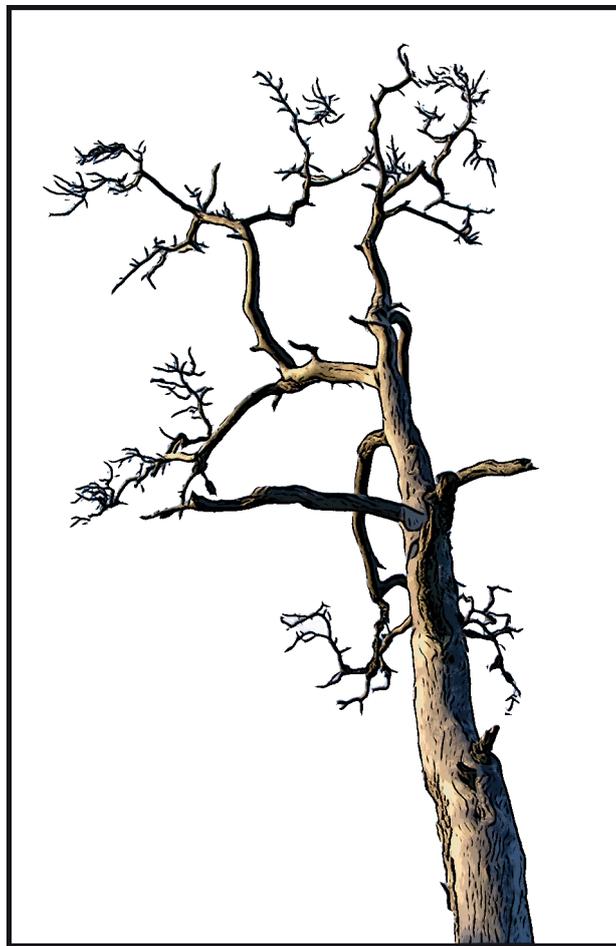


JYU DISSERTATIONS 420

Joonas Pennanen

Essentially Contested Concepts

Gallie's Thesis and Its Aftermath



UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND
SOCIAL SCIENCES

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ABSTRACT

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This study examines W.B. Gallie's claim that a special group of concepts, i.e., essentially contested concepts, bring about endless and rationally irresolvable yet perfectly genuine disputes about their proper employment. The obscurity of Gallie's original thesis has contributed to diverging interpretations and thus rendered the term 'essentially contested concept' ambiguous today. Moreover, attempts to make a firm enough case for the existence of essentially contested concepts have arguably failed. This work sets things straight in three main ways. First, it offers the most detailed discussion of Gallie's thesis of essential contestedness to date. Second, it provides a comprehensive account of the critical reception of Gallie's thesis. Third, it argues for an improved account of essential contestability.

Part one guides to the study and contextualizes the thesis of essential contestedness. Gallie was influenced by several intellectual strands of the 20th century, and his idea has inspired numerous scholars of different disciplines. Part two presents and analyzes the seven conditions of essential contestedness which are commonly understood as inhering in a particular kind of concept. Instead, they are best divided into two groups, one belonging to semantics, the other to pragmatics. Part three delves deeper into the nature of contestation, the required sense of essentiality, the rationality of having an irresolvable and endless dispute, the genuineness of disputes manifesting essential contestedness, and the presumed unity of an essentially contested concept. Part four evaluates the soundness of a concept-centered thesis that understands contestation as revolving around a single concept that has a special structure. Options found in the literature are presented and analyzed. In the end, the concept-centered thesis is discarded in favor of individuating essentially contested concepts functionally.

This study explicates for the first time virtually all elements of Gallie's thesis, clarifies his terminological choices, and extensively covers the secondary literature that has accumulated over the years. It is claimed that the key to essential contestability is found in the specific way concepts are employed, that is, anthropocentrically with an aim to persuade others within the parameters set by a decision-based reasonable disagreement.

Keywords: Gallie, essentially contested concept, conceptual disagreement, reasonable disagreement, endless dispute, essential contestability.

TIIVISTELMÄ (ABSTRACT IN FINNISH)

Pennanen, Joonas

Olenaisesti kiistanalaiset käsitteet: Gallien teesi ja sen jälkimainingit

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Työ käsittelee W.B. Gallien väitettä, jonka mukaan joukko olenaisesti kiistanalaisia käsitteitä saa aikaan päättymättömiä ja rationaalisesti ratkeamattomia mutta yhä täysin aitoja kiistoja käsitteiden sopivaa käyttöä koskien. Gallien alkuperäisen teesin hämäryys on edistänyt erilaisia tulkintoja, minkä myötä termistä 'olennaisesti kiistanalainen käsite' on tullut monimerkityksinen. Olenaisesti kiistanalaisten käsitteiden olemassaoloa ei ole saatu perusteltua riittävän hyvin. Työ korjaa tilannetta kolmella pääasiallisella tavalla. Se on ensinnäkin tähänastisista Gallien teesin käsittelyistä tarkin. Toiseksi se pitää sisällään kattavan selonteon teesin kriittisestä vastaanotosta. Kolmanneksi se esittää paremman käsityksen olenalaisesta kiistanalaisuudesta.

Ensimmäinen osa johdattaa tutkimukseen ja taustoittaa Gallien alkuperäistä väitettä. Gallie sai vaikutteita useista 1900-luvun intellektuaalisista juonteista, ja hän on inspiroinut lukuisia oppineita eri aloilta. Toisessa osassa esitetään ja analysoidaan seitsemän olenalaisen kiistanalaisuuden ehtoa, jotka tavallisesti ymmärretään käsitteeseen sisäsyntyisesti kuuluviksi. Sen sijaan ne on syytä jakaa kahtia semantiikkaan ja pragmatiikkaan lukeutuviin ryhmiin. Kolmas osa sukeltaa syvemmälle kiistämisen luonteeseen, olenalaisuuden vaadittuun merkitykseen, ratkeamattoman ja loputtoman kiistelyn järkevyyteen, kiistojen aitouteen ja olenaisesti kiistanalaisen käsitteen oletettuun yhtenäisyyteen. Neljännessä osassa arvioidaan käsittekeskeisen teesin perusteltavuutta. Tuolloin olenalaisessa kiistanalaisuudessa katsotaan olevan pitkälti kyse yksittäisen käsitteen erityislaatuudesta rakenteesta. Eri vaihtoehtoja analysoidaan, mutta lopulta käsitteen rakenteeseen nojaava teesi hylätään olenaisesti kiistanalaiset käsitteet funktionalistisesti erottavan käsityksen tieltä.

Tässä tutkimuksessa analysoidaan ja kehitetään eteenpäin lähes kaikkia Gallie teesin perustekijöitä, selvennetään hänen terminologiaansa ja käsitellään kattavasti vuosien aikana kertynyttä tutkimuskirjallisuutta. Työssä väitetään, että avain olenalaisen kiistanalaisuuteen löytyy yhdestä erityisestä tavasta, jolla käsitteitä käytetään: ihmiskeskeisesti ja toisia suostuttelemaan pyrkien päätösperustaisen järkeenkäyvän erimielisyyden puitteissa.

Avainsanat: Gallie, olenaisesti kiistanalainen käsite, käsitteellinen erimielisyys, järkeenkäypä erimielisyys, loputon kiista, olenalainen kiistanalaisuus.

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FOREWORD AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We begin to be philosophers by recognizing our masters: too often we are confirmed as philosophers by quarrelling with them – W.B. Gallie, Philosophy and Historical Understanding, 1964, 155

It is difficult to believe that the day has come. I remember vividly how hard I was pondering, as a low-income undergraduate, whether to purchase an article named “Essentially Contested Concepts” to which I had no institutional access at the time. It is a good thing that I did. On my first reading, I was struck by what you might call an intellectual revelation. The gist of it was that many, if not most, philosophical questions should be re-examined by each successive generation without any guarantee of lasting answers. The same goes for values that need to be articulated anew in a process where progress is plausibly made but hard to identify and validate. That is not particularly striking by itself but, back then, I felt that studying philosophy in an academic environment, about which I had doubts at the time, now came to be a meaningful activity again. I was quite disappointed, however, when I read the first commentaries on Gallie as they did not elucidate what I thought to have intuitively understood. Had I been mistaken? Maybe there was a fundamental theoretical insight wedged firmly in the text for anyone studious enough to break it free. And thus began my quest to get to the bottom of what Gallie really was after, the enterprise that has led me to the study at hand. It is no exaggeration to say that Gallie’s thesis saved philosophy. For me.

This dissertation was made possible by the support and guidance of several individuals, groups, and institutions.

I want to thank first of all my two supervisors, Professor Arto Laitinen and Professor Sara Heinämaa, to whom my gratitude extends well beyond the pages of the current study. I have had the joy of working with Arto (while enjoying his impeccable sense of humor, I should add) for some time now, starting with undergraduate courses and my master’s thesis, later being members of the same research project, and recently as one of his many supervised doctoral students that look up to him. It has been great; what’s next? I became acquainted with Sara when she came to hold a position in Jyväskylä, and since then I have greatly benefited from her practical assistance, many pieces of advice, and sheer acuity in this work, in my doctoral studies, as well as in my first published paper that she commented extensively. I want to thank them both for many words of reassurance and encouragement that have been needed to combat a constantly accompanying self-doubt – and to banish an occasionally surfacing anxiety. The things that could have been done to improve this work have been raised by them; any remaining flaws lie in execution.

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I wish to thank the two pre-examiners, Professor Andrew Mason and Professor Jouni-Matti Kuukkanen, for their thoughtful and valuable comments on the earlier version. I want to specifically express how much I appreciate their willingness to examine what is by no means a short study and so must considerably increase what must already be a heavy personal workload. That is the academia that is not visible to the public nor does its work get the broader recognition that it deserves. Professor Wibren van der Burg has kindly agreed to act as the opponent, and Professor Jari Kaukua as the custos, at my doctoral defense in Jyväskylä. They too spend their valuable time and do so by choice in furtherance of both academic tradition and standard. Needless to say, I am grateful to both of them.

The Kone Foundation has funded most of my undertaking, for which I owe many thanks. Their support to Finnish philosophy is invaluable. I also want to thank the Finnish Cultural Foundation and the University of Jyväskylä. Without the grants provided by them, I might not have finished this project.

I have learned from, as well as enjoyed the company of, the members of the Finnish Academy project Pathologies of Recognition and another one funded by the Finnish Cultural Foundation, Philosophy and Politics of Recognition. I would also be remiss if I did not mention the highly supportive atmosphere of the philosophy unit at the University of Jyväskylä's Department of Philosophy and Social Sciences, which has made this enterprise a lot more palatable and enjoyable experience than could otherwise have easily been the case.

I am grateful to all the participants in many seminars, workshops, conferences, and congresses, in which I have had the opportunity to present and discuss my ideas over the years. I have given presentations on the topics closely related to this study in Edinburgh, Jyväskylä, Venice, Tampere and Trento, with regard to which (and in addition to people already mentioned) I want to give special thanks to Jussi Backman, Jan Forsman, Neil Foxlee, James Garrison, Jaakko Hirvelä, Stephanie Kapusta, Polaris Koi, Markus Kortesmäki, Joonas Martikainen, Luis de Miranda, Professor Stephen Houlgate, Juho Ritola, Jussi Saarinen, Christopher Schaumberger, Ninni Suni, Tuukka Tanninen, Teemu Toppinen, Pasi Valtonen, Tommi Vehkavaara, Tullio Viola, Jaana Virta, Professor Mikko Yrjönsuuri, as well as a host of Ph.D. students at Jyväskylä. I should also specifically thank Professor Martin Kusch and Professor Jure Zovko for organizing a memorable summer school in Dubrovnik in 2016. Although the themes discussed there did not find their way directly into these pages, the experience started processes that keep on giving.

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representatives of the Golden Generation of philosophy in Jyväskylä, or Jarno Hietalahti, Onni Hirvonen and Saana Jukola? Probably less philosophy, and that would be a great shame.

In addition to the people who relate closely to my daily struggles in academia, I would also like to thank Mikko Ahlfors, Jussi Haatanen, Joonas Luukkonen and Henri Pennanen for their occasional kind remarks that have not gone unnoticed over the years. I owe special thanks to Riku Mönkkönen for his enduring, although somewhat ungrounded, confidence in what I do. During my time in Jyväskylä, I have also been supported by my wife's parents Marjatta and Pekka Nieminen as well as the rest of the family. But most especially, I am deeply grateful to my parents, Raija and Risto Pennanen, who have patiently waited for me to finish my studies while offering their encouragement, support, and love all the way through. Whether for good or ill, exceedingly rarely have they implied (and have never said) that I should pursue some other, perhaps more lucrative, career. I appreciate it greatly.

And finally, we come to my wife, Anne, and to my dear daughter, Ronja. They have changed my life in ways that the lucky ones know and those less fortunate are sorely missing. Without Ronja, I would be unhappy; without Anne, I would not be much of anything.

Jyväskylä, June 30, 2021
J.H.S. Pennanen

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PART 1: LEAD-IN

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Persistent moral and political disagreement is a pervasive feature of the modern world, the feature which is commonly attributed to social and moral pluralism prevalent in contemporary liberal-democratic societies. Many ongoing disputes appear intractable and virtually impervious to rational argument, but there is often no denying their high significance for personal and social reasons. This is in large part because of our individual and collective life goals which are backed up by what we consider to be reasonable beliefs about the world, and the different views we hold often come into conflict. Our beliefs matter to us, greatly, and how we perceive ourselves in relation to our compatriots, family-members, work associates, or simply other human beings depends on our related conceptualizations. What strikes us as right, proper, just, or beautiful (and as many other things) has normative force with regard to how we form our beliefs; we are keen to keep near what we hold dear. In the social sphere, the propriety of such conceptualizations is constantly under negotiation, and they easily become points of contention between people.

How are we to understand the situation in which many of our basic conceptualizations are incessantly contested by others? For one somewhat unnerving proposal we must go some decades back. In the middle of the 1950s, W.B. Gallie published an article “Essentially Contested Concepts” (hereafter *ECC*), in which he claimed that there is a group of concepts that somehow bring about endless and rationally irresolvable yet perfectly genuine disputes regarding their proper employment. No single use of such a concept can be set up as the correct or standard use, and Gallie proposed *DEMOCRACY*, *ART*, *SOCIAL JUSTICE*, and *CHRISTIANITY* as “live examples”¹. The tenor of the paper is that there

¹ I employ small caps to name and refer to concepts while the implementation of italics introduces terminology and theoretical notions or, alternatively, a rhetorical stress. Single quotes are used to mention linguistic expressions, phrases, terms, and words, while double quotes are used for quoting authors, scare quoting, and other informal uses. The text is in American English, but I have not altered direct quotations to match. Brackets are consistently used to mark additions, either stylistically or informatively, and most often in connection to separating a content from a source material that is referred to directly or indirectly. My

is no philosophical scandal involved. By acknowledging the existence of such concepts, one would just affirm what is going on in fields like political philosophy, philosophy of art, or philosophy of religion. What has made the argument especially attractive is that it appears to come with a promise: the intractability of disputes over moral matters, policy choices, and aesthetic valuations is due to the nature of certain key concepts, and thus one's feeling of bafflement or frustration, when confronted with disagreement, gets an explanation². It is just how things are on account of the concepts employed—some say, quite conveniently.

I have chosen Gallie's thesis of essential contestedness, and the subsequent academic discussion, as the main subject of my treatise for two central reasons. The first (and more general) reason is that the claim of essential contestability³ is intellectually provocative. There is little that one can state about concepts that is not controversial, and the claim that irresolvable disputes follow from the employment of certain concepts is perhaps even more debatable as it goes against the self-understanding of many who argue against others' particular way of employing a concept while defending their own. If Gallie's thesis, or one similar enough to it, holds true, it would likely necessitate changes in how one should conduct, or respond to, such disputes in the future. This has a special significance in fields of inquiry in which concepts have a particularly significant role as objects of study, like philosophy and political theory. That being said, there is no consensus on what would follow from the recognition of essential contestability: some say radical skepticism, the impossibility of communication, and/or value nihilism; others are predicting an improved level of argumentation and enhanced mutual respect between rivals among credible outcomes. Given such a wide range of perceived possible consequences, the adequate clarification of what the claim of essential contestability entails is in order.

The second, and more pertinent, reason for choosing the present subject is that claiming a concept to be essentially contested or contestable⁴ is

employment of parentheses is looser: they too mark additional observations, yet they are utilized mostly for the flow of the text.

² Disagreement is sometimes understood as an on-going engagement with others' views while a dispute may be considered to break out and die away more abruptly. Nevertheless, I do not adopt the corresponding theoretical usage here; 'disagreement' and 'dispute' are used interchangeably throughout the study unless otherwise noted.

³ When I refer to Gallie's original account of essentially contested concepts, I predominantly follow his preferred terminology, i.e., 'essentially contested concept,' 'essential contestedness,' and so on, instead of modalized 'essentially contestable concept' or 'essential contestability.' If further specification or emphasis is for some reason needed, I will speak of the 'original account of essentially contested concepts,' 'Gallie's thesis of essential contestedness,' *et cetera*. When I refer to the general phenomenon of especially pervasive contestability that is somehow intimately tied to the concepts, I will use 'essential contestability.' In turn, an argument or theory that pertains to the phenomenon is 'a thesis of essential contestability.'

⁴ When I refer to concepts, about which a thesis of essential contestability seeks to assert something, I will most often simply speak of 'essentially contested concepts.' By doing so I do not mean to take a final stance concerning the modality, the matter that can easily become a point of theoretical controversy, especially owing to different connotations of, or what is

philosophically thought-provoking. It is *prima facie* very difficult to establish the essential contestability or contestedness of concepts, or even to distinguish disagreements involving the concepts that are most typically claimed as essentially contested from other types of disagreements, most notably value disagreements. Gallie's original thesis is arguably obscure in that regard, which has contributed to its diverging interpretations while many have continued to argue for their preferred and distinct conceptions under the same general heading of essential contestability. The term 'essentially contested concept' is well-known and widespread among scholars (esp. Anglo-American), but qualifying a concept as 'essentially contested' or 'essentially contestable' has become ambiguous. It is no longer clear what an author means by referencing Gallie's *ECC*. Because there is continuing, even increasing, interest in essentially contested concepts (cf. 2.6), it is timely to revisit the matter. As a corrective, I offer (i) the most detailed discussion of the thesis of essential contestedness to date, (ii) an extensive account of the critical reception of Gallie's thesis, and (iii) an improved account of essential contestability. These are the three major goals I hope to achieve in the current study.

I focus on essential contestability views that take their cue from Gallie's original thesis, and that can be clearly placed in the same intellectual continuum. It might be possible to speak of the essential contestability framework or the like instead, yet subsequent commentators have emphasized quite different aspects of the phenomenon or attributed differing characteristics to it. It is thus doubtful that there is a clearly identifiable, general theoretical framework that exists independently of Gallie's thesis. Because I also end up proposing a new account of essential contestability, I argue for my findings at two levels: on the one hand, I elucidate Gallie's thesis and its context, clarify his terminological choices, and point out possible issues with the help of secondary literature; on the other hand, I gradually form an alternative position that I claim to be faithful to Gallie's insights, though not as susceptible to the problems that his original thesis faces. Because my preferred account combines elements from Gallie's works as well as from those of his readers, these two levels of argumentation overlap in the study content-wise.

The method that I employ is characteristically philosophical with regard to interpretation, analysis, and theoretical explication. I further understand the philosophical method as critical thinking, argumentation, and the analysis and production of representational tools. Given that I cast light on Gallie's original idea in addition to systematically laying out the ways it has been received, my work contributes to history of ideas as well. Nevertheless, the study aims to be useful to all who are interested in the topic regardless of their discipline.

My primary sources are the following two articles and one book by Gallie: "Essentially Contested Concepts" (1956a/*ECC*), "Art as an Essentially Contested

entailed by, 'contested' and 'contestable' (see 12.2). Some commentators have not paid much attention to the distinction, and I have for the most part left everyone's preferred terminology intact when discussing their ideas.

Concept" (1956b/ART), and *Philosophy and Historical Understanding* (1964/PHU). Having Gallie's texts at the center of my investigation provides structure to the otherwise elusive topic and enables me to focus on a stable and clearly demarcated target. When needed, Gallie's original intentions are further clarified with the help of his other published texts⁵. Given the complexity, opacity, and arguable obscurity of Gallie's original presentation, and to better identify what may be the lasting insight behind essential contestability, I have adopted an approach that is markedly charitable, even sympathetic, to Gallie's ideas. In addition, I will utilize the secondary literature that directly examines the thesis of essential contestedness or its most significant variants in addition to other works that I have specifically selected for the purpose of analyzing ideas that have so far been underdeveloped in the essential contestability literature. As to the inclusion of sources that directly pertain to the germane issue of essential contestability, I have sought near-comprehensiveness. Yet I have omitted most of the articles, in which one or another concept is affirmed or denied to be essentially contested or contestable without a deeper theoretical engagement with the topic of essential contestability.

One can identify four general ways of understanding the origin of essential contestability: (a) a concept-centered view that typically seeks to posit a special kind of concept, the inherent structure of which leads to essential contestability; (b) a sociological interpretation that locates essential contestation or contestability within social practices and conventions, in which case the contestability is understood as somehow socially determined; (c) a historical or historiographical interpretation that conceives essential contestability as arising from a specific historical trajectory or from the fact that one needs to apply historical understanding to the contested case; (d) a political view that understands the concepts in question as quintessentially political, and for that reason essentially contestable; or alternatively the view that politics as the kind of activity it requires essential contestability (cf. Pennanen 2015). More specific theses of essential contestability can be placed in one or more of these categories; the present typology can thus be useful in thinking through various authorial interpretations of essential contestability⁶.

What I call *the concept-centered thesis* stands as the most orthodox way of conceiving essential contestability in the secondary literature. The approach consists of two basic premises that most of Gallie's commentators appear to attribute to a thesis of essential contestability. The first premise is that a concept is either the object of essential contestation or is otherwise centrally involved in

⁵ See References for the complete listing of the works that I consider.

⁶ To present a few examples, Connolly (1973/1993) and Freedman (1996) are chiefly combinations of (a) and (d). Gray (1977; 1978) and (Waldron 1994; 2002) are perhaps best understood as blends of (a) and (b), although Waldron's conception of historically acquired contestability incorporates (d) as well. For Ruben (2010; 2013), essential contestability originates in factors that fall under (b) and (c); Evnine (2014) understands the matter much in the same lines with Ruben but complements the view with an account of how that translates to linguistic or conceptual level. Moreover, what I ultimately claim as the improved account of essential contestability combines elements from (a), (b), and (c).

the contestation. The second premise is that the essential contestability is generated by the special structure or organization of the concept, which makes it the case that essential contestability inheres in the concept. These are widely shared presuppositions in the literature, and nearly all more specific theses incorporate the two premises into their preferred understanding of essential contestability (see esp. ch. 17), notwithstanding the fact that they may also incorporate elements from other lines of interpretation—that is, from (b), (c), and/or (d). In this study, I am analyzing Gallie’s original thesis *in toto* and thus touching upon all the four interpretation lines. However, I am doing so by focusing specifically on the viability of the concept-centered thesis, not on the viability of those positions that disregard concepts as the primary objects of interest.

As I go along, two additional basic ways of cashing out essential contestability are introduced in the family of essential contestability theses: *the admittance to a tradition thesis* that situates essential contestability within a historical and social context and argues that endless and rationally irresolvable disputes turn on questions of who is the true successor *to* the exemplar, who are the proper members *of* the tradition, and/or who gets to speak *for* the tradition; and *the processual conflict thesis* that states that whatever it is that is essentially contested or contestable (e.g., terms, concepts, judgments) is constituted as such in a dispute. I will discuss and develop the two theses in more detail later⁷. In abstract, both theses can incorporate elements from all four interpretation lines, even if they draw the most attention away from the inherent character of concepts understood as the origin of essential contestability. The admittance to a tradition thesis and the processual conflict thesis provide an interesting and illuminating contrast to the concept-centered thesis⁸.

Next, I will explicate how the major goals of my study (i.e., (i), (ii), and (iii) above) relate to its argumentative structure. The treatise consists of four main parts, the more specific contents of which I will present at the end of the present introduction chapter. The chapter that follows the introduction offers a theoretical contextualization of the thesis of essential contestedness. Together these chapters form part one of the study that leads to more substantive treatment of essential contestedness. The next three parts make up the bulk of the study. Part two aims to capture the nature of essentially contested concepts by introducing and reviewing the seven conditions of essential contestedness as set by Gallie. Part three continues discussing the phenomenon of essential contestedness by expanding the perspective to all other issues that Gallie discusses in connection to essentially contested concepts that are not directly related to the seven conditions. Together, part two and part three achieve the first

⁷ I identify Ruben (2010; 2013) and Evnine (2014) as proposing different variants of an admittance to a tradition thesis. Garver (1978) and Garver (1990) are particularly apt examples of a processual conflict thesis.

⁸ One may perceive in this tension a reflection of a broader perspective shift that has taken place in the latter half of twentieth century philosophy, in which an analysis of concepts or language comes to be replaced by an analysis of interpretative and participatory practices (with a temporal continuity).

two major goals. Part four is devoted to analyzing the viability of the concept-centered thesis of essential contestability. I will examine different ways of accounting for a concept's structure; yet, in the end, no special structure or organization capable of guaranteeing essential contestability is found. That motivates making changes to the two premises of the concept-centered thesis and leads to a version of the essential contestability thesis, the articulation of which satisfies my third major goal. Arguing for an improved thesis of essential contestability means that there must be at least one thesis on which my account is an improvement. That case is made in relation to Gallie's thesis, the relevant defects of which have been shown in parts two and three. The final chapter is reserved for the presentation of my conclusions.

In addition to my major goals, there are four specific key issues that I am going to clarify. First, in *ECC*, Gallie presents seven conditions of essential contestedness, and it is commonly presumed that those conditions are the conditions of *a concept*. I will argue against that reading and adopt an interpretation that the last three conditions belong to pragmatics rather than to semantics. Second, I claim that to the extent that essential contestability involves concepts, the contestability does not originate in a special structure of a limited group of concepts that can be determined in advance, as Gallie is most often understood to be affirming. Essential contestability is best viewed as a result of employing a term in the function of solving a characteristically human problem while attempting to persuade others that one's particular employment of the concept stands as the best solution to the mutually acknowledged problem. Third, Gallie's reference to the contested *uses* of essentially contested concepts has typically been understood to mean that endless and irresolvable disputes involving such concepts are about concept-application. I am going to propose instead that the kind of dispute in which most advocates of an essential contestability thesis are interested is over concept-formation. Fourth, and in close connection to the third point, it appears that shared concepts capable of being contested, if there are any that are unified enough while admitting contestation to begin with, *become contested* in a dispute. However, I will claim that to the extent that there is a common concept, it *becomes constituted* in a particular type of dispute that I am calling a decision-based reasonable disagreement.

The above key issues, claims, and conclusions will be further refined in the following study. The first claim is put forward at the end of part two (ch. 10) while the other three are developed as part four progresses. Considerations that support the claims intersect all the chapters, though the subject matter of the first issue and claim is more clearly restricted to part two. By singling out these issues and claims, I mean to say that they are paramount to other claims and interpretations that I argue for in the treatise. That is because they are pivotal to the thesis of essential contestability that I prefer, and thus to my ability to meet the major goal (iii).

In this treatise, I argue that no concepts *qua* concepts are essentially contested. That view does not preclude the kind of essential contestability that still centrally involves concepts yet comes as a result of conflicting views

concerning how one should employ a concept in solving a highly significant human problem. Essential contestability as an ever-present possibility of contestation is now understood as a typical feature of the human condition, but the status of particular concepts as essentially contested is not determined before those concepts come under contestation in a dispute. A myriad of terms may denote concepts that are essentially contestable, but whether those concepts are, in fact, essentially contested is determined by how the terms or expressions are employed and in which contexts. I argue for the view that I call *the combinatory account*: essential contestability is brought about by anthropocentric/interpretive concept employment with an endorsement/advocacy function given the human condition.

The upshot of my argument is that disputing parties need not share *exactly* the same concept to employ their concepts or terms in the function that is characteristic to essential contestability. The essentially contested concepts are entities that come about because different conceptual contents and normative standards are treated as a unified whole under the rubric of a term or expression. That conceptual whole is not necessarily confused on that account; rather, it is a collection of conceptual and normative elements (like evaluative standards and normative principles) that is popularly utilized in seeking a solution to a shared problem. Although the disputants might thus employ different concepts, in fact their concepts can be considered subsumed under an essentially contested concept in the right circumstances. As a result, some concepts contextually have a second-order standing as essentially contested, while in other contexts the nominally same concepts are not essentially contested. This reframing helps in avoiding a key objection against theses of essential contestability, the objection that puts into question the unity of a concept under essential contestation. I claim that my account is robust enough not to incur an insurmountable loss vis-à-vis that which a strong thesis of essential contestability strives to affirm.

The following outline introduces what is discussed and where.

In chapter two, I will identify the principal influences behind, and most relevant theoretical contexts of, Gallie's ideas concerning essential contestability. Apart from a short biography and introductory notes (2.1), the bulk of the chapter examines the theoretical background of the idea of an essentially contested concept. I start by briefly discussing Stuart Hampshire's contemporaneous conception of essentially *disputed* concepts (2.2). The coining of 'essentially contested concept' is regularly attributed to Gallie, yet Hampshire's reminiscent account illustrates that there were also others who professed similar ideas at the time. One rather obvious reason for that is the late Wittgensteinian influence, which motivates assessment of Gallie in relation to the idea of family resemblance (2.3). The connection is certainly there, but there are notable differences between Gallie's and Wittgenstein's respective accounts as well; I will add to the examination in later parts of my study. As much as Wittgenstein may have had a considerable influence over the formation of Gallie's ideas, there is reason to believe that another philosophical giant, C. S. Peirce, held even more sway. I discuss a few interesting affinities as well as a couple of notable differences

between them in the fourth section (2.4). In the fifth section, I present some of Gallie's ideas that relate to history and their scholarly background (2.5). Gallie emphasized the importance of historical understanding, and some commentators have understood this to entail historicism. Since still others have read Gallie as presenting a completely ahistorical perspective on concepts, the topic of historicity demands some attention. Finally, I end the chapter by evaluating the subsequent influence of Gallie's thesis (2.6). Claims of essential contestability tend to crop up in diverse contexts, which is a testament to how well Gallie has been able to pique the interest of scholars working on different topics and in different fields of study.

In part two, I will explicate the idea of an essentially contested concept by offering a close reading of Gallie's three texts that serve as the primary sources of this treatise. Of them, *ECC* is the best known and the most commented upon by a wide margin, and it stands to reason to concentrate on it; yet it would be a mistake to ignore the other two. In *PHU*, Gallie makes a few clarifications and additions to his earlier thesis. This makes that work especially suitable for elucidating his intentions concerning both very general issues, like the scope of the thesis, and more detailed matters, like clarifying certain unclear formulations. In *ART*, Gallie presents the most comprehensive discussion of any concept that he dubs as 'essentially contested'; that is, *ART*. That significantly adds to the skeleton-like exposition that is offered in *ECC*. Part two is nevertheless mostly structured around how Gallie introduces different topics in *ECC*.

I start chapter three by describing Gallie's aim and the form of his argument in *ECC* (3.1; 3.2), after which I am going to introduce the imaginative example scenario, to which Gallie appeals at different stages of his argument, and which also serves as a hermeneutic device for capturing what is meant by essential contestedness, more substantively (3.3). Most of my attention is deservedly on the seven conditions that Gallie presents for what he calls 'essential contestedness' (chs. 4–9). Each condition-covering chapter is further divided into two sections (e.g., 6.1 and 6.2): a condition is first discussed in the light of Gallie's original works, and it is then further reviewed based on the secondary literature. I end part two by examining the status of essentially contested concepts (ch. 10). Gallie's seven conditions should be divided into two clusters: the first four conditions are of semantics while the last three are of pragmatics.

My single most significant break from the greater part of the secondary literature is that, for all the talk of concepts, I argue for the interpretation of essential contestability that emphasizes the context in which concepts are, or become, essentially contested derivatively rather than by themselves. There is no denying that Gallie spoke of a new group of concepts, i.e., essentially contested concepts, but I contend that he sought to state something crucial about the nature of certain type of disputes in which such concepts are employed, and how they are employed. It is also to this effect that he presents the seven conditions of essential contestedness. This is by no means an insignificant change in the focus, and it cannot but be reflected in how I present my findings. I do not want to

smuggle it in as part of a supposedly neutral interpretation, even if I do believe that there is ample textual evidence to support my conclusion.

In part three, I will expand the inquiry beyond the seven conditions to the overall phenomenon of essential contestedness as Gallie presents and develops it. Now the general aim is to elucidate the circumstances in which contestation over essentially contested concepts takes place, how it occurs, and how continuing to contest the matter can be understood as a rational enterprise. There is scholarly literature in abundance concerning epistemic, moral, and political disagreements, including highly specialized epistemological discussion on a variety of disagreement types such as peer disagreements, deep disagreements, and faultless disagreements. However, for the most part I am limiting my discussion to how the disputes described by Gallie are to be characterized, what type of rationality they manifest, and how that supposedly comes down, or relates, to the essential contestedness of concepts.

The first one of the four chapters of which part three consist, chapter eleven, is devoted to filling the remaining gaps in my presentation of Gallie's original ideas. There, I take a more critical look at Gallie's artificial example of championship (11.1) and examine his arguments in *ART* with the help of two reconstructed example cases that are needed to properly understand the character of essentially contested concepts in relation to traditions, activities, and historical understanding (11.2). I clarify what Gallie means by somewhat abstruse expressions 'elementary use,' 'standard general use,' and 'category of human activity' (11.3); and present and analyze Gallie's account of how conversions one concept-use to another can be justified in the absence of the possibility of universal agreement (11.4). As I see it, the original thesis of essential contestedness cannot be adequately understood without paying attention to the matters that are discussed in this chapter.

In chapter twelve, I will analyze what can be taken as the four key elements of essential contestedness: indeterminacy, contestation, essentiality, and irresolvability. I discuss how ambiguity and vagueness can figure in essential contestedness (12.1), distinguish contestedness from contestability (12.2), gauge different senses of the essentiality of contestation (12.3), and present the primary ways in which the irresolvability and endlessness of disputes has either been affirmed, denied, or reinterpreted (12.4). For the most part, this chapter presents a collection of views that are drawn from the secondary literature, and that demonstrate the variety of mutually conflicting interpretations of the phenomenon. The sheer number of variations precludes me from discussing them in depth. Still, I will conclude each section by presenting a more nuanced take that I personally favor or consider otherwise particularly enlightening.

In chapter thirteen, I will examine the reasonableness of essential contestation⁹; that is, of an act of contesting within the parameters of essential

⁹ In the current study, 'reasonableness' most often refers to overall justifiability of any given action, belief, conceptual scheme etc. while 'rationality' is most often understood more as instrumental or individual justification concerning one's own beliefs and actions. There may be significant overlap between the notions in practice: from one perspective, a person's

contestability. I start by assessing whether claiming superiority to one's preferred concept-use is compatible with the awareness of the disagreement's true nature (13.1), after which I turn to briefly discuss the idea of reasonable disagreement and the way the operative sense of reasonableness is practical rather than cognitive from the perspective of disputants (13.2). I also evaluate the validity of the common presumption that essential contestability is a thoroughly liberal notion: there is no denying Gallie's liberal sentiments but I argue that the case for the necessary relation between essential contestability and liberalism is much harder to make (13.3). The fourth section of the chapter continues with the general theme by presenting the operative mode of rationality in Gallie's account as transitional (13.4). I further deem that opposing parties in disputes manifesting essential contestedness are engaging in *ad hominem* (as distinct from *ad personam*) reasoning and argumentation. Last, I discuss the objections and criticism according to which an essential contestability thesis is self-refuting or leads to radical relativism/ skepticism (13.5). I argue that neither is the case.

Chapter fourteen ties earlier discussions together by accounting for the nature of Gallie's disputes as genuine (14.1) and by problematizing the unity of essentially contested concepts (14.2). As far as the unity of the proper sort of conceptual disagreement is concerned, these sections deal with two sides of the same coin. The fact that neither section presents resources for satisfactorily resolving the common problem sets the stage for chapter fifteen in which a thesis affirming the essential contestability of a single concept is challenged more explicitly. With this order of presentation, I also wish to argue that Gallie's original answers to the arising problem are not satisfactory without considerable refinement.

Part four is the culmination of the current study by challenging the presupposition that some concepts are the bearers of essential contestability by virtue of being the kind of concepts that they are. In chapter fifteen, I will outline what ought to be generally required of a concept-centered thesis. More specifically, I am presenting what stand as two fundamental challenges to such a thesis: the problem involved in possessing or mutually sharing a concept that is at the same time contested (15.1); and the possibility that the relevant type of conceptual dispute is best framed as involving distinct conceptual contents that do not have to be parts or interpretations of a single concept (15.2). I also add further desiderata concerning the strength of an essential contestability thesis worthy of its name (15.3). Many of the hallmarks of essential contestability can plausibly be explained, and sometimes explained away, by reframing the matter in different terms. Any advocate of the thesis is challenged to clearly state what makes essential contestability unique among related philosophical conceptions.

conversion from one view to another is rational when the person thinks that she has good reasons to do so; from another perspective, the same conversion may be deemed unreasonable because she is, in fact, lacking more objective justification for the conversion. How this relates to the conception of rationality implicit in Gallie's thesis will be later expounded (11.4; 13.2; 13.4).

Chapter sixteen provides a background for discussing the contestability of *concepts*. I start by describing the features that are commonly attributed to concepts both in psychology and philosophy (16.1), but nothing that I say there should be construed as an endorsement of one or another theory of concepts. In fact, in the following study, I will do my best to avoid taking a definitive stance concerning the nature of concepts, the correct theory of meaning, and other such broad philosophical questions. The point of the section is to remind the reader of what is generally involved in the talk of concepts. After that, I raise the issue of a potential confusion between words and concepts or terms (16.2). Despite claims to the contrary, Gallie is not self-evidently confusing words with concepts; it is rather that his concept of a concept differs from the one viewed as axiomatic by some. The third section deals with similar issues in presenting two different options for understanding concepts as objects of investigation: the scientific-ideal framework and the language-focused framework (16.3). The claim of essential contestability is typically viewed as the claim about the special structure of a concept that gives rise to endless and irresolvable disputes. It nonetheless appears often to be the case that the structure in question is not so much a clearly demarcated collection of properties rather than something extrapolated or abstracted from merely roughly congruent, and even possibly conflicting, term or word usage by several people.

In chapter seventeen, I examine the structure and organization of concepts, i.e., their internal architectures, and multiple ways of how concepts' structural features could set in motion essential contestation over them. First, I propose that the baseline for understanding the structure of essentially contested concepts is to view them as criterially governed concepts, but I also discuss their possible relation to (possibly inter-disciplinary) theories and normative principles (17.1). Second, the differential weighting of the criteria of application will be discussed in terms of what results from the weighting of the features or component parts of the valued achievement that are analogous to the features present in the object to which the concept is applied (17.2). Although the differential weighting appears to play a key role in Gallie's original thesis, it is unable to ground a strong concept-centered thesis of essential contestability. I then turn to discuss the applicability of the concept/conception distinction in cashing out what makes essentially contested concepts special (17.3). To the extent that the distinction presumes a common core concept, and thus an unquestionably shared conceptual foundation, the distinction is manifestly controvertible as the explanation of essential contestability. It has also been argued that essential contestability is the result of the interplay between a concept's descriptive and evaluative elements (17.4), or its otherwise complex or cluster-like organization (17.5). However, both options suffer from at least one of the following problems: they fail *either* to distinguish the concepts or terms that are typically considered as essentially contested from the mundane ones that appear to share the same characteristics *or* to show that the described structure somehow necessarily leads to essential contestedness or contestability. These failures motivate me to ask how an application dispute that concerns a concept's extension can threaten the

concept's intension, alas to no avail (17.6). In conclude that, so far, no one has put forward a clear and plausible enough argument for how certain concepts are endowed with a special structure or organization that is also a telltale sign of the concepts' essential contestability. It appears that the basis for individuating essentially contested concepts needs to be located elsewhere.

In chapter eighteen, I will introduce and develop an account that derives what is distinct in essentially contested concepts from how they are characteristically employed in disputes and in relation to human activities and problem areas. The first section introduces a key notion that is central to my preferred account of essential contestability: the decision-based reasonable disagreement (18.1). I also clarify how Gallie's idea of essentially contested concepts as popular conceptions could be reinterpreted in terms of *endoxa*, the Aristotelian idea that translates as common conceptions accepted by the many or the wise. After that, I assess the role that a concept's point, or the point of view from which the concept is formed, may play in the essential contestability of the concept (18.2). I bring into discussion the term 'animating point' – in brief terms, the goal or ideal concept-users pursue in applying the concept – as it helps in explaining the character of essentially contested concepts as well as contributes to their individuation. The third section deals with essential contestation in relation to activities and practices (18.3). A wide variety of concepts is liable to become essentially contested. What is decisive is that they are employed to facilitate the best possible solutions in a general problem area or to a widely shared human concern (e.g., how to be fair in one's social relations) that a broad human activity (e.g., morality) addresses, the activity to which the concept that is employed (e.g., SOCIAL JUSTICE) is intimately connected in practice. Sharing the problem and the goal of solving that problem are an integral part and background of the conceptual practice of *both* using the essentially contested concept in contestation *and* making interpretative sense of the activity and the problem in question.

In the fourth section of chapter eighteen, I will introduce the distinction between the historical development thesis and the historical understanding thesis of essential contestability (18.4). The two theses are then evaluated and juxtaposed with a reading of Gallie that views essentially contested concepts as semantically akin to natural kinds. In the overall scheme of things, the point of this section is to perceive where the potential lines of demarcation between different theses of essential contestability could be drawn, especially in connection to historical considerations. Finally, I end the chapter by presenting a thesis of essential contestability that I prefer over available alternatives (18.5). I call it 'the combinatory account.' I contend that concepts are not vessels of essential contestability due to their inherent structure but that concepts are vehicles of essential contestability, the contestability that originates in a specific way of employing concepts. As that usage, I identify the anthropocentric/interpretive concept employment with an endorsement/advocacy function, the description that will be elucidated in the section. The final section is both aggregative in colligating the previous findings

and argumentative in developing the combinatorial account and presenting how that account clears up the challenges and requirements that I have previously set. In the nineteenth and last chapter, I present my conclusions.

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL BACKGROUND, HISTORICAL CONTEXT, AND INFLUENCE

The thesis of essentially contested concepts stands at a crossroads of various philosophical and methodological considerations, a matter which reflects Gallie's own eclectic interests. In the current chapter, I will situate Gallie in different theoretical and intellectual contexts in order to identify some of the sources from which he draws, and the key approaches that are either complementary or contrasting. Many significant influences might go virtually unnoticed because of their distinctness on the one hand, and because of Gallie's singular renown for the notion of the essentially contested concept on the other hand. The proper contextualization can help in making sense of issues that would otherwise remain opaque or even outright odd.

I start by with a short biography of W.B. Gallie which is followed by equally brief introductory remarks on Gallie's thesis (2.1). The rest of the chapter serves the purpose of contextualizing the thesis. First, I point out the similarity to Stuart Hampshire's notion of essentially disputed concepts (2.2), after which I will begin to approximate how closely Gallie's thesis corresponds with Wittgenstein's family resemblance (2.3). The conception of family resemblance also crops up here and there throughout the study (esp. 11.2; 17.5). The third section is dedicated to giving the reader a general sense of why Gallie's many concerns reflect his longtime interest in Peircean pragmatism, and how it may have influenced Gallie's views (2.3). In the fourth section, I will present a case for why one should not overlook the historical dimension in tracking Gallie's original intentions (2.5; see also 18.4). Gallie has also carved a place in the field of analytic/critical philosophy of historiography, which marks an often neglected background for his ideas. Last, I will assess the reception of Gallie's thesis in terms of its influence, and I will situate it in even broader intellectual and academic contexts (2.5).

2.1 Biographical and introductory notes

Walter Bryce Gallie was born 5 October in 1912 in Lenzie near Glasgow¹⁰. Gallie took first-class honors in philosophy, politics, and economics- degree at Balliol, Oxford, and started his academic career in 1935 as an assistant lecturer in philosophy at Swansea. In the Second World War Gallie served in the British Army from 1940 to 1945, leaving the service with the rank of Major, and was awarded the Croix de Guerre. As with so many others, wartime made a great impression upon Gallie. He later returned to the philosophical topic of war in the form of two books, *Philosophers of Peace and War* (Gallie 1978) and *Understanding War* (Gallie 1990). After the war Gallie returned to Swansea where the Wittgensteinian influence was beginning to dominate¹¹. Gallie followed Alexander Dunlop Lindsay, 1st Baron Lindsay of Birker (CBE) (1879–1952), his teacher at Balliol, to Keele in 1950 where Gallie became Professor of Philosophy at the University College of North Staffordshire. Later, he also wrote a book on Lindsay and the Keele experiment (Gallie 1960). After Keele, Gallie became Professor of Logic and Metaphysics at Queen's University, Belfast from 1954 to 1967; Professor of Political Science at Cambridge University from 1967 to 1978. He was also a Fellow of Peterhouse, Cambridge, from 1967 to 1978, and President of the Aristotelian Society for the Systematic Study of Philosophy from 1970 to 1971. In 1940 Gallie married Menna Humphreys, and they had two children. Gallie died in Cardigan, Dyfed, on the 31st August 1998.

Today, Gallie is best known for one paper, “Essentially Contested Concepts” (Gallie 1956a/ECC), published in the Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society in 1956 and which also formed a part of his book *Philosophy and the Historical Understanding* (Gallie 1964/PHU). In Gallie’s obituary, R. A. Sharpe makes a passing note that “Gallie believed it to be his best work too, along with a paper on the nature of science also from the Fifties”¹² (Sharpe 1998). In his late years, Gallie was planning to write a book entitled “Apologia pro opusculo suo” (see Editor’s Introduction in Gallie 2000) in which he wanted to review his abiding interests in philosophy, which he viewed important not only personally, but for philosophy in general. The book was meant to consist of four stages of Gallie’s teaching and writing, but only the first part dealing with Charles Sanders Peirce’s philosophy and Gallie’s Swansea years was completed (more or less) due to Gallie’s declining health. In it, Gallie makes no explicit mention of essentially contested concepts. The other three parts of the unfinished book were meant to cover Gallie’s thinking on education and the influence of A.D. Lindsay, Gallie’s

¹⁰ The biographical information concerning Gallie is based on the two references: Gallie’s obituary in *Independent* written by R.A. Sharpe and the Editor’s Introduction to “Apologia pro opusculo suo” by Sister M. Jadwiga OP and R.A. Sharpe.

¹¹ Sharpe asserts that Gallie “was never much in sympathy with the Wittgensteinian influence which was beginning to dominate there, and indeed, he disliked Wittgenstein the man” (Sharpe 1998).

¹² The paper Sharpe refers to is, quite likely, “What Makes the Subject Scientific?” which was published in 1957.

interest in the philosophy of history and his time in Belfast, the philosophy of peace, war, and nuclear disarmament, and the years spent in Cambridge. All in all, in the completed book Gallie intended to describe the impact of Peirce, Collingwood, Popper, Berlin, Butterfield, and Gellner to his thought. Gallie's description of his relation with A.D. Lindsay, who is named by Gallie as a major influence on his life (Gallie 2000, 175), is found in Gallie's *A New University: A. D. Lindsay and the Keele Experiment*¹³ (Gallie 1960).

According to the Editor's Introduction of "Apologia," Gallie "came to see himself as a somewhat enigmatic figure on the British Academic scene" and in his last years he thought "that his intellectual career had been a mixture of apparent misfortunes and strokes of luck" despite the importance of the subjects that held his attention (Gallie 2000). It is a shame on that background alone that Gallie does not make any references to essentially contested concepts in the highly unfinished "Apologia." On the one hand, it would have been interesting to hear whether he would have considered his famous thesis as a "stroke of luck" after all the interest the paper gathered. On the other hand, it would have been hugely valuable to know what the possible misfortunes or misunderstandings were that may have dissuaded Gallie from developing his thesis further after the revised version of *Philosophy and Historical Understanding*. That being said, not much can be inferred from Gallie's omission. It could very well be that Gallie viewed essentially contested concepts as more connected with his wider interests in the philosophy of history rather than with Peircean pragmatics. Then again, it might just as well be that many of his interests came together in unique fashion in "Essentially Contested Concepts"¹⁴. In that case, neither the paper nor the thesis can be neatly placed as belonging to a certain clear-cut stage in Gallie's intellectual life.

The philosophical circumstances in which Gallie found himself in the 1950s were exciting, tumultuous even. George Lakoff describes that atmosphere with a flair for drama: "A philosophical war was on in England (...) Into this fray came Walter Bryce Gallie (...) who delivered a fateful paper called 'Essentially Contested Concepts.'" (Lakoff 2009, 178-9.) Although Gallie's paper "ran very much against the intellectual tide," as Sami Syrjämäki points out, at the time of its writing it did not receive that much attention (Syrjämäki 2011, 150). Today it is difficult to assess the level of excitement generated by Gallie's essay – Terence Ball has even called it "unjustly neglected" (Ball 2002, 21) – but the fact is that a significant number of articles and books, in which the notion of essentially contested concepts is either applied or criticized directly, appear only after the beginning of the 1970s. Thus, it stands to reason that it is mostly since then that essential contestability has been "subsumed into the subconscious of political

¹³*A New University* provides a wealth of information concerning how Gallie viewed Lindsay and his work, and the reader familiar with Gallie's works cannot but recognize Lindsay's considerable impact on his ideas. In the current study, I will omit discussing the matter further.

¹⁴ A summary of Peircean elements that look to have a role in how the thesis of essentially contested concepts got its peculiar content and form is given in section 2.4. A case can be made that Gallie's "historicist" ideas are rather deeply influenced by Peirce.

studies (...) as a relative background commonplace of vocabulary that students of politics are expected to know something about" (Vincent 2004, 108). The impact of the notion, however, is not limited to political studies. For example, Jeremy Waldron observes that, in the legal literature, "the use of the term has run wild, with "essentially contested" meaning something like "very hotly contested, with no resolution in sight"" (Waldron 2002, 148–9). Conducting a search in the Westlaw database Waldron identifies 43 terms that have been described as "essentially contested" (ibid., n31). New candidates emerge all the time as Gallie's notion gets referenced and applied in numerous papers on different fields of study.

What it is about essentially contested concepts, or "Essentially Contested Concepts," that ultimately brought the notion to people's attention? A partial answer lies in the fact that Gallie was able to predict some later intellectual and philosophical developments which might have given the notion of essential contestability a longer shelf life as a philosophical commodity, if you will. But it is also likely that in its most basic form the idea of essential contestability that resonates with people is not "Gallie's idea" as such but rather an intuition, a general impression, or an obscure inkling that there must be some rather easily identifiable and presentable reason for the fact that we do seem to have endless disputes concerning a variety of moral and political matters. For instance, David-Hillel Ruben (2010) finds Gallie's interests "extraordinarily prescient." Although Gallie himself had in mind controversies like "the cold war dispute over the meaning of 'democracy' between socialists and liberal democrats" which is not that energized anymore, "the contemporary world is rife with disputes of the kind he identified, especially religious and political disputes which literally tear some societies apart" (Ruben 2010, 258). It might also be the case that Gallie just happened to put that general feeling into words in a thought-provoking manner while using terminology that roused people's imagination. I present two anecdotal examples. First, Étienne Balibar comments on Gallie's paper (approvingly I should add) that "One could say that the title here is the most important thing, but the content is very interesting as well"¹⁵. The second example is found in Ernest Gellner's book review of *Philosophy and Historical Understanding* where Gellner recalls his first impression of Gallie's thesis: "I admired it greatly: it was one of those papers which permanently enter one's thought" (Gellner 1974, 95). Terence Ball notes that applied to various political concepts, "the thesis of essential contestability proved to be both bold and provocative" (Ball 2002, 22).

At the same time, one cannot deny that both the reception and later application of the thesis of essential contestedness are characterized by a peculiar sort of ambivalence; John Gunnell's remark that Gallie's essay "has been a continuing source of both hope and confusion among political theorists and political scientists" (Gunnell 2017, 193) is quite apt in that regard. There is a case to be made that Gallie's thesis has become a kind of philosophical Rorschach test which reveals a philosophical profile of its interpreter. Gallie's novel, though at

¹⁵ <https://www.politicalconcepts.org/concept-etienne-balibar/> (accessed 17.3.2020)

times somewhat obscure, way of presenting his ideas is at least a partial culprit here, as it has created room for his readers to project their own theoretical interests and *desiderata* onto their interpretations of what is said. This is the fate that Tullio Viola assigns to Gallie: “It sometimes happens that the reputation of a thinker ends up being conditioned by the fortune of a single idea, which gets adopted by an unexpectedly large number of scholars, although often at the price of having its original purport altered or curtailed” (Viola 2019, 233). Be that as it may, by contextualizing Gallie’s thesis properly we may hope to find clues for why Gallie’s notion has become so extensively discussed and further mutated.

2.2 Stuart Hampshire and essentially disputed concepts

The epithet ‘essentially contested’ was coined and first applied to concepts by Gallie in “Essentially Contested Concepts.” A similar idiom was adopted by Stuart Hampshire, who claims in his book *Thought and Action* (orig. 1959) that

There are some concepts that are permanently and essentially subject to question and revision, in the sense that the criteria of their application are always in dispute and are recognized to be at all times questionable. Hampshire 1960, 230

John Gray observes that Hampshire makes use of the distinction between a term’s meaning and the criteria of its correct application in his account, the distinction that R.M. Hare can largely be credited for bringing into moral philosophy (Gray 1983, 94; Hare 1963/1952, ch. 6). If disputants cannot agree on the criteria of appraisal/comparison regarding the good qualities of a certain object – say their dispute is about whether LeBron James is ‘a good athlete’ – it must be true that they have different concepts with respect to that object, or they have different concepts of athlete. Hampshire notes that no other possibility is left if the argument is pressed far enough. This does not preclude him from identifying a group of “essentially disputed concepts” (Hampshire 1960, 230) among which Hampshire places MORALITY, ART, POLITICS, MIND, and ACTION.

What are the main characteristics of Hampshire’s essentially or “perpetually” disputed concepts? Firstly, the criteria of their application are always in dispute. They are essentially questionable and corrigible partly due to “their connection with variable human emotions.” Human desires and attitudes towards things, and changing social forms, can ground classification, and when this is the case one should not expect “undisputed and standardized criteria of application.” Secondly, essentially disputed concepts are “very general and abstract.” The boundaries of these relatively non-specific concepts, for example, MORALITY, are not easily drawn, and any changes in their use are far-reaching as any dispute about them would involve a dispute about a host of connected notions. (Hampshire 1960, 230–1.) The upshot is that it is no trifling matter to change how one applies these concepts as any change would 1) bring on other

changes in one's conceptual frameworks and 2) require one to adjust one's emotional responses accordingly.

Although there are some differences between Hampshire's account and Gallie's thesis, Hampshire has been named as one of the two originators of the phrase 'essentially contested (or disputed) concepts' (Connolly 1993, 246, n12). Both seem to have been influenced by Friedrich Waismann (discussed in 6.2); Morris Weitz views both thinkers as being concerned with the openness of concepts, and he goes as far as contending that Hampshire's "essentially disputable concepts" is a variant of Waismann's open texture concepts (Weitz 1972, 108-9). Nevertheless, when the idea of essentially contested concepts is invoked today, references are made almost solely to Gallie's 1956 paper, or to the secondary literature citing Gallie as the main reference.

2.3 Similarities with Wittgenstein's family resemblance and later conceptions

Gallie's thesis is frequently evaluated on the background of linguistic, and most especially late Wittgensteinian, philosophy, and it is Wittgenstein to whom Gallie is often said to owe the most substantial debt. Wittgenstein saw each particular use as embedded in a language game or form of life, whereas for Gallie, certain concepts do not have clearly definable general or standard uses, and different particular uses are in conflict (Vincent 2004, 98). Collier, Hidalgo and Maciuceanu find it "noteworthy that [Gallie] situates himself in relation to that tradition and he seeks to build upon it" and they perceive "both strong parallels with Gallie's framework and interesting potential contrasts." Ultimately, it is a matter of complex judgment whether Gallie is able to move the discussion fruitfully beyond framing the discussion in terms of family resemblance. (Collier et al. 2006, 234-5.) Morris Weitz identifies Gallie's thesis as one form of a more general theme in twentieth century philosophy, namely "the rejection of the traditional doctrine that all concepts are or must be governed by sets of necessary and sufficient criteria which correspond to the definitive properties of the things named by the concepts" (Weitz 1972, 87). Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* can be read as exemplifying that theme.

Sami Syrjämäki asserts that Gallie comes strikingly close to Wittgenstein's family resemblance thesis but does not, surprisingly, make any references to him (Syrjämäki 2011, 181-2). That is true as far as *ECC* and the revised *PHU*-version are concerned. In "Limitations of Analytical Philosophy" (1949), Gallie however lauds family resemblance of words as one of the most important recent philosophical discoveries and sees it providing an "avenue for insight into the necessity and nature of other philosophical methods" (Gallie 1949, 37). Yet more importantly, in "Art as an Essentially Contested Concept" (Gallie 1956b/ART), Gallie mentions that he used to think that "the word 'art' expresses at most a fact of family resemblance" (ART 101) but does not think so anymore (see also 11.2).

Ernest Gellner (1974) observes that Gallie's central idea bears a distant resemblance to family resemblance, yet Gallie's notion is "greatly superior" to it (Gellner 1974, 103; see also 17.5). All in all, although there is no reason to doubt that Gallie has been influenced by Wittgenstein, it is not clear how significant Gallie's break from him is.

I will now look at some of the similarities and differences between Wittgenstein and Gallie with the help of Georg Henrik von Wright's (1993/1963) description of family-resemblance and its philosophical importance. I aim only to introduce some very general and introductory considerations, and I will examine related issues elsewhere as well (11.2; 17.5).

First, "the idea [of family-resemblance] is related both to vagueness, ambiguity, and analogy and yet different from them all" giving "unity" to the concepts of a suitable type (e.g., LANGUAGE, SENTENCE, GAME); "we may call them family-concepts" (von Wright 1993, I: §7). The unity in question is not something that is common to all instantiations of the concept. Instead, Wittgenstein was after a shared affinity or relation that is enough to provide the sense of kinship to be able to speak of one concept (Wittgenstein 1958, §65-7, see also §76-7). At the heart of Gallie's thesis is the notion of contestability that is related to both vagueness and ambiguity but is different from them both (12.1; 12.2), and essentially contested concepts share features with family concepts (see e.g., 17.5). In this study, I will present an interpretation of Gallie's thesis that understands essential contestation over initially ambiguous descriptions of a concept as a process in which they are transformed to a unified concept (14.2; see ECC, 172n1). To my understanding, Wittgenstein does not make this type of suggestion.

Second, the idea of family-resemblance is philosophically important in prompting one to give up an attempt to hunt for the "essence" of a concept (von Wright 1993, I: §7). As it is, it appears that "essential contestability directly adopts the Wittgensteinian mantle in denying that concepts and words have essences" (Vincent 2004, 98; but see Gellner 1974). If the concept has a definitive essence, its proficient use should conform to its essential characteristics. Gallie has in mind, however, a group of concepts, the essence of which is their contestability, i.e., they consist of conflicting uses (ECC 169; 11.3; 18.1) instead of having agreed upon or otherwise fixed essences.

Third, von Wright maintains that "Often symptomatic of the family-nature of a concept is a bewilderment as to whether something 'really' falls under this concept." The notion of art is typically a family-concept, and von Wright sees many problems of philosophical aesthetics as relevantly connected with family-concepts. (von Wright 1993, I: §7.) ART is one of the four primary, or "live," examples Gallie gives of essentially contested concepts, and Gallie was also certainly interested in philosophical aesthetics (11.2). However, for better or worse, essentially contested concepts are not simply about classifying particular things under a given concept in view of (a family of) similarities holding in different instances (11.3; 17.5).

Fourth, "[n]ew members of a family may originate in the course of history. New games are invented, new forms of linguistic communication are created or

can be imagined, also maybe new forms of art” (von Wright 1993, I: §7). Openness is one of the seven conditions that Gallie presents for essentially contested concepts (6.1). Further, a family has a temporal continuity and a continuous identity not unlike Gallie’s concepts, but a family is not easily conceived as an object of contestation as such, even if the status of its alleged members as the members of the same family can be contested. It remains to be seen whether Gallie can make a case for a different type of mutable concept that admits internal contestation, and whether that conception is significantly different from openness of family-concepts (14.1; 17.5).

The case for Gallie’s inclusion to the broadly Wittgensteinian tradition is clearer from a wider perspective. The classical view or model of concepts represents concepts through definitions. Object or membership categorization is determined by necessary and jointly sufficient conditions or criteria, the process which allows no borderline cases of concept application without some sort of mistake, ideally speaking. The classical view is enticing partly because it is nicely in agreement with logic, especially with the law of the excluded middle. It helps in hierarchical ordering of categories/concepts, which means that categories can form nested sets, enabling transitive category membership (Murphy 2002, 15, 27). However, there is reason to believe that concepts we actually employ in our everyday dealings are a lot sloppier, and so the classical view has become suspect in recent years¹⁶. The idea of family resemblance directly inspired recent developments in the psychological study of concepts, notably the research conducted by Eleanor Rosch and her associates in the 1970s which uncovered prototype effects in human categorization and behavior (Murphy 2002, 31–5, 41–3; Adcock 2005, 12). As I see it, Gallie stood at the crossroads of the classical view and the views that were yet to come; that is, the prototype-theory and the exemplar-theory¹⁷. Both Gallie and Wittgenstein criticize the views that

¹⁶ Gregory Murphy summarizes the main deficiencies of the classical view as (i) extreme difficulty to find definitions for most natural categories, *a fortiori* in the case of plausible psychological representations “that people of all ages would likely to use”; (ii) inability to predict the phenomena of typicality and unclear membership; (iii) incompatibility with the existence of intransitive category decisions. In addition, the classical view has not predicted such phenomena as “exemplar effects, base rate neglect, the existence of a basic level categorization, the order in which children acquire words, and so on.” (Murphy 2002, 38.) In other words: concepts as categories are not necessarily defined in terms of a conjunction of necessary and sufficient binary features—thus they have no clear boundaries or mutual transitive hierarchy—and there is no necessary one-on-one relationship with the world and the concepts (e.g., as the ultimately stable [mental representations of the] categories of the world). Murphy’s criticism is grounded mostly in empirical psychological studies; for a similar criticism in clearly philosophical terms, see e.g., Laurence and Margolis 1999.

¹⁷ Gallie’s sixth condition for essentially contested concepts, the original exemplar (8.1), might deceive a bit here, because Gallie’s thesis has more in common with the prototype theory than the exemplar theory. If the exemplar theory of concepts is understood broadly to suggest that people categorize “on the basis of similarity to known examples or to idealized examples abstracted from known examples” (Adcock 2005, 12), the affinity with Gallie’s views is however undeniable (cf. ch. 8; see also esp. 12.4). For a discussion of the prototype and exemplar theories, see e.g., Laurence and Margolis 1999; Murphy 2002; Machery 2009.

understand concepts through simple definitions, and they both appear to affirm that concepts or terms are complex and variously describable, which results in different uses or applications.

One key general finding in line with the prototype-theory and Rosch's studies is that both the typicality of some members of a category and the fuzziness of conceptual categories in terms of borderline cases – i.e., objects being situated sometimes in one category and sometimes in another, even by the same person – can in large part be explained by the frequency of family resemblances between the members of a category. As the term 'prototype' implies, each category is now presumably represented by a prototype that shares most of the properties of the members of a category. If people come to learn and better understand concepts through such prototypes – or, even more strongly, the prototypes can be said to stand for categories/concepts – Gallie's idea that various uses of a concept are derived from the original exemplar by appraising the similarity of one's particular use with it does not sound as contentious as it is usually taken to be (ECC 176/PHU 165; see also 8.2). Empirical studies and psychological theories that are formed on their basis should not be equated with Gallie's rudimentary outline of essential contestedness, of course. These similarities are suggestive rather than illustrating clear continuities. However, the rough resemblances between Gallie's thesis and the later views are striking enough that one may credit Gallie with some prescience¹⁸.

To sum things up, there are clear similarities between essentially contested concepts and the notion of family resemblance, which is not a coincidence. However, Gallie's thesis *as it is originally put forward* is not reducible to Wittgenstein's views, but prevents from trying to construct a thesis of essential contestability that corresponds more closely to the notion of family resemblance. The readiness of some of Gallie's commentators to eschew one or more of his original conditions may stem from their Wittgensteinian reading. This does not have to reflect any misunderstanding on their part, but rather a genuine belief that this is the most promising direction to develop the general idea of essential contestability.

2.4 Gallie and Peircean pragmatism

Gallie thought highly of Charles Sanders Peirce. This we do not have to guess as it is on display in Gallie's commentary *Peirce and Pragmatism* (1952). Gallie also marked Peirce as one, or perhaps even the most, powerful intellectual influence on him (Gallie 2000, 175). What is considerably less clear, however, is the extent to which Gallie's views on essential contestability, specifically, were directly

¹⁸ The instances in which Gallie directly mentions 'prototype' are ECC 176/PHU 165, ART 111/PHU 175.

influenced by Peirce's thinking. Tullio Viola (2019¹⁹) states that Gallie "recognized in Peirce precisely the opportunity to bridge the gap between humanistic and scientific approaches," a matter that Gallie had felt unsettling since his student days at Oxford (Viola 2019, 240-1; Gallie 2000, 160). This is pertinent also because Gallie posits essentially contested concepts that are typical to humanistic fields of inquiry, in juxtaposition with scientific concepts that have predictive power, and on which there seem to be a great deal more agreement. More specifically, Viola argues that

All areas of his work are influenced by his attempt to take up and further articulate a major insight of Peirce's semiotics, namely the idea that symbols are inherently *vague*, and that their meaning is in a state of perpetual growth. Viola 2019, 233

Viola also maintains that Gallie's interest in Peirce revolved around the concept of vagueness, and this interest encompassed "the whole spectrum of his [earlier] philosophical preoccupations" (Viola 2019, 235; see also 12.1). I will not cover all the Peirce-related issues, here, and some other relevant connections are mentioned in subsequent parts. Instead, I am content to present some basic Peircean ideas that have likely influenced Gallie and that help in understanding some of his theoretical choices.

In *ECC*, *ART*, and chapter eight of *PHU* combined, there is only one explicit reference to Peirce²⁰. Curiously, it does not suggest in any way that Gallie's views have a Peircean background, quite on the contrary. In the passage, Gallie counts Peirce among those who have urged us to answer affirmatively to the question whether the possibility of obtaining universal agreement is necessarily required for the genuineness of arguments and disputes of all kinds. Now, Gallie remarks that those people "have entirely neglected the existence of essentially contested concepts, and [they] have failed to examine in any detail the peculiar structures of the arguments to which our use of essentially contested concepts give rise" (*PHU* 183-4). Viola observes that "from the mid-1950s on Gallie distanced himself from some assumptions of Peirce's philosophy," and that meant particularly the idea that rational discourse is preconditioned on the possibility of reaching agreement in the long run. In the Peircean frame, disagreement is to be viewed either as a transitory stage or an altogether irrational one. (Viola 2019, 234, 240.) In contrast, the notion that engaging in irresolvable and endless disagreements can be considered perfectly reasonable is a recurring motif in *ECC* (esp. *ECC* 168-9, 188-9, 193-4, 196; see also 11.4; 13.2), and Gallie's seventh condition of essentially contested concepts can be read as an affirmation of conceptual progress that is made possible only by disagreement (cf. 9.1).

¹⁹ I had the opportunity to become acquainted with Viola's research on the topic at the workshop "(60 Years of) Essentially Contested Concepts" in Edinburgh in 2016. I am highly indebted to Viola's insightful analysis, even if I go about presenting the matter slightly differently at certain points. Possible imprecisions and misunderstandings in all the related matters, in this and all other similar cases, are my own doing, of course.

²⁰ That is, *PHU* 183-4, or alternatively *ECC* 189 with otherwise the same content but without naming Peirce.

Still, quite a few of Peirce's insights, ideas and notions may have influenced how the thesis of essential contestedness is specifically formulated. Peirce's Pragmatist maxim is a natural place to start: "Consider what effects, that might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then, our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object" (Peirce, *Collected Papers* 5*2 quoted in Gallie 1952, 11). Now, essentially contested concepts are meant to signify valued achievements, and achievements are, by their nature, to be realized somehow. It makes sense to think that achievements can be realized in various ways—consider, for example, Gallie's artificial example (3.3; 11.1). This way one's appraisal of what are the significant aspects of the valued achievement of, for example, social justice or democracy, boils down to assessing how social justice or democracy could be realized in the best possible way. This is a very general sense in which a kind of pragmatist stance is built into the notion of an essentially contested concept. In any case, Gallie starts the introductory section of *Peirce and Pragmatism* by pointing out that pragmatism was first introduced into philosophy to name a principle or method of logic; or to quote Peirce himself, "a method of ascertaining the meaning of hard words and abstract conceptions (...) a method of determining the meanings of intellectual concepts, that is, of those upon which reasoning may hinge" (Peirce, *Collected Papers*, 5*464 quoted in Gallie 1952, 11). This suggests that we perhaps do not have attempt to characterize the elements of Gallie's thesis in loosely pragmatist terms, as we can try to find out instead how Gallie viewed Peircean ideas regarding words and signs, and what their bearing is on the thesis of essentially contested concepts.

To begin with, Peirce thought that all signs are to be further determined by other signs, or by their *interpretants*²¹. This opens a forward-looking perspective into the future development of a sign. The sign is to be developed and determined by its future interpretants, and every sign is "essentially capable of evoking an endless series of further interpretant signs"²² (Gallie 1952, 126). If there indeed are, on the horizon, an endless series of further interpretants that are capable of bringing further development and determination to the sign, the corollary is that past versions of the sign are less developed and determined than the current ones, and the current ones are less developed and determined than the future ones. This means that "every sign that we use is essentially incomplete, we can always, theoretically, come to use and understand it better than we

²¹ 'Interpretants' are not to be understood as persons or minds that do the interpreting, but as other signs that have their own interpretants in turn (see e.g., Gallie 1952, 118ff). This is not to be confused with 'interpreters' that are quite properly understood as persons, individuals, group members etc. and which are involved in all relevant sort of disagreements as concept-users.

²² Gallie makes a note that, for Peirce, the endlessness of series is not necessary, but a matter of potentiality, and that "Peirce frequently points out" that "exigencies of practical life inevitably cut short such potentially endless development" (Gallie 1952, 126). In his thesis, Gallie takes quite a different perspective to the requirements of the practical circumstances of life. For him, "exigencies of living" (ECC 190), demand one to take a stance in disagreements in which suspension of judgment for an indefinite length of time might otherwise be the reasonable way to proceed (13.2)

actually do”²³ (Gallie 1952, 128). The competent use, or understanding, of a sign is always a matter of degree and/or a matter of context.

In Gallie’s reading of Peirce, the capacity of a sign “for endless development through a succession of further possible signs” is defined as “its most important necessary characteristic” (Gallie 1952, 127). But Gallie also states that perhaps the “most characteristic and fundamental philosophical insight” of Peirce is that

every symbol—be it a word, a sentence, or a scientific formula—is essentially something to be developed, something that requires or calls for development if it is to fulfil its proper function of expressing and communicating intelligent thought. Gallie 1952, 46

According to Viola, a *symbol* is “a general and mediated sign like a word or concept.” Moreover, it is *indeterminate* if there is latitude or freedom to determine it further, i.e., its interpretation is not perfectly fixed, and it is *vague* to the extent it suggests a better or more complete characterization while falling short of providing it. Any given example may lead one astray because it could even be legitimately said that “no symbol can ever be entirely exempt from vagueness, because all symbols are liable to be further determined by other signs of experiences.”²⁴ (Viola 2019, 235–6.)

It appears that indeterminacy is required of a sign that is vague, because a vague sign looks to be a sign whose *additional* latitude of determination is assumed, even if how the reference should be properly fixed remains unclear. If there were no latitude for determining the sign further, but such latitude would be presumed and the sign accordingly determined anyway, I assume one would deal with ambiguity instead of vagueness. This I cannot say for certain, however, because the present technical sense of vagueness goes against how vagueness is most often understood (cf. 12.1). Nevertheless, vagueness as the determination of the boundaries of the concept appears to be pretty exactly the sense in which Gallie understands essentially contested concepts as persistently vague. (see 6.1; 6.2; 12.1; 18.1.) It is also the case that the usage of essentially contested concepts is not meant to remain static, as at least some development or “redetermination” is needed for these concepts to better capture the valued achievements they signify in the changing circumstances—consider Gallie’s conditions of openness (6.1) and progressive competition (9.1).

In the current framework, signs/symbols do not seem to be that different from concepts, or even conceptions. Tellingly enough, Gallie himself does not explicitly distinguish between words/terms and concepts (see also 16.2). At one

²³ This seems to be close to what Friedrich Waismann had in mind with the notion of open texture (see 6.2). The connection between Waismann’s open texture and Gallie’s notion of openness has often been pointed out. Yet in view of Gallie’s familiarity with Peirce, it is plausible that Gallie’s debt to Peirce is equally, if not even more, substantial.

²⁴ Peirce himself has asserted, rather hermeneutically, that “No communication of one person to another can be entirely definite, that is, non-vague. . . . Much . . . must be vague, because no man’s interpretation of words is based on exactly the same experience as any other man’s” (Peirce quoted in Viola 2019, 236). This may be taken to suggest that vagueness is (also) a user-dependent phenomenon, or that it arises between interpreters of words/signs.

point, Gallie remarks that “if Peirce’s doctrine of Thought-signs be accepted, a conception or thought possesses meaning in exactly the same ways or under exactly the same conditions as does the word or sentence which expresses it” (Gallie 1952, 138). According to Gallie, Peirce suggests an analogy between thoughts and signs: every thought addresses itself to another (Gallie 1952, 133). This looks to be premised on the notion that both signs and thoughts are communicated and interpreted by creatures who adapt to their circumstances, qualifying their judgments concerning the symbols when needed. The matter is certainly complicated, and I do not wish to dwell on it needlessly. Yet it is of consequence that Gallie takes Peirce to hold that thought, not just a sign, “is something that takes time to reveal the thing that it is, i.e., essentially a ‘would-be’, never something given in the immediate present, complete, self-dependent, self-justifying” (Gallie 1952, 134). The “would-be” character of symbols (or thoughts) is connected to a more general insight, “namely the idea that human action, thought, and experience develop over time in a creative and unpredictable manner, by means of a constant interplay with the context in which they are embedded” (Viola 2019, 236). Instead of being merely synchronic and a-situational, thoughts are now understood diachronically and situationally, which paves way for the historicity of symbols/concepts (cf. ECC 197–8).

It is likely that these ideas have influenced the notion of the essentially contested concept as something that is properly understood or clarified when one considers instances displaying its growth and development, or by considering how it came to be (ECC 198 quoted below). Although Gallie’s seven conditions of essentially contested concepts are discussed in length in part two, I should note here that Viola considers the fourth and the sixth condition, when suitably conceived, as Peircean enough to suggest that

some of the defining features of Peircean vagueness contribute to explaining the most characteristic aspects of essentially contested concepts, namely their involving both agreement on what we are talking about when we employ them, and disagreement on how exactly we are to characterize their meaning. Viola 2019, 247

At the end of *ECC*, Gallie echoes much of what has currently been said concerning the possibility of determining vague signs further and further. The would-be character of the concepts which “come to be” is also clearly present:

Commonly we come to see more precisely what a given scientific concept means by contrasting its deductive powers with those of other closely related concepts: in the case of an appraisive concept, we can best see more precisely what it means by comparing and contrasting our uses of it now with other earlier uses of it or its progenitors, i.e., by considering how it came to be. ECC, 198; see also ART 107

In *Peirce and Pragmatism*, Gallie notes that Peirce distinguishes particular interpretants of a sign – which are further signs to a given sign – from the sign’s ‘entire intended general interpretant.’ Gallie himself presents a similar sort of structure for essentially contested concepts: they are concepts that consist of mutually contesting uses that together make up a concept’s standard general use (ECC 169; 11.3; 18.1). Peirce’s signs, or ‘thought-signs,’ grow when further

interpretants are added to the general interpretant; the process which can manifest itself, for example, in the improved understanding of a scientist concerning the practical consequences of using a particular sign (or symbol, conception, scientific formula *et cetera*). In contrast, essentially contested concepts reveal their character in the course of contestation that has a temporal/historical dimension. This is not to say that Gallie is simply imitating or paralleling Peirce. A clear divergence between Gallie and Peirce can be located to how they view disagreement. Gallie can be interpreted to hold that “the necessarily agonistic character of essentially contested concepts [Condition V] and the recognition that only the competition among their different conceptions may ensure optimal usage [Condition VII],” that runs counter to “Peirce’s insistence on agreement in the long run as a regulative idea of rational inquiries.” (Viola 2019, 247.)

2.5 Historicism and historical understanding

It has been argued, at times, that Gallie’s position concerning essentially contested concepts amounts to adopting an ahistorical attitude or stance with respect to concepts. Despite Gallie’s explicit assurances to the contrary²⁵, this view is not that uncommon in the literature (with variations, e.g., Ball 1988, 14; Vincent 2004, 101, 104, 108, 133; Ifversen 2011, 75n31; Gautier 2019, 96–7; contra e.g., Gellner 1974; Ricciardi 2001). As Tullio Viola observes, the aspect of Gallie’s work that is concerned with the relation between disagreement and history is all too often forgotten (Viola 2019, 234). Here, I will present an outline for contextualizing Gallie’s approach in terms of his historical interests.

In the current study, my primary focus is on the texts in which Gallie explicitly mentions and discusses essentially contested concepts. However, there is an underlying theme in Gallie’s works that span a decade from the mid-fifties to the mid-sixties²⁶: a theme which has two strands that are already tentatively present in *ECC*. First, Gallie is contrasting the reasoning typical to natural or physical sciences to the reasoning needed in other fields, or in “discussions of

²⁵ Consider the passage added to the *PHU*-version: “But these conditions [i.e., (VI) and (VII)] evidently embody an historical approach to, and appreciation of, the special character of essentially contested concepts. As we saw in the case of certain institutions, so here again, understanding of how concepts of this kind function or can be used requires some appreciation of how they *came to be* usable in a rather unusual way. The importance of this historical approach and appreciation will at once become plain when we turn to our live examples” (*PHU*, 168). Perhaps this addition was made because the matter was not sufficiently clear to Gallie’s contemporary readers after the publication of *ECC*. The critical discussion concerning the adequacy of Gallie’s method aside, the fact that the historical dimension of Gallie’s thesis is still overlooked today is remarkable.

²⁶ These texts include “Explanations in History and the Genetic Sciences” (1955), “Essentially Contested Concepts” (1956a/*ECC*), “Art as an Essentially Contested Concept” (1956b/*ART*), “What Makes a Subject Scientific?” (1957), “The Historical Understanding” (1963), and *Philosophy and Historical Understanding* (Gallie 1964/*PHU*). *PHU* contains a revised version of *ECC*-article as one of its chapters (i.e., ch. 8).

religious, political and artistic problems” (ECC 167, 169, 178–9, 196–7). In the preface of *PHU*, Gallie states that he has “tried to give an intelligible account of the kind of understanding that is commonly ascribed to historians and is commonly contrasted with the understanding that is achieved in the natural sciences” (PHU 9). In general, Gallie does not deem it reasonable to extend the methodological assumptions of the physical sciences—attributed to them by empiristically and positivistically minded philosophers—to the humanistic studies (in *ECC*) or historical studies, especially concerning what counts as a proper historical explanation (in *PHU*).

Second, as it is argued in *PHU*, in constructing a historical narrative one engages in a distinct activity, i.e., ‘historical understanding’ (e.g., PHU 11–2, 19–20, 105). Historical understanding is also “the exercise of the capacity to follow a story, where the story is known to be based on evidence,” and following a historical narrative requires the acceptance of explanations that help one to follow further when one’s understanding is hindered for one reason or another (PHU 105). In the latter half of *PHU*, Gallie tries to show, in the light of his account of historical understanding, “the relevance of historical considerations to political life, to the practice of science and, in more detail, to the practice and problems of philosophy” (PHU 9). Indeed, the last two chapters of *PHU*, which the revised formulation of the thesis of essential contestedness precedes, are a treatise on how moral philosophy and metaphysics, and perhaps philosophy itself, require or presuppose historical understanding (PHU 192ff). Gallie is therefore interested in figuring out to which fields of inquiry historical understanding properly applies, and his account of essential contestability appears to be part of that project. Some of the theoretical tension that is so pronounced in *ECC* may thus be a consequence of Gallie’s yet unarticulated views on historical understanding and its proper domain²⁷.

The elucidation of relevant differences between natural sciences and historical study is a recurring theme in most of the first half of *PHU*. Specifically, Gallie objects against a tendency to present historical explanation as a weakened version of the kind of explanation that is often considered to be a characteristic of natural sciences, or systematic sciences more generally. In other words,

it is claimed or assumed that any adequate explanation must conform to the deductivist model, in which a general law or formula, applied to a particular case, is shown to require, and hence logically to explain, a result of such and such description.
PHU, 105

The evident reference point for Gallie’s assertion is the widely influential covering-law model, the main proponents of which, Carl G. Hempel and Karl

²⁷ Gallie has made certain changes to *PHU* which have often been considered non-fundamental (e.g., Ruben 2010, 257). Yet some of the subtle changes, like Gallie’s altered discussion of DEMOCRACY (esp. compare ECC 183 with PHU 178; see also 11.3) or a somewhat different stance he takes in relation to unreasonable concept-uses (PHU 188–90; see also 13.3), may bring one to change one’s previous interpretation.

Popper, arguably set the tone for much of the subsequent discussions that were to be known as the critical philosophy of history²⁸.

In 1942, Hempel published a hugely influential article, “The Function of General Laws in History,” in which he wanted to show

that general laws have quite analogous functions in history and in the natural sciences, that they form an indispensable instrument of historical research, and that they even constitute the common basis of various procedures which are often considered as characteristic of the social in contradistinction to the natural sciences. Hempel 1942, 35

In Hempel’s view the model of explanation that should be strived for is nomological: scientific laws play the central role in all explanations. The view that states that an adequate explanation must be based in scientific law is called *nomologicalism*. In the context of the philosophy of history, nomologicalism involves seeing particular events and entities as instances of general pattern or laws, and it can be contrasted with *historicism* which decrees that “the identity of social entities and actions lies in their history such that to understand them is to grasp the historical development by which they came to be what they are” (Fay 1996, 155; see esp. ECC 198; ART 107–8, 110; PHU 171, 174). In historicist explanations the particularity and uniqueness of events is emphasized in one way or another. The opposite holds in nomological explanations: laws are more than mere generalizations based on past observations and events, and they apply to future instances (covered by those laws) as well. Particular historical events or actions are not considered as such, in their uniqueness; instead, the nomological explanation assumes that there are invariable relations between *classes of events*. The logical form of this type of explanation is the *deductive-nomological model of explanation*²⁹, which makes possible to deduce statements describing particular

²⁸ The last century of the philosophy of history and historiography can be divided into at least two, possibly three, paramount trends of thought. The first of these strands can be called the *substantive* or *speculative* philosophy of history—often represented by figures such as Hegel, Marx and Vico. The second strand is most often called either *analytical* or *critical* philosophy of history, and it got much of its impetus from logical positivism and empiricism along with the general interest in scientific methods and general laws. Common themes of interest for critical and analytical philosophers of historiography are the examination of conditions of knowledge of history and historical explanations, the analysis of language of historiography, and the clarification of the concepts commonly used by historians. The central representatives of the critical philosophy of history are William Dray, Arthur Danto, and Maurice Mandelbaum—and Gallie can be included in this group as well. The third strand, that is also the latest, has been dubbed sometimes as *the narrativist philosophy of historiography* [Kuukkanen 2015]. (Gardiner 1974; Tucker 2009.) Overall, Gallie’s approach to issues of the philosophy of history, or historiography, is strikingly humanistic and phenomenological, especially in comparison to other critical philosophers of history (Mink 1968, esp. 684–5; see also e.g., ART 112).

²⁹ The deductive-nomological model of explanation “relates a statement describing [an event] e to a series of statements about other events c and to one or more general laws L such that the statement of e (the explanandum) is logically deducible from the conjoint statement of c and L (the explanans). Given such an explanation, the e event could not have been other than it was—we see why it *had* to be and thus we have explained it (...) The deduction from the explanans to the explanandum is possible only because of the universal law which asserts

events that have not yet occurred if the general laws and particular causes are known. There exists a structural identity between explanation and prediction: “unless an explanation could have functioned as a prediction it is not acceptable as an explanation” (Fay 1996, 158).

On the face of it, the nomological and historicist³⁰ perspectives look to be fundamentally at odds with each other, since history-studies are quite plausibly concerned with timed events that form sequences that are at least distinctive if not completely unique. According to nomologicalism, historical, particular events should be replaced by classes of events, and the nomological perspective does not seem to allow any room for uniqueness, at least not in any explanatory sense. According to Louis Mink, “It could be said without exaggeration that until about 1965 the critical philosophy of history *was* the controversy over the covering-law model” (Mink 1973, 730 quoted in Vann 1987, 2). Richard Vann notes, in turn, that Mink, W.H. Dray, and Gallie all attacked “the underlying assumption of Hempel’s article, that all claims to knowledge must—at least implicitly—have the same logical structure”³¹ (Vann 1987, 2). Gallie characterized this situation in a following way: “There has been a persistent tendency, even in the ablest writers, to present historical explanations as so many curiously weakened versions of the kind of explanation that is characteristic of the natural sciences” (PHU 105). However, in his review of *PHU*, W.H. Walsh views Gallie as exaggerating the authoritative status given by previous philosophers to the covering law account (Walsh 1966, 221). Be that as it may, it seems unlikely that historians who conduct actual historical research would seek, in practice, to explain historical events by applying general laws to specific cases; neither do they attempt to form such laws on the basis of historical particulars. In the words of Ola Halldén, historians “almost never work with explanatory models that subsume events under a covering law; i.e., they do not use a subsumption theory of explanation” (Halldén 1997, 203). Of course, that is just one more reason to enquire into the matter of what the proper kind of historical explanation should be.

that every case in which events of the type C occur events of the type E will also occur” (Fay 1996, 157–8). For a more detailed account of nomological explanation, see Hempel 1965.

³⁰ For a useful typology of various notions that can be termed historicist preceding Gallie’s principal contributions, see Lee and Beck 1954. As a side note, HISTORICISM is also on the long list of concepts that has been referred to as “essentially contested,” even if in a very loose manner (see Paul 2010, 184).

³¹ W.H. Dray analyzes Gallie’s theory of historical explanations, calling it “the followable contingency model,” and contrasts it with the causal models of Arthur C. Danto and Morton White in “On the Nature and Role of Narrative in Historiography” (Dray 1971). The causal models of historical explanations can be seen to stem from Hempel’s basic idea of the centrality of covering-laws in historical explanations—Louis O. Mink has called White a “covering law revisionist” (Mink 1968, 683). Furthermore, I agree with Mink that, for Gallie, ‘contingent’ means something like ‘surprising’ or ‘unexpected in the circumstances’ rather than something more objective like ‘not subject to law’ or ‘not predictable in principle.’ The knowledge one has available in one’s circumstances is the decisive factor. (ibid., 684–5.)

In *The Poverty of Historicism* (1957/1966³²), Popper defines historicism as “an approach to the social sciences which assumes that *historical prediction* is their principal aim, and which assumes that this aim is attainable by discovering the ‘rhythms’ or the ‘patterns’, the ‘laws’ or the ‘trends’ that underlie the evolution of history” (ibid., 3). Lee and Beck note that Popper's use of the term “historicism” is unfortunate because “almost all the proponents of historicism repudiate any search for “laws” in the physical science sense, and hence deny that history offers a basis for prediction” (Lee and Beck 1954, 577). The sort of historicism attacked by Popper is often attributed to thinkers such as Hegel and Marx who seem to imply that the march of history follows its own necessary logic³³.

Gallie makes a passing reference to what I take to be the Popperian conception of historicism in the beginning of “Concluding Remarks” of *ECC* (*ECC* 196), and he ends the article by stating that “If this be historicism, I cannot see that it is fallacious; and if it be acceptable in connexion with appraisive concepts, then it is well worth asking where the limit of its acceptability should be drawn” (ibid., 198). And indeed, the type of historicism Gallie espouses is very different from the one Popper attacks. Gallie is a philosopher who has passion for contingency, not for necessity (see Gellner 1974, 107), and the notion of ironclad historical laws is foreign to him as something that could be able to fulfil the functions of historical explanation³⁴. Historical events and their sequences are unique, their continuation cannot be predicted with certainty, but we can understand them much like we are able to follow stories for better or worse: sometimes we are blindsided by what happens next; sometimes the flow of the story seems perfectly natural and the events follow each other almost in a “necessary” fashion. There is an important place for general laws in studying history (e.g., PHU 126), but ultimately it rests on the historian to produce an explanation that aids others in following the story properly and not just lay out a description of conditions and different possibilities according to some generalization or law.

³² According to the “historical note” in the beginning of the book, the first outline of the work was presented as a paper as early as 1936. It was also published in three parts in the journal *Economica* in 1944 and 1945. Gallie was aware of Popper’s thesis before the book’s publication—and, more importantly, before the publication of 1956 articles, i.e., *ECC* and *ART*—as he makes a reference to the third part of it in Gallie 1955.

³³ Popper sees historicist predictions as resting on untenable epistemological notions and, moreover, as a mode of thinking that easily leads to the dangers of totalitarianism connecting historicist contemplation of history to the acceptance of the intuition that human beings have an essential human destiny. Instead, historical interpretations should “answer a need arising out of the practical problems and decisions which face us” (Popper 1945, 255–6). Gallie agrees with Popper that the type of historicism so relentlessly attacked by him does not offer a fruitful way forward (PHU 55). In view of his overall work, it also seems to be the case that Gallie affirms the importance of historical understanding regarding practical issues, at least to the extent that the concepts, to which we arrive by virtue of historical understanding, are capable of informing us what to do. His emphasis on achievement-nature of essentially contested concepts indicates that to be the case.

³⁴ For Gallie’s views concerning how the use of Hempelian covering-law account or, more generally, the use of general laws and formulas, in historical research and explanation are deficient, see PHU 105ff.

In addition, Gallie contrasts appraisive concepts (most especially essentially contested concepts) with the concepts of physical sciences by observing that the appraisive concepts do not have a similar predictive or deductive power (ECC 197–8). Instead, the appraisive concepts are characterized by uncertainty in respect of what the future holds with reference to their correct use (cf. 6.1; 12.1). Whether these remarks by Gallie at the end of *ECC* are a low-key reference to Popperian critique, specifically, is somewhat beside the point. It seems clear, in any case, that Gallie understood his thesis as pertaining closely to historicist considerations—for instance, Andrew Vincent notes that Gallie “hints” at the potential to move beyond conceptual analysis into critical conceptual history (Vincent 2004, 101)—which required him to steer clear of the more unfortunate forms of historicism. At the very least he needed to let it be known that he was aware of the issue.

Essentially contested concepts, as appraisive concepts, require historical understanding in their own right. Gallie contends that clarification or improved understanding of an appraisive concept is “obtained in a very different manner from clarification of any concept of science.” It turns out that one needs to consider “such instances as display its growth and development” or how the concept “came to be” (ECC, 181, 196–8; ART 107). Here, we see again how Gallie’s views on the differences between physical or natural sciences and humanistic inquiries, or on the differences between the concepts used and the type of reasoning that is preferred, intertwine with his philosophical insights concerning historical understanding. Unfortunately, Gallie did not expand on the matter of historical understanding specifically in *ECC*, which is why it is within the realm of possibility to understand his thesis as ahistorical. With certain word-choices along with the brevity of his remarks, Gallie also gives the impression that he had not yet thought the issue completely through at the time of *ECC*—the revised *PHU*-version ends quite differently. Be that as it may, despite the general reception of *ECC*, it is certainly *possible* to read the thesis of essential contestedness as a single, albeit important, theoretical contribution on the path to identifying how wide and far historical understanding properly applies. In *PHU*, Gallie attempts to connect the notion of essentially contested concepts with his wider views regarding the philosophy of historiography³⁵, and it just might

³⁵ The importance of the revised thesis in the overall arrangement of *PHU* is a somewhat contested matter. Ernest Gellner does not think that the book is *primarily* a contribution to the logic of historiography because he views chapter eight as the really crucial: “It is the logical peak, the culminating point of a fine ridge, from which the subsidiary ridges and buttresses, valleys and foothills of the argument fall away and can be seen to their best advantage” (Gellner 1974, 95; cf. *PHU* 9). Yet with *PHU*, Gallie also established himself as an authoritative proponent of “critical” philosophy of history (Viola 2019, 234)—the title of the first chapter of *PHU* is, in fact, “Critical Philosophy of History.” Gallie’s status as a critical philosopher is not due to his ideas concerning essential contestability, however, but rather because he introduced a novel idea of a historical narrative the following of a story. This may have inspired the title of Gellner’s review of *PHU*—the review itself is all about Gallie’s idea of essential contestedness—“The Concept of a Story” (Gellner 1974). Essentially contested concepts may share some qualities with narratives, but if that is the case Gallie leaves us guessing what exactly those qualities are (cf. 18.4).

be that he had not yet thought the matter through in *ECC*. In any case, concerning the works published in the time period that is of special interest to us, it can be asserted with confidence that Gallie's historical concerns and ideas are never that far away from other, seemingly separate, observations regarding essential contestedness.

2.6 The influence and broad theoretical context of Gallie's thesis

Gallie has influenced and inspired several thinkers, some of which have advocated for a thesis of essential contestability of their own. Some of the later contributions display undeniably more attention to detail and conceptual clarity than Gallie's original texts. And yet it is not evident that the subsequent theorists have fared substantially better in clarifying the issues that held Gallie's attention³⁶. Rather, they have often gone in quite different directions or have made interpretations that fit rather ill with Gallie's original thesis and the motivation behind it (Ruben 2010, 258-9). Already in the 1970s there are articles about essential contestability which mostly discuss the views of someone other than Gallie, or which attribute someone else's interpretation straightforwardly to Gallie. The critical debate has been fragmented while being guided by mutually incompatible theoretical interests and assumptions. One author has posited that "the idea of essential contestation has become so stretched and muddled since W.B. Gallie's original, careful statement of it (...) that I think it best left alone here" (Clark 2007, 66n61). The evident danger is that, despite its successes elsewhere, the talk of essential contestability conflates a variety of distinct matters and the idiom of essential contestability would therefore constitute an impediment to further theoretical advance (Gray 1983, 77).

According to Michael Rhodes, the notion of essential contestability has been "treated both as a challenge and as an excuse by social theorists." On the one hand, there are theorists who consider their terms and concepts to be in competition with those proposed by others, each side wanting to be the champion. On the other hand, the availability of the notion makes it easy to conclude that the failure to reach agreement is due to terms and concepts being always open to contest instead of acknowledging factors such as imprecision, ignorance, or belligerence as affecting the result. (Rhodes 2000, 1.) There is also some truth in Eugene Garver's observation that the idea of essentially contested concepts "has been referred to, because of its immediate phonological appeal, in

³⁶ For instance, Andrew Mason holds that "the thesis that key political concepts are essentially contested (...) is the best candidate for an account of why political concepts are inherently disputable" (Mason 1993, 13). In his 2007 dissertation entitled "Contested Concepts and Competing Conceptions" Mark Criley contends that Gallie's *ECC* is "the first and, to date, the most extensive examination of contested concepts" (Criley 2007, 16). In the latter case, to make such a striking claim requires grasping the notion of a contested concept rather narrowly, I think. It is also possible that ideas sufficiently similar to Gallie's have been discussed only in a piecemeal fashion.

acts of incantation and as a substitute for argument,” and it has been “appealed to more often than thought about” (Garver 1990, 251). The wide embracing of ‘essentially contested concepts’ as a common catch-phrase has led to numerous articles, according to which mere interest-dependence (Green 1987, 17), or the presence of heated disagreement having no resolution currently in sight (Waldron 2002, 148–9; Abbey 2005, 462), is enough to render a concept essentially contested. Many of these articles commonly proceed by asking whether a given concept maps with Gallie’s characterization of essentially contested/contestable concepts (Syrjämäki 2011, 149; Väyrynen 2014, 2n5) as part of a general exposition on some concept that is of particular significance in one’s discipline. Oftentimes the references to essentially contested concepts are fleeting, after which the author is quick to move forward (e.g., Thomas 2006, 23; Mounk 2018, 92; List and Valentini 2016, 532; see Kurki 2010, 370–2). The idea of essential contestability is clearly vulnerable to overuse (Waldron 2002, 148); and it has even been said that nearly every concept that plays a role in debates has been called essentially contested³⁷ (van der Burg 2017, 250). The analyses are rarely grounded in specific contexts (Garver 1990, 254; Gautier 2019, 98).

There is no reason to be altogether pessimistic about either the influence or the application of the essential contestability thesis. Terence Ball ends up rejecting essential contestability of concepts, yet he finds value in the thesis “as a rhetorical stratagem for reminding us of a persistent and recurring feature of political discourse – namely the perpetual possibility of disagreement” (Ball 2002, 25). Diving deeper into Gallie’s framework and its concerns is fruitful in terms of opening a point of reflection on the intersection of normative and empirical concerns in many fields (Collier et al. 2006, 213). The thesis is a challenge also in that it requires us to come up with adequate accounts with respect to how we think in terms of concepts and their presumed contestability. Controversies aside, Gallie’s thesis has been said to provide “a major set of tools for understanding and analyzing concepts” (Collier et al. 2006, 212), or being “a compelling tool to conduct literature reviews and to raise the level of awareness of researchers in a given field” (Gautier 2019, 96). Gallie’s argument is particularly useful to those who insist political inquiry is an interpretative endeavor instead of having to do with behavioral methods or aiming to construct precise definitions that are modelled after natural sciences (Gunnell 2017, 193). Part of Gallie’s aim was to make way for pluralism and rational disagreement in the social sciences which would be made possible by the mode of reasoning that differs from the one professed in the natural sciences (Abbey 2005, 480). Wayne Booth considers that job well done as it is “precisely because the concepts we grapple with are essentially contested, in Gallie’s sense, that one is forced into critical pluralism in the first place” (Booth 1977, 410).

³⁷ To give just a sample of the variety of candidates, all of the following have been claimed as essentially contested or contestable: poem (Booth 1977), ethnographic assertion (Geertz 1973/2000), corporate social responsibility (Okoye 2009), rape (Reitan 2011), violence (Garver 1988), citizenship (Beck 1996), personhood (Gibson 2004), common good, and innovation [in the Islamic tradition] (Eickelman 2015).

William Connolly is one of the illustrious thinkers who have been directly influenced by Gallie's original thesis (see Schoolman 2008), and who have disseminated the idea to different audiences. Connolly's *The Terms of Political Discourse* (1974/1993), in which Connolly explicitly interprets and further develops Gallie's thesis, frames essential contestability in rich moral and political terms in addition to challenging, for example, the call for the straightforward operationalization of concepts used in social and political sciences³⁸. Along with Steven Lukes's influential *Power: A Radical View* (1974/2005), Connolly's work is probably a key reason why Michael Freeden can twenty years later assert that "Any examination of political concepts must be indebted to Gallie's seminal notion of essentially contested concepts" (Freeden 1996, 55)³⁹.

Gallie's basic idea has been widely applied in political studies, in one form or another. For instance, Milja Kurki observes that that "[d]emocratic theorists have taken essential contestability of democracy to be one of the most basic and crucial starting points in their analysis" (Kurki 2010, 376). At least some knowledge of the essential contestability thesis is nowadays expected of those studying politics (Vincent 2004, 108), which is the way the notion has become an integral part of professional know-how of political theorists, especially in the Anglo-American tradition. Connolly's thesis is perhaps the most well-known variant of Gallie's original account. It could be due to its influence that Gallie is sometimes (e.g., Ball 2002, 21; Galston 2014) uncritically interpreted as suggesting that all, or practically all, political (or social, or ethical) concepts are essentially contested (see also Eynine 2011, 120, 140)⁴⁰. Since its publication, Gallie's argument has both inspired and irritated political theorists (Norberg 2014).

In addition to political studies and theory, self-consciously normative or otherwise, Gallie's formulation has found its way into many discussions of legal analysis (Gunnell 2014, 485; 2017, 193⁴¹), and the influence of the thesis might

³⁸ For a perspective opposite to Connolly's, see *Political Concepts: A Reconstruction* (Oppenheim 1981) in which Felix Oppenheim, who Mario Ricciardi calls "a staunch opponent of 'essential contestability'" (Ricciardi 2001, 42), seeks to explicate an unambiguous set of neutral and descriptive operational concepts for the social sciences. Oppenheim has been criticized for putting forward reconstructed notions that have radically different points from those of ordinary discourse (Kristjánsson 1995, 74–5; see also MacIntyre 1973, 8).

³⁹ Connolly's individual renown has certainly helped in the matter. In a representative survey of political theorists teaching in North America, conducted in 2008, Connolly was ranked fourth after Rawls, Habermas, and Foucault in terms of who has made "the greatest impact on political theory over the last twenty years." *The Terms of Political Discourse* won the 1999 Benjamin Lippincott Award, "which is awarded every two years by the American Political Science Association in recognition of a work of exceptional quality by a living political theorist that is still considered significant after a time span of at least 15 years since the original date of publication." (Howarth 2014.)

⁴⁰ Connolly does not make this argument explicitly, but I tend to agree with the view that his notion of essential contestability is so broad that it applies to practically all political terms/concepts (cf. Ricciardi 2001, 42; Maxwell 2014).

⁴¹ Gunnell 2017 provides the following references as examples: Freeden 2008; Collier, Hidalgo, and Maciuceanu 2006; Mason 1990; Grafstein 1988; Koselleck 2002; Swanton 1985; Rawls 1971; Dworkin 1972. For Gallie's relation to legal studies and philosophy of law, especially in relation to Dworkin's views, see Stokes 2007 and Ehrenberg 2011.

even be greater in the social sciences than in philosophy (Criley 2007, 19; see also Smith 2002, 329–30). Väyrynen (2014) observes that “a massive range” of concepts has been claimed as essentially contestable and/or analyzed through Gallie’s framework. He specifically identifies two categories: political and legal concepts such as DEMOCRACY, FREEDOM, SECURITY, GENOCIDE, and HATE CRIME; and concepts of applied ethics and political philosophy like COERCION, RAPE, and PERSONHOOD. The latter relate to “debates concerning how to define concepts which pick out morally significant categories but over which there is persistent disagreement.” (Väyrynen 2014, 1–2.) There are thinkers who have arguably been influenced by Gallie, directly. In addition to Connolly, often cited influences include Ronald Dworkin’s (1977a) discussion of the contested concept and competing conception phenomenon, H.L.A. Hart’s (1961) treatment of justice and, most famously, the distinction between a concept and a conception employed by John Rawls (1971/1999)⁴². (Criley 2007, 19; Quest 2013, 74.)

Andrew Vincent perceives a rather straightforward continuum between, on the one hand, ordinary language theories and essential contestability and, on the other hand, later theories attempting to recover a normative and justificatory sphere of political philosophy that could overcome the relativist tendencies of essential contestability. Vincent writes:

Essential contestability was thus the *hors d’oeuvres* to the substantial main course of the concept, which although initially internally contested, could be finally resolved within a normative theory. Thus, classical normative theory *returned* again anointed with analytical oil. Vincent 2004, 109; see also Lakoff 2009, 179

In Gallie’s original framework, the possible confusion about the concept, i.e., that the disputants are talking past each other, is avoided by reference to a commonly accepted ‘exemplar’ which allows the meaningfulness/genuineness of debates. But when the matter was viewed from a new, and more analytical, perspective, it was easy to interpret the exemplar ahistorically as a common core held by the concepts such as JUSTICE, and the debate focused on what exactly that common core is (see Vincent 2004, 132–133). It follows that Gallie’s thesis, in which he stresses that essentially contested concepts need to be understood in terms of their historical development, is in tension with the kind of analytical philosophy

⁴² For the discussion of the concept/conception distinction, see 17.3. Also, see Guest 1991, 35–36 for the relation between Dworkin’s and Hart’s interpretations of Gallie’s original thesis. Stokes 2007 and Ehrenberg 2011 outline noteworthy intersections and differences between Gallie and Dworkin, who has developed Gallie’s ideas further in nuanced ways. I view Dworkin’s notion of *interpretive* concept, which is first presented in *Law’s Empire* (1986) and later discussed in *Justice for Hedgehogs* (2011), as especially noteworthy. However, in the current study I make no pretense of discussing Dworkin’s views in any real depth although I utilize his views on interpretiveness here and there. In addition, I would say that the similarities between the approaches of Rawls and Gallie do not end in the making of the concept/conception distinction. Generally speaking, Rawls (1971) seems to start where Gallie ends: the Rawlsian fact of pluralism is brought about by certain socio-historical conditions together with the burdens of judgment, which has a feel of essential contestability. Other notable affinities relate to how the notion of reasonable disagreement operates on the background of their ideas.

that is more interested in thought-experiments and other intuition pumping theoretical tools than inquiring on how things have historically come to be what they are⁴³.

What I just stated carries with it a curious paradox: as I previously noted (2.5), Gallie's work in the field of philosophy of history especially concerning what it is to follow a story (i.e., the main theme of *PHU*) merits the descriptor of 'analytical' philosophy of history. With regard to both the nature of historical explanations and how to treat concepts, Gallie can be considered an analytical philosopher, who engages in immanent criticism of what was held at the time. John Gray (1977, 1978) claims that essential contestability theses, in general, presuppose the validity of "some kind of ethical nonnaturalism," and thus they originate within a specific tradition of philosophical argument – as an example of this he gives "Aristotelian, Thomist, and Hegelian accounts of the relation between facts and values (for example) are characterized as logically fallacious." As to Gallie, specifically, Gray situates him as part of a program that "attempted to introduce into the discussions of meta-ethicists a sensitivity to the diversity and internal complexity of moral notions" (Gray 1977, 340), but I think Gallie can be seen to be at least equally unhappy with the presumption of necessary and sufficient conditions, or the sort of descriptivism that might follow it. In any case, Gray concludes, "as an immanent critique of some aspects of analytical empiricism and linguistic philosophy, [Gallie's approach] exemplifies some of the characteristic errors of these schools" (Gray 1978, 390). In similar fashion, Newton Garver asserts that "Gallie means to counter the prejudice, easily engendered by a simplistic empirical or scientific outlook, that any concept which cannot be clearly and unambiguously applied is bound to be confused" (Garver 1987, 220). There is thus some separation between Gallie's thesis and what might be very broadly called analytical or scientifically/naturalistically oriented philosophy of the time.

David Howarth identifies "the postanalytical tradition of thinking," the key founders of which were thinkers like Wittgenstein, Winch, Strawson, and Hampshire, and whose heritage was developed by Gallie, Steven Lukes, and Charles Taylor⁴⁴ (Howarth 2014). If a label is needed, the designation 'postanalytical' for essential contestability views in general is as apt as any. Gallie has also been connected to semantic externalism. Simon Evnine, who notes that his interpretation of Gallie's thesis is very similar to Hilary Putnam's and Saul Kripke's views, remarks that Gallie may deserve "some historical credit since he

⁴³ I do not wish to promote a stereotypical view of analytical philosophy, although it is certainly the case that analytical or analytic philosophy has been criticized as historiophobic. It would be nearly impossible to pin such a charge to such a wide and diverse school as analytic philosophy. It is also the case that it is immensely difficult to determine how membership in the analytic school should be decided. Regarding both matters, I advise the reader to consult Hans-Johann Glock's *What is Analytic Philosophy?* (2008; see esp. ch. 4 on the relation to history and historiography).

⁴⁴ If this list of names seems oddly narrow, it is probably because Howarth 2014 is an encyclopedia article focused on the work of William Connolly, and the thinkers that Howarth names have had an influence on Connolly's thought.

presented his theory more than a decade before the development of similar ideas by Putnam and Kripke” (Evnine 2014, 119). In this picture, the original exemplar takes place of the external world to which the meanings are anchored. Concepts are not just in individual minds; they are communal, and their historical development can be traced (see also 18.4).

From one perspective, the thesis of essentially contested concepts is a part of the larger twentieth century sea-change concerning normative and conceptual perspectives on a society culminating in the triumphant return of (already rather classical) political philosophy in the works of Rawls and others. That broader change in the climate of political philosophy is characterized by two themes: the heightened interest in the underlying principles of liberal-democracies and the acceptance of pluralism as a fact that needs to be addressed somehow. Michael Freedon (2004) observes that the essential contestability thesis has inspired and validated the theoretical stance of those students and scholars who intuit “diversity and dissent as the default position from which to make sense of the social world.” In this picture, “politics is about the marshalling of disagreement and the containment of conflict, and not about their elimination through replacing them with truth and knowledge.” (Freedon 2004, 3). I will later discuss to what extent a thesis of essential contestability reflects a liberal self-understanding (13.3).

The essential contestability thesis and its variations have been viewed to have had a noticeable impact on discussions labeled as postmodern critiques (Ricciardi 2001, 39–40; Vincent 2004, 100, 108⁴⁵). Particularity, disagreement, and the appreciation of historical processes are notions characteristic to postmodernism. According to Connolly, the “path from “essentially contested concepts” to a “post-Nietzschean sensibility” is not that difficult to discern, once some of the underbrush has been cleared by a protean thinker like Foucault” (Connolly 1993: xvii⁴⁶). In a later interview, Connolly has also asserted that he does not see a sharp break between his early exploration of essentially contestable concepts and the later exploration of genealogy, and that genealogy and conceptual contestation are bound together⁴⁷ (Schoolman and Campbell 2008,

⁴⁵ Interestingly, Mario Ricciardi and Andrew Vincent interpret Gallie very differently from each other; one sees him hostile to analysis and analytical philosophy in favor of historical considerations (Ricciardi 2001) while the other thinks the matter to be the other way around (Vincent 2004). This basically illustrates the difference between reading Gallie as a successor of Wittgenstein (2.3) in contrast to emphasizing Gallie’s history-related concerns (2.5) the influence of Peircean pragmatism falling somewhere in between (2.4).

⁴⁶ On how Connolly sees essential contestability in relation to genealogy, and how genealogy can help to appreciate the persistence and productivity of conflicts, see chapter six of *The Terms of Political Discourse* (included in 2nd and 3rd edition) and “Preface to the Third Edition” (Connolly 1993).

⁴⁷ Concerning the term ‘contestation,’ Lida Maxwell observes that it “became a prominent term in political theory in the 1970s and 1980s. Arising primarily in the thought of poststructuralists and Anglo-American agonistic theorists and inspired by new appropriations of Nietzsche and Anglo linguistic philosophy, ‘contestation’ is a term used by theorists to refer to activities that resist political and theoretical claims to final, universal, or absolute solutions to political dilemmas.” (Maxwell 2014) Maxwell credits Connolly and

312). One is reminded of the Nietzschean maxim “it is only that which has no history which can be defined,”⁴⁸ especially given Gallie’s later focus on historical understanding and narratives.

Another part of the “postmodern allure” might be traced to the general temperament of Gallie’s arguments: he does not seem very concerned with any conventionalist, expressivist, or even relativist implications of what he puts forward. Ernest Gellner has characterized Gallie as

not merely a philosopher concerned with contingency: he has something like a passion for it. Most philosophers have a passion for necessity, and this made them into philosophers: contingency made them nervous. Gallie, on the contrary, has a passion for contingency, and his prose communicates it (...) A philosopher whose passion is contingency, not necessity, and who communicates so well, is rare. Gellner 1974, 107, 111

Embracing the contingent, if you will, is often thought to be at the heart of the postmodern attitude (Pulkkinen 1998), and Gallie’s rejection of conceptual essentialism and the necessity of universal agreement should thus resonate well with those who share that sentiment. In one of his earlier papers, “The Function of Philosophical Aesthetics” (1948), Gallie voiced a criticism of “essentialist fallacy,” or the presupposition “that whenever we are in a position to define a substance or activity we must know its essence or ultimate nature,” evidenced by “idealist aesthetics” and the “19th century idealist theories.” He even spoke of the “essentialist infirmity of philosophers,” the demand that any method or technique employed should be universally applicable. (Gallie 1948, 302, 317.) At the end *ECC*, Gallie remarks that reason has been thought as “essentially something which demands and deserves universal assent – the manifestation of whatever makes for unity among men and/or the constant quest for such beliefs as could theoretically be accepted as satisfactory by all men” but that this “fails completely as a description of those elements of reason that make possible discussions of religious, political and artistic problems” (*ECC* 196). Similar passages can be found throughout *PHU*, which underlines Gallie’s persistent focus on dispute, contestedness, and contingency, rather than consensus, agreement, or universalizability.

his *The Terms of Political Discourse* along with the Nietzschean strand for bringing “the concept of “contestation” into political theory in the late twentieth century.

⁴⁸ The line is from *The Genealogy of Morals*, essay 2, section 13, the central idea of which stays relatively unchanged across most common English translations. Norman Care (1973) connects essential contestability to the same passage, albeit indirectly, through his discussion of MacIntyre’s (1973) position concerning the matter – MacIntyre’s focus is on the identity and/or historical continuity of certain social particulars such as specific political parties. Elías Palti appears to view the Nietzschean maxim as a sort of credo of those who affirm essential contestability (Palti 2005a, 113). It may also be of interest to note that Cappelen and Plunkett read Nietzsche as a forefather of what is nowadays commonly termed as “conceptual engineering,” as Nietzsche clearly railed against accepting inherited concepts uncritically and advocated their replacement with better ones (Cappelen and Plunkett 2019, 1–2, 19; see also Plunkett 2016, esp. 27–30, 45–46, 58–9).

It is not that difficult to fathom why Gallie's approach is attractive to those of a more postmodern bend. It is a mixed bag, though. Here as well the proponents of contestability theses stand at the crossroads: Connolly reminds that, from the standpoint of the Continental tradition of genealogy and deconstruction, they could be criticized of continuing "to erect barricades – such as the conception of the self as an agent – which arbitrarily confine the sapience in which the contests can legitimately move" (Connolly 1993, 226). Gallie's insistence on viewing essentially contested concepts as referring to/denoting achievements that can be developed to the optimum fashion (see 9.1), along with his celebration of reason in opposition to irrationalism⁴⁹, could be seen as bespeaking a commitment to Enlightenment values that many would be ready to discard altogether. But postmodernists are a mixed bunch as well.

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in essentially contested concepts and Gallie's thesis⁵⁰ as the framework of analysis in such diverse fields as political science, law, sociology, organization studies, and business ethics (Gautier 2019, 95). Especially in law and politics, both the existence and legitimacy of disagreement is institutionalized as something essential to the practice, to its core business, which makes essential contestability highly relevant for these disciplines: it is in their study that Gallie's thesis appears to have special traction, even if it has been subjected to more severe criticism in political theory than in legal theory (van der Burg 2017, 232, 242n57.) The thesis has also been given some theoretical attention in cognitive linguistics, and Gallie's framework "has major elements in common" with a work "that focuses on categorization, cognitive frames, prototypes, and the structure of complex concepts" (Collier et al. 2006, 235). The utilization of Gallie's thesis in cognitive-linguistics is probably largely due to George Lakoff's endorsement. In the current study, though, I will make no attempt to discuss the matter in specialized cognitive-linguistic terms, which goes beyond my professional capabilities, and which presents a marginal strand in the overall debates to this day. Instead, in what follows, I will present Gallie's thesis in light of the most common currents of the vast critical literature it has generated.

⁴⁹ See e.g., ECC 196 or 3.2 and 11.4. I will return to this issue here and there in my study.

⁵⁰ Quantitatively speaking, references to essentially contested concepts have surged: according to Google Scholar search conducted on September 9th 2020, the total number of hits with the exact search phrase 'essentially contested concept' have more than tripled during the last decade. The number of hits on that date is 10800, of which 7450 were since 2010. It can be due to a variety of factors, and caution is in order. For comparison, although issues of social justice seem to be more and more on the societal agenda, a similar search with 'social justice' brings 2090000 hits, of which 650000 are from 2010 onwards. I conjecture that the relative increase in hits with 'essentially contested concept' is not simply due to technological advances or other such external factors.

PART 2: ESSENTIALLY CONTESTED CONCEPTS

CHAPTER 3: GALLIE'S THESIS

The thesis of essentially contested concepts by Gallie is well suited for reappraisal. It is a striking formulation of a theoretically tricky and perhaps even unnerving philosophical position: the claim that certain (kind of) concepts give rise to endless and rationally irresolvable though genuine disputes. "Essentially Contested Concepts" (*ECC*) is Gallie's best known work, and the primary reference for the concept of essentially contested concept. That is why chapter three starts with the introduction of Gallie's aims as they are presented in the beginning of *ECC* (3.1). At a couple of points, I also draw from other sources to illustrate that there is more to the overall thesis. In the second section of the chapter, I will present a quick overview of the form of Gallie's argument for essential contestedness in addition to introducing two alternative ways of reading it (3.2). The chapter ends with the presentation of the artificial example which Gallie utilizes in introducing to the reader what he has roughly in mind (3.3). The artificial example is referred to throughout the study, but I will return to account for its features, specifically, in the very beginning of part three (11.1).

Part two is largely dedicated to the discussion of the seven conditions of essential contestedness (chs. 4-9). The chapters that discuss the conditions are split in two: I will first introduce Gallie's original ideas concerning the condition(s) in question, after which I turn to critically review the matter based on the secondary literature. In the introductory parts of each such chapter, I may also offer additional information on how the conditions find their place in Gallie's thesis. However, the final conclusions on their status are left to chapter ten that ends part two.

The examples that Gallie gives of essentially contested concepts, or the "live examples" as Gallie calls them, are discussed in the study *passim*. After briefly first mentioning them (3.1), I will include the examples into discussion whenever a significant theoretical point is raised by Gallie through them, or when they are able to illuminate the matter at hand to some extent. I must nonetheless forewarn the reader that other aspects of Gallie's thesis are discussed in part three, which means that the live examples will be perceived in quite different light after all is said and done.

3.1 The aim of ECC

In the first section of *ECC* (titled “Introductory”), Gallie lays out the problem he seeks to solve in the rest of the article. He starts by noting that “[a]ny particular use of any concept of commonsense or of the natural sciences is liable to be contested for reasons better or worse,” yet of special philosophical significance are those cases where users of a certain concept do not share an assumption concerning what “*kind of use*” is appropriate. Some terms are uncontroversial in this respect. The claim “this picture is painted in oils” may be contested if the picture is not actually painted in oils but in tempera, and the matter is easily settled as we can well assume that the disputants agree on the proper use of ‘oils’ and ‘tempera.’ However, the statement “this picture is a work of art” is liable to be contested because of a disagreement concerning “the proper general use of the term ‘work of art.’” Gallie mentions three philosophical strategies to elucidate the proper general use of such terms: the unearthing of a meaning that is acceptable to others; simply proposing a meaning to which others might decide to conform; and proving or explaining the necessity of the contested character of the concept relative to certain explanatory conditions “as for instance Kant tried to do in his Antinomies.” Nowadays, Gallie observes, effective philosophical elucidations are viewed as more elusive and complicated, and the idea that philosophy is a tool for eliminating conceptual confusions wherever they may arise has been widely repudiated. Although Gallie wishes to avoid any extreme form of the latter view, he still hopes to show, “in the case of an important group of concepts, how acceptance of a single method of approach—of a single explanatory hypothesis calling for some fairly rigid schematization—can give us enlightenment of a much-needed kind.” (*ECC* 167–8.) The exact nature of the enlightenment Gallie refers to is left open at this juncture, and it remains a matter of debate even today.

The group of concepts Gallie examines “relate to a number of organized or semi-organized human activities⁵¹: in academic terms they belong to aesthetics, to political philosophy, to the philosophy of history and the philosophy of religion.” Gallie observes that there are groups of people who disagree about the proper use of these concepts, “e.g., of art, of democracy, of the Christian tradition,” (*ECC* 168/*PHU* 157.) and Gallie later includes SOCIAL JUSTICE to the same grouping (*ECC* 180/*PHU* 168). It is often overlooked that, for the purposes of the revised *PHU*-thesis, SCIENCE is included as well (*PHU* 156), though with some reservations (*PHU* 190). Other possible candidates “of the same level of generality, or with the same wide bearings upon human life,” are identified by

⁵¹ Gallie’s reference to ‘activities’ is ambiguous, but example cases that he discusses in *ART* are helpful in clarifying the matter (see *CRITICS* and *LOVERS* in 11.2; see also 11.3, 12.3 and 18.3). In general, Gallie discusses the essential contestedness of concepts in intellectual terms. In *PHU*, it is implied that he is interested in, first and foremost, a number of key concepts in philosophy (*PHU* 148). Wibren van der Burg draws attention to the fact that Gallie does not mention any non-philosophical discipline, and the framing of the intractability of debates is philosophical rather than empirical (van der Burg 2017, 241–2, n53).

Gallie as LAW, LIBERTY, and GOVERNMENT. However, Gallie remains doubtful about their ultimate status. He also states that “any number of subordinate or more specific concepts” falling under the more general essentially contested concepts can be shown to be essentially contested as well; “for example, colouration, dogma, parliamentary immunity.” (PHU 190.) This is surprising since *prima facie* the typical employment of a concept like COLORATION does not appear controversial at all. I later argue that the point becomes sensible when Gallie’s notion of activity is properly understood (see esp. 11.3; 12.3; 18.3).

Regarding the primary examples of essentially contested concepts— i.e., ART, DEMOCRACY, SOCIAL JUSTICE, and CHRISTIANITY⁵²—“there is no one clearly definable general use of any of them which can be set up as the correct or standard use” (ECC 168). In *PHU*, Gallie expands on this by adding that the kind of correct or standard use is the “generally accepted” use (PHU 157; see 11.3), but as a matter of fact (ECC 168, PHU 157) there is no agreement regarding the correct use of these concepts. Instead, different uses of the terms— i.e., of ‘work of art,’ ‘democracy’ and ‘Christian doctrine’—“subserve different though of course not altogether unrelated functions” (ECC 168/PHU 157) for different groups, or to schools or movements of artists and critics, political groups and parties, and religious communities and sects. It makes sense to think that once the *variety* of functions is disclosed to the users of the term/concept, the disputes in which these concepts figure would end instantly—if disputants realize that they are talking past each other, there is no point in persisting to contest the matter in the same terms. However, the disputes do not come to an end as each group continues to defend the special functions which the terms fulfill “on *its* behalf or on *its* interpretation” with arguments, evidence, and other forms of justification it claims as convincing (ECC 168/PHU 157). This seems to be the *kind* of usage that calls for Gallie’s philosophical attention, i.e., the kind of use which serves as an instrument for carrying out rival parties’ specific functions, and concerning which Gallie seeks to obtain enlightenment.

⁵² Gallie calls these primary examples “live examples” (ECC 180) in contrast to “the artificial example” of CHAMPIONSHIP (see 3.3; 11.1). Regarding the example of CHRISTIANITY, it is important to note that Gallie uses several different terms and phrasings interchangeably, i.e., ‘religion’ (ECC 187/PHU 168), ‘the adherence to, or participation in, a particular religion,’ ‘a Christian life’ (ECC 180; see also PHU 168–9), ‘the Christian tradition,’ and ‘Christian doctrine’ (ECC 168/PHU 157). In *ECC*, it is somewhat unclear what Gallie’s primary example in this respect is. In *PHU*, Gallie is explicit that the essentially contested concept discussed is CHRISTIANITY (PHU 168–70). But, Gallie also states that he wants “to consider the concept of Christianity in its practical, not its purely doctrinal, manifestations, e.g., as exemplified by what would generally be meant by such a phrase as ‘a Christian life’” (PHU 169). This suggests that there is more than meets the eye, and Gallie himself seems to struggle a bit in finding a proper fit for this example in his framework. Others have solved the issue in various ways. For example, Ruth Abbey states outright that “a religious way of life” is one of Gallie’s examples (Abbey 2005, 464). The matter under dispute seems to be indeed which is the best way to adhere to, or participate in, the Christian religion that is conceived practically as a tradition with a variety of customs and values and that can be upheld and promoted in different ways (see esp. 18.3). With this in mind, I employ ‘Christianity’/CHRISTIANITY while referring to this live example in the current study.

Gallie emphasizes that he is not speaking of “a head-on conflict of interests or tastes or attitudes,” or of something that is brought about by “psychological causes.” Neither is he focused on the type of a philosophical dispute in which someone argues against the others that there is one and only one proper sense to this or that philosophical term – here Gallie speaks of “metaphysical afflictions” that depend on one’s philosophical temperament⁵³. Instead, the explanation for the “apparently endless disputes” need not be of either type. (ECC 169.) Most especially, Gallie attempts to show that

there are disputes, centred on the concepts which I have just mentioned, which are perfectly genuine: which, although not resolvable by argument of any kind, are nevertheless sustained by perfectly respectable arguments and evidence. This is what I mean by saying that there are concepts which are essentially contested, concepts the proper use of which inevitably involves endless disputes about their proper uses on the part of their users. ECC 169/PHU 158

Now we are in position to approximate Gallie’s basic idea in drawing attention to disagreement over the proper general use of the term ‘work of art.’ The dispute, in which one party claims something as a work of art while the other party disagrees, is presumably centered on ART rendering different uses of ‘work of art’ contested. Gallie does not discuss the relation of a word or term to a concept much (cf. 16.2), but the rudimentary idea looks to be that relevant type of disputes are brought about by virtue of those disputes being centered on essentially contested concepts, which is indicated by the specific kind of use of certain terms.

The full thesis of essential contestedness is certainly much more intricate than what was just said. For now, it suffices to say that, in *ART*, Gallie remarks that a word may be used as an ‘achievement word’ – i.e., ‘painting’ as ‘real painting’, ‘genuine painting’, or in an apparently odd fashion ‘painting which reminds us of what painting can do’ – in which case it is an expression of an essentially contested concept (ART 109). From the context, it becomes clear that behind this specific usage is a judgment about traditional values (of painting as an activity) being kept alive in the best possible way (in the form of a particular painting). In *ECC*, Gallie considers how the phrase ‘a Christian life’ is used, and sees it as expressing, or illustrating, an essentially contested concept in a similar fashion (ECC 180–1). The full sense of what Gallie means by ‘achievement’ should become clearer after I have introduced Gallie’s seven conditions of essentially contested concepts (hereafter ‘Conditions’⁵⁴), each of which refers to achievement in some way (see chs. 4–9).

⁵³ Some of Gallie’s remarks in chapter ten of *PHU*, “Metaphysics as History,” suggest that, here, Gallie’s point may simply be that he is looking for an explanation that understands positions in these debates as historically intelligible (e.g., as expressions of what is more broadly thought at any given time) rather than as demanding a black-and-white choice between them. The orthodox reading of Gallie nevertheless is that the reasonableness or justifiability of each claim is of the stronger type. See esp. 13.2, 13.4 and 18.1.

⁵⁴ I refer to the seven conditions of essential contestedness listed by Gallie as ‘Conditions’ with a capital ‘C’ while further indicating the designated condition with a Roman numeral in parentheses. For instance, the fourth condition that is listed by Gallie is ‘Condition (IV).’ Sometimes I speak of Gallie’s conditions in the context of the general phenomenon that Gallie

In the light of Gallie's revisions in *PHU*, the thesis of essential contestedness can be read from a somewhat different standpoint. At the very end of chapter seven, Gallie outlines what he is going to do in the rest of the book. In chapter eight, which is the revised version of the thesis of essential contestedness, Gallie sets out to consider

a number of seemingly inconclusive disputes over the proper definition of certain concepts, including those of science, art (in the sense of the 'fine arts'), religion, justice and democracy. These I call essentially contested concepts; and I shall try to show that their essential contestability, far from being a cause of philosophical scandal, is rather a proof of the continuing need of philosophy and of vital, agonistic philosophy. *PHU* 156; see also *PHU* 171, 173, 176

Some of the new additions to the *PHU*-version are partially clarifying and partially meant as cohesion-inducing bridges between the thesis of essentially contested concepts and the rest of the book. The mentioning of definitions is not the only, nor is it the most important change, although Gallie retains the key terminology, the conceptual framework, and the examples of *ECC* (and partly, of *ART*) for the major part. It is much easier, of course, to conceive of definitions as the object of disagreement than concepts, yet much of the allure of the original article stems from Gallie's direct reference to concepts. It implies that the thesis says something about how we categorize things at the very basic level, about how we infer or think of things. There is thus a case to be made that the type of dispute that holds Gallie's interest only *appears* definitional, and the true stakes go well beyond definitional issues despite the presence of arguments for one definition over others⁵⁵.

is after by utilizing the lower-case form 'the conditions of essential contestedness.' When there is a need to speak of what may be taken as the defining conditions of the general phenomenon, not just Gallie's specific conception of it, I will use the form 'the conditions of essential contestability.'

⁵⁵ Definitions can be considered as specifications of the conceptual content of an expression instead of the (linguistic) meaning of an expression (Audi 1999, 213). In this sense, the conceptual side of Gallie's disagreements is certainly definitional as disputing parties argue that their preferred conceptions or uses of concept should be accepted by others as well. However, focusing excessively on definitions might even lead one off the track as to finding the most interesting and/or plausible interpretation of Gallie's original idea (see e.g., Gray 1978, 391; Ruben 2013, 33-4; Evnine 2014, 127, 134). David-Hillel Ruben (2013) claims that Gallie's interest was in the phenomenon of intractable social disputes above all else, and these disputes are not only about the meaning of the disputed concept. Fallacy of equivocation with respect to attributing different meanings to a single word is resolvable by multiplying meanings and hence concepts. Now, "If ambiguity is what is at issue, it is hard to account for the strength of the social struggle over the attribution of the term, even given the positive evaluative force that each party attributes to the original but allegedly ambiguous label" (Ruben 2013, 34). *CHRISTIANITY* and the disputes revolving around it do not seem to fit the mold of definitional disputes either (see esp. the discussion of the example in Evnine 2014). Gallie's discussion in *ART* can be considered a case in point: Gallie speaks of competing theories and definitions of art more or less interchangeably, and the purpose is both to explore whether one has a need for *ART* at all in the practice of art-criticism, and how *ART* can be considered a concept of the valued achievement that seems to admit multiple mutually exclusive descriptions (see 11.2).

The previous quote (PHU 156) informs us of Gallie's general aim of emphasizing the need for philosophy, in general, and agonistic philosophy, in particular. In "Concluding remarks" of *ECC*, Gallie affirms basically the same thing, and it also becomes clear that the relevant contrast is drawn to the reasoning typical of sciences that is claimed to demand universal assent. Instead, Gallie characterizes his own undertaking as finding "reasonableness in the pursuit of inevitably endless conflicts." An account of reason that demands universal assent "fails completely as a description of those elements of reason that make possible *discussions* of religious, political and artistic problems." (*ECC* 196.) The thesis of essential contestedness thus aims to describe the elements that enable, rather than prevent, meaningful discussion and debate in certain areas of life.

Let us sum things up. In the beginning of *ECC*, Gallie outlines *the phenomenon of essential contestedness*⁵⁶ (*ECC* 180) by suggesting that of interest is what kind of use is appropriate in the case of the concepts (ART, DEMOCRACY etc.) that relate to a number of organized or semi-organized human activities (roughly belonging to aesthetics, to political philosophy etc.). When the uses of this kind, which subserve different but related functions for some groups (of the type: schools, movements, political parties, religious sects etc.), conflict with other uses of the concept, one is confronted with apparently endless disputes. Gallie wants to show that these disputes are A) centered on the concepts like DEMOCRACY and ART; B) perfectly genuine despite the fact that they are not resolvable by argument of any kind. Now, in the circumstances of essential contestedness, the groups continue to defend their use of a concept, or the specific function it subserves for them, while considering their usage justified because of arguments and evidence they have and/or can present to support that use. Gallie wants also to show that the disputes in question are C) sustained by perfectly respectable arguments and evidence. Gallie attempts to, at first, show that there are disputes which have these characteristics. All in all, 'the proper use' of essentially contested concepts is the *kind* of use that inevitably, not just apparently, involves endless disputes about their proper uses on the part of their users. We have also learned that that usage has something to do with how certain words can be used as achievement words (to express a concept that signifies a valued achievement).

The three points regarding *disputes* are in Gallie's mind when he says that there are concepts which are essentially contested. Elements of (B) and (C) can be reformulated as the basic, criterial requirements that any thesis of essential contestedness/contestability (similar to Gallie's) must fulfill. Thus, based on (B) we get *the non-confusion requirement*, which limits the relevant disputes to those

⁵⁶ It is commonly assumed in the literature that the proper focus should be on contestability rather than on contestedness, or on contestable concepts rather than on contested concepts (e.g., Clarke 1979; Väyrynen 2014, 471n1; see esp. 12.2; 12.3). I use the term Gallie preferred, i.e., 'essential contestedness' whenever I refer to Gallie's original account. However, 'essential contestability' is employed to denote the general phenomenon as well as all other views after Gallie. In this sense, the thesis of essential contestedness is a variant of an essential contestability thesis. From time to time, I draw attention to the distinction by using both forms, as in 'essential contestedness/contestability.'

where there are no severe misunderstandings concerning the object of the dispute, or the dispute can otherwise go on without threat to its genuineness; and *the irresolvability requirement*, which precludes the possibility of knock-down arguments that would end the dispute. In addition, (C) gives us *the justification requirement* which limits the cases of potential disputes to those in which the disputing parties are justified in holding the evaluations or beliefs they do because they can make an evidence-based case for them. Given the irresolvability requirement, requiring justification does *not* mean that the disputants are required to make a case that no reasonable person would fail to accept, or something similar⁵⁷.

In conclusion, I should point out that the key difference between my reading of Gallie and most commentaries is that I pay a lot of attention to the nature of the dispute instead of solely focusing on the character of the concepts involved. There is a pragmatic dimension to essential contestability – perhaps first pointed out, explicitly, by Wayne Booth (1977, 411) – the overlooking of which threatens to make the whole idea rather confused or absurd. Some have had similar thoughts. Very much in line with my exposition of Gallie’s aim, Kenneth Ehrenberg contends that “To call a concept essentially contested is to help explain its usage. It is a claim about the use to which the concept is put” (Ehrenberg 2011, 227), while Eugene Garver (1978, 1990) places essentially contested concepts firmly into particular arguments and disputes in which they are constituted. Garver further claims that the apparently theoretical paradoxes and sophisms that follow invoking the term ‘essentially contested concept’ “have serious practical consequences for how we conduct, and how we should conduct, practical argument” (Garver 1990, 251). Finally, David-Hillel Ruben quite rightly observes that the discussion Gallie received has sometimes taken Gallie’s paper into philosophical areas that are not among its main concerns. According to Ruben, Gallie was not actually interested in the nature of the concepts the same way contemporary philosophers of language would often understand the topic; by ‘use of a concept’ Gallie only means how the concept is applied (Ruben 2010, 258–9). I wish to challenge this widely shared view in the current study.

Others have attached to Gallie’s employment of ‘use’ a special significance. Samantha Besson has characterized “the *essential contestability* of normative concepts” as “the fact that the correct use of concepts which encapsulate a value lies precisely in contesting their correct use” (Besson 2005, 13). Morris Weitz has reformulated Gallie’s basic point in a way that closely follows Gallie’s original presentation: “There are certain uses of certain concepts, best revealed in argument and disagreement which may remain ultimately unresolvable, that can be explained only by the presence of an essentially contested concept” (Weitz 1972, 102; see ECC 169). Kenneth Smith points out that Gallie did not question the shared meaning between the contesting parties (see esp. ECC, 175). Instead,

⁵⁷ According to Andrew Mason, “the core of an essential contestability thesis is in its rejection of the view that if an argument is a good one, it ought to persuade any reasonable person who accepts its premises and who can apply the laws of logic properly” (Mason 1993, 54; see also 11.4; 13.1; 13.2).

Smith argues that “[t]he essence of (...) of essentially contested concepts is that they involve endless disputes over the proper use – the propriety – of a concept” which makes it possible to claim that a concept is used inappropriately even if the meaning of a concept were to be well understood (Smith 2002, 332). These are slightly different formulations on a common theme, but much clearer contrasts are soon to follow. I will emphasize positive contributions that attempt to understand or develop the notion of essential contestability further instead over those critical comments that find no value or reason in the whole affair. Given that different conceptions of essential contestability are more often tangential rather than complementary or even contradictory perspectives on more general issues of not only conceptual but also moral and political contestability, that choice may not do any favors for the plausibility of the overall notion. What is represented as ‘essential contestability’ may not be a unified phenomenon at all.

3.2 The argument in ECC

In my first approximation of Gallie’s thesis (3.1), I emphasized the kind of disputes Gallie is after in addition to suggesting that those disputes involve the usage of essentially contested concepts in some special way. However, it is equally true that Gallie envisages and presents essentially contested concepts as a “new grouping of concepts,” the emergence of which is claimed to have “important implications (...) for general philosophy.” (ECC 170.) The essentially contested concepts as they relate to the phenomenon of essential contestedness should be in full daylight after the following four steps:

First, Gallie presents “a highly artificial” example of championship (3.3; see also 11.1) in order to show:

how any proper use of this concept is in the nature of the case contestable, and will, as a rule, be actually contested by and in another use of it, which in the nature of the case is contestable, and will . . . and so on for an indefinite number of kinds of possible use: these mutually contesting, mutually contested uses of the concept, making up together its standard general use. ECC 169

Second, in view of the artificial example, Gallie presents the seven Conditions of essential contestedness⁵⁸, or “a number of semi-formal conditions to which any concept of this kind [i.e., essentially contested] must conform” (see also chs. 4–9):

Condition I: The concept must be “appraisive in the sense that it signifies or accredits some kind of valued achievement.” For example, many would urge that the concept of democracy “has steadily established itself as the appraisive political concept *par excellence*.”

⁵⁸ The section of ECC in which Gallie discussed the matter is titled “Conditions of Essential Contestedness” (ECC 171–80). The roughly matching pages in *PHU* are 161–168.

Condition II: “This achievement must be of an internally complex character, for all that its worth is attributed to it as a whole.”

Condition III: “Any explanation of its worth must therefore include reference to the respective contributions of its various parts or features; yet prior to experimentation there is nothing absurd or contradictory in any one of a number of possible rival descriptions of its total worth, one such description setting its component parts or features in one order of importance, a second setting them in a second order, and so on.” Therefore, “the accredited achievement is *initially* variously describable.”

Condition IV: “The accredited achievement must be of a kind that admits of considerable modification in the light of changing circumstances (...) the concept of any such achievement [is] “open” in character.” Later, Gallie asserts Condition (IV) to state “that the achievement our concept accredits is persistently vague.”

Condition V: “[E]ach party recognizes the fact that its own use of it is contested by those of other parties, and that each party must have at least some appreciation of the different criteria in the light of which the other parties claim to be applying the concept in question.”

Condition VI: “[T]he derivation of any such concept from an original exemplar whose authority is acknowledged by all the contestant users of the concept.”

Condition VII: “[T]he claim that the continuous competition for acknowledgement as between the contestant users of the concept, enables the original exemplar’s achievement to be sustained and/or developed in optimum fashion.”⁵⁹

The first four Conditions are the “most important necessary conditions to which any essentially contested concept must comply” while Conditions (I) to (V) give “formally defining conditions of essential contestedness.” Yet they fail to properly distinguish the essentially contested concept from the kind of concept that is “radically confused.” For that reason, Conditions (VI) and (VII) must be included, “which is in effect to justify the continued use of any essentially contested concept.” (ECC 172, 180.)

In *PHU*, Gallie calls the last two Conditions “broad historical conditions of essential contestedness” (PHU 169), and this formulation already brings into question how all seven Conditions relate to each other or what is to be their ultimate status. It is commonly presumed – and for a good reason, as the quotes from Gallie illustrate – that the seven Conditions are the conditions of essentially contested *concepts*. Still, I would ask the reader to consider, while reading the following chapters on Conditions, whether that is really the case. I will discuss the matter more thoroughly in chapter ten.

⁵⁹ The quotes above are from ECC 170–3, 180, 182 / PHU, 161, 168.

As the third step, Gallie introduces “live examples” which are meant to be compatible with the artificial example despite the fact that the examples have “several peculiarities.” The live examples are “the concepts of Art, of Democracy, of Social Justice, and that of the adherence to, or participation in, a particular religion.”⁶⁰ Gallie acknowledges that the fit between the live examples and Conditions is not precise, yet the match is sufficient for concluding that the essential contestedness of these concepts “explains—or goes a very long way towards explaining—the ways they function in characteristic aesthetic, political and religious arguments.”⁶¹ Moreover, as I see it, the artificial example and the live examples are put forward as mutually supporting devices of representation (of the phenomenon) and argumentation (for the thesis). According to Gallie, the close approximation of the live examples to the artificial example—not to the seven Conditions—explains or justifies their employment in the overall scheme. (ECC 170, 180.)

And finally, Gallie presents his answers to two highly important questions that one can raise against his thesis: (i) are the disputes in question genuine, and (ii) what follows from rival parties recognizing that they are dealing with essential contestedness? I will discuss these issues throughout the study. For now, it suffices to say that whatever the implications of reciprocal recognition are, they must stem from the improved awareness of what is truly taking place in disagreements that manifest essential contestedness. As the nature of contestedness is *essential*, we probably should not expect it to change in any significant way by us becoming aware of it (see also esp. ch. 10; 18.5). That however depends on how we understand essentiality in the first place (see 12.3).

In the final section of *ECC*, or “Concluding remarks” (ECC 196–8), Gallie anticipates the criticisms that (i) he either advocates a form of irrationalism or (ii) commits a historicist fallacy. Starting with (i), according to Gallie, the reason that demands and deserves universal assent may be adequate when one is concerned with how reason manifests in science, “but it fails completely as a description of those elements of reason that make possible *discussions* of religious, political and artistic problems.” By his own words, Gallie aims to combat and correct the “dangerous tendency” of post-Enlightenment thinking to overemphasize the irrational elements in those fields. Ruth Abbey maintains that Gallie sought to “make way for pluralism and rational disagreement in the social sciences” and “to adumbrate a mode of reasoning in the humanities and social sciences that

⁶⁰ Throughout *ECC*, *ART*, and *PHU* Gallie sometimes writes the concept-words with capital letters and sometimes not. For example, the phrasing ‘a concept of Art’ is used here and there, and there are as many or more occasions when ‘a concept of art’ is employed. At times, Gallie also mentions ‘the term Art.’ A capitalized word is sometimes used to differentiate a philosophical concept from the everyday use. In *Keywords*, Raymond Williams speaks of the difficulty to localize “the emergence of an abstract, capitalized **Art**, with its own internal but general principles” (Williams 1983, 41). It is plausible that Gallie has something of the sort in mind. As I have not been able to find any clear enough system for how he utilizes the different typographical forms, I do not draw any material conclusions on that basis.

⁶¹ Gallie originally formulates this as “a test question” which he believes his account of the live examples will satisfy (ECC 180).

differed from that in the natural sciences" (Abbey 2005, 480). According to David Bakhurst, Gallie challenged the claim that "the enduring diversity of opinion over, e.g., moral, political, or religious issues reveals that such questions lie beyond the domain of rational enquiry" (Bakhurst 2005). (ii) may be a bit surprising concern to raise in the context of *ECC*, but Gallie goes on to clarify that his intention is to "see aright the connexion between" a concept's "logical" sense and its "historical" sense in different sorts of case. The former entails the explicit rules that govern the concept's use, are needed in order to understand it, and to which one should conform. The latter means that "to understand it means to know (something about) the whole gamut of conditions that have led to, and that now sustain the way we use it." In short, Gallie concludes the paper by stating that, in the case of an appraisive concept, one would do best by considering how it came to be. (*ECC* 196–8.)

ECC can be read in two broad ways, or, alternatively, its argument is furthered along two different lines. The first option is to attribute the most significance to the seven (formal) Conditions while viewing the artificial example solely as a preliminary heuristic tool. The live examples are presented, in turn, to flesh out the abstract theoretical exposition. The thesis of essential contestedness is found without merit if the Conditions are problematic. Here, it is crucial to distinguish essentially contested concepts from other concepts as sharply as possible. The second option is to emphasize the artificial example in portraying what is either the kind of term- or concept-use, or the kind of debate, that Gallie is after. Both are then located in the live examples, or with how concepts such as ART, DEMOCRACY, and CHRISTIANITY are, and have been, employed. The job description of the (semi-formal) Conditions is to facilitate improved or ideal typical understanding of the phenomenon, but the case is crucially made when that which takes place both in the artificial scenario and in the live situations makes perfect sense.

In the literature, Gallie's thesis is almost always read along the lines of the first option, although Gallie himself places a lot of weight on the artificial example and on what it is supposed to accomplish in convincing the reader. For example, Collier, Hidalgo and Maciuceanu (Collier et al. 2006) do not explicitly mention the artificial example at all in their article that otherwise does an admirable job in overviewing the debates surrounding essentially contested concepts. Instead, their analysis is structured around the Conditions. It must be said plainly that Gallie is notoriously ambiguous and vague in his exposition. That might explain why some commentators focus solely on Gallie's Conditions, or even some limited subset thereof; the Conditions appear to mark the proper ambit of essential contestedness more clearly than Gallie's exploratory examples manage to do. In any case, I consider it an interpretative oversight, although often done for the best intentions or for a special theoretical purpose.

In the light of what has been said, I am adopting a twofold investigative strategy for what follows. I will examine which characteristics, and what kind of structure, would be capable of endowing essentially contested concepts with their special status. I will also seek to characterize the special circumstances of

contestation that Gallie is describing, which become that more important after the failure of the first part.

To conclude, I should note that Gallie's concept of a concept is rather unclear. That is unfortunate since Gallie himself constantly refers to concepts as essentially contested while terms also make their appearance alongside. For reasons that will become clear in due course, a good number of those who engage with Gallie's texts do not share or accept his concept of a concept, and the latitude that Gallie takes in discussing their essential contestedness is often frowned upon. However, it is difficult to grasp what is talked about without having at least some preconception of what Gallie has in mind, which is why I next proceed to give a few relatively informal pointers on how Gallie conceives "essentially contested concepts" as concepts⁶². Everything said afterwards that contradicts what is said here takes precedence.

First, Gallie's interest is in "word-sized concepts," or lexical concepts, that are nonetheless assumed to be complex. It invites comparison with several linguistic issues. Gallie spoke of essentially contested concepts as general terms, sometimes even as popular conceptions, and what he refers to is not that far off from words that have conventional meanings, or with words that are polysemous in connoting a variety of different, yet conventionally related, meanings. This could even be taken to imply that Gallie is confusing words with concepts (see 16.2). However, essentially contested concepts do not appear to be, or function as, basic units of meaning or categorization in the sense that they would have a single and indivisible meaning or that they would have a clear and unambiguous reference. As a default interpretation, it is probably helpful to consider 'essentially contested concept' a term of art that has its own specific technical sense and application. Second, an essentially contested concept has a history in which different ways of employing a term that stands for roughly the same valued achievement come together in consequence of a certain social and historical trajectory. What imparts unity to different uses for Gallie for one to be able to assert that there is no conceptual confusion is a matter of much controversy, and it needs to be elaborated. Third, essentially contested concepts cannot be separated from the circumstances, in which they are employed. That also includes the fact that essentially contested concepts are employed in a dispute to contest other uses, aggressively and defensively. In this respect, Gallie himself places special emphasis on historical considerations.

3.3 The artificial example

Both in *ECC* and *PHU*, Gallie introduces "a highly artificial" (*ECC* 169) example scenario or an "imaginary model" (*PHU* 161) for capturing the appropriate kind of contestability. Gallie's formulation of the example is very suggestive, and

⁶² I do not adopt any specific theory of concepts in this study, but I will talk about what concepts and terms are in more general fashion in chapter 16.

hence potentially misleading. In what follows, I briefly describe the example while reserving most of my critical remarks for later (see 11.1).

The artificial example (henceforth *Artificial*) is a description of a scenario in which different teams vie to be the champions in a continuously proceeding game. The championship that is awarded is rather unusual one: which team is considered the reigning champion is awarded on account of the support gathered by the teams. In determining to which team the spectators throw their support, they are concerned with the question of who plays the game *best*⁶³, or the way the game is meant to be played. The catch is that the judgment regarding the worthiness of the teams' performances is not based on 'scores,' or on other easily markable successes that determine the winners in most typical games or leagues, even if "a certain minimum number of successes is necessary." Instead, the backing is offered—and thus the championship is adjudged and awarded—"in virtue of level of style or caliber" meaning that the teams are to be ranked accordingly based on the level of their distinctive or specialized way of playing the game. In this sense, the contestant teams also compete "for the acceptance of (what each side and its supporters take to be) the proper criteria of championship." In this, each side has its staunch advocates while 'floating' supporters "are won over" to one side or another. The team that has the most, and the loudest, supporters at any given time will be *effectively* hailed as 'the champions.' However, the fact that there are "no official judges or strict rules of adjudication" that would decide the question of which team is the most deserving complicates the process of crowning the champions considerably⁶⁴. (ECC 170-1/PHU 158-9.)

The main idea behind *Artificial* is that even if the majority or plurality of potential supporters would hail one team as the champions, it does not suffice to end disagreement about *how* the game should be played. The lack of clear rules of adjudication seems to guarantee that people can go on contesting the merits of different teams, including the effective champions, while they consider their own preferred team as the true champions, morally the champions *et cetera*. Gallie stresses the continuous and open nature of competition: any team acknowledged (effective) champions today is aware that it may be "surpassed" tomorrow by holding less sway among spectators who no longer deem that team as deserving of their support. According to Gallie, there is no workable way of quantifying the

⁶³ What does it mean to be *the best*? In the present study, I take 'the best' to mean that a performance of a team is either better or at least as good when compared with the performances of other teams. This goes for other applications as well *mutatis mutandis*, e.g., to choose one option as the best means that that option is considered better than available options or at least as good as any of them. This concept of the best needs to be distinguished from *the best once-and-for-all* etc. which would end the debate about who is (currently) the best. Thought in these terms, the disputing parties of the artificial example are in a situation in which they consider one team better than others, i.e., as the best, but they have no decisive grounds for the claim that their preferred team is the best once-and-for-all. The latter point is reflected in the idea that 'the game' proceeds continuously.

⁶⁴ The word 'adjudication' relates to some sort of arbitration—by a judge in a legal process, for example—especially when it involves making a judgment; one lexical meaning for 'adjudication' is 'the act or process of adjudicating a dispute.' <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/adjudication> (Merriam-Webster 12.1.2020).

process of awarding the championship. That appears to be at least partially due to the fact that there is not anyone who could say (without contestation, I assume) who has really done best in their own particular way of playing. (ECC 170–1, 177/PHU 159, 166.) Gallie’s disputants are on their own in the sense that there is no outside arbiter that is in the position to judge the matter satisfactorily, although a judgment call is required.

Artificial conveys an impression that Gallie is describing a political situation in which different interests and evaluations come to conflict. Whoever comes to carry the day is decided by persuading one’s opponents, not by determining whose case has the most merit, objectively speaking. Gallie explicitly denies, however, that his thesis is about power struggles as such: the championship is not contested “through any vulgar wish to be the majority party, but because [the spectators] believe their favoured team is *playing the game best*” (ECC 171/PHU 160; cf. ECC 183–4). In real-life, people have various personal and group interests which affect how they appraise different issues, obviously, and Gallie himself gives them a role when he turns to the issue of justified conversions from one view to another (see ECC 192/PHU 186–7; or 11.4). Determining how things stand apart from the personal opinions of the supporters looks to be of no particular interest to Gallie. Still, his focus is on appraisiveness and normativity/evaluation instead of seeing essential contestedness as interest-based, and hence political in a more ordinary sense.

In fact, Gallie couches essential contestedness in epistemological terms right from the outset: “there are disputes (...) which, although not resolvable by argument of any kind, are nevertheless sustained by perfectly respectable arguments and evidence” (ECC 169/PHU 158). The disagreeing parties have beliefs concerning the point of contention, they think that their beliefs are well justified, and they continue to hold those beliefs even in the cases in which their beliefs conflict with the beliefs professed by others. That much is built into the starting premises of Gallie’s thesis, and *Artificial* also reflects the matter in its peculiar way. Moving to the epistemological domain gives rise to several crucial questions that need to be answered for Gallie’s thesis to be viable. I will address them mostly in part three, but here it should be said that Gallie’s assurances regarding the possibility of what is essentially a reasonable disagreement are not completely convincing. It is fair to ask, on what grounds are the teams compared with each other, and why do the supporters not arrive at the same conclusions about the best team if there are proper grounds for making the comparisons in the first place? Another set of issues revolves around how the disputants can even be motivated to carry out a (rational!) dispute that cannot be resolved. Taking an entirely uncommitted stance or attitude is precluded by Gallie (see ECC 190–1; or 13.2), but why exactly should the disputing parties make a clear-cut choice between available alternatives instead of sustaining their judgment?

In the revised PHU-version, Gallie frames the point of *Artificial* a bit differently. It is needed to show “why an adequate understanding of [essentially contested concepts] requires some appreciation of their history – of how they have come to be used in the ways they are” (PHU 158, see also 168). The

significance of historical understanding and/or the past development of a concept-use for how one is using the concept today is made explicit only in the last two pages of *ECC* (see *ECC* 197–8). Given the bare-boned nature of *Artificial*, it is somewhat surprising that Gallie views it as having that function; in the example, there are no clear and unambiguous references to any sort of historical process or considerations. There is an implicit reference to an already acknowledged standard in the form of how the game is meant to be played, though, and it later becomes evident that Gallie conceives there to be some earlier exemplary team (*ECC* 177) from which the competing teams take their cue, or which provides a mutually acknowledged standard of excellence⁶⁵. Furthermore, teams that surpass other teams as the reigning, effective champions may do so in a longer time span, which can perhaps be understood as historical conceptual development instead of conceptual replacement. The state of being surpassed is only a temporal matter since competition between different views is continuous and, in principle, open. In any case, too much is left unsaid in this respect in *Artificial*.

Gallie concretizes *Artificial* by likening it to a game of skittles—or more simply, bowling⁶⁶—hoping to further clarify the relation of the example to the seven Conditions (*ECC* 173/*PHU* 160). Naming the game helps in conceiving what is, and what is not, subject to contestation in *Artificial* (see also 11.1). We could now say that different skittles teams have a particular style of playing they favor; one team focuses on the accuracy of throw, while another relies more on strength and speed, and still another swears by the efficiency of swerve throws. We can now call the first team “The Sharpshooters,” the second “The Speed Demons,” and the third “The Curve Kings.” All teams have supporters, or fans, who appreciate their team over others because they play the game best. The supporters of The Curve Kings are convinced that the proficient use of the swerve produces the best results and/or is in any case the most pleasing way to play skittles—truly the way the game is meant to be played. Floating supporters switch between the teams more readily than others, and it is certainly not out of the question that some of the former supporters of The Curve Kings become

⁶⁵ This is, in effect, covered by Condition (VI) that postulates a connection to the original exempla (8.1). It would have been very easy to include “some past team that everyone agrees is the best team ever” (Gaus 2000, 31) in *Artificial*, but for some reason Gallie decided not to do it. The reason may have been rhetorical: after the discussion of the first five Conditions, the addition of the last two is easier to argue for than it would have been based simply on a loose and mainly suggestive description that is *Artificial*.

⁶⁶ In the present study, I will refer to both ‘skittles’ and ‘bowling’ somewhat interchangeably. I will also describe things ‘in skittles terms’ every now and then in order to elucidate some aspect of essential contestedness. The real-world skittles is a game much like bowling: the object is to use the ball(s) to knock over the skittles, or pins, usually nine of them. The rules and methods of scoring used to vary locally, although the game has been regularized since then (Encyclopædia Britannica 2010). In *PHU*, Gallie notes that several sports could be made to conform fairly closely to the conditions of the artificial example. He mentions ‘show-jumping’ (equestrian sport) as a good candidate but settles with ‘a variant of skittles’ because he prefers “to invent or postulate a game of unusual simplicity (...) for the sake of clarity” (*PHU* 160). As an easier example, Mark Criley offers figure-skating “only absent any judges to render an official score and proclaim a recognized champion” (Criley 2007, 22n2).

convinced of the merits of speed bowling as the game develops and performances change, thus becoming adherents of The Speed Demons. The process of deciding which team is the current champion goes on continuously. Even if The Speed Demons were to have the most support right now, the remaining advocates of The Curve Kings and the supporters of The Sharpshooters will continue thinking that their team are the true champions; the Speed Demons do not play the game as it is meant to be played, they argue. And finally, to the extent that there is a team that exemplifies in the eyes of all three teams how the game should be played, that team is from now on simply called "The Bowlers."

The way *Artificial* portrays how supporters attribute and evaluate excellences of different teams resembles quite ordinary disputes between sport-fans. Mario Ricciardi, who emphasizes the historical understanding-aspect of the thesis, likens the situation described in *Artificial* to a disagreement that takes place between knowledgeable football fans who do not usually disagree on who won the match, but which team is the best team in the recent history of the game. These people attach importance to "the idea of their team being, not simply the actual winner, but the quintessential representative of the ideal of an outstanding football team." (Ricciardi 2000, 40-1; 44.) This logic rings familiar to anyone acquainted with sports fandom, as many real-world fans are willing to argue endlessly in favor of their preferred teams or athletes. "Who is the best football player after Pelé (or Maradona, or Messi, or...) today?"; or more specifically still: "I do not think that Kevin Durant is as good as a basketball player as LeBron James because Durant does not have the real competitive spirit and willingness to carry one's team which is the mark of true greats like Michael Jordan and Kobe Bryant." In other disputes a similar ideal may be present more generally as in the case in which some hockey fans refer to "good-old-hockey" in arguing that their chosen team plays the game best, or as it is meant to be played (e.g., by making hard hits, or with sometimes excessive roughness). These cases exhibit a dispute over what is the proper way to exemplify a valued achievement that different actors imitate, sustain, and/or develop to a varying degree (cf. 9.1).

Gerald Gaus (2000) points out that *Artificial* may be misleading because the fans support their team's campaign to be the champions "just because it is *their team*." Gaus views one's team choice as a mere preference or as a matter of taste, and thus it would be odd to think that people would come to reasoned conclusions about what team they will be a fan of⁶⁷. (Gaus 2000, 33.) Mark Criley bluntly states that Gallie "could scarcely have done worse than to choose the concept champion," as it directs one's attention towards issues of team allegiance, blind partisanship, and other things of that nature (Criley 2007, 37n6). Gaus, especially, apparently thinks that *Artificial* detracts from the vital importance of such disputes as those taking place between the individualist liberals and the

⁶⁷ According to Gallie, disputants have different backgrounds that shape their preferences, yet he holds that a conversion from one view to another is not simply a matter of taste. One's choice to convert is a reasoned choice, which also implies that one's preference is not merely an expression of one's taste, emotions *et cetera*. (ECC 190-2; 11.4.)

collectivist socialists about the ideal of social justice. He goes as far as saying that Gallie's main thought looks to be that the appraisiveness of the concept like justice comes down to it being "a valuable weapon or trophy in our political battles" that "can be used aggressively against our political opponents." (Gaus 2000, 33, see also 34, 40.)

Artificial and the analogy of skittles tempt one to ascribe a variety of elements to Gallie's thesis. However, Gaus seems to mischaracterize Gallie's aims, one of which is an attempt to show how the disputes involving essentially contested concepts could be conducted in a way that is subject to rational standards of evidence, cogency, and justification (Criley 2007, 37; see esp. 11.4). Not everyone actually manages to make good cases, or marshal perfectly respectable arguments and evidence for their views, but the thesis of essential contestedness is about whether that is possible. However, for the fact that Gallie's readers often end up going off on a tangent, Gallie himself is ultimately the one to blame owing to the obscurity of the analogy and to the heavy-handed way he appeals to it in *ECC* and *PHU*. It is a fair question whether the essential contestedness just reflects the fact that one's personal feelings, histories, values, and social adherences are often decisive in what one supports or how one argues for it. And if so, does that mean that disputes revolving around concepts like ART and SOCIAL JUSTICE are similar "fan-quarrels"? This cannot be resolved confidently based on *Artificial* alone.

CHAPTER 4: CONDITION I // APPRAISIVENESS

Each of Gallie's seven Conditions is formulated in reference to a "valued achievement" that is signified by an "appraisive concept" per Condition (I). Thus, Condition by Condition, one presumably learns more about that valued achievement, of the kind of concept-use Gallie is after, and/or about the hallmarks of essential contestedness that are typically understood as the characteristics of essentially contested concepts. As we will soon see, Gallie's characterization of (I) is rather thin. Given how all Conditions refer to the valued achievement, we may reasonably expect that (I) is given more substance as other Conditions are brought to the table.

4.1 Gallie's Condition I

Condition (I) states that to count as essentially contested, a concept "must be appraisive in the sense that it signifies or accredits some kind of valued achievement" (ECC 171; PHU 161). Referring to *Artificial* Gallie asserts that "[t]here can be no question but that my concept of 'the champions' is appraisive" (ECC 173/PHU 162). In that context, the relevant meaning of appraisiveness is captured by stating that "championship" is adjudged and awarded in virtue of level of style or caliber, or that, more simply, "to be adjudged 'the champions' means to be judged 'to have played the game best'" (ECC 170/PHU 159).

One can get a rudimentary idea of what Gallie means by a concept being appraisive without much problem at first. A matter at hand is appraised according to some set(s) of evaluative criteria, or with the help of something else fulfilling the same function. This makes it possible to deem one team, in the case of *Artificial*, or one aspect of the valued achievement (see ch. 4), in the case of actual essential contestedness, better than others, or as the best (in the minds of its supporters, that is). Unfortunately, Gallie does not say much about what exactly he means by appraisiveness in this context—other than "to appraise something positively is to assert that it fulfils certain generally recognized

standard" (ECC 197)—which has created room for significantly different interpretations of his thesis and its purpose.

Gallie notes that DEMOCRACY, in contrast to LIBERTY which he views as having lost ground in comparison, "has steadily established itself as *the* appraisive political concept *par excellence*," and that "the primary question on any major policy-decision has come to be: Is it democratic?" (ECC 184/PHU 179). This suggests that the sense of appraisiveness Gallie is focused on quite simply means that the concept and/or an actual achievement signified by the concept in question is *favorably* valued⁶⁸. Moreover, Gallie stresses that, regarding the usage of DEMOCRACY, he is not interested in "questions of actual practice, vindicating or belying certain particular uses of the term 'democracy'" nor in "theory-inspired uses" that are based on "theoretical considerations (...) which appear to show that from the arrangements in question democratic results can be expected to follow, or alternatively are most unlikely to, or even could not conceivably follow" (ECC 183). According to Gallie, both types of use

presuppose a more elementary use in which it can be said to express (and usually today to express approval of) certain political aspirations which have been embodied in countless slave, peasant, national and middle-class revolts and revolutions, as well as in scores of national constitutions and party records and programmes. ECC 184

In juxtaposition to the above, I should briefly note that, in Gallie's view, certain terms like 'painting' can be used as an "achievement word," i.e., in a sense of 'real painting', 'genuine painting', or 'painting which reminds us of what painting can do. When it is thus used, it is "the expression of an essentially contested concept." (ART 109; PHU 173.) I will later show why it makes sense to think that the essentially contested concept in question is ART (see 11.2; 11.3). In general, it appears that the special function of a term or word, or its specific use in a certain context, renders the term or word in question an expression of an essentially contested concept⁶⁹. The disputing parties must still refer to the same valued achievement, otherwise they may talk past each other due to, for instance, having a verbal dispute (cf. ch. 14).

In ECC, the appraisiveness of the live examples of a CHRISTIAN LIFE and ART is brushed aside as self-evident, more or less (ECC 180, 182; PHU 169, 177)⁷⁰. In PHU, however, Gallie expands his analysis of CHRISTIANITY by considering it

⁶⁸ See also the review section for different takes on this. Also compare with the requirement that a worth must be attributed to an achievement considered as a whole (ECC 171-2; 5.1).

⁶⁹ If Gallie's assertions here or how they are reviewed in the next section seem frustratingly elusive, it is good to be reminded of R.M. Hare's observation in *The Language of Morals*: "almost every word in our language is capable of being used on occasion as a value-word (that is, for commending or its opposite) (...) the terms 'value-words' and 'evaluative' are exceedingly hard to define" (Hare 1963, 79-80).

⁷⁰ Gallie qualifies the case of ART by saying that "Art, as we commonly use the term today, is mainly, if not exclusively, an appraisive term" (ECC 182; PHU 177). This live example is thoroughly discussed in 11.2.

in its practical, not its purely doctrinal, manifestations, e.g., as exemplified by what would generally be meant by such a phrase as 'a Christian life' (...) Clearly our uses of such phrase are appraisive: they accredit a certain kind of spiritual achievement. PHU 169

I find it noteworthy that the achievement signified by the term 'a Christian life' – the term that is chosen to express the essentially contested CHRISTIANITY⁷¹ – is very concretely realizable either as a personal or as a collective achievement of *practical* nature. It is not only that a valuable thing, goal, ideal *et cetera* has practical manifestations, but those manifestations are seen as worth realizing by people valuing the thing in question and they often end up acting accordingly.

It is a bit difficult to parse what Gallie's concept of achievement is. In skittles-terms, all competing teams try to realize the achievement of playing the game as it is meant to be played. The teams themselves value one style of playing the game over others, and the spectators do likewise. For instance, the Sharpshooters try to play the game as well as they can, and they think that can be achieved by the most accurate bowling throws, or through the best accuracy-game overall. Other unwavering supporters need not dispute the prowess of The Sharpshooters on that front; they just do not think that excellence in accuracy is enough to lead to the best performance in the game all things considered. This means that they do not consider accuracy as leading to the best realization of the achievement they value⁷², perhaps because they support the Curve Kings and see more merit in a proficient use of swerve. So, in addition to involving a positive or favorable appraisal, appraisiveness is also about choosing between available ways of contributing to the valued achievement. After the choice has been made, a person may use a suitable term as an "achievement word" (cf. above) to highlight or praise the preferred aspect(s) of the achievement "for the purpose of moral or aesthetic persuasion" (cf. ECC 174n2). It is then that the specific use of that term expresses an essentially contested concept as far as Gallie seems to be concerned.

Gallie thinks that the condition of appraisiveness [along with (II)–(IV)] is *necessary* (ECC 174; cf. PHU 161), but he does not claim to give a conclusive proof to that effect. That said, he offers a brief guidance as to what form such a proof, or argument, might take in a footnote after presenting Conditions (I) to (IV) for the first time (ECC 174n2). After I have presented and discussed the first three Conditions, I take a closer look to Gallie's suggestions regarding the necessity of (I)–(IV), and I also restate, more formally, the role appraisiveness has in choosing between the different aspects of a valued achievement.

⁷¹ I gave a summary of the terminological variety in this regard in a footnote in 3.1.

⁷² But they could do so in the future. For Gallie, an individual converting from one view (or team) to another recognizes "a fact if you like, but not a mere empirical observandum (...) rather, the fact that a particular achievement [e.g., of the Sharpshooters] revives and realizes, as it were in fuller relief, some already recognized feature of an already valued style of performance" (ECC 191; see esp. 11.4).

4.2 Condition I reviewed

Condition (I) has been variously interpreted, often taken for granted, and at times criticized. Collier, Hidalgo and Maciuceanu contend that Gallie's focus on normative content "reflects a frank recognition that research in the social sciences routinely has a normative component," and that Gallie's framework points towards the issues on the intersection of normative and empirical concerns (Collier et al. 2006, 237). Some have judged the requirement of appraisiveness as uncontroversial (e.g., van der Burg 2017, 234) while others have called the characterization of an essentially contested concept as appraisive "confusing" (Freeden 1996, 55). Wibren van der Burg observes that several authors make the mistake of incorrectly replacing appraisive with normative rather than with evaluative, even if the meaning of 'normative' is either broader or otherwise different (as action-guiding) to the meaning of 'appraisive' (as referring to standards of evaluation)⁷³ (van der Burg 2017, 234n16). However, if it turns out, as I will later argue myself (18.3), that essentially contested concepts have an endorsement function, there may be no need to make a hard distinction at this juncture.

Morris Weitz rejects Condition (I) on the grounds that there are many concepts like GAME, DRAMA, or NOVEL that meet Conditions (II)–(VII) when revised appropriately⁷⁴; the concepts "whose functioning exhibits essential contestedness in spite of the fact that they are not primarily appraisive," but they are rather used to describe or classify. Although Gallie at one point suggests that Condition (I) is necessary to choose between available "logically equipollent" descriptions (see 11.4), Weitz maintains that one is not required to resort to game as an appraisive concept in order to explain someone's preferred use of 'game.' Someone "may simply believe that his criteria of 'game' name the defining properties of games," whereas some other (sets of) criteria do not⁷⁵. (Weitz 1972, 103–4.) This is probably the reason why many emphasize that essentially contested concepts are employed to evaluate rather than to refer to objects or phenomena of interest (e.g., Stokes 2007, 689). Ernest Gellner is more specific in interpreting Gallie as saying that the criteria of for an object to fall under the essentially contested concept are evaluative in that "to satisfy them is to satisfy a norm of excellence, as well as a mere precondition of a classification" (Gellner 1974, 95; see also 17.4). David Boromisza-Habashi reads Gallie as saying that the meaning of an essentially contested concept can be understood only by analyzing

⁷³ Evaluation can be considered as "somehow positive or negative in flavor" or as "information to the effect that something has (or lacks) merit, worth, or significance (that is, a positive or a negative standing) relative to a certain kind of standard, namely one that grounds claims of merit, worth, or significance" (Väyrynen 2013b, 138).

⁷⁴ Specifically: 'activity' is to be substituted for 'achievement' (Weitz 1972, 104). This is quite reasonable as Gallie himself treats them as interchangeable at times.

⁷⁵ GAME is not one of Gallie's examples. Terms or concepts can certainly be put to different use, but the talk of "primary" descriptive use of a concept is somewhat beside the point if Gallie is after a *specific* appraisive use instead.

the differing ways in which it is used in addition to the divergent norms based on which rival parties deem certain uses acceptable and others unacceptable (Boromisza-Habashi 2010, 277). These observations about the characteristic usage of essentially contested concepts leave some room for interpretation: are these concepts normative/evaluative or is it that their uses are construable as normative/evaluative in the context of the disputes manifesting essential contestability?

The normativity of allegedly normative concepts *as concepts* is a controversial matter, but Gallie is not making explicit claims on that front. Rather, he appears to be after a specific normative/evaluative use of a concept rather than describing a concept's inherent character. Mark Criley gives us a succinct and stringent summary of Condition (I):

any essentially contested concept must (a) classify only the results of agentive activities and endeavors—it must be directed toward taking stock of human achievements—and (b) that the characterization of these endeavors must be *positive*: Contested concepts must be understood to pick out activities, practices, or goals that the community's members are prepared to praise in others or strive to achieve themselves. Criley 2007, 33

Criley grants that “*some* contested concepts are certainly concerned with the commendatory evaluation of human activity” (ibid., 34) but not *all* contested concepts have to be. This is true but it needs to be remembered that nowhere does Gallie claim that his thesis covers all contested concepts (see e.g., MacIntyre 1973, 9). Gallie does, however, solely focus on appraisals or evaluations of positive and affirmative character. We might make different things of this. Perhaps essentially contested concepts are simply employed in an honorific fashion: they function as a prize or penalty in political argument (Green 1987, 19; see Glock 2008, 204–7; see also 15.2). Making a term of negative valuation “stick” to one's opponent is a clear case of the penalty, and it does not come with a positive appraisal or is met with approval. One may thus doubt “whether there must be a positive appraisal to be pursued rather than a negative appraisal to be shunned” (Garver 1987, 220).

It is no wonder then that Gallie's focus on favorable and affirmative valuation has been criticized as too narrow. According to Michael Freeden, not all essentially contested concepts signify valued achievements since “they may equally signify disapproved and denigrated phenomena (...) ‘Appraisive’ must include, as Gallie does not, the notions ‘unvalued’ and ‘devalued’” (Freeden 1996, 55–6; see also Abbey 2005, 464–5; Criley 2007, 33ff; Glock 2008, 206). This is shown by the ambiguity attached to POWER—claimed to be essentially contested by Steven Lukes⁷⁶ most famously—but this applies to some of Gallie's own examples as well. CHRISTIANITY, or even more plausibly RELIGION which Gallie mentions as a (specifically analogous) candidate (ECC 187; PHU 168, 181, 190⁷⁷),

⁷⁶ Lukes's views are discussed here and there throughout the study and also later in the current section.

⁷⁷ In the revised thesis of PHU, RELIGION has taken the place of what Gallie earlier named as the concept of “that of the adherence to, or participation in, a particular religion” (ECC 180).

may certainly signify a thing that is disapproved as well as approved. Weitz states that Gallie's reason for rejecting pejorative terms is "obscure," although there is no doubt that Gallie clearly restricts essentially contested concepts to terms that are used with praise (Weitz 1972, 103–4). Collier, Hidalgo and Maciuceanu, on their part, maintain that appraisiveness encompasses also negative valuation which Gallie just failed to discuss although he "would probably not have disagreed" (Collier et al. 2006, 216). Considerations such as these have led some to propose concepts of starkly negative valuation as essentially concepts; the proposed candidates include RAPE (Reitan 2011) and VIOLENCE (Garver 1988).

One might think that evaluative ambivalence depending on the perspective of a person or group is to be expected especially in the case of concepts that are dubbed as 'essentially contested.' By 'valence,' one means something like 'the degree of attractiveness an individual, activity, or thing possesses as a behavioral goal.' The normative valence of a concept can also be unclear, and it may depend on the theoretical framework employed, or on the specific context in which the concept is used/applied (Collier et al. 2006, 216). In *Artificial*, Gallie describes the way the supporters of each team rank the facets of the game differently, and his point is that such evaluations come in degrees in terms of how valuable or "attractive" some facets are in opposition to other facets: this is also shown well in Gallie's discussion of DEMOCRACY (Syrjämäki 2011, 141–2; PHU 179). However, it is not immediately clear how a concept like CHRISTIANITY would be solely concerned with the commendatory evaluation of human activity, or the like. But that is only when the relevant type of evaluation is not part of the concept itself; otherwise, all parties to the dispute must share the required sort of evaluative stance if they are to share the same concept—and this is a philosophically controversial position. As an alternative, there could be a certain *function* that is baked into Gallie's notion of appraisiveness. In other words, behind the employment of essentially contested concepts there could be a specific point or purpose which differentiates the contestability of such uses from other possible uses (see also 18.2).

There is a problem, however, in broadly interpreting Condition (I) to cover concepts of negative valuation or disapproval that is rarely noted in the literature. If the valued achievements that Gallie talks about are to be realized practically by the users of essentially contested concepts—as is suggested by his live examples of DEMOCRACY and CHRISTIANITY—it defies imagination to conceive of rape and violence as valued achievements, even if those of a despicable character might see them as means to some unsavory end. Moreover, what would the analogous artificial teams competing in the games of rape and violence be? Gruesome counterexamples aside, the idea here is that achievement is a kind of behavioral *goal by definition*—not that it has either a negative or positive value *as a goal*. The achievement in that sense cannot be negatively or disapprovingly realized even if one may fail to realize it. In terms of *Artificial* again, it would be difficult to conceive of different teams competing for who plays the game the

worst—which is implied by the notion of achievement that is shunned in the present sense.

The close connection between a practical achievement and how it is conceptualized is also noted by David-Hillel Ruben who maintains that, by appraisiveness, Gallie means that the application of a concept “to a particular case is in virtue of some sort of valued achievement,” and that “being a democracy or being a Christian (...) is, in the view of the disputants at least, a valued achievement of some sort” (Ruben 2010, 262–3). As I see it, a couple of assumptions come together here: 1) without a certain valued achievement, the concept in question would not be applied to a particular case; 2) the proper applications of the concept require some sort of mutual recognition of value by disputing parties. The first element can be called objective, or external to a dispute at hand; the second (inter)subjective, or internal to a dispute at hand.

For Gallie, democracy is clearly a positively valued achievement. Michael Greven observes that DEMOCRACY “seems to be recognized as a universal normative concept, in politics as well as in mainstream political science” (Greven 2009, 83). It is true, though, that the normative valence attributed to ‘democracy’ has shifted considerably throughout the centuries. Buchstein and Jörke (2007) note that democracy was a negative concept in the theories of many classical thinkers, and this usage continued uninterrupted to modern times; positive connotation of the term became gradually accepted after the French Revolution. Nowadays ‘democracy’ stands for a positive concept in western societies, and the concept is also used as “a category of self-description in global political disputes.” (Buchstein and Jörke 2007, 183–4.) This type of fluctuation in normative valence is not necessarily a concern to Gallie who frequently suggests that essentially contested concepts or our understandings of them are some kinds of products of history. What matters is that the term/concept is positively appraised *today* or *now* (see e.g., ECC 181, 182, 184; PHU 174, 177; see also 18.4).

Freeden asserts that essential contestability does not simply boil down to a matter of moral choices and human tastes—as brought about by a concept’s normative elements and the absence of universally agreed schemes of values—even if Gallie does not fully succeed in establishing the grounds for the richer notion (Freeden 1996, 55). If there is such a richer notion to be found, I claim unearthing it will require paying more attention to the nature of dispute and to the pragmatics of conceptual contestation, which Gallie tries to elucidate with the last two or three Conditions. But ECC has also been read from the standpoint that does not view those Conditions as relevant to the central claim, which is a choice that affects how both the character and the role of appraisiveness are understood.

Pekka Väyrynen (2014) observes that essential contestability is widely taken to pervade the evaluative domain. It is frequently assumed, even if the idea is perhaps explicitly endorsed only rarely, that essential contestability tells us something important about the evaluative, in particular—this goes both for the works in which it is typically asked whether some concept X is essentially contestable and for the discussions of essential contestability itself. In many discussions, the first four Conditions have been adopted as the central defining

features of essential contestability, and Väyrynen follows suit. He ends up presenting a convincing argument (discussed in 17.4) to the effect that the thusly modified essential contestability thesis offers no deep illumination of normativity of concepts—Väyrynen presumes that by ‘appraisive’ Gallie must mean something like ‘semantically evaluative.’ However, Väyrynen also points out that Gallie himself might not have been concerned with the questions about evaluative language and concepts which occupy contemporary metaethicists and philosophers of language. (Väyrynen 2014, esp. 472, 474–8, 474 [nn 10, 13], 487.) Although there is not much to disagree in Väyrynen’s discussion, it should be noted that the exclusion of the considerations that come with the last three Conditions truncates the sense and the role of appraisiveness as it relates to the broader context of conceptual application and categorization.

Gallie has also been criticized of conflating descriptive and evaluative (or prescriptive) perspectives in his notion of appraisiveness. Freedon (1996) points out that “concepts may have empirically describable and observable components that may *in addition* be conceived of as desirable and thus become values.” Gallie also collapses two meanings of ‘appraisive’ into one and may thus fail to differentiate between the concept’s intension and extension. (Freedon 1996, 56–7.) Moreover, one can presumably contest the describable and observable, or otherwise identifiable, components of a concept and/or the values related to them. If the contestation is over the ranking order of describable components, or with respect to closely associated values and valuations, rather than about some core description of a concept, it can be argued that it would be more precise to speak of “partially contested” or “evaluatively contested” concepts rather than “essentially contested” (Ingram 1985; see also 17.4). Wibren van der Burg asserts that essentially contested concepts need not be purely evaluative: at least some are concepts that are both descriptive and evaluative, or “partly evaluative” (van der Burg 2017, 233–4.) These are subtle distinctions, but it is evident that the proper role of values in essential contestability needs to be clearly articulated.

Morris Weitz reminds us that one’s preference or, in fact, “any choice regarding a particular use of an essentially contested concept employed to describe or to classify rather than to evaluate” may be founded on a metaphysical theory about the nature of the matter at hand, and one need not thus explain the preference of one use over another by appealing to appraisiveness (Weitz 1972, 104). Gallie explicitly notes that he has no wish to deny that “metaphysical afflictions” might bring about endless disputes, but he wants to show that this particular explanation “*need[s]*” not be “the correct one” (ECC 169). Although Gallie’s proviso can be understood quite straightforwardly as an attempt to find additional explanations *beside* metaphysical ones, it would also be possible to view Condition (I) as a (mere) stipulation that is meant to limit the reach of a more profound notion. In other words: Condition (I) could demarcate essentially contested *appraisive* concepts from a much larger group of essentially contested concepts *proper*, the contestability of which would be explained in metaphysical terms.

There are several authors who accept, by and large, Gallie's requirement of appraisiveness. Their suggested modifications are typically related to the proper understanding of how normative/evaluative perspectives function in bringing contestedness/contestability about. As maintained by John Gray, the general drift of *ECC* is that the normative standard embodied by a concept's criteria is the major source of its essential contestedness: "a concept is essentially contested if its rival uses express competing moral and political perspectives," and a disagreement arises in virtue of disagreeing parties having rival moral and political commitments (Gray 1978, 392). Michael Stokes emphasizes that neither obscurity nor ambiguity is the reason why essentially contested concepts admit of different conceptions; they are admitted "because of continuing disputes about the most justifiable understanding of the values which underlie the concept" (Stokes 2007, 693). Robert Grafstein points towards the political dimension as the origin of essential contestability and affirms that essentially contested concepts are value-laden (Grafstein 1988, 19, 25.). *DEMOCRACY*, for example, can be understood as a value-laden concept that is oriented towards the ideal of democracy which allows endless debate about precisely what it implies (van der Burg 2017, 233–4). In that case, the dispute would be both conceptual and substantive.

William Connolly (1974/1993⁷⁸) works the notion further by clarifying that "the concept is *appraisive* in that the state of affairs it describes is a valued achievement," and that "to call something a 'work of art' or a 'democracy' is both to describe it and to ascribe a value to it or express a commitment with respect to it." Connolly emphasizes the inescapability of normative perspective by noting that a description of a situation does not come down to simply naming something, neither does a description refer to elements bound together merely on account of similarity. Instead, "*to describe is to characterize a situation from the vantage point of certain interests, purposes, or standards.*"⁷⁹ (Connolly 1993, 10, 22–3; see esp. 18.2.) Steven Lukes argues for the view that power is an essentially contested concept, a view that he deems "ineradicably evaluative and 'essentially contested'" in addition to being empirically applicable (Lukes 2005, 14). In response to criticism from K.I. Macdonald (1976), Lukes asserts that "any given interpretation of power favours certain value judgements, and disfavors and precludes others" (Lukes 1977, 419). In fact, Lukes considers himself following Gallie "precisely" in suggesting "that disputes about the proper interpretation and application of certain concepts *are* disputes between contending moral and political perspectives"⁸⁰ (*ibid.*, 418; *contra* Freedman 2004, 7). Gray seems to agree with this interpretation (Gray 1978, 392; Gray 1983, 76) and he states that, for Lukes, the

⁷⁸ The first edition of Connolly's book *Terms of Political Discourse*, in which Connolly defends his refined thesis of essentially contested concepts, was published in 1974. All references made in this study are to the third edition, i.e., Connolly 1993.

⁷⁹ This can be rephrased to mean that to use a concept proficiently, one needs to grasp the normative point of a concept. Later, I will raise the possibility that the point that holds essentially contested concepts together is not evaluative, but rather animating (18.2).

⁸⁰ Lukes presents his views in terms of the concept/conception distinction. I will discuss the distinction and some of Lukes's views in 11.2.

essential contestability of power “derives from the fact that rival applications of it embody conflicting value-commitments” (Gray 1983, 76).

For a concept to be *inherently* appraisive in the above picture, it seems to me that it is not enough that a concept’s users have conflicting value-commitments. Rather, the value-content should be part of the concept itself, so that its applications *embody* values, the values people may or may not be committed to. When they are committed to *different* values, a disagreement ensues. But that requires a non-standard and probably highly controversial theory of concepts (cf. ch. 16). It is perhaps more plausible to assume that it is part of the meaning and function of some words “to indicate that a value judgment is required” (Waldron 1994, 527) or that some contestable concepts have a clear minimal meaning that “the rule for their correct use is to elicit a specific value judgement from anyone applying or implementing the proposition in which they appear” (Besson 2005, 82). At this stage, the latter point is left as a mere observation.

It is important to distinguish between a concept’s inherent appraisiveness and appraisiveness that is related to the concept’s employment in some other way (e.g., in various theoretical and/or empirical contexts). The fact that a view or interpretation of power favors some value judgments and disfavors others is not yet a surefire sign of a concept’s inherent appraisiveness. To illustrate, let us say that a table is an even horizontal hard surface with any number of legs that support it. If someone takes exception to my definition by claiming that I exclude other equally good or better definitions, it does not yet mean that the concept behind my definition is inherently appraisive. Relatedly, descriptions of how a concept should be used can be put forward as definitions, in which case it is often useful to make a distinction between *real* and *honorific* definitions. Sometimes it may be the case that what is offered as a theory of, say, art, is best reconstrued as argued-for recommendations to concentrate on certain criteria of excellence in art (Weitz 1956, 34–35). An argument can perhaps be made that Gallie was interested in that dynamic. The terms and concepts may be used *persuasively* by social scientists to highlight social processes, phenomena *et cetera* that are, or should be, especially interesting or significant for the research (cf. 15.2). This can perhaps be called “theoretical partisanship,” and thus distinguishable from the kind of political partisanship discussed before, i.e., the process in which one seeks positive valuation for one’s causes or negative valuation for things opposed. That is not to say that academics – or laymen, for that matter – would not often be, or could not be, political; only that the way they see the world, and how things stand in that world, is reflected in their choice of concepts that are specifically employed to draw attention to certain features. It is noteworthy that the distance between real and honorific definitions is not easy to maintain in practice, when the usage is characteristically persuasive.

To conclude, roughly around the publication of *ECC* there were many illustrious thinkers engaged in the topics surrounding GOOD, or what it is to call something good, or what it is, in general, to commend, recommend, appraise, value *et cetera*. A big part of that work was the elucidation of the normative/evaluative language used. Gallie’s concentration on the terms and

concepts of positive valuation might stem from, or be a residue of, the more general notion, that to know which objects belong to a certain class, we must have some idea regarding what its 'good' members are. Now, appraisals of good in the sense of what the proper achievements are for which to strive, and appraisals of good in the sense of what makes certain members of a class especially representative of that class, are evidently distinct, although they might share some general normative/evaluative features. But the point could just be to draw attention more generally to situations in which a thing is identified as something, an apparently intractable dispute ensues, and the dispute appears to originate in diverging evaluations. If that is so, the key to unlocking Gallie's thesis could very well be the exact explication of what he understands appraisiveness to entail. As R.M. Hare observes, "almost every word in our language is capable of being used on occasion as a value-word (that is, for commending or its opposite)" (Hare 1963, 79-80), but to incorporate positive appraisal into the analytic of the concept is something quite different. This sounds a lot like some of the arguments for the special nature of *thick concepts*, apart from limiting the thesis to *pro-judgments* and *-attitudes*. However, it turns out that is not exactly what Gallie attempts to say (see also 17.4). But of course, as we have just seen there is some disagreement concerning how exactly Condition (I) should be understood. It is simply the case that Gallie's formulation of (I) is not enough to settle those differences, and much more needs to be said about essential contestedness.

CHAPTER 5: CONDITIONS II AND III // INTERNAL COMPLEXITY AND DIVERSE DESCRIBABILITY

In the secondary literature, Conditions (II) and (III) are commonly discussed together because of their significant overlap. Gallie himself presents them side by side when he discusses DEMOCRACY (see ECC 184). I start by introducing Gallie's original phrasings of the two Conditions, including the minor alterations made by him later, after which I discuss their critical reception. Despite some proposed tweaks here and there, (II) and (III) are the most non-controversial of the seven by a wide margin. Although appraisiveness is introduced as the first characteristic of essentially contested concepts, the order in which Conditions are best seen as following each other is not perfectly obvious (cf. ch. 6 intro). However, the relation between (II) and (III) is clear: internal complexity (of a concept or achievement) is required for various descriptability (of a concept or achievement).

5.1 Gallie's Conditions II and III

According to Condition (I) an essentially contested concept signifies or accredits a valued achievement. In introducing Condition (II) Gallie refers directly to (I) by stating that "this achievement must be of an internally complex character, for all that its worth is attributed to it as a whole"⁸¹ (ECC 171-2/PHU 161). For an

⁸¹ Gallie's phrasing is a bit obscure here, yet the phrase has not attracted that much attention. One exception is David Boromisza-Habashi (2010) who explicitly makes use of Gallie's original phrasing in his own explication: "The concept's referent, Gallie shows, is such that the evaluation pertaining to it applies to it as a whole. 'Democracy' fits this description because, in spite of the complex and often conflicting ways in which public speakers conceptualize 'democracy' evaluations apply to it in its entirety, as a coherent whole" (Boromisza-Habashi 2010, 277).

achievement to be internally complex, it needs to consist of various and possibly overlapping elements, features, or component parts. Furthermore, Gallie mentions that it seems to him that surely all worthwhile achievements are “essentially internally complex” although he does not consider it necessary to discuss the issue further (ECC 173/PHU 162). In any case, to ascertain why they do have that character is “a question of the greatest difficulty”⁸² (PHU 162).

Conditions (II) and (III) are tightly connected. From the internal complex character of the (valued) achievement it follows that “[a]ny explanation of its [i.e., the achievement’s] worth must therefore include reference to the respective contributions of its various parts or features.” Gallie claims that the “component parts or features” of the achievement can be put in different orders of importance, and these ranking orders are “rival descriptions of [the achievement’s] total worth.” Moreover, “prior to experimentation there is nothing absurd or contradictory” in any one of these rival descriptions. This calls for another Condition, (III), that requires, in short, that “the accredited achievement is *initially* variously describable.” (ECC 171–2/PHU 161.)

It stands to reason to assume that there are some limits to the number of possible orders of importance, or ranking orders, which can be put forward as rival descriptions of achievement’s total worth. Moreover, Gallie’s references to a valued achievement strongly suggest that the limits of describability are provided by it. From another perspective: Gallie seems to be assuming here that there are certain features discernible in a phenomenon, a practice, or a state of affairs, (e.g., democracy) which the use of a concept (e.g., DEMOCRACY) must reflect if it is meant to refer to its object at all. Gallie does not discuss the matter in these terms but he raises the issue with reference to skittles: there are a limited number of components in a performance, or an act, we call bowling, and no one can bowl simply with speed and with no heed to accuracy, for example. Therefore, “some importance, however slight, must, in practice, be attached to each of these factors.” (ECC 173; cf. PHU 162.)

Interestingly, Gallie remarks in a footnote that one might “re-write” Condition (III) to state that “[a]ny essentially contested concept is liable initially to be *ambiguous*” (ECC 172n1). Disputants may apply the concept while having in mind different descriptions of the achievement which the concept accredits; that is, the disputants are applying the concept that signifies the achievement, and they do so by virtue of the different ranking orders they have for the complex features of the achievement. In this way their evaluation of those component parts comes to guide how they view the criteria according to which the concept is to be applied⁸³. Nonetheless, rather than making it the case that the disputants

⁸² This is a new addition that is not found in *ECC* as are the other quotes from the same page, i.e., PHU 162, for which respective *ECC*-page numbers are not provided (including the phrasing about “complexity involved” in the idea of playing a game that is discussed in the next section).

⁸³ In the current study, I will move rather freely between linguistic and semantic issues and those issues that are more clearly about thought, or psychological or cognitive processes such as categorization. For example, by ‘application’ one might mean either a semantic relation – i.e., a concept encodes the conditions by which something is in its extension – or a

would not be *contesting one and the same concept*, Gallie remarks that “this *initial ambiguity* must be considered in conjunction with condition (V)” (ibid.). Therefore, by Gallie’s own admission Conditions (II) and (III) are not enough to settle the problem that is related to the initial ambiguity and talking past each other, or conceptual confusion⁸⁴.

It is a fact well worth emphasizing that Gallie goes almost as far as likening various descriptibility to ambiguity, and that these notions are invoked as belonging to an *initial* stage of a disagreement in which disputants are engaged. What I call here ‘the initial stage’ is a placeholder by another name for the stage Gallie describes as “prior to experimentation” (ECC 172/PHU 161), the stage in which there is nothing absurd or contradictory in any one of the rival descriptions that are offered by the disputing parties. By conceptualizing such a stage Gallie makes room for himself to contend, in artificial terms, that “at the outset – when play began on the first morning of the first day – how supporters would group themselves around different factors would have been anyone’s guess” (PHU 162). This suggests that following experimentation, or after the play has gone on for some time, we should be more knowledgeable about the rival descriptions offered by the disputing parties. Perhaps, then, the

psychological process in which an object is judged to fall under a concept. Both senses are relevant since my focus is also on what rival parties do in their dispute. In the terminology I am using, criteria of application make up or govern the semantic relation of the concept (i.e., satisfying its intension) while they are also the ground according to which the disputing parties *apply* the concept in a dispute, and that is certainly a psychological operation as well. By contrast, some commentators refer to the seven Conditions set by Gallie as ‘criteria’ as in, presumably, the criteria of application, or the characteristics in virtue of which a concept counts as an essentially contested concept. I find that it invites unnecessary confusions, especially when distinguishing between essentially contested concepts in the first-order and second-order senses. Furthermore, one might want to distinguish between the characteristics of a concept that give it its overall meaning (some speak of defining properties, here) and the criteria of application that pick instantiations of a concept. In this sense, these criteria of a concept’s application can be understood as non-semantic, i.e., “[t]hey instead function as bridges between concepts and the objects in the world” (Olsthoorn 2017, 160 in reference to Martinich 2014, 338), and hence they have a pragmatic and linguistic function. Concepts in their full sense can be considered to contain more information than what is needed for categorization. Although I might invite criticism that I conflate things that should be kept distinct, I think that the criteria of application can be the sole point of reference while keeping in mind that the ensuing dispute can be about either how those criteria apply in an actual case, or about which should be the correct set of criteria that is applied to begin with. In some frameworks, the distinction does not matter much. For instance, in the case of the classical view of concepts, “the model of categorization is just the ontogeny run backwards; that is, something is judged to fall under a concept just in case it is judged to fall under the features that compose the concept” (Laurence and Margolis 1999, 11). Given Gallie’s later references to (exclusive) definitions as conflicting positions in a dispute (PHU 156, 171, 173; see also ART 112–3), it is sensible to assume this as a default view of how Gallie conceives of categorization despite his criticism of necessary and sufficient conditions (see also 17.2).

⁸⁴ The issue of talking past each other is investigated more thoroughly in 14.2 in connection to what is termed as *the unity problem*, and the issue is mentioned here and there before that as well. Matters related to indeterminacy (including ambiguity) are discussed especially in chapter twelve. The characteristics of the dispute (including its presumed genuineness) are examined in part four.

“experimentation” could show that some descriptions are not only conflicting but contradictory, or otherwise not relevant regarding the case at hand⁸⁵.

The tight connection between Conditions (II) and (III) becomes even more noticeable when considering Gallie’s discussion of the live example of DEMOCRACY, which is “internally complex in such a way that any democratic achievement (or programme) admits of a variety of descriptions in which its different aspects are graded in different orders of importance.” Gallie lists three different aspects of democracy: (a) elective power of citizens; (b) equality of citizens; and (c) continuous participation in political life (i.e., being actively involved in setting a political agenda). These features, which can exist to a greater or lesser degree, are “therefore liable to be differently placed for relative importance.” (ECC 184–5.)

In *ART*, Gallie states that ART “is one of a fairly wide and important class of concepts which are, as I like to put it, essentially complex, and, chiefly for this reason, *essentially contested*.” On the one hand, to appreciate “the peculiar structure” of ART, one needs to consider how the concept “*came to be*,” i.e., how and why “equally intelligent and knowledgeable people” have favored very different aesthetic standpoints. On the other hand, a proper grasp of ART would enable one to make sense of, and sympathize with, “the otherwise apparently futile history of conflicting aesthetic schools.” (ART 107; see also ART 110; ECC 198.) This suggests rather explicitly that Gallie sees the (structural) complexity of a concept as largely explaining the essential contestedness of certain concepts, and that the kind of complexity referred to is somehow, and importantly, connected to particular histories of intellectual traditions⁸⁶. This is evident in the following passage from *ART*, a matter which Gallie calls “a matter of the first importance for our discussion” (ART 113):

The different aspects of artistic achievement which different aesthetic theories emphasise are very *naturally* graded in different orders of importance, not so much because of different personal preferences among critics and aestheticians as because of the general condition of the arts (or of any one importantly advancing art) and of art-criticism at any particular time. ART 113

It is evident that Gallie considers the phenomenon of essential contestedness as something that has its roots in a concept’s or term’s history. Gallie is not interested only in describing the structure of essentially contested concepts

⁸⁵ Of course, it is not “anyone’s guess” how people view matters like democracy, social justice, and art. When we start discussing these matters, even with complete strangers, we usually have quite a good impression of the range of opinions that are professed. But this is well in line with Gallie’s thinking; in fact, Gallie wants to emphasize that the knowledge we have of alternative views has its (historical) roots in the original exemplar(s) (8.1), and because of that we can be relatively assured that we are not talking past each other when we engage in debating these matters. In chapter 14, I also elaborate on what I take as the most plausible explanation for why Gallie invokes ‘experimentation’ in this context (see 14.2).

⁸⁶ The structure of concepts is discussed in chapters sixteen and seventeen. See also the discussion concerning criteria in 16.4. For Gallie’s views on how the complexity of a concept is brought about by its history in connection to a human activity, see 11.2 and 11.3.

synchronously. Rather, he is seeking “a properly sympathetic historical account” that would put one in a position to understand their complex structure which is the chief reason for their essential contestedness. It is a two-way street: a proper grasp of the structure of ART would enable us “to make some sense of, to read with some appreciation and sympathy, the otherwise apparently futile history of conflicting aesthetic schools.” (ART 107.) At one point, Gallie even refers to the composition of the *use* of any essentially contested concept as “[t]he peculiar complex of loyalties, oppositions and recognitions of permissibility”⁸⁷ (PHU 211). It is not clear how all this should be reflected, or could even be reflected, on the level of a concept’s inherent characteristics. The phenomenon of essential contestedness may not be limited to the characteristics of some special group of concepts.

5.2 Conditions II and III reviewed

It is commonly thought that Condition (III), *various describability*, follows from Condition (II), *internal complexity*. John Kekes emphasizes that “there is nothing odd in the possibility of there existing several incompatible explanations of why the achievement is valued,” and the incompatible explanations are due to “different rankings of the contributions made by different elements of the whole” (Kekes 1977, 73). Christine Swanton asserts that, for Gallie, “the criteria of (...) concepts are multiple and evaluative, and stand in no settled relation of priority with one another” (Swanton 1985, 820). Collier, Hidalgo and Maciuceanu (2006) maintain that “the internal complexity of a concept makes it plausible that different users may view, or describe, its meaning in different ways.” Nevertheless, conflicting viewpoints, or descriptions, of a concept’s meaning is an outcome that does not come about automatically. For this reason, Collier et al. consider it better to speak of diverse describability rather than diverse descriptions in regard to (III)⁸⁸. (Collier et al. 2006, 216–7.)

The diverse descriptions may emphasize one or another facet of the concept exclusively, or the facets may be emphasized to different degrees in a way that accentuates their relative importance (*ibid.*). By contrast, Mark Criley understands Gallie as assuming, more strictly, that different descriptions place the various facets in *lexical rankings* (Criley 2007, 24). That would mean that even

⁸⁷ The quote is from the end of chapter nine of PHU. It is very easily missed in the analyses of Gallie’s views.

⁸⁸ Collier et al. appear to assume that the complexity of a concept is given (let us say *a priori*) although that complexity does not automatically translate to various (conflicting) descriptions (*a posteriori*). For them, the distinction between ‘describability’ and ‘description’ is parallel to the contrast between ‘contested’ and ‘contestable.’ Gallie does not seem to pay real attention to the distinction, or he does so only sporadically (e.g., ART 113–4). In the literature, Gallie’s ‘essential contestedness’ is often modalized as ‘essential contestability.’ The matter is discussed more thoroughly in 12.2.

the perceived marginal advantages with respect to one facet are enough to settle outright how the concept is to be used; that is, according to the criterion most valued. The strict interpretation finds support in *Artificial* in addition to what Gallie says in *ART* and *PHU* concerning, especially, attempts to define *ART* exclusively (see 11.2). However, in discussing *DEMOCRACY*, Gallie presents different descriptions that match with the component parts of democratic achievement and starts a description of each aspect with “Democracy means primarily” (ECC 184–5/*PHU* 179; see also ECC 176/*PHU* 164). I personally understand ‘primarily’ as leaving room for relative comparisons that are not outright exclusive—this is also suggested by Gallie’s talk of grading (ECC 184/*PHU* 179, *PHU* 162; or see 17.2). Moreover, Gallie tries to make room for rational conversions from one use to another (11.4), so no lexical ranking would be considered final. All in all, the idea that the different facets may be emphasized to different degrees is in the original spirit of Gallie’s thesis as long as it does not threaten the possibility of taking sides (subject to reconsideration) in a clear-cut fashion.

Judging something as ‘art’ or ‘democracy’ is to make a complex judgment that involves many aspects. This differs from other classificatory or categorizing judgments like judging something to be ‘red’ (Waldron 1994, 530n53). According to Ruth Abbey, it is owing to the internal complexity of the phenomenon to which an essentially contested concept refers that rival parties “are able to attach different normative significance to the concept’s various elements.” (Abbey 2005, 465.) From another point of view, the employment of the concept must be responsive to several different component parts or features of its targets (Criley 2007, 23; emphasis added). All this sounds relatively straightforward. Yet the claim according to which a concept is internally complex is meaningful if and only if the different components can be considered part of the same concept (Collier et al. 2006, 217). Together with a concept’s contestability, it requires opening a can of worms for us to consider later (see esp. 14.2). Now it suffices to say that (i) the different ingredients that are included as part of the same concept have to be complex and about the same thing; (ii) the internal structure of the concept has to be of the kind that allows such complexity; and (iii) parties to a dispute agree to a sufficient degree what the concept’s ingredients are. The various describability thus requires of the concept, and perhaps from its users as well, a certain *combinatorial tolerance*⁸⁹.

Jeremy Waldron asserts that the key to essential contestability “seems to be a combination of *normativity* and *complexity*: only normative concepts with a certain internal complexity are capable of being essentially contested” (Waldron

⁸⁹ The term ‘combinatorial tolerance’ is borrowed from Väyrynen 2014, 476. Michael Freedman refers to “the structural tolerance of word” while stating that ambiguity and “multiple connected, but not identical, meanings” of words are important to the “adequate functioning of political and ideological orders” (Freedman 2004, 10). Freedman looks to be speaking of a slightly different matter but it may be difficult to draw a hard line between the instantiations of these cases, in practice. (iii) may sound odd as it does not seem to have much to do with the internal complexity of a concept. It nevertheless follows directly from the requirement of mutual appreciation that I will discuss later in connection to Condition (V) (7.1).

2002, 149–150.) John Gray states that the criteria of correct application of essentially contested concepts are “multiple, evaluative and in no settled relation of priority with one another,” they “embody standards of excellence as well as norms of categorial demarcation,” and “their relative importance is as much a matter of dispute as each of them is itself” (Gray 1978, 389; see also Swanton 1985, 820). Pekka Väyrynen (2014) puts the brakes on too heavily emphasizing the connection between normativity/evaluativeness and complexity. According to him, the internal complexity of essentially contested concepts is similar with the one that characterizes “multidimensional expressions” generally. (Väyrynen 2014, 478; see also 17.4.) If that is so, one arguing for a thesis of essential contestability must do a lot more than refer to the complexity of concepts (but cf. ART 107).

William Connolly has introduced the notion of *cluster concept* to better describe and capture the internal complexity of essentially contested concepts. A cluster concept is a concept “to which a broad range of criteria apply; any large set of these criteria grouped together in a particular act or practice is capable of qualifying the act as political” (Connolly 1993/1974, 14). The absence of one or more criteria does not necessarily make the concept “to lose its meaning.” Or, as in the case of politics, the concept can still be applicable in situations that are properly characterized as political. Gallie himself does not take a clear stance regarding the possibility of *dropping* some of the acknowledged criteria case-by-case⁹⁰ although some might want to argue, as Morris Weitz does, that the criteria need to be outright “expendable” to allow and accommodate the new cases (Weitz 1972, 105). Gallie’s discussion in *ART* implies that the criteria, according to which art or artworks are judged as art, are in a sense placed in reserve for anyone to appeal to after they have been authoritatively presented during the historical development of ART. From time to time, Gallie states that he is talking of the employment of concepts as general terms (ECC 167, 186; PHU 168, 171; see 11.3; 16.2), even as a “supremely general” term (PHU 178), he has the “popular conception” of the concept in his sights (ECC 186–7; PHU 178, 180), or he talks about concept’s “standard general use” (ECC 169–70, 186; PHU 180; see 11.3). This suggests that Gallie’s focus is not so much on clearly demarcated or scientifically precise concepts rather than on all the plausible ways to apply the general term, the ways of which the concept’s general use or popular conception consists. Be that as it may, based on his example situations (cf. 11.2), it is at least clear that new criteria can be *added* to an already acknowledged set of criteria in the light of changing circumstances, or in the course of history.

Connolly’s notion of a cluster concept has been viewed “as a more precise characterization of what Gallie had called the internal complexity of the uses of [essentially contested] concepts” (Ehrenberg 2011, 215), and it is from time to time

⁹⁰ But compare with the following: “there are such things as *revolutions* in artistic taste and inspiration, and after such a revolution certain things are classified as Art which were not before, while other things are no longer classified as Art” (Gallie 1948, 305). In *ART*, Gallie backtracks from the position he presents in the 1948 article (ART 101), and it is unclear whether he has changed his mind in this respect also.

taken as the clarificatory starting point for the discussion on essential contestability (see e.g., Gray 1978, 389). The basic idea is similar to Stuart Hampshire's account, according to which any dispute about the very general and essentially disputed concepts involves a dispute about a host of connected notions (Hampshire 1960, 230–1; or see 2.2). That general outlook is also shared by John Gray and Michael Freeden⁹¹. Gray observes that disputants typically disagree about the correct criteria of a whole range of contextually related concepts, which is “indicative of conflicts between divergent patterns of thought – which are often, if not typically, partly constitutive of rival ways of life” (Gray 1977, 344). In Freeden's view, essentially contested concepts always appear in mutually defining and sustaining clusters, not unlike other political concepts, and they consist of multiple components that can be each weighted differently. As a result, there are various conceptions of a concept between which there is no unequivocal way of choosing. (Freeden 2005, 117, 125.)

Based on Gallie's presentation, there does not seem to be a way of telling in advance what substance or specific content is to be captured by a complex concept. According to Freeden, essential contestability “claims to be a 'truth' about structures and procedures, not about values or principles or the substance of concepts” (Freeden 2004, 7; but see Lukes 1977, 418–9). I think it is uncontroversial to assume that the identification of what is specifically tolerated as the content of a given (essentially contested) concept, or what should properly fall under the rubric of a concept, content-wise, is subject to actual conceptual analysis done to the extent that we are concerned with the perspective of the analyst. I also find it reasonable, though no longer quite so uncontroversial, that rival parties who advocate for their preferred conceptions have to, quite simply, battle it out. I am later going to present a proper argument to the latter effect (18.1).

Analytically speaking, disputants could be dealing with what might be called an *over-aggregated concept*, which means that the concept combines or aggregates elements that have no real affinity. Even if the concept looks internally complex, at first, further consideration may require disaggregation that may, in turn, eliminate the complexity altogether (Collier et al. 2006, 217). Väyrynen states that the dimensions of essentially contested concepts “allow disaggregation in the way multidimensional expressions do in general” (Väyrynen 2014, 478). In the case of Gallie's listing of the three aspects, or component parts, of democracy, one could deem a state ‘democratic’ *with respect to its elective power of citizens*, or *except for its equality of citizens* (or the lack of such equality). But that would also be possible in the case of ‘painful,’ the

⁹¹ Both Freeden and Gray end up being quite critical of essential contestability. In a later paper, Gray states that the issue should not be discussed in these terms at all (Gray 1983). He also views the earlier 1977 paper as “less satisfactory” when compared to the 1978 paper in which he departs from some of the earlier formulations (ibid., 96n21). Michael Freeden utilizes the essential contestability framework to some extent in his own morphological thesis that is mostly concerned with political concepts (see e.g., Freeden 1996; 2005). As to essential contestability, he proposes replacing the notion with “effective contestability” (Freeden 2004).

dimensions of which include intensity and duration. Wibren van der Burg identifies a similar operation but in his example case a descriptive component of LAW as 'a system of rules' is disaggregated from 'orientation towards legality,' the latter of which could be taken as a better candidate for being (a criterion of) an essentially contested concept. The need for such operation could easily become a matter of contention, say, between legal positivists and non-positivists. (van der Burg 2017, 235; see also Ehrenberg 2011.)

The disaggregation is no surefire way of arriving at an uncluttered understanding regarding normative/evaluative concepts: to change the rationale for grouping different elements together within the rubric of one concept might result in losing the moral point of the concept (Connolly 1993, 29–30; see also 18.2). Although logic by itself, as a matter of necessity and possibility, may not set very demanding limits for combining or removing different aspects, the world, or a state of affairs that is described, arguably does to some degree. There is no reason to think that essential contestability admits infinite variety or unfixity in any given case (Freeden 1996, 65–7) even if Gallie himself remarks (in artificial terms) that “at the outset – when play began on the first morning of the first day – how supporters would group themselves around different factors would have been anyone’s guess” (PHU 162). Here, Gallie is not affirming that anything goes, or that we could not really say anything about the correct set of the criteria of a concept. Rather, I view him as referencing what appears to be a key feature of essentially contested concepts: they are not what they are without contestation (cf. 14.2). Therefore, the obvious cases aside, one cannot know in advance whether a particular concept that is put forward in a dispute is over-aggregated or not.

Because the concepts in question are employed by several people rather than a single individual, the aspects that are combined together must be recognizable by others as well (see also Kovesi 1967, 55; Ewin 2012, 43, 46–7). Rival descriptions are about something, and the range of that something is captured by the concept’s criteria. Gallie requires that disputing parties “must have at least some appreciation of the different criteria in the light of which the other parties claim to be applying the concept in question” (ECC 172), which forms a part of Condition (V) that I later discuss in more detail (ch. 7). The idea seems to be based on a quite commonsensical conjecture: to deny the significance or relevancy of some easily discernible and very real part of, say, an act of bowling (cf. 3.3) would make it suspect whether one speaks of bowling at all. Arguing that accuracy has nothing to do with bowling well would be ridiculous. Yet the worry is that there is no analogy to how complex, and not straightforwardly observable, matters like art and democracy are appraised.

The bigger problem is that Gallie seems to curiously mix, even conflate, evaluative and descriptive levels of analysis. Listing descriptive features does not yet make those features salient. It may also be practically impossible to distinguish *between* attaching considerable weight to only one criterion or feature while attributing minimal weight to other criteria/features *and* having only a single criterion for the correct application of the concept (Mason 1993, 79).

Throughout *ECC*, Gallie appears to see no issue in how certain features, and not others, are picked out as uncontested material out of which different conflicting descriptions are molded. This suggests a dual structure in which a concept's descriptive features are responsive to features in the world to the same degree, while that which can bring about contestability relates to how evaluative significance is attributed to the descriptive features (see esp. Criley in 17.2). Since something must be shared for something else to be contested, it is not that easy to organize a concept's descriptive and evaluative elements satisfactorily *if* such division is assumed in the first place. For instance, Samantha Besson (2005) holds that contestable concepts have quite a specific evaluative meaning which restricts the evaluative scope of the concept's criteria but does not prevent people from disagreeing concerning the correct application. The concept may also hold "an element of relatively fixed *descriptive meaning*" which points towards certain feature(s) of an arrangement that ought to be (favorably) evaluated. (Besson 2005, 83; see also 17.4.) The reason why Besson elects to speak of "relatively fixed" descriptive meaning is, in all likelihood, that it is quite *ad hoc* to rule out the debate on what the actual and, in that sense, objective features of the world are that can be combined, or should be combined, under the rubric of concept. *Essentiality* of contestedness suggests especially pervasive disagreement, and it makes sense to think that descriptive features would be the first thing in need of resolving before one further considers other dimensions the disagreement might have. At times, it seems that Gallie is not paying much attention to this matter (but see 11.2; 11.3).

Many commentators point out the need to include the differences arising out of different interpretations of concepts in addition to different weighting of their component parts, or constitutive elements (e.g., Connolly 1993; Mason 1993, 48; Freedon 1994; Ehrenberg 2011, 214; van der Burg 2017, 234). In addition, Connolly remarks that each of the dimensions he lists in the case of the cluster *POLITICS* makes reference to a host of new concepts which need to be elaborated as well (Connolly 1993, 12–15; see also 17.5). Gallie does not fail to mention interpretations (*ECC* 168, 193), but, arguably, he leaves it somewhat open whether the criteria themselves could be interpreted differently. Since essentially contested concepts are supposedly particularly open (6.1), and there might be future circumstances in which a simple modification in weighting is not able to meet the demands posed, it is not difficult to see why this extension has been understood to be in line with the basic idea of essential contestability (*contra* Newey 2001, 252ff; or see 17.5). However, Väyrynen interjects again that a multidimensional expression like 'painful' is similarly context-sensitive: "There is no saying in advance, for instance, what considerations novel circumstances might introduce to modify previous weightings of intensity and duration" (Väyrynen 2014, 476; see also 17.4).

The evident, basic reason why there should be common agreement concerning the descriptive features of the concept is that they are likened to the defining properties of the thing represented, and so any difference there would arguably mark a different concept. Gallie faces a particular dilemma because he

appears to accept that starting point while challenging it at the same time. It is as if Gallie's view is motivated by a philosophical conception that has been called "simple criterialism," i.e., the view "that associates the fact that people perfectly share criteria with their sharing the concept" (Besson 2005, 78n66). If that is so, it means precluding one area on which there could reasonably be a contest between parties who share a concept, and further complicates pinpointing where exactly the true disagreement lies, and of what type it is.

To conclude, I would be remiss not to note that Gallie tries to illustrate, opaquely, the internal complexity of essentially contested concepts in relation to *Artificial*. Gallie first states that any valuable form of action or thought or feeling presupposes "some sort of organization of parts or elements in a whole (...) besides requiring a highly complicated social context," even if this is most evident in the case of aesthetic value or valuation. He then asks the reader to "think of complexity involved in the very ideas of playing a game, of playing against different opponents, and of playing in accordance with—or to exemplify—one particular style!" (PHU 162.) Conditions (II) and (III) may be taken to indicate that the meaning of essentially contested concepts cannot be exhausted by a simple definition (Viola 2019, 247), but it is not immediately clear what Gallie means with his exclamation. Neither is it that obvious why playing in accordance with a particular style warrants mentioning it as an example of complexity. Why not think instead that exemplifying one style over others reduces complexity and thus pits more clearly demarcated alternatives against each other? It is within the realm of possibilities that Gallie is after the notion that a style is always "a style of something" similarly to a genre that is connected to a wider practice or activity that affords subsequent genre divisions (ART 113–4; cf. Dworkin in 18.3). If so, he fails to convey it clearly.

Regardless of the need for clarification at certain points, the vast majority of commentators recognize the importance of (II) and (III)—and regarding which there is "substantial consensus" (Collier et al. 2006, 238). The criticism concerns mostly the role they play in the overall theory, or whether the internal complexity is enough to bring about essential contestedness/contestability by itself in case some of the other Conditions are eschewed.

CHAPTER 6: CONDITION IV // OPENNESS

With Gallie's general characterization of essential contestedness and the first three Conditions on the table, essential contestedness could be preliminarily approximated as follows: it is the process in which appraising an internally complex state of affairs, i.e., a valued achievement, brings forth the range of rival descriptions to which disputing parties subscribe in the manner depicted in *Artificial*. With the addition of Condition (IV), which states that the internally complex and variously describable accredited achievement is "open" in character (ECC 172/PHU 161), Gallie has laid out what he understands to be the formal characteristics of essentially contested concepts. Before I turn to discuss the fine details of (IV), I am going to briefly examine why Gallie thinks that (I)-(IV) are necessary.

Gallie offers some guidance as to what form a proof of the necessity of Conditions (I)-(IV) might take. To begin with, (II) and (III) enable "a multi-dimensional description or classification of certain facts." He goes on to contend that, "specific evidential or methodological reasons apart," it is not reasonable to prefer one description/classification of facts to another. However, if we substitute "achievements for facts," which for Gallie is basically the same thing as substituting "an appraisive concept or classification for a purely naturalistic one," we presumably find ourselves in the following situation: "for the purpose of moral or aesthetic persuasion one style of description or classification may very definitely be preferable to another which is *logically* equipollent with it."⁹² (ECC 174n2.) The basic idea seems to be that additional appraisive considerations

⁹² Further analysis of Gallie's conception of "logical equipollence," or better yet, equal "logical force" of arguments and evidence put forward by disputants (ECC 190), must wait until later (see 11.4). In addition, Pekka Väyrynen asserts—correctly, I think—that Gallie is using 'naturalistic' to mean 'non-evaluative.' Nevertheless, there are terms or concepts that satisfy (II)-(IV) but which are not evaluative in any reasonable sense that (I) has. (Väyrynen 2014, 474; see also 17.4). Criley (2007) surmises that Gallie treats 'descriptive' and 'naturalistic' interchangeably, and he notes that Gallie does not specify the content of these terms. In any case, the relevant contrasting term is 'evaluative.' (Criley 2007, 23.)

on the part of disputants enable them to prefer one multi-dimensional description or classification of *achievement(s)* over another description (cf. 4.1).

Condition (I) thus appears to be necessary, for Gallie, because rival parties must have at least some reasons to prefer one description over another, and those reasons are assumed to be absent before available options are appraised⁹³. However, it is “conceivable that experience should establish *one* style of description as, (...) for the purpose of moral or aesthetic persuasion, universally more acceptable than any other.”⁹⁴ (ibid.) That is why Gallie recognizes the need to add (IV): postulating openness keeps the appraisive options suitably open despite the possibility of temporal closures (see also 12.4). It also seems that appraisive considerations capable of swaying one to prefer one description over others are informed by mutual convention and experience. Otherwise Gallie would not need to worry about the possibility of the concept becoming fixed by common agreement or experience.

6.1 Gallie’s Condition IV

According to Condition (IV), “The accredited achievement must be of a kind that admits of considerable modification in the light of changing circumstances; and such modification cannot be prescribed or predicted in advance.” For convenience’s sake, Gallie calls “the concept of any such achievement “open” in character” (ECC 172; PHU 161). In the footnote, Gallie remarks that (IV) might be rewritten as “(IVa) Any essentially contested concept is *persistently* vague, since a proper use of it by P₁ in a situation S₁ affords no sure guide to anyone else as to P₁’s next, and perhaps equally proper, use of it in some future situation S₂” (ECC 172n1). Later, Gallie quite straightforwardly combines the two accounts, i.e., (IV) and (IVa), by summing up Condition (IV) to say “that the achievement our concept accredits is *persistently* vague” (ECC 173). The persistent vagueness of essentially contested concepts turns out to be a key notion with the help of which we may characterize what Gallie is talking about, which is hard to parse based on his original presentation⁹⁵.

To properly grasp Condition (IV), some of Gallie’s remarks regarding DEMOCRACY and ART need to be considered as well. First, concerning DEMOCRACY, Gallie observes that “democratic targets will be raised or lowered as circumstances alter, and democratic achievements are always judged in the light

⁹³ For the view that Condition (I) is not necessary, see esp. Weitz 1972, 104–5; Väyrynen 2014, 475, but cf. n13.

⁹⁴ Gallie’s emphasis on “the purpose of moral or aesthetic persuasion” can be taken to suggest that Gallie does not view the essential contestedness as separate from the practice of disagreeing with, and attempting to persuade, others in a dispute.

⁹⁵ For Wibren van der Burg, Gallie’s introduction of alternative formulations for some of Conditions “with minor or even major differences in meaning” is an example of how Gallie introduces and elaborates upon the notion of essentially contested concept in “confusing and imprecise way” (van der Burg 2017, 231n231). I agree.

of such alterations." In artificial terms, Gallie states that "In general no one can predict, at any given time, what level or what special adaptation of its own particular style—what bold raising or sagacious lowering of its achievement-targets—may strengthen any particular team's claim to be the champions." Moreover, DEMOCRACY is characterized by Gallie as "extremely vague" but "not hopelessly so" because "[i]ts vagueness reflects its actual inchoate condition of growth."⁹⁶ Second, concerning ART, Gallie holds that "Artistic achievement, or the persistence of artistic activity is always "open" in character in the sense that, at any one stage in its history, no one can predict or prescribe what new development of current art-forms may come to be regarded as of properly artistic worth." (ECC 174, 182, 186; ART 102.) A lot is packed into these assertions, and I will do my best to start unpacking the relevant points in the rest of the chapter. However, some things become clearer only after chapters 11 and 12.

As I see it, the broad idea behind (IV) is that essentially contested concepts are concepts which are constantly evaluated and (re)defined in the usage by those claiming to employ the concept correctly, and that is also why they remain persistently vague. The contestation is thus an open process with no clearly determinable—or predictable, to be more precise—end-result in sight. That is partly because of the capriciousness of "the spectators," or of all those who are there to appraise the worth of the given achievement. The concept itself is formed in the interaction between the rival parties which, by contesting the concept while attempting to persuade others, shape the concept's future development. It renders the concept vague, as its boundaries are not fixed, and reinforces overall uncertainty regarding the proper way to apply the concept (see also 12.1). Gallie understands such vagueness as a feature, not a defect, as it reflects the inchoateness of the concept as something that constantly "grows"⁹⁷. Essentially contested concepts are now revealed as a kind of historical, or diachronic, entities that are constantly reshaped by people who cannot control the entirety of the redefinition process. The concepts acquire a life of their own, so to speak, but they do not attain a definitive and final form. There is thus "an element of becoming to essential contestedness" (Abbey 2005, 478). From this standpoint, the future usage cannot be predicted simply because the concept's development is an ongoing thing that depends on its users; it is never finished. This is something every user of an essentially contested concept must deal with.

In the quotes above, Gallie also connects the openness of achievement to the *persistence of activity*. The talk of activities could simply mean that the achievement manifests as a part of real-world activities in unexpected ways now

⁹⁶ Robert Fogelin more generally observes that the characterization of terms as "hopelessly vague" is "a common and interesting expression which indicates that we really do not understand the range of application of such terms (Fogelin 1985, 2). Vagueness is not typically considered to mean indefinability as such, but indeterminacy—for example, to whom 'tall' applies is a somewhat indeterminate matter but the meaning of 'tall' is not difficult to grasp (cf. 12.1).

⁹⁷ Tullio Viola remarks that Condition (IV) is reminiscent of a crucial feature of Peircean vagueness, namely the fact that signs may always develop in unpredictable ways. (Viola 2019, 247; see 2.4; see also 12.1).

and in the future. However, Gallie's choice to use the word 'persistence' is probably not a coincidence, yet the link to the persistent vagueness that is mentioned in the alternative formulation of (IV) is far from obvious. As it is, Gallie's loose way of referring intermittently either to the concept, the achievement, the activity, or even to a program (ECC 184), that is either persistently vague or otherwise has temporal persistence, is liable to confuse the reader more than clarify the matter. What Gallie most probably has in mind is a sort of open-ended *continuum* that is the on-going activity to which the disputing parties either take part or are somehow otherwise suitably connected. But since the activity is considered open, its boundaries are shifting as well, and thus unpredictable things can be deemed valuable. The connection between activities and concepts is a key element in understanding Gallie's thesis, and I am going to return to the topic later (see 11.2; 11.3).

Lastly, there is the requirement that a valued achievement accredited by an essentially contested concept must admit considerable modification in the light of changing circumstances. Gallie expands on the issue in artificial terms: all teams strive to "put up an outstanding performance in [their] method and style of bowling" (ECC 173) or the type of performance that clearly surpasses others. Teams may garner support and praise from the spectators even in ostensibly unfavorable circumstances. The Sharpshooters might face playing grounds where the amount of light is not optimal for them to aim, the Speed Demons could find the lane soggy and slow, or the Curve Kings may not get enough traction for their shots. The team that is able to adapt well to adversities could be met with an acclamation: "They are the champions – they have shown us what speed can do when everything seems against it" (ECC 174). Gallie does not consider judgments where the favorability of circumstances is linked to a negative evaluation of a team. Yet it seems equally possible to utter: "They are not the champions, surely – they cannot perform well enough even when they have everything going for them!" This omission may result from the fact that Gallie constantly presents disputants as arguing *for* rather than *against* certain views, even if he allows both aggressive and defensive uses (cf. 7.1).

Put less artificially, "New circumstances may be unfavourable to dominant conceptualizations, but advocates may effectively adapt to preserve their preferred conceptualization" (Collier et al. 2006, 218). In practice, such adaptation might be due to, or required by, myriad factors. For example, different economic situations and the relative availability of material resources might favor certain schemes, or conceptions, of social justice over others – also in the further sense that people are more ready to support wide-ranging social programs and universal welfare as basic rights when the times are good. The people might hesitate to support the same programs and extension of rights, or even be manifestly hostile to them, when the economy tanks. This does not rule out the possibility of being unbendingly invested in one's views when the facts around change, but the primary focus is nevertheless on how adapting to the particular demands of the situation could be considered justified and rational (see also 11.4). Unlike some, Gallie does not wish to disregard or transcend contingency, even if

he makes general observations concerning the disputes that essentially involve contingent elements and how they are carried out. Still, it is not clear whether he considers the adaptation to particular circumstances a matter of individual judgment or a more collective process that draws from shared cultural resources. There is reason to believe it is both.

6.2 Condition IV reviewed

At times, Gallie seems to suggest that Condition (IV) might not be necessary for essential contestedness, but he also includes it as one of Conditions “to which any essentially contested concept must comply” (ECC 172). Commentators are similarly divided on the status of (IV). Some maintain that openness plays a central role for Gallie. Morris Weitz holds that Gallie’s whole notion of an essentially contested concept is “simply one kind of openness, that of perennial flexibility [of criteria of application]” (Weitz 1972, 105; but see Kristjánsson 1995, 82–3). Terence Ball agrees: the status of a concept as ‘essentially contested’ comes down to its meaning and criteria of application being “forever open to dispute and disagreement” (Ball 1993, 553). By contrast, some do not consider the openness to be a necessary condition. Although open concepts and essentially contested concepts do not always appear to be sufficiently distinguished, Peter Ingram observes, it is “a common misapprehension” that “openness or incompleteness in a concept is required for it to be contested” (Ingram 1985, 41, 47). The matter is further complicated by the fact that the openness of concepts, in Gallie, is rather closely connected to the notions of *incompleteness*, *vagueness*, *uncertainty*, and *unpredictability*.

The language used by Gallie in explicating the openness of essentially contested concepts stimulates imagination but does not clearly present what exactly is at stake. The related issues can be fruitfully scrutinized from several standpoints. John Kekes reads Gallie as saying that the valued achievement is modifiable, i.e., “the way in which the achievement is produced must be capable of changing with changing circumstances” (Kekes 1977, 73). Most commentators, however, understand (IV) less literally. Mark Criley (2007) distinguishes two senses of unpredictability that are connected to the concept’s openness, and both pertain to how particular descriptions are to be modified in unforeseeable ways in the light of changing circumstances: (i) it is impossible to envisage all possible cases for the concept’s application as novel circumstances are bound to emerge which puts pressure on the concept’s usage; (ii) those preferring particular descriptions may respond to new circumstances in diverse ways; they might even ignore some new features that seem perfectly reasonable to others in the changed circumstances. Criley also notes that (IV) “is by far the most recondite of Gallie’s conditions” but adds that it also seems to be one of the most influential—in having influenced Hart’s discussion of the open texture of general terms. (Criley 2007, 24–5.) Be that as it may, Criley’s distinction comes down to the need to pay

attention to *both* the new circumstances *and* how people respond to them, which together contribute to unpredictability and hence to uncertainty.

Gallie's commentators have often drawn attention to a similar notion by Friedrich Waismann, and for perfectly understandable reasons. In his classic paper "Verifiability" (1945/1968), Waismann claims that most empirical concepts are *open-textured*. Waismann holds that "a term is defined when the sort of situation is described in which it is to be used." The complete definition would then be able to function as "a thought model which anticipates and settles once for all every possible question of usage." The particular argument for open-texturedness originates from an observation that the verification criteria that one has, and to which one appeals, in using or applying a concept are connected to what are taken to be normal circumstances of the concept's usage. Now, Waismann points out that most empirical concepts "are not delimited in all possible directions" and asserts that "we can never exclude altogether the possibility of some unforeseen situation arising in which we shall have to modify our definition." Despite our best efforts there always remains some doubt. Therefore, there are no exhaustive definitions for this kind of open-textured concepts.⁹⁸ (Waismann 1968, 42, 44.)

Vagueness, however, should be distinguished from open texture. A word used in a fluctuating way, such as 'heap,' is vague while a term like 'gold' is

non-exhaustive or of an open texture in that we can never fill up all the possible gaps which a doubt may seep in. Open texture, then is something like *possibility of vagueness*. Vagueness can be remedied by giving more accurate rules, open texture cannot. An alternative way of stating this would be to say that definitions of open terms are *always* corrigible or emendable. Waismann 1968, 42

Open-texturedness of concepts can be defined more generally as the notion that there is no finite and determinate set of necessary and sufficient conditions which license the application of those concepts (Weitz 1956, 31; Gray 1978, 393) or, in Waismann's case according to Weitz: "no definitive sets of rules or criteria can be laid down for their use" (Weitz 1972, 92; cf. above). A concept is closed, in turn, "only when both the necessary and sufficient conditions for its application can be stated" (Weitz 1956, 31; see also Ingram 1985, 48). A concept can be considered open when the agreed and contested rules of application are relatively open. This enables parties to interpret the rules differently in new and unforeseen situations, even though the rules are currently shared (Connolly 1993, 10; cf. Gray 1983, 389). The possibility of the new and unforeseen may be considered as the necessary condition for the openness of a term/concept (Weitz 1972, 93), which is also the

⁹⁸ Morris Weitz notes that the doctrine of open texture is based on a verifiability theory of the meaning of the criteria for empirical terms – although Waismann rejects the verifiability theory of the meaning of empirical statements in his repudiation of phenomenalism. Since Waismann identifies the meaning with the application of criteria, he is able to move from asking "can we state the definitive criteria of any empirical term?" to ask "can we describe all the situations in which a term is used so that nothing is left to doubt?" Weitz himself holds that "It is in this context of essentially incompletable descriptions that his doctrine and examples of open texture concepts become intelligible." (Weitz 1972, 93.)

key for understanding the difference between open texture and vagueness: an open concept may be very precise in its current use, but were the circumstances to change and/or new and unforeseen cases to arise, the concept may become indeterminate (vague/ambiguous)⁹⁹.

MacIntyre observes that “in normal circumstances and in standard conditions we can behave *as if* there were such a finite and determinate set [of necessary and sufficient conditions which determine the application] and we do indeed so behave”¹⁰⁰ (MacIntyre 1973, 1–3). In other words, in normal circumstances we can treat the concept as a closed one, but there remains the possibility that it is, and has always been, an open concept. Yet nothing in Gallie’s thesis suggests that there is anything abnormal as such in essential contestedness although the true nature of the situation may be surprising to some (see ECC 193–4). On the contrary, essential contestedness is an “important truth” that can be grasped, even if disputants’ level of awareness may vary (ECC 192; see also ch. 7). That truth presumably concerns the conceptual life of certain concepts, the life of which contestation is an inherent part (Gellner 1974, 100; MacDonald 1976, 381). That is to say, that Gallie is not concerned with a (remote) theoretical possibility of openness¹⁰¹.

There are also other key points of contrast between Gallie’s reference to openness and, especially, Waismann’s conception. Whereas Waismann talks about *empirical* concepts and the incapability of verification criteria to close a concept in view of unforeseen cases, Gallie shifts the perspective and expands the theoretical uncertainty to cover *appraisive*, or evaluative, concepts. It is unclear whether there is any real difference between scientific or empirical concepts and appraisive or evaluative concepts with respect to their openness – though Gallie appears to think that to be the case (e.g., ECC 197). This can be a sufficient reason to emphasize the distinction between the open texture concepts and essentially contestable concepts, the latter of which are always evaluative (van der Burg 2017, 248). In addition, both theorists describe a situation in which available resources that should do the trick of either closing a concept without any doubt, or ending dispute in which certain concepts are involved, fail to be adequate for the purpose. Both understand the issue at hand as a philosophically interesting phenomenon and posit a type of concept as its explanation. Yet instead of talking about the verification criteria that are insufficient for this purpose, Gallie refers

⁹⁹ For example: “until the advent of test-tube fertilization, biological motherhood was a precise concept, but now ‘mother’ is ambiguous between ‘she who was the source of genes’ and ‘she who gave birth’.” (Stevenson 2005)

¹⁰⁰ MacIntyre refers to the work of, and the examples used by, not only Waismann (see also Gray 1977) but also Hilary Putnam (esp. Putnam 1970) who, however, discusses the application of words instead of concepts.

¹⁰¹ The examples Waismann mentions regarding the possible cases arising in unforeseen situations are arguably “fanciful” (Waldron 1994, 523), “fantastic,” and perhaps even “dubious” (Weitz 1972, 94). The same adjectives may perhaps be used to describe Gallie’s artificial example, but it is still evident that Gallie is after a phenomenon that has immediate significance. In fact, one possible point of distinction between the kind of “contestability” that results from the open texture and that resulting from essential contestability has been argued to be that essential contestability is also about core cases (van der Burg 2017, 248–9).

to the lack of a general principle that would be able to decide the issue of comparative evaluation between the different uses.

Gallie means what he terms as *vagueness* to be brought about by, or to fall within, the openness of concepts (see also 12.1). Vagueness and unpredictability look to be connected as well (see e.g., ECC 172; PHU 161) as Gallie makes several references to unpredictability or to not knowing how accredited achievement is modified in the light of changing circumstances. Waismann's "possibility of vagueness" of open terms that are "always" corrigible or emendable bears a resemblance to Gallie's alternative formulation [i.e., (IVa)] according to which an essentially contested concept is "persistently vague" to the extent that it offers no sure guide to what the proper use of a concept in some future situation is (ECC 172n1). Yet Waismann's notion of open texture as a permanent possibility is a theoretical and rather abstract possibility that might warrant a very weak sort of agnosticism at best in regard to fixing concepts once-and-for-all. It is not the sort of important truth that could potentially affect how people will conduct themselves in disputing political, moral, and aesthetic matters. Despite similarities, Gallie's idea goes a step further: unforeseen cases may pose questions of what to include in the previously held and now seemingly open concept, but Gallie is not really interested in *that possibility* but rather either to the contestedness actualized or to its potential when that "possibility" is actually the prevailing state of affairs.

The openness of concepts should not be straightforwardly equated with their contestability, nor should closedness with its absence. Ingram (1985) points out that scientific concepts can be closed in this world if not in every possible world, and that they still may be contested "because there is more to a word than the meaning found in the criteria of its use": a word may have "non-empirical connotations of an important evaluative, methodological or metaphysical kind, which are associated with its meaning—in different ways for different people." The disputes may arise concerning "what it is to which one is systematically committed in one's use of a term" (Ingram 1985, 48–9).

A concept may (...) be recognized as a closed or closable one, but none the less contestable for that, and *essentially* contestable, for a question about the reality of an entity such as an electron or the existential nature of a power is surely an essential one.
Ingram 1985, 49

It should be noted, however, that metaphysical/methodological considerations of the type of whether electrons actually exist or whether we can just proceed scientifically *as if* they existed are arguably beside the point in the original context of Gallie's paper. Scientific concepts like ELECTRON are not typically included among essentially contested concepts in the literature.

Nevertheless, Ingram is not the only one who draws attention to metaphysics. John Gray contends that the disputes Gallie talks about "must be conducted by a species of argument which has a distinctively philosophical—that is to say, metaphysical—character" and that "[s]uch disputes hinge upon the validity of metaphysical theses" (Gray 1977, 344). On this point, Robert Grafstein

agrees: "There has never been much doubt that the issue of essential contestability is connected to metaphysical issues" (Grafstein 1985, 25). Going further down this road requires interpreting a thesis of essential contestability anew. In Gray's view, the definitional disputes over the whole range of contextually related concepts "are indicative of conflicts between divergent patterns of thought," the conflicts which are often partly constitutive of rival ways of life. One key insight of essential contestability would thus be that conflicts between rival worldviews "are disputes which in their nature cannot be settled by appeal to empirical evidence, linguistic usage, or the canons of logic alone." (Gray 1977, 344; see also Ingram 1985, 53.) Although both Ingram and Gray refer to metaphysical statements or theses as forming the ground of the kind of definitional disputes that Gallie describes, they apparently have rather different things in mind.

Per Ingram (1985), one cannot hold in general that variable individual conceptions or connotations render a concept open. This would commit one to a position that "no concept is closed or even closable, since the individual's use of any concept is accompanied by particular connotations that are not shared between different connotations." Furthermore, "a concept may be essentially contested in a society and yet be stable for its users, whether as individuals or as members of groups." The conflicting uses of concepts need not imply uncertainty or a lack of stability in how the concept is used¹⁰². Even in the realm of theoretical consideration the realization that one is dealing with a contestable concept "need not prevent one from formulating and developing one stable version of it for present and future purposes." Defining concepts in a closed fashion does not necessarily preclude their contestation. All in all, Ingram argues that openness is not a prerequisite for contestability and that openness does not entail contestability; instead, essential contestability is claimed to be a result of a concept's underlying structure. (Ingram 1985, 48, 52.) This gives us reason to think that, if not discarded altogether, Condition (IV) should be understood as a condition that is also applicable in the case of closed and closable concepts. It favors understanding (IV) in terms of large-scale openness (cf. later). If that is indeed the case, 'openness' of a concept starts to look like a misnomer.

Condition (III) emphasizes the possibility of providing different descriptions of a valued achievement signified by a concept. Yet not all, or perhaps any, descriptions are strictly speaking complete. Waismann has introduced another relevant notion; *essential incompleteness* (of an empirical description), a matter which arises from open texture (see Waismann 1968, 44-45; cf. MacIntyre 1973, 2-3; see also Care 1973). Waismann points out that, logically speaking, the descriptions can always be extended by adding some

¹⁰² Ingram gives an example of a dispute in which disputants disagree on which of the two, wealth or pornography, is "really" obscene. He also points out that uncertainty, lack of stability, or inability to use the concept consistently and unhesitatingly in the future would only arise if one of the disputants partially, but not entirely, persuaded the other of the validity of their point of view. (Ingram 1985, 52.) This seems true at least to the extent that one must have some reasons to believe that one might be wrong, whatever the origin of such reasons.

detail or other. This way, “[e]very description stretches, as it were, into a horizon of open possibilities: however far I go, I shall always carry this horizon with me” (Waismann 1968, 44). The horizon of possibilities is not completely unexpected as the ways to extend the description can be foreseen, in principle, if given enough time. Thus, in Waismann’s original paper, two types of openness are introduced: the open-texture of concepts related to unforeseen situations, and the essential incompleteness of descriptions to be extended into a horizon of open possibilities. These are meant to support the argument according to which “[a]n experiential statement is, as a rule, not conclusively verifiable” (ibid., 45). It is not necessary to delve deep into the issue of verifiability. The basic idea is that the lack of conclusive verifiability introduces an element of uncertainty that has two sources in this case. Furthermore, even when the criteria of application of a concept are incomplete in certain respects, that concept might be over-aggregated in other respects. Incompleteness and over-aggregation can presumably co-exist in the same concept. This would be one way for a concept’s intension to be disorganized, and disputes could ensue over its proper organization.

By an open texture concept, in general, Waismann seems to mean a concept that is “perennially flexible” (Weitz 1972, 94). With respect to essential contestability, the flexibility is a useful notion to employ side by side with openness because a) it has an active connotation in suggesting malleability of a concept by its users, and b) it can be conceived as connected to a concept’s “combinatorial tolerance” (see 5.2). Weitz states that the criteria of application of essentially contested concepts “must be expendable so that new cases can be accommodated as continuing examples within a tradition” and they must also “be vague so that competing interpretations of them can be admitted in order to cover the present cases” (Weitz 1972, 105). The new criteria that are suggested may not be reasonable modifications in light of current circumstances; instead, they end up stretching further than what can (actually) be tolerated in a given case. A good judgment is needed for making the right decision – open texture is often conceived as a conceptual asset (Sartori 1984, 44). Of course, the sort of flexibility or combinatorial tolerance conceived in terms of openness is not distinctive to appraisive concepts, or evaluative terms (see Väyrynen 2014, 13).

Openness, incompleteness, and flexibility of a concept are its structural characteristics which demand judgment or decision on the part of their users. Morris Weitz defines open concepts in a way that emphasizes active decision:

A concept is open if its conditions of application are emendable and corrigible; i.e., if a situation or case can be imagined or secured which would call for some sort of *decision* on our part to extend the use of the concept to cover this, or to close the concept and invent a new one to deal with the new case and its new property.¹⁰³ Weitz 1956, 31

We encounter strictly closed concepts only in logic and mathematics, where concepts are constructed and completely defined; not so with empirical-descriptive and normative concepts unless the range of their uses is stipulated

¹⁰³ Note the similarity to the definition provided by Waismann above.

and thus “arbitrarily” closed (Weitz 1956, 31). Still, conceptual operations involve various considerations even in the case of normative concepts. Instead of deciding to expand the scope of a given concept in the changing circumstances, the best course of action could often be to simply disambiguate the proposed concept by inventing a new one – in what follows I refer to this operation as the “multiplication strategy.” In fact, if one were to erect boundaries between concepts as strictly as possible, every change would imply a different concept. These matters are discussed more thoroughly later, but it is worth noting that here lies one reason why both Weitz and Gallie can be read as proposing a group of concepts that are not formal-logical (Shi 2014, 293–7)

In a later paper, Weitz criticizes the view that sees concepts as *either* closed *or* open but does not take adequately into account the “varieties and vagaries of conceptual life” (Weitz 1972, 96), i.e., that concepts have additional alternatives for their conceptual structures besides being either open or closed. Michael Freedman offers a related perspective on openness by arguing that contestable concepts are fixed when they are decontested. This way “they achieve a stable meaning within a given framework” (Collier et al. 2006, 218) and, for Freedman, the relevant framework is primarily an ideology that is understood as a constellation of ideas; “ideologies need (...) to straddle the worlds of political thought and political action (...) and decision-making is an important form of decontesting a range of potential alternatives” (Freedman 1996, 76).

MacIntyre has briefly commented on the applicability of (Waismann’s) openness in the case of essential contestability in “The Essential Contestability of Some Social Concepts” (1973). MacIntyre sees a difference between natural sciences and social inquiry¹⁰⁴: while natural sciences settle debates “at least temporally and provisionally (...) in large areas of social inquiry there are not even temporary and provisional settlements.” The debate remains open about “which the central, standard, and paradigmatic instances of the phenomenon are,” making the suggestion that disagreements characteristic to social inquiry are merely due to the open texture of concepts, or due to lack of industriousness of users, appear implausible. Instead, we do not seem to have a firm understanding of what counts as normal circumstances or standard conditions of application in the areas of social life in which the concept is employed. (MacIntyre 1973, 2–3.) This suggests that there would be no standard definitions in these areas, or that all attempts to define terms would be merely provisional. The relevant difference between social inquiry and the natural sciences thus boils down to the lack of – or, perhaps, the assumption of – normal, or paradigmatic, circumstances. Instead of essential incompleteness, MacIntyre surmises, there might be essential contestability in those areas. However, MacIntyre’s claim that there are no paradigmatic instances of the phenomena of interest sets his conception somewhat against Gallie’s original thesis, one part of which is Condition (VI), the

¹⁰⁴ These observations may seem out of place, but Gallie himself draws attention to differences between natural and human sciences (see esp. ECC 168, 196; or see 3.1).

original exemplar (8.1), whose authority is acknowledged by all users of the concept¹⁰⁵.

Not all share MacIntyre's view. John Gray observes, on the one hand, that most of our empirical concepts are "recognizably open-textured" and that the "exhaustive statements of verification criteria are no more available in the natural sciences than in ethics and the social sciences" (Gray 1977, 340). When openness is not the feature that explains the intractability of the concepts that are employed in the social studies, other distinguishing features need to be identified. On the other hand, "the claim that social and political concepts are open-textured can show only that they may share an essential incompleteness with very many other concepts in diverse areas of thought and practice." (Gray 1978, 393.) David Boromisza-Habashi understands the open character of essentially contested concepts to mean that their use is radically context-dependent (Boromisza-Habashi 2010, 277); unfortunately, he does not elaborate further. The radical context-dependency cannot mean that the dispute involves incommensurable contexts of thought within which the relevant terms occur as that would render the conflicting views mutually unintelligible (Gray 1978, 393). It may mean, though, that essentially contested concepts always require a complex situational judgment, without which they would lack their normatively sensitive content, and/or that such judgment requires both a backward-looking and forward-looking perspective in addition to the evaluation of the current circumstances.

K.I. MacDonald (1976) claims that Gallie's focus is on "competing hurrah noises" which are aimed at evaluating particulars, and "the contest arises over which instantiation is closest to some accepted exemplar." He sees the ensuing problem of the weighting of attributes as very close to a taxonomy problem. (MacDonald 1976, 381; but see Lukes 1977, 418.) Gray (1978) develops the objection a bit further by considering technical concepts, especially in different taxonomic systems, i.e., classificatory frameworks. These concepts can be rivals in the sense that "their adoption would make incompatible demands on students of the subject, the choice between which cannot be seen merely as one to be made by definitional legislation appealing to considerations of convenience." This kind of situation could arise even in the case of a subject matter with inner stability and clearly demarcated borders, the component concepts of which are not significantly open-textured. And yet it "could plausibly be construed as one in which we had entered an area of essential contestability." This suggests that "essentially contestable concepts" are not *necessarily* open-textured.¹⁰⁶ (Gray 1978,

¹⁰⁵ In MacIntyre (1973), the only direct reference to Gallie's thesis is MacIntyre's admission that he borrows the expression 'essentially contestable' from Gallie (i.e., MacIntyre 1973, 7). Gallie is perhaps more hesitant to unmoor meanings of terms/concepts by denying the normal circumstances of their use, or at least the normal circumstances of certain terms/concepts should be understood as characterized by contestation. In the latter sense, "MacIntyrean position" is implicit in Gallie's thesis (see esp. ECC 179).

¹⁰⁶ Compare with the previous discussion of Ingram's points about non-empirical commitments that may go with certain terms and concepts. In addition, Jeremy Waldron understands Waismann's notion of open texture in terms of classificatory theories as our best response to experience. Different classificatory theories need to be constructed when experience presents us with new objects behaving in different ways. (Waldron 1994, 522-3.)

392–3.) Ingram (1985) raises a similar point regarding the political concept of representative election: one can first list all the possibilities for organizing representative elections after which each of them can be defined in closed detail and clearly demarcated from one another. People can now start to contest the issue in arguing that only their own favored system is truly representative. (Ingram 1985, 50.) From a conceptual perspective it is enough to note that this scenario is *possible* which means that the presupposed type of openness is not *necessary*.

It should not be taken for granted that MacDonald, Gray, and Ingram are dealing with the same kind of contestability that is identified by Gallie. Suggesting various types of contested concepts that do not meet with Gallie's Conditions is not as forceful an objection as one might think. The restricted list of essentially contested concepts that Gallie offers can be thought both "surprising" and "unconvincing" (Collier et al. 2006, 215; PHU 190), but it is still undeniable that he did not regard all political concepts, not to mention all social, political, and moral concepts, as essentially contested. Instead, Gallie's focus is on a specific subset of complex, open, and evaluative concepts (Green 1987, 17). The references to taxonomies and other such classifications are still very interesting, and I will later present an alternative way of understanding why essential contestability may appear to have a form of taxonomy problem (see 12.4).

Moving on, according to Robert Grafstein (1988) a realist could claim that the source of essential contestability is "an indeterminacy in reality itself."¹⁰⁷ However, the *conceptual* indeterminacy generated by an indeterminate reality cannot be resolved into competing determinate characterizations. The disagreeing parties should not oppose one another as each holds a complementary piece of the puzzle. (Grafstein 1988, 10–11.) Grafstein views Alasdair MacIntyre as making a similar type of argument in his defense of the essential contestability thesis; the argument which is more relevant, even if Grafstein considers it as ultimately mistaken.

According to MacIntyre (1973), one encounters essential contestability in attempting to characterize, or define operationally, the identity of social particulars such as organizations and practices that have historical continuity¹⁰⁸. Debate *within* social particulars such as political parties, or the "categories of social practice" such as "politics, education, or science," "is inseparable from debate *about* the practice, and both form parts of each practice." There is "a certain kind of continuity in belief and in practice informed by belief," and a part of the

Furthermore, Gray's characterization of the area of essential contestability one enters seems to imply a dispute between a number of fully defined, and therefore distinct, concepts which is at odds with what Gallie says (cf. e.g., 6.1; 14.2). It should also be noted that Gray's comments are also directed against views of Alasdair MacIntyre (1973).

¹⁰⁷ Throughout the study, I try to avoid discussing the matter in such realist or anti-realist terms that would decide the viability of an essential contestability thesis from the get-go.

¹⁰⁸ Sami Syrjämäki asserts that the insight of Gallie's thesis is most significant in analyzing conceptual continuities and discontinuities (Syrjämäki 2011, e.g., 15–16). Ruth Abbey agrees: the condition, or the state of affairs, to which these concepts refer is not fixed and static (Abbey 2005, 465).

continuity and identity of such a social practice or social organization “is the continuity of institutionalized argument, debate, and conflict.” As a characteristic of beliefs and concepts that are embodied in such social practices, MacIntyre sees that “[i]n applying the concept we acknowledge a kind of inability in respect to its application in future instances” which is not the case “in applying concepts to natural particulars.” Social particulars are not “law-governed” in the same way natural particulars are law-governed¹⁰⁹. MacIntyre views beliefs as “partially constitutive of at least some central social institutions and practices, and such beliefs always involve some version of a concept of the institution or practice in question.” When considering debates about the direction and identity of social particulars, we cannot say what their outcome is going to be. This is so even retrospectively: “we cannot find anything in the state of the arguments and conflicts which would have enabled us to predict the outcome.” (MacIntyre 1973, 4–6.)

Grafstein reads MacIntyre as saying the following:

He argues that since the outcome of a social practice is unpredictable, there inevitably will be diverse and contested ways of projecting our descriptions of the existing process into the future. Most important, the social practice itself is constituted by participant concepts that face similar problems predicting the future. The contestability surrounding this practice is, therefore, an internal feature of society's "institutionalized argument" and not merely an artifact of the observer's deficiencies. Grafstein 1988, 14

MacIntyre fails to convince because

a future we are unable to predict is not necessarily indeterminate once it arrives (...) the outcome of a practice is not automatically indeterminate or ambiguous just because it was unpredictable. Equating unpredictability with indeterminacy is redolent of positivism at its worst. Grafstein 1988, 10n1, 14.

Both MacIntyre’s argument and Grafstein’s criticism may also be considered relevant in Gallie’s case, but mostly this is something for us to consider in a general fashion.

It is easy to agree with Grafstein that unpredictability and indeterminacy should not be equated. It still seems to me that unpredictability can make room for contestability, especially in the case of social particulars with a historical continuity. Since the future and the current trajectory of the social particular, e.g., a political party, is unpredictable, the course of the social particular can perhaps be steered more to one’s liking. Contesting the matter is not pointless. Furthermore, Grafstein may exaggerate the role of unpredictability in the argument of the above kind. One may acknowledge inability with respect to how a concept like SOCIAL JUSTICE is applied in future instances because one is aware that people’s views on the redistribution of goods, or what are the proper objects

¹⁰⁹ This distinction is somewhat analogous to the distinction that was made earlier between empirical and appraisive concepts with respect to openness. See also the discussion of criterially governed concepts in 12.4.

of our respect and esteem, have varied quite a lot in the past as well. In contrast, one may have lucid views concerning how those things should be perceived, but that is no guarantee of how things are going to be in the future. For example, let us assume that fifty years go by and a momentous technological discovery was made some twenty years ago: some or most countries now have access to unlimited energy. This has shaped views on the redistribution dimension in such a way that personal merit is no longer as important a factor as it previously was, and this is more generally reflected on views concerning social justice. More concretely, now everyone gets a living provided for them on the basis of their shared status as human beings. Retrospectively, was there something in the arguments over social justice fifty years ago that would have enabled one to predict the outcome? Perhaps someone might have predicted what *could* happen if unlimited energy became available—people are people after all—but this is certainly a very different kind of prediction than those made regarding natural particulars. One must ask oneself: would what I just described *actually* take place? People are people after all.

There is much more to be said about the essential contestability thesis in which essentiality of contestation has its origin in specific ways certain social institutions and practices are formed, organized, and sustained. The matters that are relevant with respect to openness can cover a polity's relative openness or closedness as connected to opposing theories of social and political life (Connolly 1993) or as connected to the self-understanding of a society's members (Gray 1977; see also 13.3). In addition, irresolvability and endlessness of disputes might not mean that there are no closures of any kind since debates may be temporally brought to an end "in such a way as to answer for ourselves certain of the basic questions about the character of our institutions and practices" (Care 1973, 14–5; see also Syrjämäki 2011, 169; cf. esp. PHU 211). I will return to discuss these issues at later points in the study.

The conception that views openness as an attribute of certain areas of inquiry or social and/or historical contexts, institutions, and practices within which concepts are employed can be called *large-scale openness*. Some concepts may have social functions as part of the general fabric of society that require them to be sufficiently open, or open within reasonable limits. For instance, Samantha Besson (2005) takes a note of a striking feature of our disputes about justice in our society: "*no agreement* exists as to its central applications or common use" and it is somewhat difficult to find "paradigms of justice which are undisputed by reasonable participants in practice." This issue can be called as the *underdeterminacy* of the community standard¹¹⁰. There are clearly too many disputing claims about justice to single them out as evidently mistaken, crazy *et cetera*. (Besson 2005, 79.) For the purposes of the present study, it is enough to contend that when (IV) is interpreted broadly as large-scale openness, the openness is not (only) conceived as a special feature of concepts/terms as such—

¹¹⁰ Compare with Boromisza-Habashi's notion of essential contestability as the violation of communal norms (Boromisza-Habashi 2010, 278 or see 12.3).

or alternatively: as describable only at a linguistic level – but as a feature of wider circumstances in which those concepts/terms are employed.

The large-scale openness stands in contrast to *small-scale openness* of the criteria of application or meaning of concepts/terms. An example of small-scale openness is arguably found in Gallie's thesis; namely, the variously describable nature of the valued achievement that is signified by the concept, which makes it possible to use the concept flexibly by emphasizing one or another aspect over others in the light of changing circumstances. The distinction between the two kinds of openness is analytical, and sometimes it is not even that reasonable to make it sharply in arguing for one or the other. For example, according to Ingram (1985) – who employs the term 'large-scale openness' in reference to MacIntyre's views – contestedness is typically created by the social use of language and it arises for a person as a participant in a collective life. The relationship between me and others rather than between me and the world is decisive. (Ingram 1985, 51.) Ingram's emphasis is clearly on the social dimension but the contestedness to which he refers manifests because of how we use language. In Gallie's case, what at first looks like small-scale openness starts to look quite different when one considers the valued achievements themselves, or how they manifest or are made manifest in societal contexts and thereby shape people's conceptualizations.

I will now conclude the current chapter by summing things up and by offering four observations that need to be made more explicitly. First, by considering Gallie's (IV) and (IVa) together (cf. 6.1), an achievement that is signified or accredited by a concept appears as a changing process or phenomenon, which can be identified as a continuity, a progression, a sequence *et cetera*. Otherwise, the achievement could not admit considerable modification in the light of changing circumstances. Because one cannot say for certain to which direction such a changing process or phenomenon develops, it becomes a moving target for anyone who wishes to capture or conceptualize it, and that presumably requires a diachronic perspective or historical understanding (cf. esp. 11.2; 11.3; 18.4).

Second, an open debate about the central, or paradigmatic, examples of some phenomena (perhaps in large areas of social inquiry like MacIntyre suggests) cannot take place between completely opposed conceptual frameworks, or forms of life. We now arrive at *the incommensurability qualification* of essential contestedness/contestability: for there to be contestation of any kind, there must be a mutually intelligible conceptual frame, or background, within which that contestation is carried out. The incommensurability qualification needs to be met to guarantee the genuineness of disputes. In order to have a genuine dispute, i.e., not a confused one, an object of a debate must be the same for all disputing parties, i.e., the parties must not talk past each other, or the dispute must be suitably rooted in some other fashion. This requires a frame of reference capable of fixing that object in a way that does not rule out contesting (the aspects, or component parts, of) the object. These issues are intimately connected with the domain of the last three of Gallie's Conditions, especially with the Condition (VI), the original exemplar (see 8.1). Mutually intelligible conceptual frames and backgrounds

may not need to be completely shared or totally uncontested to fulfill this function. Nevertheless, they need to be stable enough to provide intelligible anchoring for the contestation about central or paradigmatic examples.

Third, the idea that concepts are incomplete, perhaps essentially so, needs to be distinguished from the further claim that such incompleteness results in their essential contestability. Incompleteness is a relatively simple matter by itself. It is plausible to think, for instance, that the incompleteness of concepts provides more room for disputants to argue for their preferred understanding of these concepts, especially given the open future¹¹¹. The disputants can introduce unlimited number of cases and considerations regarding which the applicability of the concept is to be decided and possibly contested. Yet this does not guarantee essential contestability, since it might be possible to resolve all these disputes with enough time and effort.

Fourth, concepts might be incompletely shared in addition to being incomplete. It is commonplace to assume that a single concept is contested in the disputes that manifest essential contestability (see esp. 14.2). Incomplete sharing raises concerns that the disputants are talking past each other as it may not be easy to identify one concept that is incompletely shared. Such identification may not necessarily mean specifying any unchanging set of a concept's incompletely shared criteria. There needs to be a range within which contests over partly shared concepts can rationally proceed – and so different uses of a concept/term could still be considered perfectly proficient and/or reasonable – but that range may be anchored in different ways.

¹¹¹ Many moral, societal and/or ideological concepts have a forward-looking function especially in political argumentation; indeed, in certain cases it even seems that their primary role is to make sense (and persuade others) of how a valued achievement signified by the concept is best sustained and advanced, which is the perhaps the most important function ascribed by Gallie to essentially contested concepts (see 9.1). Compare with Reinhard Koselleck's conception of political concepts, especially various isms, before and after *Sattelzeit* (e.g., Koselleck 2002).

CHAPTER 7: CONDITION V // MUTUAL APPRECIATION AND RECIPROCAL RECOGNITION

Many commentators view the first four Conditions as adequate for their purposes; whether it is to further develop a thesis of essential contestability or to reject it. It would be wrong to say that (I)–(IV) are accepted as they stand, but neither are they typically understood to be as problematic as the previous critical discussion might suggest. The last three Conditions are an altogether different matter. One would be hard-pressed to find a theorist who has *not* criticized them in some way, and most commentators have ended up eschewing one or even all of them. In the current chapter, I present the first one of the three, i.e., Condition (V), the full significance of which has often eluded Gallie’s commentators as I will argue in the current study.

In *ECC*, Gallie proceeds by first presenting Conditions (I) to (IV) after which he asserts that they do not define “what it is to be a concept of this kind” (*ECC* 172/*PHU* 161), i.e., of an essentially contested kind. For that purpose, Condition (V) needs to be introduced. Many have understood Gallie’s overall argument to be that (I)–(IV) bring about a concept’s status as essentially contested, or a state of affairs described by (V) (see also ch. 10). This is not an unreasonable way to read Gallie, but it has often led to the brushing off of those elements of the thesis that are introduced only after (I)–(IV), which is unfortunate. In *PHU*, Gallie states in a new addition, that (I)–(IV) suffice to explain how and why the situation described by the artificial example might arise. However, he also reiterates that those Conditions are missing something when it comes to the full definition as they “do not suffice to define what it is to be an essentially contested concept.” (*PHU* 161.) Thus, we need to take a closer look at what *would* suffice.

7.1 Gallie's Condition V

For a concept to count as essentially contested—in the sense illustrated in *Artificial* (ECC 171)—it is not enough to add “that different persons or parties adhere to different views of the correct use of some concept” (ECC 172) but

(V) that each party recognizes the fact that its own use of it is contested by those of other parties, and that each party must have at least some appreciation of the different criteria in the light of which the other parties claim to be applying the concept in question. ECC 172/PHU 161

Immediately after introducing (V), Gallie adds to what he means by it:

More simply, to use an essentially contested concept means to use it against other uses and to recognize that one's own use of it has to be maintained against these other uses. Still more simply, to use an essentially contested concept means to use it both aggressively and defensively.¹¹² ECC 172/PHU 161

Gallie is evidently describing the kind of disagreements in which the disputants have at least somewhat strong convictions or attitudes regarding how a contested concept should be used. Unfortunately, Gallie does not explicitly state why one's use has to be maintained against others' uses, but his reference to “exigencies of living” that demand one to choose sides (ECC 190/PHU 185) can be taken as one such reason (see also 13.2). That is not merely a strategic consideration, and Gallie is not after disputes in which disagreeing parties engage in contesting the matter under some false pretense (cf. 11.4). Instead, the disputants truly and honestly think that their use of the concept is the best and should therefore be preferred by others as well. A value they attribute to an achievement that is indicated by the concept is of such significance that they consider it pertinent to stand for their preferred usage. In Gallie's framework, specific reasons for adopting a given usage vary on a case-by-case basis and especially with respect to a disputant's background, the background from which individual reasons to maintain a specific use are often drawn¹¹³. Furthermore, Gallie holds, rather optimistically, that the combined employment of an essentially contested concept, and especially the continuous competition over the concept, may lead to certain beneficial results (see 9.1). Those benefits would be lost if one did not engage in contesting the matter in the first place.

The relation between the different formulations is not clear. The simpler characterizations of (V) are neither self-evidently entailed by, nor do they follow from, the “more complex” phrasing. Still, it seems that aggressiveness and defensiveness are to be understood as modes of presenting one's views in a

¹¹² While discussing (I)-(V) in the context of *Artificial*, Gallie glosses over (V) by saying that “[t]here can be no question but that my concept “the champions” (...) is used aggressively and defensively” (ECC 173).

¹¹³ The value of the achievement is evaluated in, or from the standpoint of, one's “particular marginal appraisive situation” (ECC 191). For a more detailed discussion, see 11.4.

dispute which ascribes the contested character to a concept in question. When the concept is used aggressively and defensively to maintain one's preferred use against other uses, the concept's contested character "appear[s] to belong inherently to it *now*," even if the aggressive and defensive uses are a consequence of the historical development of the concept/term (PHU 170). In any case, (V) appears to have a highly important double function: recognition of the contested character of one's own usage, or *reciprocal recognition*; and (minimal) *mutual appreciation* of the different criteria according to which other parties apply the concept in the dispute. I start with the mutual appreciation.

Earlier I mentioned that there are practical limits to the number of possible rival descriptions of an achievement's total worth (5.2). In the terms of *Artificial*: some importance, however slight, must be attached to factors such as speed, accuracy, and swerve (ECC 173; cf. PHU 162). Real world examples of essentially contested concepts presumably follow in suit, even if the component parts of the achievements that they signify are certainly not as easily identifiable. Yet achievements are constituted by certain component parts rather than others, and (V) now requires that disputing parties must have some appreciation of how other disputants apply appraisive concepts that signify such achievements. It is easy to conflate descriptive/constitutive and evaluative/appraisive elements here, and Gallie does very little in terms of steering clear from possible confusions. It is almost as if the various ways of putting the component parts of the valued achievement in different ranking orders automatically follow from the identification of descriptive elements, and such identification is not problematized in any way. In the case of an individual person, whose judgment might guide her to identify these rather than those descriptive elements as salient, there is no issue. In the case of several disputants, however, it seems that Gallie is requiring one to hold in value also those descriptive elements that are picked out by others who may be guided by their own evaluation. If Gallie is intending instead that one's evaluative judgment does not affect the identification of what I have here termed as the descriptive elements, Gallie should be assigned the job of explaining why there is no similar contestation over those elements, or how they are there to begin with waiting to be appraised, metaphorically speaking. As to the seven Conditions, it appears that task falls to (VI) and (VII) that situate the disputants vis-à-vis the valued achievement (cf. chs. 8 and 9).

I have also already noted that Gallie raises the possibility of re-writing Condition (III) to state that "[a]ny essentially contested concept is liable initially to be *ambiguous*" and that "this initial ambiguity must be considered in conjunction with condition (V)" (ECC 172n1¹¹⁴). The situation to which Gallie refers seems to be that individuals or groups enter a dispute with different

¹¹⁴ The whole footnote goes: "IIIa) Any essentially contested concept is liable initially to be *ambiguous*, since a given individual P, may apply it having in mind description D, of the achievement which the concept accredits, and his application of it may be accepted (or rejected) by other people who have in mind different descriptions, D₂, D₃, etc., of the accredited achievement. But this *initial* ambiguity must be considered in conjunction with condition (V)." (ECC 172n1). Relatedly, Ruth Abbey observes that (V) seems to follow from (III) (Abbey 2005, 465).

descriptions of a valued achievement in mind, after which their descriptions become either accepted or rejected by others. The ambiguity encountered could now be conceived as such that the disputants quite simply mean different things with their different descriptions. If that is so, they are plausibly understood as employing different concepts. By persevering with the dispute, the disputants would wind up talking past each other, in which case their disagreement would not be genuine. It looks that Gallie is trying to get ahead of this objection by acknowledging the ambiguity between different descriptions and identifying it as “initial.” He seems to suggest that the initial ambiguity is dispelled, resolved, or otherwise found unproblematic, when the situation is considered in the light of (V). However, as I pointed out above, the straightforward requirement of mutual appreciation simply gives rise to additional questions.

Instead, it makes sense to view contestation over an essentially contested concept as a process, in which the initial ambiguity that comes with different descriptions is transformed to what Gallie calls essential contestedness involving a concept that has “a *single meaning*”¹¹⁵ (ECC 175; see also esp. 14.1; 14.2). At one point in *PHU*, Gallie refers to the composition of the use of any essentially contested concept as “[t]he peculiar complex of loyalties, oppositions and recognitions of permissibility” (PHU 211). The invocation of “recognitions of permissibility” in describing the usage of essentially contested concepts most likely refers to how that usage is determined and/or limited by the mutual appreciation of different criteria. From this perspective, Gallie argues that a dispute that appears to be not-genuine or even a conceptual confusion, at first, turns out to be something quite different after the kind of concepts described by (I) – (IV) are employed in accordance with (V). If mutual appreciation alone is not enough to dispel the ambiguity by securing conceptual unity, one should consider other formulations of (V) in connection with it. One may also include other elements of the thesis of essential contestedness, so that it becomes sensible to talk about a single concept that is essentially contested. For instance, one might ask: “Is mutual appreciation *and* reciprocal recognition enough?” or “is mutual appreciation, reciprocal recognition, *and* Conditions (VI) and (VII) enough?” The general issue is how much one needs to agree with others in order to share a concept, and at what point that agreement impinges on the room for contesting others’ uses of that concept? This is, in essence, what I call *the unity problem* (see 14.2).

Gallie presents different solutions to the unity problem, both in the artificial terms and more formally. On the one hand, he acknowledges the possible objection that his concept of the champions not only denotes different teams when used by different supporters, but it also seems to connote different ways of playing the game, which (may) constitute as different achievements in the eyes of supporters. Gallie then asserts that “no one would conceivably refer to one team among others as “the champions” unless he believed his team to be playing

¹¹⁵ David-Hillel Ruben calls Gallie’s reference to ‘ambiguity’ “confusing” (Ruben 2010, 259) but the other option is to assume that there is only one shared meaning all along, and that does not gel with Gallie’s explicit reference to initial ambiguity.

better than all the others *at the same game*" (ECC 176). This suggests that the disputant's individual beliefs concerning either the shared object of the dispute or the nature of the dispute itself is to be factored in somehow when justifying the unity of their combined conceptual usage. On the other hand, Gallie introduces Conditions (VI) and (VII) (see 8.1; 9.1) for the explicit purpose of making sense of how and when a *continued* use of an essentially contested concept could be justified, which he views as solving the problem of talking past each other. This marks a theoretical shift from the characteristics of concepts to the circumstances of their contestation, but the status of (V) in all this remains somewhat unclear. Neither option amounts to a complete account of how Gallie thinks conceptual confusion can be avoided, of course, and I return to the issue later (esp. ch. 14).

The second important function of (V) is *reciprocal recognition*, or "that each party recognizes the fact that its own use of it is contested by those of other parties"¹¹⁶ (ECC 172). Despite its connection to what is contested in a dispute (i.e., different concept-uses), the reciprocal recognition does not immediately help with the issue of ambiguity. But there looks to be more to it. When asking what we should expect to follow from the recognition of the essentially contested character of a given concept¹¹⁷, Gallie states that

It is important to distinguish clearly such recognition—a somewhat sophisticated "higher order" intellectual feat—from the everyday "lower order" recognition that one is using a given concept both aggressively and defensively. The difference is between recognizing that one has, and presumably will continue to have, opponents, and recognizing that this is an essential feature of the activity one is pursuing. ECC 192/PHU 187

Here, Gallie's focus is not only on the way disputing parties relate to different uses but also on the nature of the disagreement they all are having. The lower order recognition comes down to the disputants (i) recognizing that their preferred uses of a concept are contested, i.e., others claim that their preferred use is superior. The mere fact of contestedness, however, does not make that contestedness *essential* (cf. 12.3), and Gallie distinguishes the recognition of a higher order, an intellectual feat, which amounts to (ii) recognizing that endless contestation is an essential feature of the activity the disputants are pursuing. Is this the smoking gun we have been looking for with respect to locating the origin of essential contestability?

Unfortunately, in *ECC*, little to none is said of what is meant by 'activity' in this context, or of how contestability can be an essential feature of an activity one is pursuing. A more complete picture emerges when Gallie's other texts are fully

¹¹⁶ Some, e.g., Collier et al. (2006, 219), have dubbed Condition (V) as "reciprocal recognition" seemingly on these grounds. There is no established naming convention for Gallie's Conditions, and Jeremy Waldron, for example, names (V) as "aggressive argumentation" (Waldron 1994, 530n53). I use 'reciprocal' instead of 'mutual' to underline the contrast to mutual appreciation.

¹¹⁷ The second "preliminary" answer given by Gallie in this regard pertains more closely to Condition (VII). It is discussed in 9.1.

considered, but that discussion must await until the rest of the Conditions are laid out (see esp. 11.2; 11.3). As to the notion of reciprocal recognition, the type of awareness that is required of the disputants will be further qualified with the addition of Condition (VII). However, if the required reciprocal recognition entails awareness concerning the true nature of the dispute, we have a rather problematic notion on our hands. By problematic, I mean the possibility that the disputes manifesting essential contestedness are such by virtue of disputing parties understanding the dispute they are having in a specific way – and that might be why they view their different descriptions as more or less converging, or about the same thing. But what difference should it make? If the disputants are simply mistaken in their assessment of what is going on, the specter of conceptual confusion would not be banished; at most, it has a slightly different form. Moreover, the idea according to which essential contestability, i.e., the endlessness and irresolvability of disputes, would hinge on the fact that the disputants themselves understand the disputes as endless and irresolvable is quaint, to say the least. I return to this issue in the review section.

7.2 Condition V reviewed

When different values like honesty and sensitivity come into conflict in practice people are usually quite cognizant that there are reasons for telling the truth but also reasons for withholding one's opinion or telling a white lie. Conflicting views on what reasons should ultimately be decisive can result in disagreement about the correct weighting of these values. Each may accept that the consideration the other sees as decisive has some rational force, even if they attach different weight to it, and there is thus no evident reason to think that the disagreeing parties are talking past each other. However, when one party *does not see any merit at all* in the other's considerations, it appears they have some sort of conflict at hand but it is not certain that they disagree genuinely. Both parties may feel that the other party is missing something crucial, and the prospects of agreeing to disagree, let alone agreeing tout court, are slim to none. Lurking nearby is a related value-dispute but the first hurdle that needs to be cleared concerns whether they disagree about the same subject.

If the considerations of one party are deemed totally irrelevant by the other party, the judgments on which the disagreement itself is premised simply differ too much. This can be taken as a form of miscommunication or talking past each other. Andrew Mason calls this specific form "the ordinary conception of miscommunication," i.e., "one person fails to communicate with another if she presents an argument with premises which the other doesn't accept" (Mason 1993, 94). The possibility of a similar occurrence appears to motivate Gallie's requirement of the mutual appreciation of the different criteria of a concept's application. Mutual appreciation is needed for the sake of guaranteeing the relevancy of considerations presented in a conceptual dispute: to appreciate a

criterion behind the other's concept-use is to consider it as at least somewhat relevant with regard to how the concept should be employed (see also 11.4; 14.1).

The dispute, above, might be taken to involve the concept of good conduct or the like, concerning which the disputants disagree on which criteria of application should be weighted most. However, identifying a concept in this way seems *ad hoc*. True, in one sense the dispute is about how to conduct oneself well, and in this example the terrain of the disagreement consists of the values of honesty and sensitivity. It is not immediately clear, though, what would be gained by assuming that the dispute originates in essentially contested GOOD CONDUCT instead of framing the dispute in terms of a clash of values and various judgments related to those values, for instance. Gallie certainly did not claim that GOOD CONDUCT is an essentially contested concept, yet a worry remains that DEMOCRACY, SOCIAL JUSTICE, CHRISTIANITY, or ART are no more suitable for offering insight into the disagreements in which they allegedly figure. This should be kept in mind going forward.

Collier, Hidalgo and Maciuceanu (2006) and Chilton (2008) draw attention to the fact that those advocating for a certain conceptualization may not explicitly acknowledge the contestability of the concept as they would assert that their own use is the only correct one. Both view this as a violation of the requirements of (V), although Collier et al. do not see it as a significant problem because (V) "is not always pertinent." (Collier et al 2006, 219, 239; Chilton 2008, 228; cf. ECC 180, 182.) Wibren van den Burg also reads Gallie as admitting that (V) need not be present for a concept to be essentially contested (van der Burg 2017, 238). That indeed is what Gallie appears to be saying when he notes that conformity to Conditions (I) to (IV) does not entail (V) in the case of Christianity, but it merely makes it "extremely likely" (ECC 181). However, in Gallie's lingo that is as strong as it gets, which can be seen by comparing this instance to how he constantly refers to the "possibility" of there being essentially contested concepts to begin with (e.g., ECC 174n2, 178–9, 186, 189). In fact, the relevant passage (i.e., ECC 181) makes it clear that Gallie considers contestability to be an inherent part of Christianity now, and thus his talk of 'extreme likelihood' appears mostly rhetorical.

I find it somewhat difficult to accept that (V) would not be pertinent in every instance of essential contestedness as Gallie understands it. (V) is included in the definition of essentially contested concepts (ECC 180), and Gallie asserts explicitly that (I)–(IV) by themselves do not define what it is to be an essentially contested concept. It is true that Gallie suggests, at times, that not all of the live examples fulfill all Conditions completely, yet Gallie certainly connects the live examples with aggressive and defensive usage of the corresponding term (ECC 181–2, 186). One might even agree with van der Burg (2017) that Gallie does not provide any real argument to support his conclusion or even "why precisely this condition is so important"¹¹⁸ (van der Burg 2017, 238), while still maintaining that

¹¹⁸ Gallie's stinginess in providing reasoning for his claims has given room for widely different interpretations. For instance, Boromisza-Habashi has interpreted (V) as establishing "competitive use" of a concept in a way that the "use of essentially contested concepts is

(V) is highly significant. Elements like mutual appreciation might not be found in every instance of *conceptual contestedness* – but every such instance does not yet count as *essential contestedness* as Gallie intended it. Nevertheless, as there is no clarity concerning the exact relation between the different formulations of (V), it is not crystal clear whether each formulation is meant to be perfectly applicable in every instance of essential contestation.

Michael Freeden (1996), who analyzes and applies Gallie's thesis mostly in the context of political disagreement and ideological expression, notes that reciprocal recognition is a prerequisite for the philosophical discussion but the same is not required of ideological expression. Concepts can be contested with limited awareness, or no awareness, in ideological practice. (Freeden 1996, 60.) Ideological expression aside, if the type of contestation Gallie is describing is exclusive to a sphere of philosophical or intellectual theorizing and debate, the attribution of the characteristics of Gallie's disagreements to the disputes of a more practical nature is erroneous and misguided. A cry for freedom is not necessarily a cry for the correct ranking order of the criteria of FREEDOM, that much is certain. What combines the two instances is the assumption that the valued achievement appealed to in demanding freedom and the valued achievement signified by essentially contested FREEDOM is one and the same, even if the respective modes of contestation were to be different.

Jeremy Waldron (2002) calls for the more careful elaboration of the relation between theoretical and non-theoretical uses of an essentially contested concept. According to him, the street-uses of concepts are characteristically a form of know-how. Sometimes this know-how is also meta-theoretical – as would be the case, for example, when one is wary of voicing too strong an opinion because one is conscious of there being at least some borderline cases, even though this awareness would not extend to all cases in which the similar consideration of vagueness would be pertinent. (see Waldron 2002, 160–1.) Moreover, as concerns an essentially contested concept

there are two levels of theory to which ordinary street usage might orient itself (and vice versa). There is (a) the theorizing involved in the construction of a particular conception of a contested concept, and there is (b) the theorizing involved in the diagnosis of the concept as essentially contested. Waldron 2002, 161

It is probably unrealistic to assume that the street-level usage would involve more than a glimpse of (b). The street-level usage is typically more sporadic as one is unlikely to dwell on the relation between different well-worked-out conceptions that correspond with informal uses. The street-level user may have only the slightest sense of which side he is on so far as rival conceptions identified by the analyst are concerned; not everyone is concerned with analytic consistency. (Waldron 2002, 162).

always 'use-against' and, as such, a rhetorical exercise" (Boromisza-Habashi 2010, 278). That seems to be taking things too far, as elsewhere Gallie is quite explicit that he has a more fundamental or "elementary" function in mind (see 11.3).

In some cases, it is not possible for disputing parties to determine whether their dispute is rooted in different conceptions rather than on “emotional bias, prejudice and lack of education, conflicting interests, or simply confusion” (van der Burg 2017, 238). In general, different concepts are employed with a greater variety of reflective involvement and with variable precision and cognitive awareness. One should not try to force the perspective of an observer or analyst and that of a participant in a dispute into a unified, undistinguishable whole (see also 13.2). As a sensible conclusion Waldron asserts that

The verdict of essential contestedness does not stand or fall with everyone’s being aware of it; it stands or falls with the way it helps us understand all that goes on at the various levels at which people use a concept and reflect upon their use of it. Waldron 2002, 162

Van der Burg (2017) claims that (V) is not crucial for understanding the phenomenon, but when (V) is interpreted weakly, it is “the criterion that distinguishes contestable concepts from contested concepts.” Van der Burg maintains that the required awareness that one’s own conception is contested should be omitted, yet the aggressive and defensive usage can be retained, when it is properly understood. (V) is now modified as the requirement “that there is actually a debate in which the parties appeal to the concept or to its implications.” Thus modified, it is clear that (V) is a functional or pragmatic criterion, not a semantic one. Van der Burg proposes a stipulation that “essentially contested concepts are essentially contestable concepts that are actually contested.” (van der Burg 2016, 233n12, 238–9.) Mark Criley is another author who explicitly connects (V) with the requirement that there be an actual dispute (Criley 2007, 26).

I agree that (V) should be viewed as a pragmatic rather than semantic criterion/Condition (see also ch. 10). As a consequence, Gallie’s original “definition” of an essentially contested concept consisting of (I)–(V) would now have both semantic/conceptual and pragmatic/functional elements. Yet I am hesitant to relinquish the requirement of awareness altogether, especially if it means disregarding what Gallie says about the two orders of recognition and contestation as an essential feature of an activity one is pursuing. Be that as it may, it is instructive to briefly examine why van der Burg rejects what I have named as reciprocal recognition. First, according to him, (V) “arbitrarily excludes those debates where the parties are not aware that the core of their disagreement is conceptual rather than merely a conflict of interests or belief.” Second, (V) also fails to exclude contingently contested or confused concepts since disputes on these concepts may take place even when everyone is fully aware that they have different conceptions. (van der Burg 2017, 238.) These points are motivated by the possibility that Gallie sought to include (V) for the purpose of distinguishing essentially contested concepts from other concepts. Some of Gallie’s remarks indeed suggest this (esp. ECC 172n1; cf. 7.1).

It is easy to confuse the different objects of awareness of which Gallie speaks. To my knowledge, the distinction between mutual appreciation and reciprocal

recognition (7.1) has not been made in the literature before (at least not explicitly) and it is true that both notions deal with a sort of cognizance, yet with different objects. The former is primarily about the appreciation of the range of relevant considerations that match with the assessment of other disputants, and I do not think it demands a conscious awareness on the part of concept-users. For instance, it is possible for two persons to employ the same concept, or it can be the case that the core of their disagreement is conceptual, even if they think and claim otherwise (as they might be mistaken). The latter can be characterized either as the awareness of the fact that there is a conflict (e.g., of beliefs and interest) or as the awareness of the qualitative difference between the fact of mere conflict and the acknowledgment that this conflict is not only temporary but something to be expected given the nature of the case. The lower order of recognition can be seen to correspond to contestation with limited awareness while the higher order of recognition requires reaching a correct conclusion, or a second-order conceptualization, about the first order contestation in order to arrive to “an important truth” (ECC 192).

The higher order of recognition, or “a somewhat sophisticated (...) intellectual feat” (ECC 192), corresponds with the mode in which typical philosophical discussions are carried out. Or, as Kenneth Ehrenberg points out,

to characterize the concept as essentially contested is to step outside of one’s own conception for at least a brief moment; it is a claim about the concept itself (in that it is a claim about all possible uses of the concept – all conceptions), and not any particular conception. Ehrenberg 2011, 214

Accepting this much does not commit one to Gallie’s more specific views on what sort of debates and disputes are best characterized as manifesting essential contestedness. I should further note that commentators formulate what I call reciprocal recognition in slightly different ways depending on their preferred terminology. For example, John Gray observes that “It may be said of any essentially contested concept that its denotation is non-contingently indeterminate, and, further, that this feature is acknowledged by its users” (Gray 1977, 332).

Gallie’s views on awareness/recognition are split in a similar way to what Waldron illustrates above by distinguishing between the two levels of theory to which ordinary street usage might orient itself. The detached stance similar to a higher-order of recognition is what is required of philosophical diagnosis of essentially contested concepts while the more hands-on lower-order of recognition is about simply being aware that one’s use of a concept, or conception, is contested. Coming back to van der Burg’s objections, I agree that participants’ awareness should not be required in the higher-order sense for there to be meaningful contestation in which an essentially contested concept can be properly involved. It is not realistic, and it may have curious results in terms of how essential contestedness is constituted. If, as a result, one ends up ruling out the higher-order recognition *and does not separately consider* the point about the mutual appreciation, the lower-order recognition of contestedness is seemingly

the only option left for achieving the task. It will not do, obviously, to simply point out the need for participants in a dispute to realize that they are, in fact, in a dispute, which favors reframing the role of (V) in the overall thesis.

Perhaps (V) fails to distinguish essentially contested concepts adequately on its own, yet both the mutual appreciation and reciprocal recognition need to be interpreted in the light of the overall thesis. One key element to focus on is the structure or organization of an essentially contested concept. The requirement of mutual appreciation is naturally combined with the assumption that rival parties consider exactly the same set of criteria as those that govern the concept in question (cf. 16.4). That may not be mandatory: for instance, the criteria of a cluster concept are disjunctive instead (5.2; see also 17.5). It is thus possible for the disputants to mutually appreciate the specific criteria in the light of which others are applying the concept as pertinent, in abstract, even if one's particular use would come to conflict with the other uses in a given instance. The ensuing conceptual disagreement could perhaps be about how the intension of the concept is more specifically organized or how the concept is to be applied in the case at hand – especially in relation to the weightings of the criteria (see esp. 17.2). That is what we should expect of conceptual disagreement, in which neither party is self-evidently confused, but it is not a self-evidently representative case of what can be properly called essential contestability (see esp. 15.3).

There is a more straightforward approach as far as the conceptual structure is concerned: (V) is now meant to contribute to the twofold purpose of (a) guaranteeing that disputing parties do not talk past each other, i.e., their disagreement is genuine; and (b) making sense of how the described type of contestation is essential. Both (a) and (b) are achieved by conceiving an essentially contested concept as a concept that consists of its mutually contesting uses, which therefore renders aggressive and defensive uses of such a concept essential to the concept in question. What this means, exactly, is developed in detail later on (see esp. 11.3; 12.3; 14.2; 18.1; 18.5), but we can take a preliminary cue from Leslie Green (1987), according to whom essentially contested concepts are “not merely concepts whose essences are contested, but rather concepts the contest about which is part of their essence.” Were the argument about an essentially contested concept to cease, we might have “better reason to think that we had lost the concept than that we had resolved the dispute.” (Green 1987, 18.) Actual contestedness, by itself, is no self-evident sign of essential contestability, neither is the lack of it an indicator to the contrary – one does not entail the other (see 12.2). Yet nothing stops us from stating that it is a necessary, though not sufficient, condition of an essentially contested concept that it consists of its conflicting, or mutually contested and contesting, uses as Gallie himself appears to suggest (ECC 169). If there are no conflicting uses, there is no essentially contested concept; and for there to be conflicting uses one needs a disagreement, or the situation in which the concept is aggressively and defensively used.

One's conclusion that one is dealing with an essentially contested concept can certainly be mistaken, and there are two closely related observations that need to be made. First, it is not reasonable to suppose that disagreements,

disputes, and arguments in which essentially contested concepts are involved somehow automatically transform the awareness level of disputants *because* these concepts rather than those of another type are employed. The awareness that one is confronted with essential contestedness does not necessarily accompany disputes that involve essentially contested concepts. Second, from a slightly different angle, Condition (V) might be understood to render the distinction variable in an arbitrary way, “as a concept could become essentially contested merely because suddenly the parties realise that they have different conceptions – even though the concept itself does not change” (van der Burg 2016, 238). The realization that one is disagreeing does not affect the *contestability* of the concept (12.2), but it does appear to be a phenomenological precondition of actual and active *contestedness*. Similarly, essential contestedness may somehow depend on the personal perspectives of the disputants, but Condition (V) appears to provide us with only a partial piece of that puzzle, at best.

Pekka Väyrynen reminds that “The results of metasemantic negotiation among conversational partners can also be substantively objectionable and open to dispute by external parties” (Väyrynen 2014, 484). Although disputants themselves would consider their dispute as manifesting essential contestedness after careful consideration, their mutual appreciation of the range of criteria for applying a concept should not be taken to mean that there is no room for criticism. But it seems to me that, to the extent that mutual appreciation is a necessary element of essential contestedness, this sort of “outside criticism” cannot strictly speaking represent, or be considered as, a party to a dispute that manifests essential contestedness as Gallie defines it. Mutual appreciation is something that is required of the disputants, not of their uses of a concept as such. If this is so, one can certainly criticize the views held by the disputants from the outside – just as well as one can criticize any other view – but this might not have any effect on the nature of the dispute as it has been negotiated by the parties internal to the dispute. In that way it would not affect essential contestedness as a feature of a dispute. In this picture, essential contestedness is not a universal phenomenon, or perhaps not even a feature of concepts, but it is always localized in actual disagreements, as wide and far-reaching as they can sometimes be.

Kenneth Ehrenberg discusses Gallie’s thesis in the context of *LAW*, and he finds the application of (V) to the general concept of law problematic (see esp. Ehrenberg 2011, 227–31). For Gallie, *LAW* is a “possible candidate” (PHU 190) for being essentially contested, the candidacy which he nonetheless doubts. Ehrenberg observes that “the aggressive and defensive uses of the law are limited to the more specific concepts”¹¹⁹ (Ehrenberg 2011, 224; cf. Waldron 2002). The concepts of different specificity may be located on different conceptual levels, and one may not be simply dealing with general concepts and their more specific conceptions (cf. Ehrenberg 2011, 225). Rather, aggressive and defensive uses seem to occur within or in connection to a practice or activity signified by the concept, or in accordance with the norms to which the more general concept is

¹¹⁹ The following exchange is Ehrenberg’s (2011, 224) simple example to highlight the matter: “Your honor, he can’t do that, it’s against the law.” . . . “Not under my interpretation; it isn’t.”

closely connected (see also 12.3; 18.3). For example, the rule of law is not just a more specific conception of the concept of law in the same way we typically think of Nozick's and Rawls's views concerning justice as conceptions of justice. All of Gallie's example cases seem to have that same characteristic. This finding is further supported by Gallie's inclusion of subordinate or more specific concepts—such as “colouration, dogma, parliamentary immunity”—that fall under the more general concepts—“art, religion, democracy, etc.”—which he claims can be shown to be themselves essentially contested (PHU 190). In terms of the example of the disagreement with which I started the current section, this would amount to saying that if GOOD CONDUCT is essentially contested, then the concepts that are subordinate to it are as well, i.e., HONESTY and SENSITIVITY. The connection between the aggressive and defensive uses of the more specific concepts of law and the general LAW, between PARLIAMENTARY IMMUNITY and DEMOCRACY, and between GOOD CONDUCT and HONESTY and SENSITIVITY, is thematic rather than hierarchical. In other words, the conceptual relations between the aforementioned concepts are not as much similarity relations based on shared features as they are contiguity relations based on co-occurrence in events or scenarios, or within institutions, practices, and activities (see esp. 11.3). These relations could thus be considered pragmatic or functional.

CHAPTER 8: CONDITION VI // ORIGINAL EXEMPLAR

Essentially contested concepts cannot be single-criterial, i.e., be based upon only one criterion: if one party thinks that justice is *solely* about giving everyone what they deserve, and another party considers justice *solely* as guaranteeing the well-being of all, there is no room for the kind of conceptual disagreement that Gallie has in mind. Although such disagreement could easily lead to a deadlock, it can be doubted that the dispute involves a single concept that is shared by the disputants. Instead, there could be two distinct concepts, or JUSTICE₁ and JUSTICE₂, and in other similar cases something else entirely. After the concepts have been disambiguated, there is nothing more to clarify or disagree with, conceptually speaking. The disputants might still have a dispute over facts of the case, or one that originates in differing values, but we would rightly hesitate in calling it conceptual given what we know. In general, concepts based on a single criterion seem to foreclose the possibility of essential contestability due to their “remarkable thinness and abstraction” (Freeden 2004, 8). Without complex components that are referred to by all disputants, there is no weighting disagreement concerning their mutual ranking order (5.1; see also 17.2).

Considerations of the above sort have probably led Gallie to think that there must be some set, or range, of criteria that is mutually acknowledged by disputing parties as somehow relevant in the nature of the case, i.e., with respect to the valued achievement signified by the concept. By requiring such mutual appreciation of the criteria (7.1), Gallie seeks to avoid situations in which disputants would simply talk past each other as that would render the dispute in question not genuine. This results in Gallie describing disputes in which rival parties are much more likely to say that “I see what you are getting at, but I am quite sure that you have not yet grasped the full significance of these (and these) considerations...” rather than “you are utterly and completely wrong in your views, and I cannot even begin to comprehend how you have arrived at them!” In other words, there always needs to be a chance, even if a slim one, that one’s interlocutors could be swayed by the arguments or evidence produced by any side (see also esp. 11.4).

As we will soon see, Condition (VI), i.e., the requirement of the original exemplar, can be seen to provide and/or authorize a mutually acknowledged set of criteria for employing an essentially contested concept. But Gallie presents the matter in a more roundabout way: distinguishing the essentially contested concept from the kind of concept that is confused comes down to justifying the continued use of any essentially contested concept (ECC 180). (VI) and (VII) are introduced for that purpose. Here is a charitable reading of what Gallie is after with the justification of the continued use: because essentially contested concepts are employed aggressively and defensively in a dispute (7.1), the justification of such continued use eliminates the worry that the parties are talking past each other when they engage in contesting the concept. Gallie's specific framing of the argument is a bit odd, almost evasive, and it can be rejected as I will later show (see ch. 9; 14.2). Luckily, most of the issues surrounding Condition (VI) can be grasped perfectly well by being aware of its function as a safeguard against conceptual confusion, and the rest can wait until later.

More generally, Gallie characterizes (VI) and (VII) as Conditions that "evidently embody an historical approach to, and appreciation of, the special character of essentially contested concepts" (PHU 168; see also ART 107, 114, ECC 198; Ingram 1985, 41–42). In *PHU*, Gallie calls the last two Conditions as "broad historical conditions of essential contestedness" (PHU 169), and thus these conditions deal with "questions about the debate and the intellectual history of the concept and hence also are about the usage of the concept" (Ehrenberg 2011, 227). Some find the introduction of historical considerations as a key explanatory factor unconvincing (e.g., Kekes 1977, 73), some view them irrelevant to the matter that is of primary interest (e.g., Väyrynen 2014), and still many others are either suspicious or outright discard (VI) (see 8.2). Simon Evnine (2014) is an exception to the rule. For Evnine, (VI) is "central to the phenomenon in which [Gallie] is interested" (Evnine 2014, 122, see also 125–6). Be that as it may, there should be no doubt that Gallie sees himself as making an argument for the importance of historical understanding, or for the need to consider how certain appraisive concepts "came to be" (ECC 198; cf. 2.5; 3.2; see also 18.4).

8.1 Gallie's Condition VI

Condition (VI) is "the derivation of any such concept from an original exemplar whose authority is acknowledged by all the contestant users of the concept" (ECC 180/PHU 168). Gallie is not explicit regarding what 'derivation' entails in this context, especially in *ECC*. In a passage added to the *PHU*-version, Gallie emphasizes that "the adequate understanding of [essentially contested] concepts involves some appreciation of their history." At the very least, "we must accept that every proper contestant use of such a concept can be traced back to a commonly acknowledged exemplar, and can be justified on the ground that, and to the extent that, people can be found who regard it and can rationally defend it as the best possible development of the original exemplar's aims" (PHU 189).

This passage clearly shows that not only (VI) but also (VII) is meant to embody “an historical approach to, and appreciation of, the special character of essentially contested concepts” (PHU 168; see also 9.1). I will later expand on how Gallie appears to conceive of the valued achievements that are signified by concepts as historically embedded normative ideals (see 11.3). Now it suffices to say that Gallie expects disputants to make their judgments regarding how to use a concept based on some historically available material – in the case of DEMOCRACY, they relate the preferred uses “to an unmistakable succession of political endeavours and aspirations which have been embodied in” (PHU 178) various historical events, actions, movements, texts *et cetera*.

The example that is set by the original exemplar is internally complex and variously describable, which is why “it is natural that different features in it should be differently weighted by different appraisers.” Gallie continues by requiring that “recognition or acceptance of the exemplar's achievement must have that “open” character which we have ascribed to every essentially contested concept.” (ECC 176–7/PHU 165.) Here, the phrasing “recognition or acceptance must have that open character” is a curious one. It may become clearer when we remember that Gallie views an essentially contested DEMOCRACY as extremely vague, and that its vagueness “reflects its actual inchoate condition of growth” (ECC 184). The condition of growth appears to come down to those circumstances in which the achievement of the original exemplar is followed, imitated, adapted, revived, sustained, or developed, which is an open-ended historical process. Gallie thus appears to require of the disputants that they recognize the valued achievement of democracy as a “living thing” that is still developing. DEMOCRACY now becomes imbued with vagueness that is a direct result of open-endedness of circumstances in which it is sustained and developed.

To see why exactly Gallie thinks that the derivation of an essentially contested concept from an original exemplar helps in avoiding conceptual confusions, let us note that, in artificial terms, each team could

properly be said to be contesting for the *same* championship if, in every case, its peculiar method and style of playing had been derived by a process of imitation and adaptation from an *exemplar*, which might have the form either of one prototype team of players, or of a succession (or tradition) of teams. ECC 176/PHU 165

There are thus two different ways for understanding the entity that is the original exemplar (see also 8.2). On the one hand, there can be a single exemplar whose achievement is remarkable to the extent that others want to follow that exemplar's lead. On the other hand, traditions or temporal successions of worthy contributions may serve as the original exemplar. At one point, Gallie states that (VI) is about “derivation from a single generally acknowledged exemplar,” after which he immediately remarks that it “cannot be simply or directly applied” (ECC 182.) For example, aggressive and defensive uses of ‘democracy’

claim the authority of an exemplar, i.e., of a long tradition (perhaps a number of historically independent but sufficiently similar traditions) of demands, aspirations,

revolts and reforms of a common *anti-inegalitarian* character (...) the vagueness of this tradition in no way affects its influence as an exemplar. ECC 186

The conclusion that should be drawn here is that, for Gallie, the original exemplar sets some recognizable and followable guidelines despite their obscurity or vagueness. People can argue about how the guidelines are to be followed but *if* they follow the same guidelines, they are thereby using the same concept and/or try to contribute to how the same valued achievement is best developed in the changing circumstances (cf. 9.1). The valued achievement that is captured by the original exemplar, and the valued achievement that is signified by an essentially contested concept, are “both” open because they are, in fact, one and the same achievement (see also 6.1).

Gallie describes the way the original exemplar is followed in artificial terms yet again: the teams seek “to revive and reproduce [the achievement of the original exemplar] in their play” (ECC 177). By this, Gallie does not mean the achievement is mechanically repeated or carbon copied. Instead, following an exemplar comes down to exerting oneself to revive “its (or his) way of doing things, not only to the utmost of one's ability, but to the utmost that circumstances, favourable or unfavourable, will allow” (ECC 177/ PHU 165). In addition to invoking openness as a key feature of essential contestedness, Gallie hides here an assumption that disputants who contest others' uses of a concept are not only required to mutually appreciate the different criteria according to which others apply the concept (7.1), they are also required to look on the valued achievement of the original exemplar as something that can be revived to a different degree and in various ways. With the addition of Condition (VII), it becomes evident that the referred revival is also to be considered in terms of *sustaining* and *developing* the valued achievement (cf. 9.1). It is now mostly a matter of scholarly interpretation which of these Conditions is ultimately understood as the source of the notion that the original exemplar's achievement is sustained and developed by the disputants, who use the concept to signify the valued achievement as best as they can.

In general, Gallie can be read as drawing attention to a *backward-looking* perspective which is deployed in judging how to follow, imitate, or adapt an original exemplar's achievement. In addition, essential contestedness appears to involve a *forward-looking* perspective that is concerned with how the valued achievement is sustained and developed further. Together they enable an individual or group to orient themselves in relation to a historical continuum or trajectory that revolves around the said achievement or normative ideal. The forward-looking element is discussed more in the next chapter (ch. 9). Regarding the backward-looking perspective, consider the following quote from the end of ECC:

For, if we want to see *just what* we are doing, when we apply a given appraisive concept, then one way of learning this is by asking from what vaguer or more confused or more restricted version (or ancestor) our currently accepted version of the concept in question has been derived. ECC 198

The original exemplar, or set of exemplars, is acknowledged as authoritative but that is not meant to exclude further specifications, clarifications, and extensions or limitations concerning the related concept. One's presently accepted use of the concept is meant to be authoritative as well, i.e., as it is one's best evaluation concerning the worth of the different aspects of the achievement, even if others might contest the claim. It is what is acknowledged as best exemplifying the valued achievement in the current circumstances. Gallie's thesis does not require or entail that others also contest that any progress is made at all; if anything, rival parties presume some progress, implicitly, while they disagree concerning only where exactly that progress is made¹²⁰.

8.2 Condition VI reviewed

The motivation behind introducing Condition (VI) is that the derivation of one's use of a concept from an original exemplar safeguards against conceptual confusion and clears room for a genuine dispute about which use of a concept is the most apt characterization of what is significant in a valued achievement. The original exemplar is thus viewed as anchoring the conceptual meaning or rooting the dispute in some other way. These basic ideas also come up in commentators' descriptions of (VI). For instance, according to K.I. MacDonald, Gallie's contests arise over "which instantiation is closest to some accepted exemplar," and this judgment requires the differential weighting of the attributes (MacDonald 1976, 381). Michael Stokes notes the function of the exemplar as something that both provides a complex model of the concept¹²¹ and "unifies the concept because all plausible conceptions of that concept must be plausible interpretations of the exemplar" (Stokes 2007, 690; see esp. 14.2). But it is Pekka Väyrynen who manages to sum up the connection to the disputes over essentially contested concepts most succinctly by noting that "disputants' disagreement over the correct application of the concept results from extrapolating different views of what relationship among the component features of the concept the exemplar exemplifies" (Väyrynen 2014, 479). To the extent that differential weighting is now required, the component features of the concept are weighted; the features which are derived from the original exemplar.

¹²⁰ In contrast, John Kekes identifies "unjustified anti-progressive bias" in Condition (VI) as Gallie appears to suppose that past instances of essentially contested concepts are superior to present or future ones (Kekes 1977, 82-3). I do not think that is what Gallie intends to say at all, which is illustrated here as well as with respect to (VII) (9.1).

¹²¹ Simon Evnine surmises that with Condition (II), i.e., internal complexity, "Gallie refers to the exemplar in his use of the word "achievement." Any concrete reality is internally complex and this is especially so for the kinds of things Gallie is concerned with" (Evnine 2014, 124).

Collier, Hidalgo and Maciuceanu make a salient distinction by pointing out that Gallie's original exemplar can be interpreted either *narrowly* or *broadly*¹²². In the narrow interpretation, the link between the original exemplar and the use of a concept allows analysts to distinguish between essentially contested concepts and confused concepts. Contestation is over the *same* concept, and there is a single original exemplar. The narrow interpretation is supported by Gallie's occasional use of the singular article (as in: *an* exemplar) and by his references to the French and the American Revolutions (ECC 186; PHU 180.) with respect to DEMOCRACY¹²³.

The broader interpretation of (VI) can be inferred especially from the passages where Gallie ascribes to the original exemplar very much the same characteristics he identifies essentially contested concepts as having, i.e., internal complexity, various describability, and openness. The broad interpretation allows more latitude regarding the link between the exemplar and the concept, but as a downside the link becomes more obscure. The original exemplar may now take roughly the form of a background/context/historical origin that has affected, influenced, or inspired the particular usage of the concept. Gallie's discussion of DEMOCRACY and the possibility of conceiving the exemplar as a vague tradition or a combination of traditions, or as that which brings various aspirations, actions, and events together, support the broad interpretation (e.g., ECC 176–7, 186; see 8.1). Nonetheless, Gallie should have been more transparent that there need not be more to an exemplar than it being a tradition of argument with a certain unity, like the liberal-democratic tradition (Green 1987, 17). In addition, he offers no clear answer to the question of how different or "sufficiently similar" traditions are to be distinguished (Mason 1993, 81; see ECC 186).

Much of the criticism presented against Condition (VI) echoes objections raised by Ernest Gellner (Gellner 1974/1967). It is commonly accepted that the present functioning of a concept is logically independent of its history. In order to distinguish the functioning of an essentially contested concept from how a confused concept functions in a dispute, the essentially contested concept should be identifiable based on its current functioning, not by indicating its roots or pedigree in some earlier exemplar. Gellner rejects the inclusion of (VI) in the definition of essentially contested concepts (cf. ch. 10), and he specifically objects to the incorporation of the *belief* in the existence of a unique original exemplar to

¹²² See Collier et al. 2006, 219–20. Most of the points in the current paragraph are from them, though perhaps expressed in slightly different terms.

¹²³ Unlike many commentators, Gallie does not mention Athenian democracy as the exemplar for DEMOCRACY (see e.g., Abbey 2005, 467–8). It might be because the French and the American Revolutions have been more influential in shaping our current popular conception of democracy, or how 'democracy' is used as a general term today. The Athenian concept of democracy does not have the same egalitarian or anti-inegalitarian emphasis we have come to attribute to (liberal) democracy more recently. Here 'democracy' might simply refer to different things. Invoking Athenian democracy as an exemplar might have rhetorical value but it would do little in terms of guaranteeing that two modern-day disputants are employing the same concept of democracy despite their differences.

a concept. Although notions like Christian conduct (sic: Gallie's CHRISTIANITY) incorporate such beliefs, the functioning of the concept is quite independent of whether one is right in believing so or not. Requiring the original exemplar would make the status of being essentially contested intolerably "a hostage of the past," and it would encourage the illusion that such concepts have a single origin. Gellner further doubts that neither (VI) nor (VII), separately or together, is capable of providing a general differential in the form of an abstract criterion for distinguishing Gallie's concepts from those that are confused. Instead, some "clusters of characteristics" have a real affinity, and they are "fertile just because of their internal conflicts," while others are "accidental and as it were sterile." (Gellner 1974, 96, 99.) If there is no *general* criterion for the job, interesting clusters of characteristics must be identified case-by-case.

What does it actually mean that the authority of the original exemplar is acknowledged by all the contestant users of the concept? That is not evident based on Gallie's text (Criley 2007, 29). If some achievements or ways those achievements are signified and/or exemplified have a cardinal status of sorts, what guarantees them that status in the future and how should that status be understood? From this perspective, it is not surprising that Gellner thinks that Gallie's way of talking, as if "behind each 'essentially contested concept', there was hidden away in some Platonic heaven, a non-contested, unambiguously defined and fully determinate concept or exemplar," comes down to implicitly betraying the idea of essential contestedness (Gellner, 1974, 99). One might now conjecture that the postulation of the original exemplar "presumes an agreed or correct position from which deviations have occurred" which is "in effect inimical" to the kind of contestability that Gallie is after (Freeden 1996, 60). That is basically Ruth Abbey's interpretation: the valued achievement is "contained in the original, uncontested version of the concept," and/or there has been a "consensus over a concept" which later breaks out as a debate (Abbey 2005, 466, 468). Michael Stokes thinks that one can defend against the charge of Platonism even if an exemplar is required, but he wonders if it is possible to identify its important features without some intuitive understanding of an ideal type (Stokes 2007, 690n22). All in all, if there is an exemplar or an ideal type present, and it is acknowledged authoritative by all, why not presume it to be the last say in the matter and be done with contesting the issue further? The trick is not to turn the sort of conceptual anti-essentialism professed by Gallie upside down (see also 12.3).

The Platonism charge leads naturally to the accusation of having committed a genetic fallacy¹²⁴. Gallie can be criticized for failing to distinguish logically between the present functioning of a concept and its history, and both Gellner (1974) and Gray (1978) attribute a genetic fallacy to Gallie's thesis. John Gray

¹²⁴ E.g., Edward Damer defines the genetic fallacy as "Evaluating a thing in terms of its earlier context while ignoring relevant changes that may have altered its character in the interim, and then using that evaluation to support a conclusion in the present." One who commits this fallacy "typically transfers the positive or negative esteem that he or she has for the thing in its original context or earlier form to thing in its present form." (Damer 2009, 99.)

however adds that there is no “*necessary fallacy*” since it is possible to interpret Gallie as attempting to illuminate the social and cultural sources and the historical nature of the contest without suggesting that a historical investigation can actually resolve the dispute (ibid., 390). Perhaps the main problem with Condition (VI) is that it is not clear how an original exemplar is meant to figure in contestation over the concept. It is completely possible that of real importance is not whether the original exemplar is incorporated in the concept and its present proper functioning in some way but that rival parties *believe* in the existence and authoritativeness of the exemplar (cf. Gellner 1974, 96). That belief could then affect what judgments they make or how they argue about the matter (see also 12.4).

It has also been denied that an agreed exemplar is always, or even typically, present in the relevant sort of disputes (e.g., Gray 1978, 390; Miller 1983, 42). Peter Ingram goes a step further in claiming that it is not possible to postulate an original exemplar for a concept like ‘work of art’ that he takes as a prime instance of a contested concept (Ingram 1985, 42). However, I doubt that it is a particularly illuminating example of an essentially contested concept (but see also 11.3). There is no denying that different people may easily come to hold different judgments concerning whether a given object is a work of art, but that does not yet mean that their dispute is often specifically about how WORK OF ART applies to the object, not to mention that WORK OF ART would be *essentially* contested. A dispute in which the term ‘work of art’ figures may simply be a substantive value disagreement in which parties disagree on how things should be without noticeable conceptual incompatibility. Moreover, as Simon Evnine (2014) states, it is clear that Gallie does not require one to postulate the original work of art. Ingram appears rather to confuse things by taking ‘work of art’ as the primary formulation of the contested concept or term instead of ‘art.’ (Evnine 2014, 136n24.) Evnine’s point is that ‘art’ or ART stands in a different relation to an artistic tradition than works of art that are produced as part of that tradition. That is a somewhat good approximation of what Gallie is after (cf. 11.2; 11.3), yet the present discussion underlines the difficulty of interpreting the function of Condition (VI) in the characterization of essentially contested concepts.

Some have doubted other aspects of (VI). If the original exemplar (or, its achievement) is indeed internally complex, variously describable, and open, there is room for some concern that not all parties to a dispute will acknowledge its authority (Collier et al. 2006, 220¹²⁵). A reference to an original exemplar could itself be a cause of real confusion (Ingram 1985, n4). After all, it seems that the original exemplar is meant as the source of differing interpretations that may even result in distinct schools of thought (see esp. 11.2). A possible answer to both worries would be to delimit the area of essential contestedness: confusions may be possible but Gallie does not have to demonstrate that the reference to an original exemplar would eliminate *all* conceivable confusions. By contrast, a strong notion of the original exemplar might prevent a community from later

¹²⁵ Collier, Hidalgo, and Maciuceanu (2006) attribute this concern to MacIntyre (1973, 2), Gray (1978, 390), and Swanton (1985, 816).

retracting their judgment as mistaken, the judgment according to which previously agreed upon exemplars that were understood as central or canonical are instances to which the concept applies. Essential contestedness does not protect people from errors of judgment, and some conceptions may be analytically wrong in that “they do not fit the shared paradigms in the discussion” (Besson, 2005, 74; see also Waldron 2002, 152). This does not mean that the paradigms could not be changed if found wanting. Yet one should probably acknowledge in many such cases the shift from one concept to another as well, even if the usage of the same word is retained causally. Paradigms are what they are for a reason. In general, the possibility of retracting one’s judgment after additional conceptual inquiry is a salient characteristic of contested concepts (Criley 2007, 29)¹²⁶.

One theoretical function of the original exemplar is to help in distinguishing proper cases of essential contestedness from confusions, but that must be done in a fashion that does not jeopardize the basic idea that disagreement between disputants is brought about by their differing views concerning the exemplar’s achievement. According to Abbey, “the belief in an original exemplar fulfills a bonding function.” She ties (VI) more closely with (VII) by noting – very soundly I should add – the need for some sense of participating in, reproducing, and enhancing, a shared tradition with a common source. Without such sense, “the debate might become utterly centrifugal.” (Abbey 2005, 468.) Sami Syrjämäki takes a similar overall perspective to the matter by noting that the existence of an original exemplar “can help to explain how people may be proponents of different concepts (...) and can still understand each other, and assumes that they are arguing in the same conceptual continuum” (Syrjämäki 2011, 138–9). Here, it should be noted that the original exemplar may help in explaining the matter even if its existence is not included in the definition of a concept. In Tullio Viola’s Peircean reading (2019), Condition (VI) is interpreted as a way to draw attention to the ability of signs “to single out with relative accuracy the object to which they refer, even though they are still unable to characterize it with precision.” This may contribute to explaining why both agreement and disagreement concerning the use of essentially contested concepts is possible (Viola 2019, 247; see 14.2). Therein lies both the promise and frustration with (VI): it appears to provide rival parties with something that they can agree on, but it contributes to uncertainty about “*what it is* that is said by Gallie to be essentially contested” (Gray 1978, 391), or perhaps “*what it is in* such concepts that is contestable: the original exemplar or conceptions of it” (Besson 2005, 74).

Steven Lukes (1974/2005; 1974; 1977) is a notable exception to the long line of critical commentators. He claims that POWER is essentially contested and that there are “standard cases of the possession and exercise of power about which all will agree.” These instances constitute the concept’s common core while the disputes involving such concepts concern where exactly the boundaries of the

¹²⁶ Mark Criley ends up claiming that (VI) is false (Criley 2007, 29). That is partly due to him understanding it as the condition that is supposed to pertain to all contested concepts or conceptual contests, and not just to essential contestedness (cf. Criley in 14.2).

concept lie (Lukes 1977, 418)—Collier, Hidalgo and Maciuceanu also maintain that the idea of the common core in form of multiple paradigmatic examples is helpful in anchoring the concept and the contest (Collier et al 2006, 220, 239). Mark Criley endorses the notion that essentially contested concepts are anchored in sets of authoritative examples, but he understands them as instances in the case of which the concept correctly applies (Criley 2007, 26). As to the relation between Gallie's and Lukes's views, Lukes's understanding of exemplars has been considered parallel to Gallie's broader framing (Collier et al. 2006, 220) while exactly that parallelism has also been found scant (MacDonald 1976, 381). The verdict appears to heavily depend on the latitude granted to how the original exemplar, and its role, is to be understood. In any case, Gallie did not adopt, at least not explicitly, a view according to which essentially contested concepts have common cores all can agree on (see 17.3). Be that as it may, the Lukesian interpretation has been influential in shaping the subsequent discussion, and it is similar to several subsequent interpretations (e.g., Vincent 2004; Lakoff 2009, 178).

There very well may be practically incontestable historical situations or practices where power is implemented. It is another matter, though, whether the structure of contested concepts, the concepts that are applicable in other and perhaps partly conflicting instances, is such that it consists of standard cases that have gathered everyone's agreement. Ingram thinks it possible to claim that, given the surprising historical developments (of some words and their etymologies), "implicitly discordant conceptions of justice or democracy, for example, could have developed, if not from one original exemplar, at least from a set of related exemplars." Ingram avoids the genetic fallacy by stating explicitly that "structural difficulties in the concept exemplified in its essential contestedness have to be discussed and dealt with as that concept actually exists" (Ingram 1985, 54). In other words: instead of seeking solutions in the origin of conflicting conceptions, one would need to analyze how a concept's structure, as it stands today, could admit them.

A lot depends on how historical considerations are understood to figure in the evaluation of the concept: there is always the danger of treating the range of relevant conceptions as simply given due to their historical, and not as much conceptual, status. Gallie himself maintains, rightly or wrongly, that "worthy (...) clarification or improved understanding of an appraisive concept (...) must include, not simply consideration of different uses of a given appraisive concept *as we use it to-day*, but consideration of such instances as display its growth and development" (ECC 197-8; see also 8.1). He follows that by asserting that in wanting to see "*just what we are doing*" when we apply a given appraisive concept, *one* way of learning it is to inquire about the pedigree of our specific concept-use (ECC 198; quoted fully in 8.1). Assuming that (VI) is not included in the definition of essentially contested concept, it makes sense to think that (VI) is a qualification on what we *do*, i.e., contest the concept in a certain way. This supports my view that (VI) and (VII) describe the pragmatic circumstances of essential contestation rather than the inherent characteristics of concepts.

Most of the criticism presented so far hits home, especially in the case of the narrow interpretation that requires a single exemplar or originator. This makes the broader interpretation more attractive—indeed the view to be preferred when the aim is to extract the strongest possible interpretation of essential contestability from Gallie’s original writings—even if it is not without its problems either. Appealing to “a tradition of argument” or the like may be too obscure in terms of justifying a specific claim. Moreover, is the original exemplar supposed to *be* a tradition or is it *a part of* a tradition? Do the traditions give rise to examples (see e.g., Viola 2019, 248), are they to be considered “examples” as a whole, or are they distinguishable from each other (see e.g., van der Burg 2017, 240)?

Mark Criley (2007) observes that the plausibility of (VI) owes to the difficulty in imagining a conceptual dispute in which neither party admits even one example as falling under the concept. If there is not a single case (or application) on which the parties agree, “it would go a long way to undermining (...) conviction that [they] were engaged in a dispute over a single concept.” Despite this view being quite common [e.g., Besson 2005, 74], it would not mean, however, that in disputes including *several* parties *all* disputants have to agree on (at least) one example. One could have an overlapping, and yet imperfect, consensus that might suffice to ground a conceptual dispute even if all parties cannot agree on a single exemplar that falls under the concept. (Criley 2007, 28.) Here, Criley appears to be applying the general idea of family resemblance to make a critical point. Rather than being an exception, I think this is something to be expected at least to some degree when the original exemplar is understood broadly. The range of instances based on which a disputing party has become acquainted with the valued achievement (that is signified by the concept) is potentially as vast as the human condition (with personal backgrounds and life experiences), such that there could be considerable mutual differences concerning the agreed instances.

Simon Evnine (2014) argues that an essentially contested term is correctly applied to something “if and only if it bears a certain kind of relation to samples or exemplars that have played an historical role in the use of the term.” Evnine’s semantic externalist position is made possible by conceiving essentially contested concepts as analogous to natural kind terms à la Hilary Putnam and Saul Kripke. Exemplars are now understood as cultural instead of being natural: they are “something like a stage of a tradition.” Thus, the exemplar can “consist in anything that might be an element of a tradition: cultural objects (e.g., literary works, codes of law), institutions, ways of doing things, people and their actions and intentions, and people’s understandings of all of the above.” Since the traditions in question are internally complex, “in practice, any element of a tradition may itself be picked out and treated synecdochally as an exemplar itself.” (Evnine 2014, 127–8.) That our present conceptualizations are at least partly informed and affected by what has gone on in the past seems indubitable, even if the effect is mediated through shared language, culture, institutions, and practices. In other words, our access to the value or worth of the achievements in

question is robust in that there are innumerable access points in various forms, such as literature, artworks, pop culture, stories told by the campfire *et cetera*.

The sheer number of possible exemplary instances does not mean that there could not be one or a few paradigmatic instances shared by all, but it takes some force away from the assumption that those paradigmatic instances are necessarily of decisive importance. An imperfect consensus might also work in guiding how the concept is to be employed even if some differences in the usage would be expected as well. Gallie, however, does not really articulate how the valued achievement that is signified by a concept is accessed through derivation from exemplary instances besides offering a couple of hypothetical or allusive examples (see e.g., *LOVERS* in 11.2). The broad interpretation better enables leaving that which is aimed at with the help of the notion of original exemplar outside the inherent structure of a concept, and the concept can be seen as formed more ordinarily on the basis of whichever instances, both past and present, that are considered representative or exemplary. If one privileged historical instances or exemplars over current ones in attaining conceptual mastery/proficiency, one would commit a genetic fallacy. However, (VI) can tell us something insightful about how disputes over essentially contested concepts play out, without setting exemplars understood thus in the genetic order of importance. Gallie himself stands in opposition to what could be called an *anti-genetic attitude* towards concepts, i.e., tearing them from the changing social contexts and seeing them in a timeless and static way (Gellner 1974, 97; see also PHU 127–30). That does not justify, of course, the adoption of a fallacious form of historicism.

Alasdair MacIntyre (1973) contends that, in large areas of social inquiry, the debate about the central, standard, and paradigmatic instances of the phenomena of interest is not settled but remains open. This being the case it seems that we lack the basis to decide “whether a given alleged instance of a phenomenon is to be treated as a counter-example to a proposed generalization or as not an example of the phenomenon at all” (MacIntyre 1973, 2–3; see also Gellner, 1974, 99). If MacIntyre is right, the lack of knowledge about the paradigmatic instances, or the original exemplars, may lead one to a skeptical conclusion that is actually not that far from Gallie’s position: there is no general principle for deciding between the contested instances or we are unsure what that principle would be (cf. 12.1). The difference to Gallie is that, for MacIntyre, the unavailability of a general principle is a matter that is most pressing not in comparatively evaluating how well different uses of a concept match with the aspects of a valued achievement, but in deciding what the correct exemplars are in the first place. Gallie takes the original exemplar for granted, more or less.

The notion of the original exemplar is not very precise, but it can be utilized rather fruitfully in connection to various issues. For instance, Boromisza-Habashi, who emphasizes essentiality of *contestation* and the *rhetorical* aspects of the phenomenon in his reading, asserts that

The rhetorical function of positing an exemplar is to anchor a particular interpretation of a contested cultural concept in a historical event (or series of events), an ideal manifestation of the concept’s referent, which, in turn, equips the interpretation with

normative status. Reference to an exemplar allows a group of contestants advocating a particular use of a contested concept to claim that their use does meet normative standards whereas other uses do not. Boromisza-Habashi 2010, 278

That is what seems to take place, by and large, in disagreements in which an exemplar figures prominently not only as a background requirement for contesting the views of others but as a resource that is used for justifying one's case. Anchoring an interpretation of a concept in a historical event, or series of events, is nevertheless a trickier notion; here one might want to consider Evnine's semantic externalist position as an option how to go about it (see esp. 18.4) or take a look at how W.H. Walsh (1974) understands colligatory concepts¹²⁷. In a historical anchoring, content is ordered thematically rather than hierarchically; in order to arrive at their preferred use, disputants would need to assess contiguity relations based on co-occurrence in events or scenarios rather than similarity relations based on strictly shared features. The further issue is what exactly makes the matter contestable (see esp. 18.4), and one option is to describe the actual historical process in which conflicting views concerning the valued achievement are put forward. Or as Kenneth Ehrenberg says, "to call a concept essentially contested is to characterise that historical debate (possibly from outside it)" (Ehrenberg 2011, 227).

Jeremy Waldron (1994) holds that a contested concept can be shared without a reference back to a (narrow) exemplar. There might be contexts in which "the authoritative specification of a term is what matters" and one may have no choice but to carry out one's "battles of principle" about related matters on the ground defined by the authoritative specification. Certain terms may be accompanied with a history of "disputation in which a given term has played a major role, so that continuing in that quarrelsome tradition means, again, fighting on that particular verbal ground." Quoting Ronald Dworkin [1986, 70], Waldron asserts that an exemplar (or a paradigm) may emerge in the course of discussion as "a kind of plateau on which further thought and argument are built" instead of fixing the elements under disagreement beforehand. (Waldron 1994, 533.) What makes the argument possible, and how it then proceeds, can be two distinct issues, but it seems to me that this can be accommodated by the broad interpretation of (VI). In addition, Ehrenberg characterizes a similar idea slightly differently raising the possibility that, rather than focusing on a paradigmatically 'correct' original conception, we might want to focus on understanding "the original point of the concept, the use to which it was historically put."¹²⁸ We would be free to reject (or alter) that point presently, "but only if we were prepared to substitute our own, along justifying the change in focus." (Ehrenberg 2011, 226–7.) Here the original point of the concept – perhaps together with a few specific conceptions from the past – provides one with a kind of argumentative

¹²⁷ A colligatory concept, like INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION, is "a higher order concept that brings a series of events together by describing them from an aspect that makes them intelligible or relevant in an explanation" (Halldén 1997, 204). When a colligatory concept is understood it gives an understanding of a history, i.e., of a particular trajectory of development.

¹²⁸ I will discuss the point or function of essentially contested concepts further in 18.2.

plateau but the talk of a concept's point could make it easier to connect the concept with the normative ideal that it signifies. Since the argumentative plateau in question is a wide framework for further contestation, this idea falls within the broad interpretation of (VII).

However, interpreting (VI) broadly does not offer much respite from criticism, if the link between a use of a concept and the broadly interpreted exemplar, like a tradition, is suspect in the first place. Gellner (1974) doubts the necessity of the exemplar. If the various aspirations, events, and movements are recognized as forming a unity – in the form of a tradition, for example – because there is an ideal to be followed within that tradition, “the ideal is not supplied by the exemplar, but on the contrary the traditions are endowed with such exemplars as they may possess *by* that ideal” (Gellner 1974, 97; cf. van der Burg 2017). The broad notion of the original exemplar becomes theoretically redundant as exemplars themselves are picked based on an ideal; the ideal takes the original exemplar's place as the point of reference. By contrast, Criley (2007) draws attention to the fact that one instance can serve as the exemplar for multiple concepts, and thus the notion fails to guarantee the required unity of conflicting uses of a concept. I view this criticism as highly effective, especially against Gallie's original framing of the matter, an issue which is further discussed in 14.2.

Some of Gellner's other points concerning the continuity/continued identity of a concept or institution (see *ibid.*, 97–98) point a way, I think, to salvage exemplars. Exemplars can be seen as consecutive instances that manifest in complex and variously describable configurations but that are nonetheless interpretable as “repeats” of some phenomenon of interest by someone who possesses adequate conceptual resources, the resources which themselves have their form in reference to other exemplars, for interpretation of which one needs... and so on, and so on¹²⁹. The point is that exemplars of both past and present are attributable to an ongoing phenomenon (that is subject to complex causalities) that presents us with more and possibly slightly different exemplars, also in the future. Gellner himself speaks of “roughly similar (but slowly changing) activities” in this context (*ibid.*, 97–8) and he doubts that Gallie would accept this kind of modification because of Gallie's views on practical uses of history which seem to privilege the past (see PHU 130, 132–3 cited by Gellner). When Gallie is read charitably enough, he is not actually that far off from Gellner's preferred view (see esp. 11.2; 11.3) even if Gallie's conception of the exemplar is, without a doubt, more rough-grained. In any case, the continuity

¹²⁹ The discussion in terms of exemplars or exemplary instances of a concept invites one to consider the process by which individuals acquire the concept by inferring the concept's characteristics from its specific instances. On the one hand, there is something suspicious about the notion that a concept's meaning, core or otherwise, could be *deducted* from any number of exemplars without already having a concept that informs what to look for. On the other hand, if the process of arriving at the meaning is *inductive* more should be said about how that takes place. That is a specialized discussion that goes outside my current study, especially since I think that philosophers do not have as much to contribute to it as psychologists and cognitive scientists do.

and succession of activities, practices, and institutions is one thing, and forming the concepts of those activities *et cetera* is quite another.

As we have seen, the notion of the original exemplar is problematic in many ways, and that profoundly unsettles the thesis of essential contestedness. Gallie's basic idea regarding contestability, arising from differences in how the component parts of a complex valued achievement are appraised and described, is in jeopardy if those component parts cannot be mutually accessed (for evaluation) through the mutually acknowledged exemplar.

CHAPTER 9: CONDITION VII // PROGRESSIVE COMPETITION

In the previous chapter, the achievement of the original exemplar was characterized as something that can be revived and reproduced to the utmost of one's ability and to the utmost that circumstances will allow (8.1). The addition of (VII) makes it sufficiently evident that the revival and reproduction are also to be considered in terms of *sustaining* and *developing* the valued achievement¹³⁰. By contrast, (V) describes the mode of contestation: to be an essentially contested concept a concept/term is to be used aggressively and defensively while disputing parties mutually appreciate the criteria in the light of which others employ the concept. The rivals also reciprocally recognize that their uses are contested and that their own uses need to be maintained against other uses. From this standpoint it seems clear that, with (V), (VI) and (VII), Gallie is no longer discussing semantic features of concepts. He has arguably moved on to the broader circumstances or context of contestation and concept employment. It needs to be carefully considered whether the net is already much too wide (see also ch. 10).

9.1 Gallie's Condition VII

Condition (VII) requires even more reconstruction than (VI) as it is difficult to grasp by relying only on Gallie's phraseology. According to Gallie, (VII) is, or is to be understood as,

the probability or plausibility, in appropriate senses of these terms, of the claim that the continuous competition for acknowledgement as between the contestant users of

¹³⁰ I will not vex the reader by producing the minute comparative examination of the different phrasings by Gallie regarding (VI) and (VII). Even though (VII) is perhaps the most obscure of the seven Conditions, this claim should be well supported this chapter.

the concept, enables the original exemplar's achievement to be sustained and/or developed in optimum fashion. ECC 180/PHU 168

Depending on whom one asks, Gallie's phrasing of (VII) is either quaint or infuriating. It becomes more palatable by assuming that the role of (VI) and (VII) is to characterize the *circumstances*, or the situation, in which *the continued use* of an essentially contested concept is justified. (VII) can thus be rephrased as follows:

(VII*): The continued use of an essentially contested concept is justified, in part, when it is probable or plausible that the continuous competition for acknowledgement as between the contestant users of the concept, enables the original exemplar's achievement to be sustained and/or developed in optimum fashion.

The same operation could be carried out in the case of (VI) as well. As a result, we would get

(VI*): The continued use of an essentially contested concept is justified, in part, when any such concept is derived from an original exemplar whose authority is acknowledged by all the contestant users of the concept.

(VI*) follows with what I have already stated concerning (VI) in the current study. For the ease of reference, I will continue referring to both Conditions without asterisks. These formulations are meant to illustrate that neither (VI) or (VII) has no obvious bearing on how to individuate essentially contested concepts based on their present conceptual features, although the matter is clearer in the case of (VII).

After indicating the first part of the circumstances, in which the continued use can be defended (i.e., VI), Gallie goes on to point out that given "the internally complex, and variously describable, and peculiarly "open" character of the exemplar's achievement" (ECC 178) one must admit the possibility that

this achievement could not have been revived and sustained or developed to the optimum which actual circumstances have allowed, except by the kind of continuous competition for acknowledged championship (and for acceptance of one particular criterion of "championship") which my artificial example was designed to illustrate. ECC 178/PHU 166

Gallie draws attention to a backward-looking perspective which allows disputants to see themselves as following, imitating, or adapting an exemplary achievement (8.1). This enables them to make a claim that their use of a concept accords with the "true line of descent" or "the right method of development of exemplar's [achievement]" (ECC 178/PHU 166). In addition, Gallie further asks us to consider the possibility that the optimum development of the achievement would not have been reached without continuous competition over the correct use of the concept. Here, it appears that a mere *possibility* is transformed into a *requirement* in Condition (VII): the continued use of an essentially contested concept is justified when the continuous competition enables the original exemplar's achievement to be sustained and/or developed in optimum fashion.

The reference to the possibility of the optimal development through continuous competition suggests that determining the matter requires a separate assessment. When it is probable or plausible that this is what is taking place and competing uses of a concept are derived from the original exemplar as required by (VI), the continued use of an essentially contested concept is justified. Since essentially contested concepts are characteristically used in an aggressive and defensive manner (7.1), the continued use means contesting others' uses of the concept. (VI) and (VII) are an answer to the problem of conceptual confusion by putting forward what I call *the situational justification* (see also 14.2). However, it is not perfectly clear whether the required kind of justification comes from the disputants' mutual assessment that their dispute has a point, or from some "objective" state of affairs that does not require higher recognition or awareness¹³¹.

In addition to a backward-looking perspective, the assessment of the optimum development requires a forward-looking perspective that considers both the valued achievement and the future of continuous contestation. This reading finds support in a new addition to the PHU-version:

It is in this conception of a possible optimum (never finally achieved and approachable by a variety of routes and through a variety of results as between different competing claims) that the unity of an essentially contested concept may be said to reside (or at least to be made manifest) and that, consequently, its continued use can be justified.
PHU 167

A couple of questions immediately suggests themselves: (1) through what kind of process is an achievement sustained and developed to the optimum; (2) what is the full significance of alluding to the possibility in this context instead of supposing that (VII) is *necessary* for avoiding conceptual confusions? I will go over Gallie's "answers" to these questions in turn.

Starting with (1), the basic premise of essential contestedness is that we are unable to find or fix a "general principle" (ECC 177, 189/PHU 166, 184), or a rule, by which to decide which use of an essentially contested concept is ultimately the best (see also Swanton 1985, 813–5). Each particular principle is contestable, as is each specific use of a concept. However, referencing *Artificial*, Gallie states that none of the teams could have developed their playing style "to its present excellence" had those teams not been separately aspiring to convert supporters of the other teams in a continuous competition for acknowledged championship. Gallie emphasizes that engaging in such continuous competition does not justify any single claim [once and for all], yet it "it might be said to justify, other things being equal, *the combined employment* of the essentially contested concept" (italics

¹³¹ The commentators who seriously engage with Condition (VII) appear to be somewhat divided on how to understand it. For instance, according to Simon Evnine, (VII) states that "the very contestedness of the concept *be seen by the contestants* as contributing to the sustainment or optimal development of the phenomenon in question." Evnine surmises that Gallie might have been inspired the Millian liberal idea concerning the mutual benefits of honest disagreement. (Evnine 2014, 125–6 italics added.) Further views are discussed in 9.2, and the liberalism aspect especially in 13.3.

added) by all the contesting teams. The process by which achievements are sustained and developed (to the optimum) is none other than the continuous competition over a concept's correct use, i.e., the employment of the concept that consists of its different aggressive and defensive uses. However, Gallie grants that the question whether the continuous competition between rivals leads to the optimum development will usually be a very difficult one to decide. (ECC 178–9/PHU 167.)

Furthermore, Gallie notes “an obvious affinity” to the theory of competition between rival scientific hypotheses, but the situation is very different in the case of essentially contested concepts, none of which “ever succumbs—as most scientific theories eventually do—to a definite or judicial knock-out.” (ECC 178–9; cf. PHU 188.) This negative answer is not very informative. We already know that Gallie is speaking of concepts that “relate to a number of organized or semi-organized human activities” (ECC 168/PHU 157) that are further likened to philosophical inquiries on history, aesthetics, politics, and religion. In the humanities, there is a considerable methodological variance for how the hypotheses are tested and findings confirmed, a process which is heavily theory-laden and/or dependent on one's perspective. The intricacies of academic publishing lead to the culling of *some* claims, but definite knock-outs in the form of final truth, or even a single prevailing paradigm, are indeed rare. Nevertheless, although Gallie openly invites the contrast between the natural and humanistic sciences, I think it would be a mistake to understand essential contestedness solely in institutional, intellectual terms. The primary focus is on the activities or the phenomena that are of interest in the aforementioned philosophical inquiries (see esp. 11.3).

Turning now to (2), Gallie's talk in terms of what is possible, probable, or plausible does not come across as very forceful. Overall, the specific defense of the continued use of the concept by appealing to its optimum development is termed “conditional in the extreme,” and Gallie further notes that it may be precluded at once by the facts in certain cases. It also seems that the valued achievement can be sustained and developed to the optimum only in favorable circumstances, as is shown by Gallie's observation that the continued use of rival versions of an essentially contested concept might “have the effect of utterly frustrating the kind of activity and achievement which it was the job of this concept (in and through all the rival contestant versions) to appraise—and through positive appraisal to help to sustain.” (ECC 179/PHU 167, see also ECC 180.) In addition, in some passages Gallie appears to hedge his bets by observing that the scenario he has in mind could come about or is “perfectly possible” (ART 101–2; see also ECC 189). It is likely that Gallie is aware that his appeals to different example situations could be countered with still more examples in which the characteristics he deems necessary for essentially contested concepts fail to manifest. Be that as it may, that too factors in my preferred reading: essential contestedness, as Gallie presents it, is a much more localized phenomenon than is generally thought.

Another point of interest makes itself visible in the preceding quote (i.e., ECC 179). We already know that an essentially contested concept is appraisive in that it signifies or accredits valued achievement (4.1). Now Gallie designates another function for the appraisal: the achievement/activity¹³² is not only passively appraised or valued, but it is also actively sustained by positive appraisal. The natural counterpart to this is that the disputants are motivated to carry on contesting the matter because they want to sustain and develop the achievement that they value – and this can be the case whether or not they believe that the combined and continuous aggressive and defensive employment of the concept enables its optimum development. But Gallie evades being upfront about it. However, the function of the concept in sustaining the achievement in and through all the rival contestant versions is not presented by Gallie as something that is conditional. It is rather the job of the concept (see also 18.2), while the success in doing that job is a fact that may or may not obtain. It is a matter of a possibility.

The backward- and the forward-looking perspectives take their place in a four-part process: (1) appraising the achievement of the original exemplar; sustaining and developing the valued achievement (2) through positive appraisal, in general, and (3) in terms of one's own appraisal, in particular; (4) developing the valued achievement to the optimum through the combined employment of the essentially contested concept. From this perspective, it appears that Gallie is committed to a kind of social constructionism¹³³, and certainly not to timeless essentialism (see also 12.3). The valued achievements are in the world because people make them so by virtue of their contesting, appraisive uses. This reading is supported by *ART*, in which Gallie tries to show that alternative (aesthetic) points of view, even if one-sided, have "something of essential importance to contribute to our understanding of the concept of art" (*ART* 106). If the identity of an essentially contested concept is constituted by the process in which the valued achievement it signifies is sustained and developed through contesting uses, the criterion for individuating essentially contested concepts could be found right there. Unfortunately, Gallie does not say much more about the matter; pretty much everything over and beyond this is left for the reader to fill in (see esp. 14.2).

As things stand, the idea of optimum development as a matter of the constitution of essentially contested concepts remains somewhat implausible and *ad hoc*: the contestation by disputing parties *may* contribute to the optimal development of a respective valued achievement, and *when* it does, we are, *in fact*,

¹³² This is one clear instance of Gallie fusing activities and achievements in *ECC*, although the notion of activity is given more content elsewhere, most notably in *ART* (see 11.2; 11.3; see also *ECC* 182, 192, 194).

¹³³ In this study, I adopt the following general definition of social constructionism from *Encyclopedia of Communication Theory*: "Social construction theory addresses the processes by which people jointly construct their understandings of the world. Advocates assume that meanings are developed in coordination with others rather than separately within each individual or in the world of things, making social interaction the loom upon which the social fabric is woven." (Littlejohn and Foss, 2009, 891.)

dealing with an essentially contested concept, or so the argument might go. If the threat of conceptual confusion is avoided at all, it is done by smuggling in the assumption of unity. Assuming a thing is developed through several distinct contributions, the contributions are certainly related to the same thing. Otherwise, it would be non-sensical to speak of the one thing that would be developed to the optimum. Moreover, Gallie consistently talks of a possible optimum in terms of it being attainable through the combined employment of a concept. Whatever that optimum is, there is a fair chance it is also a combination rather than a single conception that can be held by any party at any time. If that were so, would we be even dealing with a concept anymore?

To conclude, Gallie does not really offer any explicit reasons why and how continuous competition through the combined employment of a concept would enable or lead to the optimum development of an achievement. The closest he comes to doing so is in connection to the recognition of the essentially contested character of a concept¹³⁴:

Recognition of a given concept as essentially contested implies recognition of rival uses of it (such as oneself repudiates) as not only logically possible and humanly "likely", but as of permanent potential critical value to one's own use or interpretation of the concept in question; whereas to regard any rival use as anathema, perverse, bestial or lunatic means, in many cases, to submit oneself to the chronic human peril of underestimating the value of one's opponents' positions. (ECC 193)

Gallie then goes on to state that as "a very desirable consequence" of reciprocal recognition "in any proper instance of essential contestedness" one might expect "a marked raising of the level of quality of arguments in the disputes of the contestant parties." This would also mean *prima facie* a justification of the continuous competition. (ECC 193.) The idea is that the competition over the best way to sustain and develop a valued achievement leads to certain intellectual advantages¹³⁵.

In a new *PHU*-passage, Gallie expands on what he means by the improved quality of arguments. The importance of good arguments is now contrasted to the excessiveness of "more or less lunatic fringe," i.e., "fanatics of their own self-righteousness or dyed in the wool gloaters in their own exclusive orthodoxy." However, the perceptive protagonists, the moderate, and the sane "could express agreement as to where the *real* issue between them lies" while denying "the intrusions of lunatic voices, from whichever side." Exuding optimism that some

¹³⁴ This is the second part of Gallie's answer to the question "In what ways should we expect recognition of the essentially contested character of a given concept to affect its future uses by different contestant parties?" (ECC 192). The first "preliminary point" presented by Gallie, the one about the two-orders of recognition, has already been discussed in connection to Condition (V) in 7.1.

¹³⁵ This contradicts with Gallie's statement that "[i]t is not the job of the present analysis, or of political philosophy in general, to offer particular predictions or advice on [whether continuous competition leads to beneficial or detrimental results]" (ECC 186/*PHU* 179). As will become clear in the next section, many commentators do not pay much heed to these words in their assessment of Gallie's intentions, and perhaps quite rightly so.

might view out of place in analyzing intractable, typically political, disagreements, yet brimming with commonsensical realism at the same time, Gallie concludes that “Here we have the best result that, very often in this life, can reasonably be looked for: namely that a given contest can at least be identified with the best elements that take part in it.” (PHU 188.) Is Gallie optimistic with regard to the prospects of rationality or is he recommending the exclusion of unreasonable views from the best elements that make up the reasonable debate? On balance, he is more optimistic, yet especially together with certain other features of his thesis the latter option is not a complete reach (see 13.3). In any case, Gallie’s position is quite at odds with the readings that view him as advancing a form of irrationalism, radical relativism, impossibility of communication, and/or moral nihilism (see 13.5).

More pessimistic possibilities are considered as well. The cost of continuous competition might “be judged too high in the light of its more general effects,” one instance of which could be “the formation of savage political cleavages” between the disputants (ECC 179). That practical judgment is distinct from the evaluation of the valued achievement itself, and it suggests that essential contestation could perhaps be put on hold due to its adverse effects. Gallie also considers the chance of disputing parties realizing that they cannot, ultimately, “persuade and convert all their opponents by logical means.” They might thus make “a ruthless decision to cut the cackle, to damn the heretics and to exterminate the unwanted.” Gallie affirms that this could indeed happen, yet, as a possible *causal* consequence, it has no logical relevance to his analysis. (ECC 193–194.) It is a good question, though, why *only* those consequences that are detrimental appear to be logically irrelevant instead of *all* consequences including the beneficial results, like the raising of the quality of arguments? It seems as if Gallie is trying to persuade the reader to accept the thesis of essential contestability as agreeable rather than as true.

9.2 Condition VII reviewed

Objections to (VII) are not particularly hard to find; many commentators just eschew it as irrelevant for their particular purposes or explicitly view it as out of place or confused¹³⁶. Moreover, there are not many who explicitly defend Condition (VII), and given its obscurity, it may even be rather difficult to decide what exactly would count as a support¹³⁷. It is difficult to decide where to focus

¹³⁶ For brief takes on a variety of past thinkers who have thought it best to de-emphasize this and/or other Conditions, see e.g., Abbey 2005, 466–468; Ehrenberg 2011, 210–1. The authors who have explicitly left Condition (VII) from their discussion or view it as flawed or deficient some way include e.g., Gray 1978; Connolly 1993; Freedden 1996; Väyrynen 2014; van der Burg 2017.

¹³⁷ For example, Collier et al. refer to a variety of quite different, though not incompatible, takes regarding (VII), the only common thread being that (VII) is about development in conceptualizations which requires the possibility of fixing some conceptualizations even if

with the inclusion of (VII) to Conditions. For example, Collier, Hidalgo and Maciuceanu (2006) note that the possibility and valuableness of the progressive competition must be assessed in part on the basis of concrete examples (Collier et al. 2006, 221). That is quite sensible; Gallie says pretty much the same thing, and one might also add that more collaborative processes should not be overlooked completely by focusing on competitive ones as the collaboration may also lead to improvements (Ehrenberg 2011, 225). Viewing (VII) mostly in empirical terms nevertheless misses the theoretical role (VII) has in justifying the continued use of an essentially contested concept. But since it is not perfectly clear how empirical assessment figures in determining the status of being essentially contested concepts – Gallie is seemingly of two minds concerning the matter (see ECC 180; 9.1) – it is difficult to make proper sense of (VII).

As was the case with (VI), Collier et al. distinguish between a narrower and a broader understanding of Condition (VII). The narrow reading understands (VII) as intimately connected to the notion of the original exemplar in that (VII) is about achieving more complete agreement about the exemplar; that is the way its achievement is sustained and/or developed in optimal fashion. The broader reading omits reference to the original exemplar. Collier et al. find support for the latter framing in Gallie’s account of justified conversions (11.4). Their basic idea looks to be that the narrow understanding entails more complete agreement than the broader conception which seeks “agreement” solely between consecutive uses of an individual or a group. (Collier et al. 2006, 220–1, 240). The distinction may help in drawing attention to the situation in which a given individual or a group might be confused in thinking that the currently held conception is still a conception of the same concept as the formerly held conception was/is. It does not really move the needle as far as conceptual confusions between persons or groups are concerned.

Adopting the narrower perspective, Ruth Abbey (2005) observes that (VII) builds on (VI), while also harking back to (V). Contestation over a concept’s meaning “preserves and progresses the valued achievement contained in the original, uncontested version of the concept,”¹³⁸ and some of Gallie’s remarks suggest that disputants themselves decide when the debate is productive. This paves the way for identifying an agonistic element in Gallie’s presentation: competition improves the quality of the debate as a whole and everyone benefits from the battle. Abbey states that because an agonistic struggle occurs among the exponents of the concept, “they are likely to guard its meaning jealously, and not allow it to be used to refer to something that is way outside the boundaries of its defensible meanings.” In Abbey’s reading, the continuous competition has not only a predominantly intellectual character, but it also becomes etched with a definitive ethical quality. When the disputing parties are aware that the

only temporally. See and compare with each other Care 1973, 15; Swanton’s 1985, 815; Garver 1987, 220; Freedman 1996; Collier et al. 2006, 221.

¹³⁸ I am not convinced that holding something as exemplary requires there to also be an uncontested *version* of a *concept*. In addition, the assumption of an uncontested version of a concept chimes too closely for comfort with perennial Platonic concepts (see also 12.3).

competition leads to everyone's (intellectual) benefit, "the competitive stance comes to be infused with an attitude of mutual respect rather than a drive for mutual annihilation." (Abbey 2005, 466, 480.) The agonistic element of the thesis "lends it a distinctive normative spin" (ibid., n22). A connection between essential contestedness and agonism is somewhat rarely noticed in the secondary literature (yet see e.g., Connolly 1993; Maxwell 2014; Viola 2019), even if Gallie does so himself (PHU 9, 156, see also 151–3; cf. 7.1). It is a valid question whether the disputants are required to adopt a markedly ethical or moral stance for essential contestedness to make sense, or whether it is merely a contingent result of engaging with others (see 13.3).

Continuous competition supposedly leads to various beneficial results, like a raised level of arguments and an increased mutual respect. One might simply get a better sense of what is truly important with respect to an achievement when the wheat is separated from the chaff. "The chaff" could be a lot of things; for instance, views that are outdated in the light of present knowledge. After all, Gallie's "conceptual competitors must consider altered circumstances when defending their own version" (Collier et al. 2006, 218). Wibren van der Burg (2017) views the claim of (VII) as a version of the notion of the marketplace of ideas, i.e., in discussing what a concept means we may sift out less defensible conceptions. This is not merely an intellectual exercise that has no practical consequences. The contestation may lead to a higher awareness of the values inherent in the concept, yet contestation may also lead to a stronger internalization and/or fuller realization of those values. This is an empirical possibility, a *potential*, not a conceptual necessity.¹³⁹ (van der Burg 2017, 241; see also Evnine 2014, 125–6.) Nevertheless, the orthodox interpretation of Gallie is that the mutual awareness of essential contestedness contributes to the intellectual enrichment of all disputing parties promoting tolerance within the intellectual life thus enriched

¹³⁹ The notion of the marketplace of ideas is often attributed to J. S. Mill and to his "spirited defence of freedom of thought and discussion" (Collini 1989, xii) in the second chapter of *On Liberty* (Mill 1989). As Stefan Collini observes, Mill argued for the view that free discussion is the best route to the discovery of new truths but also that "it is desirable for even our most secure beliefs to be 'vigorously and earnestly contested' so that, by being forced to articulate and defend them, we come to hold them more actively, as 'vivid' conceptions and 'living' beliefs. The meaning of even well-established doctrines will otherwise become, in a revealing term, 'enfeebled'" (Collini 1989, xii; quotes from Mill 1989, 41–4). Even after dropping the reachability of a singular truth from the picture, this is very close in spirit to Gallie and especially Condition (VII) (ch. 9). However, it is possible, even likely, that the notion comes to Gallie through Hegel who, almost by the sheer quality of being Hegel, can be connected to a wide variety of thinkers and ideas. Yet consider the following notion from *Philosophy of Right*: "In furthering my end I further the universal, and this in turn furthers my end" (§184Z). According to Frederick Neuhouser, "Hegel was impressed by the kind of relation between individual and collective interests that underlies Smith's account of the market. Such an arrangement (one in which there is a unity of particular and universal wills) makes it possible for the collective good of a social whole to be achieved through the free (uncoerced) activity of its individual members" (Neuhouser 2000, 88). In *PHU*, Gallie gives Hegel partial credit for the view that "the word 'art' is most usefully employed (...) as an appraisive term accrediting a certain kind of achievement" (PHU 174), and achievements that are signified by concepts and sustained and developed perhaps to the optimum (9.1) are of course the closest thing there is to the universal in Gallie's framework.

(see Connolly 1993, 11; Gray 1978, 389). The latter potential result of continuous competition is then somewhat indistinguishable from the consequences that follow from perceiving the nature of the contestation in its true light. If this were the full import of (VII), it would increase the pressure to resolve the awareness related problems in order for Gallie's thesis to have a fighting chance in its original form.

William Connolly (1993) maintains that the absence of knockdown solutions means that one must come to terms with the political dimension of concepts. If the contestants realize that there is no single use that all reasonable persons must accept, "the politics of these contests would become more enlightened." The cognizance that others are not solely self-serving in propagating their views could introduce "a measure of tolerance and a receptivity to reconsideration of received views." Nonetheless, the current stance flows from the assumption that "rationality, fragile as it is, is helped, not hindered, by heightened awareness of the nature and import of our differences." (Connolly 1993, 40-1.) Samantha Besson (2005) affirms that the quality of debates is improved, and the understanding of the values encompassed by the concepts is increased, with the introduction of essentially contestable concepts. Yet the debate does not guarantee the emergence of the best conception of a concept; deliberation offers more opportunities for obtaining a good decision, yet it does not ensure that the decision has been perfected. (Besson 2005, 74.) Eugene Garver finds similar beneficial results as Connolly and Besson but understands them as resulting from engaging one's opponent in the first place rather – even then the benefits are not necessary but rather tied to the goal of a discourse (Garver 1990, 259, 263). By contrast, Gerald Gaus (2000) notices the tolerance aspect of Gallie's views, but he interjects that the spirit of the debate is not furthered by skepticism about the right answer – that only serves to undermine it – but by recognition of our own fallibility. (Gaus 2000, 42.) Gallie's talk of the chronic peril of underestimating the contributions of our opponents (9.1) may indicate that he saw the one as following from the other. Still, it is hard to say this way or that whether reasonable debate is helped or hindered.

Jeremy Waldron (1994; 2002) claims that it is often the case that "the definitional dispute enriches the wider debate in which the disputed concept is deployed," and in some instances there is no doubt whatsoever. As an example, Waldron mentions the on-going debate among artists, aesthetes *et cetera* about what art "really" is. No one has the last authoritative word, yet any suggestion that the disputing parties are just wasting their time and that they should stop by abandoning the contested term is likely to be met with derision. Similarly, in debating democracy, few parties would be content with the resolution that would determine that they were talking past each other. Instead, the debate is real, it concerns democracy, and understandings on all sides "are enriched rather than confused by the persistent disagreement." Waldron also thinks the enrichment can take place even without the disputants' awareness, and thus he is able to say that "the fact that contestation between rival conceptions deepens and enriches our sense of what is at stake in a given area of value" is one of the

things that distinguishes an essentially contested concept from a radically confused concept (Waldron 1994, 531–2; 2002, 162.) From an inverted standpoint, prolonging conceptual confusions hardly contributes to the shared sense of what is truly at stake, and if they do, that result is certainly accidental.

It is not clear why exactly Waldron thinks that a persistent disagreement leads to such happy results. His reference to differences in artistic views suggests, very much in line with what Gallie says in *ART* (11.2), that in some spheres of human activity one-sidedness of expressed valuations could be considered unwanted torpidity. How exactly this translates to the level of concepts is left mostly unexplored.

Ruth Abbey (2005) and Mark Criley (2007) read Conditions (I) and (VII) together, and both question Gallie's insistence that all relevant appraisals should be positive¹⁴⁰. For Abbey, (VII) descends directly from Condition (I), "for it would not be possible for anyone to see the debate as preserving and progressing the original phenomenon without deeming this as a valued achievement" (Abbey 2005, 466). Criley interprets Gallie similarly (see 4.2), but he adds that essentially contested concepts have special social significance for Gallie because "the competition over them provides community members additional incentive to strive for achievement, above and beyond the value found in the praiseworthy achievement itself." (Criley 2007, 33.) I guess "the thrill of competition" over the concept can provide "further incentive to excel" (*ibid.*), which could further contribute to the overall achievement. But that is again secondary to the primary theoretical concern of how essentially contested concepts are distinguished. A social dimension of essential contestability could and should be developed further, and later I will strive to present how it assists in avoiding conceptual confusions.

The continuous competition itself has been characterized in different ways. Michael Stokes (2007) places Gallie in the company of Ronald Dworkin by asserting that both view competing conceptions as the competing visions of the exemplar – or of the great traditions of our society that provide substance to the conceptions – and its/their future development. The conceptions are used competitively to criticize the visions of others and to answer to the criticism raised by others. (Stokes 2007, 695.) A terminological pair 'vision/tradition' nicely captures the dynamic between the backward- and forward-looking perspectives that I personally attribute to (VI) and (VII) (8.1; 9.1). I will get back to how traditions appear to figure in Gallie's scheme a bit later (see *LOVERS* in 11.2).

Abbey observes that Gallie seems to hold, at certain points, that the disputing parties "must value the contributions rival users of the concept make to enhancing one another's understanding of the phenomenon in question"

¹⁴⁰ Criley also remarks that, since Gallie seems to think that Condition (I) is potentially superfluous if there would be "a purely non-naturalistic" concept that satisfies (II)–(IV) [ECC 174n2], he is "likewise prepared to hedge on the necessity of condition (7), since it could only be necessary if (1) were" (Criley 2007, 35, n5). This is correct given Criley's premise, yet Gallie is not putting (VII) forward as a necessary condition *for a concept*, as I and some others understand the matter (see ch. 10).

(Abbey 2005, 466; ECC 193). This may lead one to further argue that Gallie is offering an intellectualist thesis according to which our improved conceptual handle is what is meant by the progressive development of the valued achievements. That is a matter of interpretation. Gallie's careful choice of the word 'enable' in the formulation of (VII) can be taken to suggest that his focus is on intellectual prerequisites of a development that can take also other, more concrete forms. The further possibility that an achievement *is or has been* sustained and developed to the optimum by virtue of continuous competition goes beyond those requirements, and Gallie did not assume that the optimum development of the achievement is actually achievable (PHU 167).

The practical consequences of continuous competition do not stop to beneficial results already mentioned. Gallie is not shy of using colorful language when he turns to discuss some of the possible negative consequences of contestation: it is conceivable that some frustrated party, now aware of the true nature of the dispute as endless and irresolvable, may well make "a ruthless decision to cut the cackle, to damn the heretics and to exterminate the unwanted" (ECC 194). Wayne Booth relatedly observes that a test of a concept's continued justification as 'essentially contested' can, "with a slight shift, become a test of a participant": the question becomes "whether the contestants are serving the continued vitality or viability of the human achievements that originated the contest" (Booth 1977, 411). Booth's reading emphasizes the pragmatic nature of both (VII) and (VI), to which his description harks back, and it also hints at how questions of membership in a tradition or community can become intertwined with more intellectual concerns while possibly leading to, at one extreme end, to other's ostracism or annihilation.

Continuing with adverse effects, Michael Freeden asserts that a concept may be "impoverished" in the course of the competition over its interpretation or that "the level of the debate may be of low quality" (Freeden 1996, 60), although he leaves it open according to which standard such impoverishment is determined¹⁴¹. A well enough example is when a concept undergoes a process of *semantic bleaching* i.e., the criteria of a term's or concept's application are stretched because of the indiscriminate or metaphorical employment of the respective word or expression. This obscures the concept's original point making it possible to apply it to new situations that may have little in common with the earlier applications¹⁴². Eugene Garver makes a related autobiographical observation:

¹⁴¹ The distinction between the "optimal usage" of an essentially contested concept or the like (e.g., see Viola 2019, 247) and the optimum development of the valued achievement is not always clear, or it is made differently by various authors, as Freeden's remark also illustrates.

¹⁴² For example, in the Finnish context the term 'rasismi' (in English; 'racism') has partially lost its original mooring to 'discrimination against people on the basis of their race or ethnicity' with the advent of new ways to use the expression, such as 'ikärasismi' (literally, 'age racism') which roughly appears to mean 'to discriminate on the basis of someone's advanced years.' The meaning dimension that relates to race or ethnicity is lost while the negative valuation and the connotation of discrimination is retained.

I do not treat creationism as science. My reason is not just that so dignifying it would undeservedly increase public respect and attention for creationism and decrease my chances of winning an argument. The concepts of science and reasoning would be weakened by becoming instances of an essentially contested concept along with creationism, and for that reason it would be a mistake to treat that debate as one involving essentially contested concepts. Garver 1990, 264

Gallie does allude to some other practical considerations as well: for instance, in stating that the suspension of judgment is not typically possible in these disagreements because of the exigencies of living or other partisan considerations (ECC 190–1; see also 4-3-2). More generally, it appears that the disputants need to take into account *some* practical factors if they are to assess, with any accuracy, the possibility that the continuous competition enables sustaining and developing the achievement in the optimum fashion *in their current circumstances*—Gallie also expresses an interest in how disputants' adherences to their interpretation of an essentially contested concept generate normative commitments (PHU 191). Oriented towards an ideal as the rivals might be, they cannot really do so in a detached or purely theoretical manner.

By contrast, although essential contestability is sometimes presented as a struggle, some appear to view the actual struggling as taking place only at the cognitive level—and more or less exclusively between political philosophers, theorists, and thinkers (e.g., Abbey 2005, esp. 469ff). For instance, Abbey's counter-example against Gallie's requirement that all appraisals of a valued achievement need to be positive is that the critics of fascism could understand fascism as essentially contested while thinking that the debate about its meaning retains and develops an understanding of its horrors (ibid., 466). If the relevant character of achievement is purely cognitive or, say, intellectual, the case presented by Abbey should perhaps be admitted to the fold. One does not hold an achievement in high regard because of its negative consequences, and thus the only identifiable achievement (for the critics of fascism) seems intellectual.

As I see the matter, Gallie has in sights those, and only those, achievements that (a) people value positively, that (b) people want to sustain and develop in the world (even if the disputes Gallie has in mind could be exceedingly intellectual); and (c) the content of the improved understanding and the achievement that is furthered are linked. When one wants to understand fascism without wanting to further the cause of fascism, that link—however we may describe it—is missing. From this standpoint, the evaluative perspective, or a concept's animating point as I will later propose (18.2), that is shared by the disputants and according to which the normative valence is attributed to the concept determines the matter, not some alleged moral fact about what the concept stands for. There can be *other kind of* achievements, yes, but not all of those achievements are *the kind of* achievements that Gallie talks about. In Waldron's terms, that which is at stake in a given area of value that accompanies an essentially contested concept goes beyond merely being able to propose a

reasonable definition that others might cognitively accept or reject¹⁴³. Essentially contested concepts are not only world-guided but also action-guiding, and quite possibly in a much more limited fashion than is usually thought. In general, concepts can be put to different uses. If some limitations are placed on how the concept is used, it might be more plausible to refer, though, to a certain kind of *function* rather than to a certain kind of a *concept*.

We have slowly but surely moved toward considerations of how disputants themselves relate to a valued achievement that is at the center of their dispute. When all is said and done, Gallie is primarily interested in what can be approximated as the abstract sense of a valued achievement, a sense which is extracted from particular historical events, beliefs, and actions in which it is embodied. This type of “elementary use” of a concept, which references a normative ideal rather than anything else that is evaluated in relation to an actual practice, is discussed later (11.3; or see ECC 183–5 also n3). Leslie Green (1987) holds that different aspects of an essentially contested concept (as an evaluative cluster concept; see 17.5) are promoted by different conceptions of the concept. That way the totality that is the valued achievement is promoted and sustained by contestation and debate over the concept. Green presents an example of Lockean and Rousseauian democrats who are viewed as preserving “one element of the cluster of democratic values, non-tyranny and self-rule respectively.” These elements are now conceived as assets, not as obstacles to be overcome, and for Gallie “they are assets precisely because there is a kind of conceptual division of labour in which partisans of each conception contribute to the value of the complex whole.” (Green 1987, 18.) The division of labor manifests in the continuous competition between different conceptions, and thus debate over a concept becomes almost like a co-operative enterprise in the right circumstances. This is the dimension that John Kekes emphasizes: not only should the contest involved “be in the interest of the participants, for it concerns the best way of satisfying their needs and achieving their goals,” but essentially contested concepts themselves “signify a type of voluntary and goal-directed activity” (Kekes 1977, 74, 77; see also esp. 11.3). In other words, the debate over the concept is such a close part of the conceptual practice associated with the concept that the concept comes to signify also the practice of using it.

¹⁴³ It is possible to read too much into Gallie’s thesis concerning its non-cognitive elements. Leslie Green observes that many writers now employ ‘essentially contested concept’ to refer to no more than the interest-dependence of conceptual disputes while affirming either pluralism about interests or, more often, non-cognitivism or skepticism about disputes regarding interests. As Green himself notes, Gallie’s original thesis “was more subtle, and more striking” (Green 1987, 17.) In addition, John Gray notes that “the thesis of essential contestability of social concepts may be impoverished” by the attribution of an ineradicable political dimension to social theory. Gray considers it best to deny the practical character of social thought and to sever its direct links with moral and political life. He concludes: “We need to be able once again to assert with confidence that, however meagre its result in increased insight, social theory has no warrant for existence save in the pursuit of understanding” (Gray 1983, 101). Then again, it is not necessary to subject a thesis of essential contestability to the needs of the social theory.

Peter Ingram doubts, however, that everyone is as historically minded as (VII) would seem to require: “an original exemplar may be held up as a kind of shibboleth, but that does not mean that those who do so are genuinely seeking to realize its essence” (Ingram 1985, 41–2). Some potential disputants might have no real intention to advance the same achievement with others, and it may be almost impossible to ascertain, reliably, how things stand with any given individual (see also Kekes 1977, 75). The basic idea of a goal-directed conceptual practice is nevertheless far from doomed as some localized conceptual practices to which community-members take part are perfectly conceivable. For instance, members of the Christian Church probably have a vested interest in sustaining and developing the normative ideal they connect with Christianity. Another more controversial option would be to argue that certain very broad human activities like rationality, morality *et cetera*, and how judgments are made in connection to them, evidence similar character (see Kekes 1977). Leaving that aside for now, I should further point out that Gallie appears to endow an active role to rival parties as they are expected to shape the contours of the dispute by excluding unreasonable or extreme elements from the sphere of contestation (9.1; 11.4; 13.3).

The points raised before highlight the need to explicate what kind of awareness is now required of disputing parties (cf. esp. 7.2; 8.2). Gellner (1974) briefly considers the possibility that Gallie could mean instead that the valued achievement is sustained and/or developed in optimum fashion by virtue of contesting the matter, i.e., without participants conceding that it is, probably or plausibly, what is indeed occurring. This alternative is implausible. If there is some objective independent sense in which the claim in (VII) is valid, one can ask “What superhuman mind, what superhuman cognitive penetration, is to discern this norm, so as to be able to say that the 'essentially contested' use of this or that concept does indeed serve the end of approximating it?” (Gellner 1974, 98–9). By looking into the matter superficially, this is also what Waldron seems to argue for, namely “that disputation *can* make things better *whether or not the participants are in position to associate that process with anything like the idea of essential contestability*”¹⁴⁴ (Waldron 2002, 162). However, one needs to note that Waldron stops short of claiming that the concept he is focused on, THE RULE OF LAW, is constituted by its progressive development through contestation. Rather, constant debate about what THE RULE OF LAW means is brought about not only

because the Rule of Law is an essentially contested concept, but also because law and legalism are inherently garrulous and self-reflective practices. It is part of law and the practice of law to reflect and wonder what law is, and for this reason it is part of any evaluative ideal involving law – such as the Rule of Law – that it will have this self-referential argumentative presence in society. Waldron 2002, 164; cf. Ehrenberg 2011, 225–31

¹⁴⁴ Waldron asserts that this goes against Gallie’s “suggestion,” which means that he understands Gallie to say that the disputants themselves need to think that the optimal development of a concept is possible (only) through its contestation.

The passage may be taken to imply that Waldron considers law's nature as a self-reflective practice as a distinct matter from its status as essentially contested concept. Nevertheless, it is also clear that contestation over what constitutes law is part of the ideal expressed, or a valued achievement signified by, *THE RULE OF LAW*. Yet the "self-referential argumentative presence" to which Waldron refers does not *have to* lead to progressive outcome even if it *could*. In this line of thinking concept-users would no longer need be particularly historically minded; the realization of the "garrulous" nature of the conceptual practice suffices. For an attentive reader this is nothing new: indeed, it is what Gallie calls the higher order recognition, which can now be rephrased as recognizing that continuous competition is an essential feature of the activity one is pursuing (ECC 192/PHU 187; cf. 7.1). We are dealing with the awareness of the true nature of the dispute yet again, and were it to be dropped, not much would be salvageable from Condition (VII).

Gellner's objection about the sheer impossibility of discerning how a concept-use serves the end of approximating the optimum development still has legs to it, though. The specific formulation of (VII) can be objected on the grounds that 'in optimum fashion' is not definable (Chilton 2008, 228). In more concrete terms, Kekes observes that it is impossible to determine whether the change from the original exemplar represents a deviation or development, because that must be decided on other grounds than those provided by the original exemplar. And Gallie does not provide us with other [meaningful] ways of assessing the matter. (Kekes 1977, 83; cf. ECC 179–180; *contra* Garver 1978, esp. 166.) In fact, Gallie cannot do so because that is where the source of essential contestedness lies. When contestedness is traced to our differences concerning how the valued achievement of the original exemplar should be sustained and developed, it is the optimum developmental trajectory that is in dispute to begin with. If a disputant cannot fix an uncontestable principle for deciding which particular use best sustains and develops an achievement right here and right now, on what grounds can the disputant become convinced that the combined usage either directly leads, or could now possibly lead, to sustaining and developing the valued achievement as best as the circumstances allow? In both instances one is dogged by the same sort of contestability, the one that is about evaluating the merit of any use of a concept in comparison to the original exemplar—if the original exemplar would provide the disputants with a standard to evaluate the matter, the same standard would plausibly resolve their overall disagreement. The continuous competition *might* have a vital role in the optimum development of the concept but establishing that requires therefore a separate argument. Otherwise, Condition (VII), and how it contributes to distinguishing essentially contested concepts, threatens to become acceptable on the basis of faith rather than rational conviction.

When Gallie is read literally, the problems concerning how to assess the optimum development of the valued achievement risk the viability of his overall thesis. The individuation of a concept as essentially contested is predicated on assessing the justifiability of the continued use of the concept, which in turn

requires the assessment of progressive development in comparison to the original exemplar. But as exactly that is contested, a genuine dispute involving one and the same concept could not get off the ground (see also Kekes 1977, 83–4). Gallie’s formulation of (VII) is problematic in much the same way as (VI) appears to be: while (VI) seems to make concepts hostage of the past, (VII) renders their individuation hostage of the future. Identifying a concept as essentially contested presently starts to look like a highly speculative task. As it arguably is a problem for Gallie, it suggests an inconsistency at the heart of his thesis.

How sensible it is for rival parties to hold the following beliefs at the same time: (a) one’s preferred use of a concept is the best way to sustain and develop the valued achievement that is signified by the concept; and (b) only the combined employment of the different uses enables the valued achievement to be sustained and developed in optimum fashion? Not very. Still, the same issue crops up with each essential contestability thesis that shares its DNA with Gallie’s essential contestedness: it could be argued that one can either be aware of the contestability of the issue at hand *or* one can claim that one’s usage of a concept should be adopted by others, but not both. The matter further divides into two distinct, though often related, objections: (i) one cannot argue for one’s own use of a concept, or conception, while acknowledging that there is no superior use/conception (13.1); (ii) one cannot argue for one’s use of a concept against other uses while maintaining that other people are similarly justified in doing the same thing (15.3). This would effectively preclude one from being able to gain “enlightenment of a much needed kind” (ECC 168), or impede the awareness of “an important truth” (ECC 192) *while* engaging in contesting the matter just as everyone else does.

All in all, one could easily get the impression that Gallie is speaking of the justification for the continued use of a concept in two very different senses: justifying the continued use of an essentially contested concept by individuating its distinctness in comparison to a radically confused concept; and justifying the continued use of an essentially contested concept, i.e., its on-going contestation, by appealing to epistemic and ethical benefits that follow from continuous competition in which the concept is involved. The arguments to the latter effect might induce positive reaction in readers with liberal sensibilities – and if the benefits listed indeed follow, they are certainly nothing to sneer at – but they have no purchase on resolving the crucial theoretical issue which (VI) and (VII) are supposedly set to resolve. Furthermore, apart from Gallie’s assurances, what reason do we have that the improved level of the quality of arguments does not amount to the mitigation of differences in a process in which initially conflicting positions are slowly converging on the one true view? With (VII) Gallie himself offers a conditional or situational argument that relies not on what is necessarily the case but on what is plausible or probable in a given case (9.1). But why draw the line in assuming that the optimum development is enabled and the quality of arguments is improving over time, and not just go on inferring that as *prima facie* evidence that there is also a correct answer to be had? Gallie’s thesis that the

disputes are endless and not resolvable by argument of any kind is comparable to the treasure at the end of the rainbow—there is no end to following the rainbow and the treasure is only a figment of imagination. However, if by following the rainbow, one constantly comes across gold coins, why not assume that there is also a chest lying around somewhere?

CHAPTER 10: THE STATUS OF CONDITIONS

As was briefly mentioned before (3.2), Gallie considers the first four Conditions as “the four most important necessary conditions to which any essentially contested concept must comply.” With the addition of (V), the first five Conditions are understood as “the formally defining conditions of essential contestedness.” (ECC 171–2, 180.) At one point, the seven Conditions are characterized as “semi-formal” (ECC 170), which, however, is not repeated in the revised *PHU*-version. There, Gallie also more confidently asserts that all of the five Conditions are necessary, not just the first four (*PHU* 161; but cf. ECC 182). Given that (V) describes a concept’s aggressive and defensive usage (7.1), it indeed makes sense to consider it necessary in the case of an essentially *contested* concept (but cf. 12.2). This is also supported by Gallie’s talk of Conditions (I) to (IV) as “necessary preconditions of a concept’s being of essentially contested character” (ECC 174–5; see also 7.2). Gallie’s utilization of the logical jargon of necessary conditions is nevertheless somewhat shaky (Ricciardi 2000, 45), which makes grasping the exact relation that holds between Conditions more complicated. More generally, Gallie’s theory is difficult to pinpoint because of certain confusions and imprecisions in how he presents and elaborates the notion of essential contestedness (Evnine 2014, 121; van der Burg 2017, 231n4, 232).

The way Gallie talks about his Conditions may be taken to suggest that Conditions (VI) and (VII) especially are not strictly speaking necessary, or that they are necessary only in some qualified sense (cf. esp. ECC 181). The explicit purpose of (VI) and (VII) is to distinguish essentially contested concepts from concepts that are radically confused, and Gallie understands that as a matter of justifying the continued use of an essentially contested concept. That way (VI) and (VII) are put forward as an attempt to guarantee the genuineness of the disputes; in Gallie, conceptual unity and the genuineness of disagreement go hand in hand, as will be later shown (ch. 14). It can be wondered, though, how (I)–(V) could be sufficient for defining an essentially contested/contestable concept if the function of (VI) and (VII) is to distinguish it from the one that is radically confused (Ricciardi 2000, 45; see also Evnine 2014, 121–2). That looks to

be why many authors presuppose that Gallie considers all his Conditions as necessary and jointly sufficient (e.g., Ricciardi 2000, 45; Criley 2007, 22).

The status and applicability of Conditions has also been understood as more flexible. Some commentators have suggested that not all Conditions need to be present for a concept to be 'essentially contested' (e.g., Collier et al. 2006, 219, 239; see also Ehrenberg 2011, 210). That reading is supported to some extent by how Gallie discusses the live examples, "none of [which] conforms with perfect precision to the seven conditions" (ECC 180). According to Wibren van der Burg, presupposing that Gallie considers the seven Conditions as necessary and sufficient conditions has resulted in many of the critiques simply missing the mark. Gallie does not present a formal definition for essentially contested concepts at all; he rather implies that his sketch is ideal-typical. (van der Burg 2017, 232, 240n49.) Collier, Hidalgo and Maciuceanu (2006) view Gallie as offering "seven criteria for identifying, understanding, and reasoning" about essentially contested concepts. They nonetheless find it more productive to think that the criteria/conditions do not stand "in a well-established definitional relationship to one another, but rather in a relationship that varies somewhat with the distinct constellations of features that characterize each concept." (Collier et al. 2006, 212, 215.) Yet some find the status of Conditions simply unclear. John Gray has even remarked that the introduction of (VI) and (VII) "discloses an area of systematic ambiguity in [Gallie's] account," or "an uncertainty about *what it is* that is said by Gallie to be essentially contested" (Gray 1978, 391). At least some interpretation is required as there is "no consistent position explicitly articulated over exactly what an essentially contested concept is." (Evnine 2014, 122.) All in all, (VI) and (VII) are by a wide margin the most controversial of the seven, which is why they are often eschewed as being simply out of place or practically not mentioned at all (van der Burg 2017, 233, 240; but see Evnine 2014, 122, 140).

Gallie's specific formulations of (VI) and (VII) are problematic, but there may also be other, more general reasons for leaving them out of the account. One set of such reasons relates to the relative salience of other Conditions. Pekka Väyrynen (2014, 474) maintains that Gallie takes (II)-(IV) to secure (I). That is suggested in a footnote in which Gallie mentions the possibility that the addition of (IV) renders (I) superfluous, and that he suspects that no *purely* non-appraisive or naturalistic concept conforming to (II), (III), and (IV) will be found (ECC 174n2). Some others have also noted that (II)-(IV) seem to form a distinct set. According to Mark Criley they are "centered on the ways in which the "internal complexity" of a concept is involved in its contestedness" (Criley 2007, 23). Gallie himself has stated that the concepts that he talks about are "*essentially complex*, and, chiefly for this reason, *essentially contested*" (ART 107). From this perspective, it is sensible to focus on the first four Conditions—or even leave (I) out—as that which brings about essential contestedness, the contestedness that is, in turn, affirmed by (V). This position is well illustrated in Ricciardi (2000): "the first group of five conditions is sufficient to define an essentially contested concept

and to explain the nature of the disagreement” (Ricciardi 2000, 45; see also Kekes 1977, 172).

Another worry is that (VI) and (VII) do not seem to describe features that belong to a concept intrinsically, even if by naming them ‘conditions’ Gallie suggests that they have the same standing as the rest. (VI) and (VII) are specifically put forward to answer the objection that (I) to (V) fail to distinguish an essentially contested concept from a radically confused concept. Curiously, Gallie frames the objection as a request “for an indication of the conditions in which the continued use of any such concept (...) can be defended” (ECC 176). (VI) and (VII) quite simply describe those conditions—and ‘conditions’ is to be understood here as ‘circumstances.’ The choice of words appears deliberate; the reference to the conditions *of a concept* would imply modifications to the formal definition instead¹⁴⁵. In fact, we can add (V) to the mix and observe that the last three Conditions do not describe inherent characteristics of concepts at all. Instead (V), (VI) and (VII) point towards the overall context of concept employment. They describe the mode of contestation, the circumstances in which essentially contested concepts are used, and how the concept-users relate to the valued achievement (and perhaps also to each other). That is why it is difficult to perceive them as *conditions of a concept*, or as something that are capable of defining or individuating essentially contested concepts.

I find it actually quite unmistakable that (VI) and (VII)—which Gallie perceives as embodying an historical approach to the special character of essentially contested concepts (see chs. 8, 9)—are not put forward on the same level as the first five. Although (I) to (V) arguably fail to distinguish an essentially contested concept from a radically confused concept (ECC 180/cf. PHU 164, 168), Gallie suggests that the definition given in the form of (I) to (V) needs no further refinement (ECC 176/PHU 164), which supports not including (VI) and (VII) in the *definition of a concept*. The proper placing of Condition (V) is trickier as Gallie *does* include it in the definition. However, I think one could say that (I) to (IV) make up the conceptual elements that come to be contested according to the mode of contestation that (V) yields. It is now the job of (VI) and (VII) to describe the circumstances in which such contestation could go on indefinitely. That way we get a good approximation of how the seven Conditions should be understood in relation to each other: a certain kind of concept (I-IV) is employed in a certain way (V) in certain circumstances (VI-VII). Or, by paraphrasing Gallie: if we want to see *just what* we are doing when we apply a certain kind of concept that is

¹⁴⁵ One might perceive here a weak reference to a verificationist theory of meaning and to its search for verification conditions. From that perspective, Gallie can be viewed to argue for an extension to suitable (empirical) conditions of verification as far as identifying an essentially contested concept in a second-order sense is concerned while denying the existence of a general principle for deciding between contested cases of a first-order concept (e.g., ART). William Lycan asserts that “To a verificationist, a sentence’s meaning is its epistemology, a matter of what its proper evidence base would be” (Lycan 2019, 104), and Gallie’s way of dealing with the possibility of justified conversions from one view to another (11.4) is similarly epistemological. Ultimately, however, Gallie’s thesis is skeptical concerning our ability to get to the truth of the matter (Swanton 1985).

subject to irresolvable and endless dispute, then one way of learning this is by considering how it has come to be and how we sustain and develop the valued achievement signified by the concept (cf. ECC 198).

Van der Burg (2017) suggests that the last three Conditions form a cluster that is “of pragmatics, the use of essential contested concepts in actual debates,” while the first four Conditions are of semantics. I think that is right. However, he also maintains that (V) simply “refers to the pragmatic requirement that there actually is a contest,” and that the last two Conditions should be disregarded as defining criteria for the most part. (van der Burg 2017, 232–3, 240, 255; cf. Ehrenberg 2011, 227.) It is there that I disagree, but only to a degree¹⁴⁶. A somewhat similar, albeit importantly different, explanation is given by Eugene Garver (1978): Gallie’s insistence that the idea of essentially contested concepts needs no further refinement apart from a justification of their continued use “amounts to saying that essentially contested concepts cannot be found or identified outside a rhetorical situation.” A concept’s status as essentially contested does not depend on some intrinsic attribute of the concept but on the character of an argument in which it appears. (Garver 1978, 159, 163.) In Garver’s view, essentially contested concepts require a very specific pragmatic context that is indispensable (see also 13.4).

Pritam Baruah (2014) takes a bit different perspective to the status of Conditions. He observes that the first four Conditions describe the nature of essentially contested concepts while the last three are “conditions generating agreement in the form of life.” (Baruah 2014, 348–9.) This is well in line with the above, especially when the agreement that is generated by Conditions (V), (VI), and (VII) is correctly understood as the precondition for having a disagreement (about one and the same thing). The function of these Conditions is to explain when a disagreement is genuine. But what provides us with that which *generates* the disagreement in the first place? Baruah points out that “the first four criteria for [essentially contested concepts] are factual reports about concepts over which disagreement already exists.” For instance, the existence of different interpretations of art is “evidence of the fact that the concept of art *is* open,” but it “does not amount to explaining why subscribers to certain interpretations disagree with each other.” Or a concept could very well be appraisive, but we might still appraise the concept similarly and no disagreement might ensue. Instead, one would need to explain the reasons for why persons hold differing interpretations or conflicting appraisals. Unfortunately, the last three Conditions

¹⁴⁶ Van der Burg states that the last two Conditions that are introduced as a possibility, or “conditional in extreme” as he observes Gallie as saying (cf. ECC 179). It is not perfectly clear whether the alleged conditionality is meant to cover both (VI) and (VII). Van der Burg thinks so, but I am more inclined to think that the phrase “conditional in extreme,” especially, refers only to the possibility of the optimum development of the achievement. The development requires the notion of the original exemplar, yet Gallie’s qualification is still reasonably about (VII). In addition, I am emphasizing the role of (V) in Gallie’s thesis in various ways (see e.g., 14.2), and I also think that understanding Gallie’s intentions is perfectly possible without discarding any of the Conditions. As far as my own account of essential contestability is concerned, I end up reinterpreting them (18.5).

do not fare any better in explaining why there is a disagreement. In Baruah's interpretation, they describe attitudes [like mutual appreciation; see 7.1] or beliefs [parties must recognize a common exemplar or they believe that contestation leads to an optimum development; see 8.1; 8.2] that concept-users hold *while* disagreeing. Attitudes towards other disputants, beliefs about the attitudes of other parties, or beliefs about the property represented by the concept "do not contribute towards the claim that reasons for essential contestability lie in the nature of the concepts themselves." (ibid., 353-4.)

The fact that Gallie spends so much time in describing the context in which essentially contested concepts are characteristically used, i.e., a certain kind of dispute, appears to support Garver's view that a concept's status as essentially contested depends on the character of an argument in which it appears. However, Baruah's main point is that the seven Conditions only amount to an external and descriptive explanation of what conditions exist when disagreement occurs. The Conditions seem to "instruct us on how to spot cases of disagreement where [essentially contested concepts] are in operation, rather than explain why disagreement ensues." This is a major failing with respect to what is typically understood as Gallie's main argument, namely that essentially contested concepts bring about endless and irresolvable disputes. Baruah surmises that perhaps Gallie merely seeks answer the question "how is it possible that people who disagree about a concept are yet not talking past each other?" while simply accepting that "certain concepts support different conceptions, and there are good reasons to believe that the conceptions are of the same concept." (ibid., 353-5.)

I find Baruah's criticism fair in general. My previous formula for unlocking the seven Conditions is that a certain kind of concept (I-IV) is employed in a certain way (V) in certain circumstances (VI-VII). With how Gallie frames and discusses Conditions, even this grouping could be taken to reflect contestation that merely takes place rather than *why* it takes place. Sami Syrjämäki observes "that Gallie himself seems to be aware of the fact that contestation is largely, if not completely, due to changes in circumstances, and not only due to some inner nature of these essentially contested concepts" (Syrjämäki 2011, 139). That supports Baruah's argument, even if that argument may ultimately rest on what one identifies as the chief content of the last three Conditions especially. For example, from Condition (V) Baruah takes on board the requirement of mutual appreciation as a belief of disputing parties, but he overlooks the recognition that one's own use of the concept has to be maintained against other uses (see 7.1). Granted, it is not easy to see how such recognition would count as a concept-centric reason for essential contestability, but perhaps that is simply because I have not yet covered every facet of the thesis of essential contestedness. There could be other factors as well.

To conclude, Gallie's Conditions are ambiguous to the extent that they do not belong to semantics alone. I argue that one should split them in two clusters, one set belonging to semantics, the other to pragmatics. The clearest way to make that division is to follow van der Burg's lead, above. But how that line is drawn

ultimately depends on how one understands the specific Conditions, both their content and status. For instance, if one finds the interpretation of (IV) as large-scale openness especially convincing and relevant (see 6.2), that feature becomes a part of the pragmatic context in which a concept or term is employed – or a part of an external description of how a disagreement is carried out by the disputants. In the revised *PHU*-version, Gallie modifies his characterization of (I)–(IV) as the four most important conditions by stating instead that

These four conditions suffice to explain how and why the kind of situation might arise in which different groups of spectators would cheer on and comment on their favourite teams for their respective styles of play. But they do not suffice to define what it is to be an essentially contested concept. *PHU* 161

The quote illustrates not only the argumentative importance of *Artificial* in Gallie's framework but also that it is possible to frame even the first four Conditions (or some of their parts) as providing the *context* for a specific kind of contestation. This gives room to think that something other than concepts become contested in the course of that contestation (cf. Gray before).

It is crucial to realize two things. First, none of the Conditions can guarantee the irresolvability and endlessness of the dispute alone, and neither is there any clear combination nor set that succeeds in doing so. Second, Gallie furthers his argument on the terrain of both semantics and pragmatics, and pragmatics is to be understood almost as broadly as possible. Otherwise much of what Gallie says in his texts becomes irrelevant or even unintelligible, at least as far as the contestability of *concepts* is concerned. What exactly is contested in Gallie's thesis? A concept or term, or something completely different like a judgment concerning who is the most faithful to the original exemplar? Can Gallie answer the criticism that was introduced here and in the review sections? To find out, we need to move to part three.

PART 3: THE NATURE OF ESSENTIAL CONTESTEDNESS

CHAPTER 11: EXAMPLES, ANALOGIES, AND EXPLICATIONS

The thesis of essential contestedness is often presented and understood almost solely in terms of the seven Conditions. Having them now at hand, one may still be quite unsure what exactly Gallie claims to be essentially contested. Different interpretations abound, and some commentators have decided to practically eschew concepts *qua* concepts by electing to speak of views, beliefs, judgments, or conceptions instead ¹⁴⁷. Regardless of the proper bearer or locus of contestability, the phenomenon of essential contestedness is not reducible to the seven Conditions. Some of the reasons for that have already been given; in the present part, I will offer plenty more by analyzing in depth the phenomenon of essential contestedness. What takes place, and how we are to deal with it?

While part two was mostly about individual concepts and their inherent characteristics, I now turn to discuss how Gallie's disputes are carried out, what type of judgments are made, and how all that relates to the reasonableness of having irresolvable and endless disputes. In the first two chapters (chs. 11, 12), I will add to the conditions for how essentially contested concepts are to be used by looking more closely into Gallie's writings and various commentaries. As my inquiry progresses, I will also stretch Gallie's original framing as well as offer my own recommendations for how Gallie's ideas could be developed further in order to find more secure moorings for a thesis of essential contestability (chs. 13, 14). I will try to make it clear where I am discussing Gallie's original ideas, where they intersect with mine, and where I am going well beyond what Gallie or others have said.

In chapter twelve, I will present and analyze what can be taken as the basic components of the sort of contestedness of which Gallie talks: indeterminacy, contestation, essentiality, and irresolvability and endlessness. Chapter thirteen

¹⁴⁷ At times, I will also refer to conceptions or views in addition to uses of a concept for ease of reading and to converse better with Gallie's commentators. By so doing I do not mean to endorse any particular theoretical explanation, like the concept/conception distinction (but cf. 17.3). When I directly comment on, or clarify, Gallie's original ideas and phrasings, I will retain his specific terminology for the most part.

focuses more pronouncedly on responses of rival parties in disputes manifesting essential contestedness with a specific emphasis on questions of rationality and reasonableness. In chapter fourteen, I lay out how Gallie and others have sought to address the problems that are associated with the contestedness of *a single concept*. That discussion sets the scene for the last part of the study: an inquiry into the plausibility of essential contestability in concept-centered terms.

In the current chapter, I will introduce and analyze additional theoretical examples and analogies for understanding essential contestedness. First, I take another, more critical, look at the artificial example of the championship (11.1). Given that Gallie appeals to it constantly in *ECC*, it is important to note problematics involved in the analogy that may mislead the reader in several ways. Next, I will turn to analyze Gallie's discussion concerning art as an essentially contested concept (11.2). I will identify two specific arguments which I name *CRITICS* and *LOVERS*. The latter is vital for understanding how Gallie is introducing historical considerations into evaluation and usage of essentially contested concepts. Third, I will investigate how the essentially contested concepts are employed by analyzing three characterizations that each reveal an aspect of that usage: an elementary use, a standard general use, and a category of human activity (11.3). The first two characterizations are relatively straightforward while the third one is near decisive for grasping the scope of Gallie's claims. Fourth, I will end the chapter by introducing a conception that I have named as "Gallie's account of justified conversions," with the help of which Gallie argues that one may change, or "convert," from one use of a concept to another without assuming that universal agreement is possible and still be rational (11.4). I will also expand on what Gallie means by the logical force of arguments and evidence.

11.1 Critical look at the artificial example (of championship)

The artificial example of championship (*Artificial*) describes a situation in which rival teams that exemplify different playing styles compete against each other. The winner, or the champion, is decided in a continuous manner by potential supporters who appraise which team plays the game best or the way it is meant to be played. What apparently matters most is which team is acknowledged as the champions, and in the light of which criteria. In the current section, I am going to show why *Artificial* is obscure to the degree of being misleading. I start by briefly taking note of a later development/re-emphasis in Gallie's thought that is of considerable interest. The bulk of the discussion is reserved for throwing into relief the kind of concept that is produced through *Artificial*¹⁴⁸.

¹⁴⁸ For a more concrete account, see 3.3 or *ECC* 170–1. For the basic outline of Gallie's overall argument, see 3.1 or *ECC* 169–70. Only scant attention has been given to *Artificial* or to CHAMPIONSHIP as the artificial example of an essentially contested concept (but see Gaus 2000, 28–9; Rhodes 2000, 14–5; Syrjämäki 2011, 140–1; Criley 2007, 21–2). At this juncture, I should mention Neils Albertsen who was kind enough to send me his unpublished conference paper

By presenting *Artificial*, Gallie asserts that he is setting “a highly artificial example of an essentially contested concept” (ECC 169). That concept looks to be CHAMPIONSHIP. Rather than discussing its specific characteristics, the alleged example of an artificial concept turns out to be a description of a certain kind of situation in which disputing parties continuously contest each other’s views concerning which team plays the game best. In the revised PHU-version, Gallie states that a model taken from the field of “imaginary sport” should enable us to appreciate more unbiasedly “a certain way of meaning, of influencing, of persuading, which has hitherto been either ignored or grossly underestimated” (PHU 158). I have already proposed that Gallie’s philosophical interest seems to lie in trying to figure out what *kind of use* is appropriate in the case of certain concepts related to certain human activities, which are under scrutiny in fields like aesthetics and political philosophy (3.1; see also 11.3). It seems likely that the certain *way* of meaning/influencing/persuading Gallie obscurely refers to is *that* “kind of use” that broadly holds Gallie’s interest. Essential contestability would thus be brought about by a specific *type of usage* rather than a specific *kind of concept*. But if that is so, essentially contested concepts are in large part characterized by their function in a dispute – notwithstanding the obvious fact that Gallie tries to cash out the idea in terms of a hitherto unacknowledged grouping of concepts (cf. e.g., ECC 168, 170, 194, 196).

Read literally, *Artificial* aims to produce CHAMPIONSHIP as an artificial example of an essentially contested concept. In addition to a general description of teams competing over being awarded the championship, CHAMPIONSHIP as the focal point of the example is quite properly called “artificial.” It is not intuitively similar to the live examples, and neither does it correspond one-to-one to the more formal definition of essentially contested concepts. One might claim that *Artificial* is merely a preliminary heuristic that is thrown away after CHAMPIONSHIP is formed to serve as a model for the structural characteristics of essentially contested concepts. However, that is not what Gallie does as he appeals to *Artificial* while developing his ideas throughout ECC¹⁴⁹ – while also adding that some parts of the argument may seem somewhat specious when stated in artificial terms alone, and without taking the live examples into account (ECC 176). If anything, *Artificial* is given even more significance in PHU (e.g., compare ECC 172 with PHU 161). I will now show why artificially understood CHAMPIONSHIP is incoherent or misleading in a function of being analogous to actual essentially contested concepts.

The problem with *Artificial* is that Gallie is not making it sufficiently clear whether the supporters are contesting the criteria/characteristics of CHAMPIONSHIP or how a particular game, e.g., skittles/bowling, is to be played

in January 2015. In the paper, Albertsen presents his interpretation of Gallie’s thesis, the interpretation which emphasizes the role of CHAMPIONSHIP. From that point on I paid more attention to how CHAMPIONSHIP figures in Gallie’s thesis.

¹⁴⁹ Those ideas include questions regarding how disputes involving essentially contested concepts are conducted, how those disputes can be thought as genuine (14.1; 14.2), and how disputants are justified in converting from one use of a concept to the other (11.4).

best. If CHAMPIONSHIP refers to the process of deciding on what basis one team is crowned as the champions, the concept that the supporters have of that process does not seem to be in contestation¹⁵⁰. In fact, we already have an explicit criterion for determining who the proper champions are: the championship is to be adjudged and awarded “in virtue of level of style or caliber” of a team, or to be the champions “means to be judged ‘to have played the game best’” (ECC 170). Both staunch and floating supporters appear to be perfectly aware of this criterion as they adjudge the championship to the team they think is “*playing the game best*”¹⁵¹ (ECC 171). Nobody is suggesting other criteria for applying CHAMPIONSHIP *thus understood* differently; it is just that the application of that one criterion by the disputants does not resolve the dispute they are having (see also 13.4). Their actual disagreement is about *which team* should be crowned the champions in the sport at hand¹⁵². Unfortunately, Gallie is adding to the terminological and conceptual mix-up by describing the continuous competition over the correct use of an essentially contested concept as being about “acceptance of one particular criterion of “championship””¹⁵³ (ECC 178). That is misleading when taken literally as Gallie instead obviously has in mind an act of ranking one way of playing the game over others.

Spectators must acknowledge that all teams that seek their endorsement are playing the same game (ECC 175); otherwise, there is no sense in comparing the teams’ performances. The focus of *Artificial* is clearly on the viewpoint of the supporters/spectators whereas competing teams are already there to be appraised, or watched from the stands, if you will. As if it were possible to merely *witness* essential contestedness that plays out in front of the people who need to make up their own minds concerning which available conception, or concept-use, they prefer (cf. 5.2). This way most disputants start to seem like passive vessels that have no real hand in shaping the criteria that depict a valued achievement, while real advances are made by some great individuals or schools of thought as Gallie appears to be saying in *ART* (see 11.2). That is not necessarily a flaw – it might even be a realistic presumption – yet it is reflected in *Artificial* the way that the characteristics of the game (i.e., bowling) are not in dispute, and neither is the

¹⁵⁰ Gallie speaks of the championship and the champions as if they were interchangeable, conceptually speaking (see ECC 169–70, 173, 175, 177–8). Yet they are not the same, and neither is the extension/denotation of CHAMPIONSHIP the champions, i.e., some actually existing team that has won the championship. To avoid conflation, one should think the championship as the process or procedure for awarding the title of the champions.

¹⁵¹ It is worth emphasizing that Gallie not only repeats this criterion in *Artificial* but also makes repeated references to it throughout *ECC* (see e.g., ECC 173, 175, 177–8).

¹⁵² Gerald Gaus notes in conjunction to Condition (I) that “Each team wants the title of “champion.” No party to the dispute would be willing to let another team decide on how “champion” is to be used” (Gaus 2000, 29). This is misleading as there is no real dispute over how ‘champion’ is to be used, and especially for what purpose, in *Artificial*. Supporters just happen to disagree which team is (to be judged as) the champions. Gallie himself says as much when he states that “The context of any typical use of “the champions” shows that it has thus far an unequivocal meaning as between its different (contestant) users” (ECC 176).

¹⁵³ In *Artificial*, Gallie speaks of the acceptance of the criteria in a plural form (ECC 171; PHU 160) but, given the context, nothing of real significance can be read into it.

set of criteria or factors that constitute or contribute to a performance in that game. Instead, contestation takes place over what factor (e.g., accuracy, speed) is the most important for performing well or best, or what weighted combination of factors is the best. Which team plays the game best—or bowls with a capital ‘B’ *et cetera*—is a distinct appraisal/judgment in addition to how the supporters understand and respectively apply CHAMPIONSHIP/CHAMPIONS. There is no disagreement concerning BOWLING either, for that matter, not at least with respect to how the concept is typically grasped. Even with all the artificiality involved, the particular ways to play the game can hardly be considered as the criteria for how CHAMPIONSHIP should be applied even if evaluation of the specific playing styles is needed to judge a team as the champions.

One can grant that *Artificial* and accompanying claims concerning CHAMPIONSHIP as an artificial example of an essentially contested concept are awkwardly and possibly misleadingly formulated while attempting to present a charitable reconstruction of what Gallie might be after, more generally. He is attempting to treat two somewhat different things under the umbrella of one concept, i.e., the artificial CHAMPIONSHIP: (1) evaluation concerning how to rank different playing styles, and (2) the playing styles as the descriptive criteria of the concept of performing (well) in that game. One sensible interpretation of this is that Gallie intends to draw attention to a type of process or situation in which concepts can become essentially contested, the process/situation which is analogous to the (artificial) championship competition. In this picture, *Artificial* is meant to point towards the basic idea of essential contestedness regardless of how it is more precisely formulated. In another interpretation, CHAMPIONSHIP as a product of *Artificial* is not really a concept but rather a model that guides the formal characterization of essentially contested concepts. This is what Gallie is literally saying, and it is supported by the specific way Gallie argues for the characteristics of essentially contested concepts. Most especially, the requirement of mutual appreciation (7.1) calls for the disputing parties to appreciate the different criteria others have for using the concept, and Gallie repeats it in artificial terms with respect to Condition (III): “some importance, however slight, must, in practice, be attached to each of these factors [i.e., speed, accuracy, swerve]” (ECC 173/PHU 160). Taking the component parts of the act of bowling for granted seems to transpose to taking component parts of a valued achievement as given in the case of (proper) essentially contested concepts (which also results in taking the criteria for applying the respective concept as given; cf. 17.2). Before one can put value on the descriptive criteria, they must be selected first, which can be a highly contentious matter. Here a comparison between bowling and things like social justice fails; we cannot just as easily observe what the constitutive elements in the latter case are.

A tension that comes with combining evaluation and description is subsequently reproduced in essentially contested concepts, but it is not perfectly clear how that happens. First, Gallie can be seen to conflate descriptive with evaluative. Second, the combination may take place when a disputant judges the matter at hand reflexively (see 12.3; 17.4). Third, evaluation and description may

become somehow unified *in* a concept, integrally; here questions such as whether one is dealing with an irreducible fusion or elements that can, in principle, be disentangled are potentially relevant (see Criley in 17.2; 17.4). Unless there are additional ways of understanding the matter, one needs to evaluate how strong a case can be made for the second and third alternatives – the first one is already a failure, of course. If there is no plausible case to be made *at all* in this respect, the analogy between *Artificial* and actual instances of essential contestedness fails completely.

After its initial appearance, Gallie appeals to *Artificial* in some of the most difficult and problematic points in his argument. It is as if he is struggling to find a conceptual apparatus and terminology for discussing what he otherwise considers more immediately accessible through the example of competing teams. That is a self-inflicted weakness in the sense that Gallie frames each of the seven Conditions as a condition of a concept instead of separating those elements that are not conceptual/linguistic, semantically speaking, but instead refer to the wider context of a concept's application, or pragmatics (cf. ch. 10). The latter type of elements, like requiring a connection to the original exemplar, may not be necessary to contest a concept, yet they are required for making a relevant type of judgment in a certain type of disagreement. From one point of view, *ARTIFICIAL* does illustrate the need for a historical perspective that transcends the rules of a particular game (see also Ricciardi 2000, 40–1), rules that determine a more conventional winner in non-artificial cases of sports. An ahistorical perspective may not be able to answer the question of how some game is meant to be played, especially as a matter of style and preference. To judge without any knowledge of how the game has so far been played would be met either with indignation or a hearty chuckle by the fans of the game: this guy does not know what he is talking about! Historical considerations are exactly what Gallie wants to introduce (ECC 196–7), but *Artificial* fails to make a clear enough case for it. In the final analysis, *Artificial* remains too remote from the considerations that concern concepts as entities. But it is highly suggestive regarding the type of dispute in question.

11.2 Critics and Lovers (of art) we are

The significance of "Art as an Essentially Contested Concept" is almost always overlooked in commentaries (e.g., Criley 2007, 19n1), although it is Gallie's most comprehensive treatment of any concept which he claims has the status of being essentially contested. A portion of *ART* is reprinted in the revised *PHU*-version, and some might thus consider *ART* as an inferior or redundant early draft. Others might not be comfortable with how it appears to extend the scope of essential contestability/contestedness. *ART* is a tricky, even opaque, piece to grasp but it stands as what I take as Gallie's honest attempt to explore the boundaries of essential contestedness without being restricted by the more formal presentation given in *ECC*.

The key content of *ART* can be reconstructed as two somewhat distinct arguments. In the first, Gallie speaks of the necessity of *ART* for “assessing the value of works of art” (*ART* 99), or for art-criticism. I will call this particular line of reasoning “*CRITICS*” from now on. In the second, Gallie asks “What light is thrown on the concept of art by the history of the concept of art?” (*ART* 107). The example itself is, on the face of it, about how “a simple art-lover” comes to possess, or form, *ART* despite its conflictual and contestable nature, and for that reason I refer to it as “*LOVERS*.” With the help of *CRITICS* Gallie ends up making general observations regarding the possible structure and characteristics of essentially contested concepts while *LOVERS* is more directly about diachronies/temporal continuities and a historical setting¹⁵⁴.

Let us begin with *CRITICS*. According to Gallie, one *could* argue that “there can be no general rules or recipes for the creation and appreciation of works of art” because each artwork is “prized for its own unique self.” Demanding that works of art should be evaluated according to a single set of criteria could give rise to the accusation that one has a dogmatic stance towards appreciating art. However, despite the remarkable diversity of the criteria, one inevitably has to use terms that refer to art in general, and to one’s attitudes towards art. Otherwise the *field of the discussion* cannot be understood. But now it seems that unless one already possesses *ART*, how can one tell so much about the criticism of art, i.e., about what art is and what it is not? Still, previous attempts to define ‘art’ appear to have been unsuccessful. This is a dilemma, or a kind of “Platonic puzzle”: either we possess/share *ART*, in which case it is useless for critical purposes, or either we do not possess/share it, “in which case we have no adequate idea of the field of objects and activities” related to art-criticism. (*ART* 99–100.)

Gallie observes that the obscurities involved in using ‘work of art’ or the alleged fact that it does not express a genuine concept at all have not hindered proper criticism of interpreting and assessing particular works of art. Proceeding to elucidate what is going on, Gallie asks us to imagine *two critics* who discuss the merits or failings of a particular picture. Whether they agree or disagree, they try to justify their views concerning whether the painting is a good one by pointing out its features that match with the criteria of success or failure they have for a painting of its kind by, for example, recalling other relevantly similar paintings. What they do not discuss at all, in this example, “is the question of the ‘artiness’ of the picture they are assessing,” and there indeed is no need to do so in one’s voiced assessment of a particular artwork. However, Gallie holds that art-criticism still requires or makes use of *ART*, even if “the special force” of everything the critics say can be shown “in terms of the immediate context—picture facing [the critics]—or of other recalled or imagined relevantly similar contexts.” (*ART* 101.)

¹⁵⁴ *ART* is partially a commentary on several contributions to William Elton's composite volume *Aesthetics and Language* (1954, reprinted 1967 by Basil Blackwell in Oxford) and two recent books by Harold Osborne. Gallie's own contribution to the volume edited by Elton was “The Function of Philosophical *Æsthetics*” (orig. pub. in *Mind* in 1948), and in *ART* Gallie updates his views on art and art-criticism. Here I present Gallie's argument in a more compact and generalized form.

But now it is critical to ask, “how *widely* can the sense of this last phrase be stretched? or, what is the criterion of ‘*relevantly* similar contexts’?¹⁵⁵” To answer this question, Gallie introduces another critic who discusses a particular picture but “may not use the word ‘art’ or any of its derivatives¹⁵⁶, and is most unlikely to make any reference to, or any use of, any philosophical theory or definition of art.” Gallie goes on to surmise that perhaps that person once did read a book on art by some author, and this “may have affected however slightly his view and practice of the critic’s calling, may have modified his handling of current critical terminology in a way that considerably affected his power and consistency as a critic.” Gallie adds that this seems to him “perfectly *possible*”¹⁵⁷. (ART 101–102.) It is worth drawing special attention to the fact that, above, Gallie emphasizes ‘*relevantly*’ in ‘*relevantly* similar.’ I will later discuss how this specific reference should be understood in connection to vagueness (12.1), and I will utilize the emerging conception throughout the study in delineating the boundaries of essential contestation over concepts (esp. 18.1).

Gallie is proposing that despite a person’s particular grasp of relevant terminology, that person could still be connected to and affected by a (intellectual) tradition of art and art-criticism some other way; *a fortiori* in the case of those who have a more direct contact with artistic traditions, schools or movements. Together with the talk of definitions and theories of art – both of which, for Gallie, appear to represent attempts to grasp ART – as something that may have had an effect on one’s current views, Gallie implies but does not commit to some sort of externalist thesis regarding the semantics of ART or ‘art.’ It occurs in a roundabout way, though, and what follows is my reconstruction of what I understand to be a possible thought process that leads there.

A critique of a particular painting in its immediate context is ultimately made intelligible by taking a step back. That way one can see that there are *relevantly* similar contexts in which artworks are produced and assessed – e.g., sculpting, composition, and poetry – and unifying this family of activities is the common acceptance of them all being instances of the arts. But evaluation of a painting *as an artwork* is possible only by having some inkling of which objects

¹⁵⁵ See also Gallie’s highly similar discussion with regard to ‘science’ (Gallie 1957, esp. 122, 126).

¹⁵⁶ In *ART*, Gallie makes several seemingly out-of-place references to how the word ‘art’ is or is not used in a given case, and whether it is necessary to do so. This is because he criticizes a philosophical *method* that understands philosophy solely as the elucidation of meanings by looking into various a range of familiar *contexts* in which “some perplexing highly abstract word (or formula or concept)” or its derivatives are used. According to that method, the answers to all philosophical problems are “always already there *in the words as properly used*,” beyond or behind which one should not venture. Gallie thinks that this betrays a fundamental misconception of what philosophy can do. (ART 98.) In a prior article (1948), Gallie offers an alternative method which he calls “the attitude of informed skepticism” about the possibility or worthwhileness of philosophical aesthetics. The informed sceptic will *deny* that the word ‘Art’, as commonly used, stands for any one thing, and will deny that for every given work of art there is one way of ‘reading’ that gives us its meaning and value.” (Gallie 1948, 313.)

¹⁵⁷ Compare with the discussion of Gallie’s “possibility talk” in 9.1.

can be compared as art, and this understanding is shaped by how one understands which activities come together under the heading of art. This is supported by Gallie's remark in which he equates ART with "the field of fruitful comparison between the different arts" (ART 113). Differences of opinion concerning what things can be fruitfully compared and why get passed down culturally, but they are also the stuff which leads to different movements and schools of thought that are also reflected in different theories and definitions of art. Perhaps one could arrive at similar views on one's own, but the chances are that similar views have been presented in the past, and one comes to adopt them as part of one's social and cultural heritage. This includes a way of judging some rather than other things as art, which in turn implies a presence of a general concept.

Gallie also considers the possibility that the answer to "the Platonic puzzle" can be given in terms of family resemblance, which is informative for the present purpose. Gallie notes that meta-criticism might be said to aim at solving problems within the well-recognized field of art-criticism, though sporadically and locally. Despite the recognizability of the art-criticism, however, its boundaries are "hopelessly hazy and our uses of it show no uniform or coherent logical structure" which has resulted in previous failures to define it. This immediately raises the question: what exactly is the object one attempts to define here? Gallie notes in passing that the "words 'art' and 'work of art' do not express clear concepts any more than the words 'farming' or 'farming-job' do" (ART 100). This is a curious, almost an off-the-cuff remark, and its point may become sufficiently clear only in conjunction with Gallie's later 1957-article "What Makes a Subject Scientific?" (1957). There, Gallie speaks of farming and asserts that there are no "characteristics that are common to all farmers and to no one else" neither there are "no activities in which (a) all farmers and (b) no one except farmers, engage," we are not able to define farming in terms of common characteristics. If at some point there is "some one activity which all living farmers are engaged in," it would be "a contingent fact in no sense deducible from the way we commonly employ the words 'farm' and 'farmer'." (Gallie 1957, 119.) Gallie appears to be ascribing the same quality to the concept or concepts behind the words 'art' and 'work of art.' If so, ART is not clear in the sense that there would be common characteristics and/or activities that belong to it and solely to it. Moreover, Gallie seems to view art-criticism as a complex or multi-faceted activity, or as a variety of activities/practices to the extent that it is to be modelled after farming. This connects with a passage at the end of the PHU-version, the passage in which Gallie discusses how any number of subordinate concepts or more specific concepts that fall under art, democracy, *et cetera* can be shown to be themselves essentially contested (PHU 190). There are only a couple of passages in which Gallie talks about this type of sub-ordination (PHU 190; ART 109n10; perhaps also ART 113n12), but Gallie's idea appears to be that the more specific concepts should be considered always in relation to some wider activity or practice. I will return to this issue in the next section (11.3).

Above, Gallie certainly utilizes the notion of family resemblance, the telltale sign of which is the ordering of activities in which different farmers engage “A, B, C,” “B, C, D,” “C, D, E,” and so on (Gallie 1957, 119). However, as to works of art, and assessing their value, in *ART*, Gallie ultimately rejects the family resemblance account as an adequate explanation because (1) it does not challenge the idea that “certain highly general features may in conjunction be found necessary and peculiar to the heads of object or performance that are commonly regarded as works of art”; (2) it offers no explanation of “why, among all the conceivable sets of over-lapping resemblance that could be traced between and among [different art-objects] *one particular line of resemblances*, or one set of such lines, has been picked out and valued under the rubric ‘work of art.’” (ART 101.) The family resemblance account stays silent on how individuals have come to hold the views they have, while Gallie’s example of a simple art-lover (or *LOVERS*) tries to rectify that.

It is instructive to further point out that perceiving family resemblances and affinities may not be as straightforward a matter as Wittgenstein implies. Wittgenstein’s example traits of a family member—“build, features, colour of eyes, gait, temperament” (Wittgenstein 1958, §67)—are biologically determined, more or less, but the reason we understand them as family resemblances in a given case stems from the fact that we already know that those traits are features of family members in that case. This is also true of extending “the family concept” to new cases. I might meet a person that looks like my friend Jarno, but that is not reason enough to think that that person is a member of Jarno’s family. Instead, I will look for similarities when I already understand certain people as family members. It is not enough just to “look and see” (cf. *ibid.*, §66)¹⁵⁸. I find it likely that at least part of the reason why Gallie has come to think that art-criticism in some way requires or makes use of *ART* (cf. ART 101; quoted before) is due to a similar train of thought. The existence of different contexts in which artworks are fruitfully assessed is not enough even if we assume them to be similar to each other; we need to have at least an inkling of what similarities are relevant in order to identify those contexts or judge what could be included within the family.

Overall, Gallie finds the defense of the possibility of art-criticism and meta-criticism without the involvement of *ART* unsatisfactory. Concerning a concept’s structure, Gallie remarks that we are now able to see that

the concept of art (if it exists) must be a very queer concept—one of a kind whose structure has never been adequately explored. It may even be simply an embryonic, as yet unarticulated, concept, in which case its beneficent effects upon criticism must be hard to evaluate or may for the most part be yet to come. ART 102

It suffices to note, here, that the concept’s embryonic nature or inarticulateness can be understood to involve both openness and a kind of incompleteness (cf. ch. 6; see also 17.5). Gallie is not after very specific concepts, but he has in his sights concepts as they are popularly understood (ECC 186–7, PHU 178, 180), which is

¹⁵⁸ I am indebted to Wibren van der Burg for making this point in a paper presented in Edinburgh in 2016.

one level removed from any concept that a particular individual might hold. This introduces a possibility that one's specific concept of art at any given time can be thought "complete" while the popular conception is of an ever-evolving thing that constantly shifts its boundaries. It could also be the practice or activity, the boundaries of which are shifting. For instance, Gallie conceives art and art-criticism as continuing activities and/or open practices that can develop to new and possibly unforeseen directions thus widening our artistic sympathies (cf. ART 113-4). Rather than one or the other, the two seem to go hand in hand.

Now it is time to turn the attention to *LOVERS*. The example case of "a simple art-lover" is meant to answer the question "What light is thrown on the concept of art by the history of the concept of art?" According to Gallie, one needs a historical account of how ART "*came to be*" which comes down to seeing how and why presumably equally competent people have favored different and even radically opposed aesthetic standpoints. This should help us to appreciate the peculiar structure of ART: "to see that it is one of a fairly wide and important class of concepts which are (...) *essentially complex*, and, chiefly for this reason, *essentially contested*." Conversely, to see the grounds of essential complexity and contestedness of ART enables one to make sense of the "otherwise apparently futile history of conflicting aesthetic schools." (ART 107; cf. ECC 198 and ART 110.) This also illuminates Gallie's remark in *ECC* that the clarification of both CHRISTIANITY and ART "requires that we view [these] concept[s] with the historian's as much as with the logician's eye" (ECC 181-2). Overall, Gallie suggests that both a concept's contestedness and complexity are products of a certain kind of historical development or trajectory, and that such concepts need not be complete or able to be precisely articulated in order to use them.

Gallie asks us to "imagine the case of a simple man who likes many recent and contemporary paintings, and who seeks guidance in the formation of his taste from the judgment of professional art critics." He is soon confronted with a problem: during his initial inquiries he hits upon critics who portray the matter as if "there is *one* style or method of painting (...) which *alone* gives us real paintings,"¹⁵⁹ but each critic suggests a different style that often conflicts with or excludes other options. Who can the simple man trust; only himself? Enter a historian of art and art-criticism who comes to kindly offer her help. She does not actually claim to answer the question of who is right, or how different points of views may be reconciled, and neither can she directly help by cultivating the simple man's aesthetic taste. Instead, she promises to tell him "how this separation of points of view came to be." Although the details of that story are not really important, according to Gallie, it is a tale of (sometimes) deep division in artistic aims and standards, and some splinterings may be connected to a variety of social, political, or technological reasons that affect how art is to be practiced (cf. Gallie 1948, 306-7). Of special significance, however, throughout

¹⁵⁹ Real paintings, i.e., "paintings which sustain and advance the great traditions of the past and herald the unborn masterpieces of to-morrow" (ART 107). This is directly linked with Condition (VII) although no explicit references to it, or to any other Condition, are made in ART.

the art-historian explanation is that “the spokesman of *most* of the rebel movements or schools” would claim that the style that they prefer is “the true inheritor and advancer of the great tradition of painting which had preceded them.” Presenting radically conflicting claims is made possible by the fact that painting is a highly complex affair that admits different genuinely helpful and illuminating descriptions in different circumstances. In other words, the relative importance of the many aspects of the painting are assessed “according to the beliefs of any painter or critic as to the best way in which the traditional values of painting can be developed or sustained.” (ART 107-8.) This is in line with Gallie’s thesis as it is presented in *ECC*, but now a historical dimension is much more prominently emphasized.

Gallie then turns to discuss the most important “classic theories or definitions of art” or “main types of aesthetic theory”: configurationist theories, theories of aesthetic contemplation and response, theories of art as expression, theories emphasizing traditional aims and standards, and communication theories. Each type of theory “has been a contestant for the title of the true, the only satisfying, the only plausible theory of art” and “[e]ach is still capable of exercising a certain pull on our sympathies.” According to Gallie, “almost all philosophical aestheticians (...) have sought to define art by means of one key notion or category.” Yet the characteristic difficulty of every theory has been to specify one of the categories so that it can be applied only to all works of art. The results are “disappointing”: either one fails “to specify sufficiently narrowly” which leads to “a hopelessly vague theory,” or one’s attempts at stricter specifications conduce to “the exclusion of something essential to at least some works of art.” The only possible comparison between works of art needs to be conducted in terms that are related to all central views, because each provides a criterion or a category that is intimately related to the general criteria of success and achievement (in the arts). (ART 109-112; cf. Gallie 1948, 311-2.) In the *PHU*-version Gallie adds that “so-called ‘theories of Art’ are intelligible only as contributions to a seemingly endless, although at its best a creative, conflict” (PHU 177).

In his bleak assessment of philosophical aesthetics, Gallie is joined by Morris Weitz who observes that the main concern of “the philosophy of art” is to determine the nature of art by attempting to state its defining properties, i.e., its necessary and sufficient conditions. Almost mirroring Gallie, Weitz observes that each of “the great theories of art” claims to be true “because it has formulated correctly into a real definition the nature of art” while other theories are false “because they have left out some necessary or sufficient property.” Weitz further notes that theorists who seek the correct definition view it as “an absolute necessity for any understanding of art and our proper evaluation of it.” Otherwise, one would be at a loss concerning how to respond to it and related issues, like comparison between different artworks. (Weitz 1956, 27.) Gallie and Weitz thus share the same critical tone and are both interested in the problems

involved in attempts to pinpoint the necessary and sufficient conditions of art while holding similar views on that regard¹⁶⁰.

As to *LOVERS*, let us say that the art-historian has now concluded her “explanatory narrative.” The simple man has come to understand the perfect naturalness of the situation in the contemporary art-criticism. The state of affairs is irritating, but not altogether deplorable, “any more than the rival and often contradictory claims of competing political parties are altogether deplorable.” Gallie does not mean to suggest that the contemporary art-criticism is somehow politicized; rather, the point is that art and the appreciation of art could be furthered by competition between different viewpoints that is analogous to political contestation within party government. Political parties are now functionally replaced by “different schools of artists and their critical interpreters and cheer-leaders.” (ART 109.) These need not solely include the people who are primarily philosophers. There are also persons of great insight into some of the arts who have been able to voice what needed to be done and how, powerfully enough for them to influence critics of other arts as well. Their “teachings and preachings” can thus become seen as worthy and applicable to the arts in general. (ART 109.)

In contrast, a philosopher who comes onto the scene picks the new (art-related) findings out “and proceeds to pack a dehydrated version of some great critic’s message” into the preferred framework of particular philosophical system. One should not expect too much of theories of art; as important and influential as those might be, they should often be regarded as over-generalized abstractions. Instead, “as philosophical analysts we must try to do justice to the many-sidedness, the intrinsic complexity, of artistic excellence.” So Gallie is not devaluing philosophy as such, but he does not subscribe to the idea that all meaningful ways to employ concepts and terms are captured by typical philosophical methods. As philosophers we “think and speak of Art, i.e., of the field of fruitful comparison between the different arts” but there are also other ways or senses. This is a crucial point, the point because of which the current line of argument is dubbed *LOVERS*: we also think and speak of art as “art-lovers and enthusiasts, as protagonists or camp-followers in some movement of critical opinion.” (ART 113.) This is a significant element in the *kind* of use (of an essentially contested concept), if there is any to be found¹⁶¹, that Gallie is after (see 3.1).

¹⁶⁰ For those similarities, see Weitz’s article referred here, “The Role of Theory in Aesthetics” (Weitz 1956), and see also “Open Concepts” (Weitz 1972). Aili Bresnahan observes that many philosophers have considered Weitz 1956 “the *sine qua non* in support of the position that theories of art should be ‘open’,” and she lists Gallie among the supporters of the same view “for similar but non-identical reasons” (Bresnahan 2014, 2).

¹⁶¹ Boromisza-Habashi points out, aptly, that despite Gallie’s insistence that “the meaning of essentially contested concepts can only be derived from their use,” he “devotes more analytic attention to the structure of the concepts themselves, and limits his “observations of use” to the discussion of hypothetical situations and scenarios” (Boromisza-Habashi 2010, 277n1). The discussion in *ART* is not really an exception.

Gallie elaborates what he means by stating that “when we press or resist the claim of a particular work or genre or style to be regarded as 'art', we will inevitably be using the term in a contestable (and often as not in an immediately contested) way” (ART 113–4). Leaving the distinction between ‘contested’ and ‘contestable’ aside for now (see 12.2), it is important to pay attention where we are at right now. On the one hand, he continues by clarifying that what is said can easily be recognized as appreciation or criticism from the excessively one-sided point of views, and thus contestability depends on others’ reactions or interpretations to some extent. On the other hand, we just saw that Gallie also dubs the one who claims something as ‘art’ as an art-lover and protagonist, which might be taken to further imply that one may also have a more active hand in shaping the matter by virtue of taking a stand. Furthermore, it does not matter whether one is a critic or a painter; the aspects of an activity of painting will still be “differently assessed according to the beliefs [of a person] as to the best way in which the traditional values of painting can be developed or sustained.” Our specific conceptions concerning art will widen or curtail our aesthetic sympathies in different directions but “there is no certain way in which the correctness or incorrectness of any such belief can be established in advance or on principle.” (ART 108.) What specifically matters in this context is that everyone assessing the matter is implicitly assumed to fill the roles of a critic *and* an art-lover, in turn or at the same time.

Overall, the characteristics of essentially contested concepts are meant to reflect the way our activities and practices are historically and socially formed, and how this affects our evaluations or judgments within and in close relation to those activities and practices. Nowhere is this as clear as in the case of SCIENCE, even if Gallie remains ultimately doubtful regarding its status as essentially contested (PHU 156, 190). In his reply to David Harrah, Gallie clarifies his previous claims (made in Gallie 1957) by emphasizing the importance of tradition with respect to judgments and evaluations:

a piece of work can be judged to be good or genuine science only by (at least implicit) reference to the main scientific tradition which lies behind it and which it represents even as it advances – and in advancing no doubt in a way alters – that tradition. Gallie 1959, 239

In the same context, Gallie makes a note of “the colossal diversity of the activities to be included under the term 'scientific'” (Gallie 1959, 239). Gallie could say exactly the same regarding the term ‘artistic,’ and we could also add the qualifications discussed in connection to our previous discussion about the family resemblance and farming (see before). Moreover, it starts to seem like Gallie is settling into a position in which traditions are both indispensable for making certain kinds of evaluations/judgments and the source of ensuing contestability. It is a matter of interpretation whether he really commits to it, but the elements are certainly there. For instance, Gallie states that the “different aspects of artistic achievement (...) are very *naturally* graded in different orders of importance (...) because of the general condition of the arts (or of any one

importantly advancing art) and of art-criticism at any particular time” (ART 113). He explicitly adds that it does not take place “so much because of different personal preferences among critics and aestheticians” (ibid.). And preferences leading to various describability and to different ranking orders (5.1) is at the heart of the sort of contestability that Gallie is introducing to us. They are not just subjective or personal in the most relevant sense of Gallie’s essential contestedness.

In *ART* Gallie mentions activities sparingly; the term is used only on three occasions¹⁶². When we consider the following passages, however, we get a sense that the specific nature of certain activities, like art-criticism, is exactly what Gallie has tried to portray all along:

...the arts being the kinds of activity that they are – ever expanding, ever reviving and advancing values inherited from a long and complex tradition – the [essentially contested] character which I have ascribed to the concept of art is exactly what we should expect (...) In any field of activity in which achievements are prized because they renew or advance a highly complex tradition, the point of view from which our appraisals are made – our concept of the achievement in question – would seem always to be of the kind I have called ‘essentially contested’. ART 114

The fact that Gallie essentially repeats the same characterization at the end of the revised *PHU*-version (PHU 190) – as he ponders about the proper width of the class of essentially contested concepts – is a testament to the continuing relevance of *ART*. Furthermore, the above confirms that concepts are essentially contested in connection to continuous activities that aim to expand, revive, and advance traditional or inherited values. That is the proper context or background for the kind of concept-use he is after, I claim, the fact that is further supported by Gallie’s reference to “an *optimum* development of the vague aims and confused achievements of the democratic tradition” (ECC 186) in his discussion of DEMOCRACY in *ECC*. Gallie thus views essentially contested concepts as signifying *achievements* which can be, have been, and are sustained and developed further by those contesting the correct way to use the concept (9.1). The concept that is allegedly essentially contested is intimately related to the values advanced by a complex of activities; in fact, how people describe those values becomes the different aspects of the valued achievement that is signified by the concept.

At one time Gallie awkwardly states that it is “the job” of an essentially contested concept to appraise and through appraisal to help to sustain the (original exemplar’s) activity and achievement (ECC 179/PHU 167). It can be understood as a statement of the characteristic function to which essentially contested concepts are put, and it also illustrates how essentially contested concepts are peculiarly reflexive: one’s normative judgment infiltrates how the matter is conceptualized in the first place (12.3; 17.4). John Kekes (1977) offers as his own proposal that essentially contested concepts “signify a type of voluntary

¹⁶² In comparison, ‘activity’ is mentioned five times in *ECC* and whopping seven times in *PHU*.

and goal-directed activity” and thus essentially contested concepts “do not refer to individual instances of such activities, but to the class comprising them.” Essentially contested concepts are instantiated by particular performances, but they merely illustrate “the range of instances that fall within the domain of an [essentially contested concept].” An essentially contested concept thus describes a type, an instantiation of which is merely a token of the type which the essentially contested concept signifies. (Kekes 1977, 74.) But this synchronic take on the nature of the concept can be analytically separated from how it is perceived diachronically. Since conflicting descriptions of what is significant in a valued achievement are understood primarily as a product of the general conditions of the broad activity, and given general conditions are a stage in the development history of the activity, the possibility of contestation between those descriptions is predicated on a certain historical development¹⁶³. This is the sense in which Gallie’s thesis is historicist, as I understand it, but it does not yet amount to a stronger claim that either historical development or historical understanding is the decisive factor that gives rise to essential contestability of concepts.

11.3 The elementary use, a standard general use, and a category of human activity

In this section, I am going to present and analyze what Gallie is after when he speaks of the elementary use of a concept, a standard general use, or a concept of activity. David-Hillel Ruben contends that by ‘use of a concept’ Gallie meant only “the application of the concept,” or “how it is applied,” and he did not have any specific technical use of ‘use’ in mind (Ruben 2010, 259). I do not think that is all there is to it; a more careful analysis pays dividends in identifying various elements of essential contestedness. A word of warning though: Gallie himself cut back or edited passages regarding some of these matters in the revised *PHU*-version. However, as far as I am aware, he did not explicitly correct or redact anything in *ECC*, and I do not think that the presently relevant modifications amount to a change in the DNA of the overall thesis.

In discussing *DEMOCRACY*, Gallie states that he is not interested in those uses or mentions of the term ‘democracy’ that commend or criticize certain political arrangements on the grounds of theoretical considerations. Neither is he interested in the “questions of actual practice, vindicating or belying certain particular uses of the term ‘democracy.’”¹⁶⁴ For Gallie, those particular uses

¹⁶³ When Ernest Gellner titled his review of *PHU* as “The Concept of a Story” (Gellner 1974), a choice for which he offers no explicit reason in the review itself, he may have had something along these lines in mind, I think.

¹⁶⁴ This phrase, for example, has been cut from *PHU* (cf. 178). In fact, there is no mention of the elementary use in *PHU*—there is an addition, though, that refers to the “basic and most popular use” of ‘democracy.’ Along with the other changes, the section emphasizes how, when challenged, one has to be willing to justify one’s use of ‘democracy’ in relation to a

presuppose “a more elementary use” that expresses political aspirations which have been embodied in countless “revolts and revolutions as well as in scores of national constitutions and party platforms.” These political aspirations are “centred in a demand for increased equality” or “they are advanced against governments and social orders whose aim is to prolong gross forms of inequality.” (ECC 183–4.) In short, Gallie looks to be referring to a historically embodied normative ideal that is captured by a concept, while an exemplary instance which bears or manifests that normative ideal becomes a part of a given stage of a wider tradition (see Evnine 2014, 127–8; 8.2), in the course of which the normative ideal is sustained and developed further. When people differ concerning how to realize the ideal, or its many aspects, they also come to disagree on how the respective concept is to be applied (see also Besson 2005, 82–3) and/or how it should be formed in the first place (as I am going to argue later on).

The focus is thus on democracy as a normative ideal rather than as a matter of empirical or theoretical classification. Gallie treats the elementary use of ‘democracy’ almost as a banner, under which various political aspirations and egalitarian concerns coalesce and for which the ideal of democracy serves as a conduit¹⁶⁵. Given that essentially contested concepts signify valued achievements, it makes sense to consider ‘democracy’ as designating an ideal or goal that animates people to strive for it as they have also done in the past (see also 18.2; 18.3). This specific way of using ‘democracy’ and other terms of the same cloth is predicated on various historical and social developments even if not completely determined by them. If our history of struggling against those who aim to prolong gross forms of inequality had played out differently enough, we might possess a concept that signifies a similar achievement to that which our DEMOCRACY captures but with certain changes. For instance, perhaps past events would have convinced us that it is perfectly okay to systematically favor democratic candidates over those espousing totalitarian ideologies rather than to strive towards maximally free elections. Yet an essentially contested concept is not strictly a historical recording. In discussing SOCIAL JUSTICE, Gallie states that the two conflicting conceptions of social justice, as a commutative (merit-based) or distributive (entitlement-based) concept, should not be “identified with or confined to particular historic forms or ideals of society,” but instead, they would seem to be “conflicting facets of any advanced social morality” (PHU 182). This does not mean that all essentially contested concepts necessarily enable making

sequence of historical events (e.g., the reference to “an unmistakable succession of political endeavours and aspirations”), actions, artifacts *et cetera*.

¹⁶⁵ In this, essentially contested concepts resemble Ernesto Laclau’s (1996; 2005) empty signifiers (or more generally, floating signifiers). In both cases, “equivalential” links(s) between various demands, aspirations *et cetera* are formed when unity is ascribed to difference. However, an essentially contested concept does not require an antagonistic camp like an empty signifier like, for instance, in the case of ‘people’ in opposition to ‘elite’ (see e.g., Laclau, 2005, 129, 139–40). Compare especially with the discussion of Stevenson’s persuasive definitions in 15.2: in order for certain words to carry relatively stable emotive meanings that can be supplied with different conceptual contents, those words need to be more concrete or stable than the concepts they are used to denote or describe, which can be considered a characteristic of a floating signifier.

such a broad claim concerning that which is signified or represented by the concept. However, I take that to suggest that essentially contested concepts are of the kind that can be employed to represent different activities that constitute one's form of life as one knows and understands it.

In *ECC*, especially, Gallie also refers to *the standard general use*. This turn of phrase may have led some to believe that Gallie is presuming a fundamental or correct way of using essentially contested concepts¹⁶⁶. Kenneth Smith goes as far as to suggest that Gallie is introducing two or three kinds of concepts *in addition to* essentially contested concepts¹⁶⁷ (Smith 2002, esp. 340–1). In the passage that gives rise to these observations Gallie states that “mutually contesting, mutually contested uses of the [essentially contested] concept” make up “together its standard general use” (*ECC*, 169). The same idea is repeated in the discussion of *DEMOCRACY*, when Gallie speaks for its “single general use made up, essentially, of a number of mutually contesting and contested uses of it” (*ECC* 186). Tracking how Gallie uses the same expression in different instances dissipates the notion that any *particular* usage by an individual or group would be set as the correct or somehow more fundamental use than others (esp. PHU 157 with *ECC* 168–9). Instead, the *combined* employment of different contesting uses is considered as the characteristic, or standard, use of an essentially contested concept (see 9.1). This should ultimately be viewed as a statement about the proper structure or organization of an essentially contested concept (see esp. 14.2; 18.1). Gallie's remarks concerning the standard general use should thus be understood as an expression of a view that it is perfectly normal to employ essentially contested concepts in a contesting and contested manner¹⁶⁸, or aggressively and defensively (7.1).

The elementary use and the standard general use are relatively easy notions to understand. That cannot be said about the third notion, a category or concept

¹⁶⁶ For example, see Ingram 1985, 42, n5. Ingram states that Gallie (*ECC* 194–5) maintains that there is one “fundamental” use of ‘good’ which holds contested uses of a word together as applications of one concept. This is an evident misreading as Gallie is attributing such view to “moralists,” the views of whom he refers to in order to reflect his own, a very different position. I view this error as possible only in connection to what Gallie says elsewhere about the standard general use, even if Ingram does not directly refer to it. Ingram otherwise correctly observes that essentially contested concepts do not have agreed fundamental uses (Ingram 1985, 42, 56).

¹⁶⁷ They are “mutually contesting and contested concepts” and the “standard general use.” Smith's arguably unique interpretation rests, unfortunately, on several misapprehensions, the gravest of which is the underlying assumption that Gallie is actually referring to different groups of concepts in *ECC* 167–9, 176, 186 when he is, in fact, just describing one group, i.e., essentially contested concepts, in different terms. The whole idea is not completely misguided, though, as it is possible to analytically distinguish between the initial stage of conflicting uses (e.g., of an ambiguous word) and their essential contestability under a single concept (see 14.2; 18.1).

¹⁶⁸ This resonates with Gallie's earlier view, according to which not only those concepts the necessary and sufficient conditions of which are known or readily ascertainable can be counted as “standard expressions,” i.e., as the common and proper ways to employ the term/concept (see 1949, 42; see also Gallie 1948, 313). Herein also lies the possibility of understanding Gallie as confusing words, terms, and concepts with each other (see 16.2).

of human activity, which occupies us for the rest of the section and is further refined throughout the study¹⁶⁹. The place to start is *PHU*, in which Gallie asserts that the word ‘art’ has had a surprisingly short history “[w]hen [the word is] used to stand for a supreme genus or category of human activity” and that ‘art’ as “a categorial term—and as an ingredient in the titles of many different institutions—grew up as an answer to Science: just as the idea of ‘the fine arts’ was an answer to the challenge of ‘useful knowledge’” (*PHU* 170). I have already observed, here and there, that essentially contested concepts appear to be general categories that are ordered thematically rather than hierarchically—in another instance, Gallie speaks of the continued use of “Art as a supremely general or categorial term” (*PHU* 178)—but the genus-species characterization appears to challenge my reading¹⁷⁰.

The passage that is crucial for deciphering Gallie’s original point is found later in the text: “Any number of subordinate or more specific concepts falling under the concepts of art, religion, democracy, etc., can be shown to be themselves essentially contested: for example, colouration, dogma, parliamentary immunity” (*PHU*, 190; see also *ART* 109n10; cf. Weitz 1956, 32). However, if Gallie wants to say that a subordinate concept (e.g., *DOGMA*), becomes essentially contested under the umbrella of a more general concept (e.g., *RELIGION*), it is not clear why that is the case. Clearly, subordinate concepts like *DOGMA* or *COLORATION* do not satisfy Conditions of essential contestedness: they do not signify (controversial) valued achievements, and neither one is complex, open, or derived from the original exemplar in the appropriate senses (cf. part two).

Furthermore, think of *RELIGION*, *CHRISTIANITY*, *CHRISTIAN TRADITION*, and *ADHERENCE TO A PARTICULAR RELIGION* which Gallie presents as more or less interchangeable candidates for being an essentially contested concept (*ECC* 180). Is *DOGMA* a hierarchically subordinate concept to this group of concepts, or just to one of these concepts? Gallie does not say, but the deeper issue is that there simply are no evident hierarchies to work with in the presented cases. Instead, it is eminently more plausible to think that the relevant type of contestation is to be

¹⁶⁹ The basics of the current reading were first presented in a co-authored (with Arto Laitinen) conference paper “Essentially Contested Concepts and Mutual Recognition” in Trento in June 2017. The current account is substantially different in many respects, though.

¹⁷⁰ By invoking the genus-species distinction, Gallie is not, in all likelihood, referring to the same notion that just about every other scholar or researcher does. As I see it, Collingwood’s view of the nature of philosophical concepts has likely inspired Gallie a lot. Here I specifically mean Collingwood’s unique way of understanding philosophical concepts as dividing into genus and species while admitting what he calls the “scale of forms,” i.e., a sort of dialectic succession of more and more specific conceptions; each stage carrying the previous conceptions with them. This is not a place to dwell on an exegesis of Collingwood’s ideas as they are presented in *An Essay on Philosophical Method* (2005). Weimin Shi, however, offers us a reading of Collingwood that pairs him and Gallie intimately (Shi 2014). For those wishing to unearth an answer to the scholarly question of what influences led Gallie to posit concepts with such a peculiar structure, Shi’s article is probably as good place as any. And since Gallie’s historical view of concepts has been connected to a dialectical thinking, or to “the myth of dialectic” (Gellner 1974), I have found Leon Goldstein’s discussion of Hegel and Collingwood in connection to openness of concepts illuminating (Goldstein 1994).

located within some broad, thematic setting rather than a single, hierarchical concept—possibilities include a conceptual domain matrix, conceptual constellation, specific discourse, or some other pragmatic context. Even then it is hard to conceive of what is *conceptually* contested there, or *which* concept. DOGMA could perhaps figure in a disagreement about what makes Christianity valuable as an achievement or what Christian faith demands of its adherents as a normative ideal when judgment concerning whether some guideline is to be taken as a dogma or not is required. Although settling the broad disagreement concerning what those professing Christianity should do would require that parties grasp DOGMA the same way, the narrow “disagreement” allegedly about DOGMA is nothing special. There are various concepts we need to employ and share all the time in order to both agree and disagree, but not every disagreement of interest, value, or judgment is reasonably portrayed as a disagreement about the concepts employed.

Something crucial is missing in my present account. In that respect, Gallie’s laborious description of how COLORATION can be essentially contested in connection to more clearly contestable ART serves as an example (see PHU 171–3; cf. *LOVERS* in 11.2). Here are its key points: (i) painting is a particular activity that belongs to the arts; (ii) a particular style of painting is just one possible conception among many others that have been presented “as the true inheritor and advancer of the great tradition of painting”; (iii) painting is “essentially a complex activity” and as “long as there is painting as we know it, there will always be a number of ways (or at least of alleged ways) in which the traditional values of paintings can best be kept alive”; (iv) ‘coloration’ can be used appraisively “from different artistic viewpoints” to refer to, or to praise, various things that a painter has achieved, or has wanted to achieve, with his actual brushstrokes on a canvas. Gallie’s conclusion then appears to be that (v) the different viewpoints reflect the number of ways to keep the traditional values of painting alive, there is contestedness involved, and it is identified as essential contestedness¹⁷¹.

In the example above, Gallie is perhaps at his most opaque. It is true that looking at matters from different artistic viewpoints may introduce contestability, but it is hard to avoid thinking that Gallie is indeed after some specific way of using different terms, a way which is intimately connected to how things are praised as achievements *within* an activity or practice. A particular kind of pragmatic context, in which terms like ‘dogma’ and ‘coloration’ are used, now

¹⁷¹ This and other current points can be fruitfully compared to Gallie’s discussion of ‘science’ in “What Makes a Subject Scientific?” (Gallie 1957; see also Gallie 1959). It seems to me that Gallie thinks of science and art (as in the fine arts) as traditions and activities in much the same way, and thus Gallie’s points about ‘science’ could be used to clarify how Gallie understands essential contestedness in general. Unfortunately, Gallie has both claimed and denied the essentially contested status of SCIENCE (PHU 155, 190), which is one reason why I do not appeal to his observations concerning ‘science’ that much. Another reason is that I see scholarly value in clarifying Gallie’s direct, more well-known remarks on essential contestability as they are probably perplexing to many. That being said, what Gallie says there supports my reading of him.

conveys a conceptual disagreement concerning “more general” CHRISTIANITY or ART. A concept like ART is now something that is either presumed or leaned on when one makes a judgment concerning all things artistic, while the surface disagreement may involve other terms. This way there would be a conceptual dispute involved when COLORATION is employed as part of a judgment which is made from a controversial point of view, although that dispute would not be about COLORATION but about how art is conceptualized in a goal-oriented manner as a normative ideal. Consider the following excerpt:

'Painting', when used as it often is to-day as an 'achievement word', meaning 'real painting', 'genuine painting', 'painting which reminds us of what painting can do', etc., is the expression of an essentially contested concept (...) The same is true of such ostensibly neutral terms of criticism as 'coloration', 'unity', 'depth', in so far as these are used by critics writing from radically different aesthetic points of view. ART, 109, n10.

The coloration of a painting refers to the physical world in that it is pigment on a canvas, but when 'coloration' is used by persons from (radically) different artistic viewpoints [cf. (iv) above] while making a judgment that appraises the current artistic achievement in the context of traditional values [cf. iv-v], it becomes something quite else: an expression of an essentially contested concept. Similarly, in *ECC*, Gallie examines the uses of a phrase 'a Christian life,' and sees it as expressing, or illustrating, an essentially contested concept (*ECC* 180–1). I claim that this the most reasonable reconstruction of Gallie's claim, although now it appears that terms corresponding to “sub-ordinate concepts” do not directly really refer to or signify an essentially contested concept, say, COLORATION_{EC}. It is rather the case that the term/concept 'coloration' figures in mutually contesting and contested judgments that involve contestability that is traceable to how certain values that are associated with the activity in question (e.g., painting as an artistic activity) are revived and advanced as each sees fit.

The observation by Morris Weitz that essentially contested concepts are “institutional ones that relate to certain highly valued activities, such as art, politics, religion, and morals” (Weitz, 1972, 102; see also Criley 2007, 33–4) points to a right direction. Gallie himself, of course, relates essentially contested concepts to “a number of organized or semi-organized human activities” that are the subjects of aesthetics, political philosophy, philosophy of history, and philosophy of religion (*ECC* 168/PHU 157; see also PHU 170). There are two basic options for understanding essentially contested concepts as institutional in a broad sense: (a) they are representations of human activities or practices or (b) they figure in judgments that are typically made *within* or *in suitable connection to* such activities or practices.

In option (b), various events, experiences, and entities are categorized with reference to an activity and/or for the specific purpose of that activity. So called sub-ordinate concepts can be only loosely related to each other, and there might be nothing extraordinary about them. What matters is that there is a common “theme,” i.e., that the concepts of “different generality” come together and are contested as a part of an activity with certain boundaries and associated norms. In the case of the arts, for instance, it is about how and where one identifies

aesthetic value and employs concepts accordingly to express that value rather than it being the case that the nature of those concepts themselves renders them unique vehicles for such expression. That could be why Gallie considers RELIGION and CHRISTIANITY as having the same status: they are both connected to a broad human activity that relates to things like a religious/spiritual way of life or an adherence to a particular creed.

Gallie emphasizes, at times, that he speaks of the use of 'art' or 'religion' "as an entirely general term" (PHU 168, 171) while 'Christianity' or 'painting' are more specific variations (of a general activity). That suggests a kind of genus-species distinction which is missing in the case of DOGMA and COLORATION, but my preferred reading stays the same: essential contestability is predicated on the connection of terms/concepts to some worthwhile human activity or practice which admits expansion, revival, and advancement of the values associated with the activity in different ways (see ART 114 or *LOVERS* in 11.2). Therefore, there also has to be some room for new ways of realizing the values of the activity, which suggests a degree of latitude in revising what falls within the proper boundaries of the activity; all of which further accords with Gallie's remarks concerning the persistence of artistic activity or achievement (ECC 182/PHU 177). In general, one who goes with option (b) could see essentially contested concepts as sort of *proxies* for activities within which contestability takes place. Whatever it is that the participants in an open-ended activity are supposed to do, it is influenced by how they conceive of the point of the activity and its value¹⁷². It is that which appears to be the true source of essential contestability; whether or not it further translates to conceptual level in a manner that warrants the talk of essentially contested concepts *qua* concepts.

Let us now consider option (a), i.e., essentially contested concepts are institutional in the sense that they are representations of activities or practices. Sometimes Gallie himself looks to be saying that essentially contested concepts are *concepts of activities*¹⁷³ (ECC 190). According to Mario Ricciardi, "a concept is essentially contestable when it 'stands for' an open-ended activity." The activity in question is "like a game with no end-state, where all or some of the participants disagree on who, among the actual participants, is best doing what he or she (or it) is supposed to be doing according to the rules of the game." (Ricciardi 2000, 40; cf. PHU 170ff.) One virtue of Ricciardi's interpretation is that it explains why Gallie could think that the output of *Artificial* is CHAMPIONSHIP as an artificial example of an essentially contested concept (11.1). CHAMPIONSHIP is now understood as a concept of the open-ended activity which results in intractable disputes between the supporters of different teams over which team plays the game best. When transposed to the live examples, they too now stand for or

¹⁷² In this respect, one may find Gallie's talk of how "the different emphases placed upon elements of cult and of doctrine, of personal salvation and of social cohesion, of moral comfort and metaphysical illumination" (PHU 168) render RELIGION as an essentially contested concept. I will discuss the passage in connection to the admittance to a tradition thesis in 12.4.

¹⁷³ See also how Gallie examines the criteria of how 'science' is used in Gallie 1957.

represent (human) activities, and their popular conceptions may be a bit of a mishmash of various ideas that reflect or track the appreciable purposes within the human activity. The concept of the activity becomes contested when one disagrees with others about how to realize the characteristic values of the activity and (thus) its proper boundaries¹⁷⁴.

The obvious problem with option (a) is that this is both a lot and very little to incorporate within a single concept: concepts that are allegedly essentially contested like ART and DEMOCRACY have a quite specific function in one's conceptual framework. If one were to encounter a person for whom RELIGION applies to certain kind of belief systems with no reference to purposes and values associated with an accompanying religious or spiritual activity, even if she would profess such views anyway, one could not have a dispute properly characterized by the essential contestability (of a concept) with her. Although Gallie claims that the basic and popular use of certain terms, like 'democracy,' stands for essentially contested concepts (esp. PHU 178; see also ECC 186-7), the way that type of usage is framed renders it very technical, which makes one to suspect as well that 'essentially contested concept' is mostly a term of art. Option (b) may capture better the full import of Gallie's original thinking, and it may also have a fighting chance in presenting essential contestability in a wide enough form to be interesting.

In conclusion, Gallie's thesis is attractive in part because he is talking about disputes in which conflicting demands are made within ordinary thought and practice (Gray 1983, 96) without giving pride of place to the precise technical definitions of intellectuals and experts (Connolly 1993, 11), experts who also sometimes fail to grasp that Gallie does not seek to describe the nature of concepts that have all the specific functions they hold important. The basic point about contestability that is squarely concerned with definitional disagreements that typically occur within academic fields is that they always leave something out in concentrating on one admirable aspect of the human activity (cf. 11.2).

Having said that, the idea also professed by Gallie that some theoretical or definitional views or disputes feed into the loop in which the activity may be viewed as progressing towards a better realization of certain values, and perhaps partially as a result of contesting the matter, is not outlandish. Some social, moral, and political developments specifically require a change in one's conceptualizations (see e.g., Connolly 1993, Ch. 5). The institutionalized fields of humanistic inquiry in which our conceptual tools are constantly multiplied, and occasionally sharpened, may very well advance our understanding concerning a human activity that we do our best to represent as correctly as possible. Gallie's point of view reminds us that academic inquiry and accompanying intellectual squabbles are not the be-all and end-all. Beyond theoretically intricate conceptualizations of things like art and social justice, people still employ the

¹⁷⁴ Even if nobody is actually engaging in disputing the matter, the possibility of questioning where exactly the boundaries of the activity should be drawn remains (cf. ART 99n2; 12.1). In this minimal and weak sense, the concept signifying the activity is *contestable*, but it may not yet be necessarily or essentially contestable (see 12.2; 12.3).

predicates 'is art' and 'is democratic' to express a broad normative ideal or goal, the popular boundaries of which are much vaguer and ever more shifting than classically constructed definitions of those concepts would suggest. That is made possible by the existence of a broad human activity, the category of which an essentially contested concept is geared to be and which is expressed by the concept's or term's elementary use.

11.4 The account of justified conversions

An essential contestability thesis presents us with a dilemma: the dispute appears to be of the kind that enables rival parties to be justified in holding on to their views even if all uses remain essentially contested. How is this possible despite conflict? In this section, I focus on presenting and analyzing Gallie's most concrete answer to that essential question: the disputants engage in persuading each other while trying to bring about conversion from one concept-use to another, and if such conversion can be considered justified, the dispute itself is genuine and rational¹⁷⁵. Gallie's relevant remarks are brief, and mostly offered in reference to *Artificial* (3.3; 11.1), which means that I must frequently take interpretative liberties in the following exposition. That needs special emphasis because the direction, to which I will later extend Gallie's thesis, draws from how I more broadly view a conception of reasonableness implicit in it.

In disputes involving essentially contested concepts, rival parties profess beliefs regarding how accurately their concept-use reflects a valued achievement at its best. They are motivated to stand up for their own conceptions and to persuade others to come around and see the matter from their point of view. However, that motivation does not spring from strategic, personal, or group interests in the sense that the disputants would merely try to reach a certain political clout or influence, or that they would otherwise use special pleading. A disputant holds on to a view because she views it as best reflecting the achievement that she values highly, and every other possible factor behind the dispute, like ignorance or malice, is of secondary importance, at best. When someone changes their mind, that person is undergoing a *conversion* from one view, i.e., the use of a concept, to another. Gallie's remarks concerning the rationality of a conversion are also meant to apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to the rationality of a continued use of a concept. In general, one could characterize the disputants' beliefs as defeasible in the specific sense that the disputants have (strong) presuppositions in their favor, but they are still open to revision. The kind of open-endedness envisioned by Gallie means that new arguments are

¹⁷⁵ The question of the genuineness of disputes is thus turned into a question about the justifiability of conversions: if there is "such a thing as "the logic" of conversion," "the notions of evidence, cogency and rational persuasion" can properly be applied to the endless disputes to which the use of any essentially contested concept gives rise (ECC 188). The genuineness of disputes is further discussed in 14.1.

presented as cultural circumstances change, although any number of disputants may hold steadfastly to their views in any given situation or at any given time.

Social disputes are often settled through power struggles or by sheer brute force, but Gallie is discussing the matter from the point of view of normative reason, or by assessing the relative strength of arguments and justifiability of claims (Ruben 2010, 258). Gallie's disagreements are broadly evidential in the sense that different uses of essentially contested concepts can be backed up by "perfectly respectable arguments and evidence" and by what each party to a dispute claims to be convincing forms of justification (ECC 169). The relevant type of dispute does not turn on confusion, ambiguity, or merely partisan or rhetorical appeals (Criley 2007, 26). Neither does Gallie speak of disagreement that comes down to merely conflicting personal dispositions regarding the matter, like gustatory disagreements over basic taste (see also Freedman 1996, 55). To engage in essential contestation is to make a case for why one should think in a certain way rather than to merely record a difference of opinion.

It is somewhat unclear, however, to what extent Gallie treats justifiable conversions *also* as psychological operations, notwithstanding his intention to not target those conversions that are psychologically or sociologically "expectable" or "purely emotional" (ECC 190-1). After briefly discussing CHRISTIANITY, Gallie notes that the most important question it raises is one he tries to deal with later in a more general form. That is, "whether the so-called arguments by which adherents of one creed seek to convert adherents of other creeds are in any proper sense arguments at all" (ECC 181). The fact that essential contestedness seems to take place between the adherents probably goes a long way in explaining why he elected to speak of 'conversions' instead of changes in beliefs, judgments, *et cetera*. Based on Gallie's other remarks, there is no reason to suppose that Gallie would actually doubt the argumentative nature of the attempts to convert others. Individuals appraise how to use a concept properly not so much in a manner of all-things-considered, or "by some observandum whose sheer occurrence all observers must acknowledge" (ECC 191), but considering all the things of which the one potentially undergoing conversion is cognizant, or to which he is responsive (cf. Stokes later; see also 13.4).

What sort of a new realization dawns on one who undergoes a conversion? According to Gallie, we are dealing with a sort of fact, but one that is about how an achievement signified by a particular use of a concept "revives and realizes, as it were in fuller relief" some already recognized feature of the original exemplar. Because of the new evidence, the disputant undergoing conversion now "sees, or claims to see, more clearly and fully why he has acknowledged and followed the exemplar's style of performance all along." The newly adopted conception is superior to an earlier conception from the perspective of the disputant, and this suggests asymmetry that is characteristic to biographical transitions (see also 13.4). Each disputant recognizes the value of new claims, arguments and evidence from the standpoint of one's "particular marginal appraisive situation." One's recognition of *value* is conclusive to oneself

“although it is merely impressive or surprising or worth noticing for others.”¹⁷⁶ (ECC 189, 191.)

To explain particular preferences and adherences, Gallie remarks that “it will no doubt be necessary to call upon psychological or sociological history or the known historical facts of a person's or group's background” (ECC 192.) It appears that the particular (marginal) appraisive situation plays a specific theoretical role in emphasizing the unique situatedness of disputing parties as appraisers who evaluate the matter from their personal points of view with the arguments and evidence they have at their disposal at the time. By contrast, a person's (or group's) background may encompass a wider array of motivations, reasons, and rationalizations, which are needed for a full understanding of why one is attuned or more responsive to some concerns than others. The difference is not crystal-clear, though, and it is possible that Gallie does not even consciously differentiate between the two.

The basic premise of essential contestedness is that there are no general standards of evaluation or other principles available for adjudicating different cases (see also Freeden 1996, 55). Combined with the notion of the particular appraisive situation, especially, we can extrapolate that disputing parties do not share the same standards according to which they come to their conflicting views. Thus, it is to be expected that their disagreement is not simply about what conclusions to draw based on the evidence but more fundamentally about the standards according to which the matter at hand should be appraised. However, more is obviously needed than to simply say that people just happen to hold different views or prefer different uses of a concept because they are different people who happen to think differently.

One may begin to reconsider one's use of a concept, in artificial terms, because of a “particular performance” of a team or due to a “shrewd appraisive comment” from one of the supporters (ECC 189-90). I guess that a myriad of things could function as a trigger – Gallie can be read as accepting a diversity of both rational and non-rational reasons as causes of belief formation (Mason 1993, 59-61) – and it also makes sense to think that they do not necessarily have to be directly included in a justification for a new position. The important thing is that the trigger starts a process, in which one critically evaluates one's own view and compares its reasonableness to the proposed alternative(s)¹⁷⁷.

Pieces of evidence and arguments of varying shrewdness that are put forward by one side can have an effect, or “logical force,” of *different degree on different disputants* given their previous information and the grounds for their views (ECC 189-191). In addition to a person's or a group's subjective

¹⁷⁶ Gallie vacillates between the first person and the third person perspectives in his thesis, and most especially in making the case for justified conversions. The passage quoted is one of the rare cases in which he appears to make the distinction clearly, even if only to distinguish between an individual disputant or group and other parties to the same dispute. One should further distinguish between perspectives internal and external to a dispute (see 13.2).

¹⁷⁷ The closer one were to come to often messy real-world debates, the more important it would be to make sense of how all things affective find their place in Gallie's framework.

background, there also *might or could be*¹⁷⁸ “logically appraisable factors in an individual’s use, or change of use, of a particular contested concept” (ECC 192). Some continued uses or conversions are thus not simply psychologically or sociologically expectable, but they are also “defensible,” “justifiable,” or “more or less intellectually respectable.” Gallie leaves those factors unspecified (see ECC 192), but he clearly means that individual disputants’ conduct and positions within the dispute are rationally assessable (Criley 2007, 38; Bakhurst 2005; see also 3.2). Even if the contest cannot be settled by rational means, it can be “rational debate” (Booth 1977, 410), it often involves “arguments that aspire to be, and sometimes are, rationally persuasive” (Bakhurst 2005), or, at the very least, “rational considerations are not idle” (Evnine 2011, 120).

The only example of how a conversion takes place is presented in artificial terms by Gallie (ECC 189–191). There are three contestant teams T₁, T₂, and T₃. “For simplicity,” he asserts, the style of play of T₂ “can be said to stand mid-way between the styles of T₁ and T₃” (ECC 189). In each respective group of supporters “there will always be wavering or marginal individuals” who are also often aware of the characteristic excellences of other teams (ECC 189). These individuals are the prime candidates to be converted, and an individual I₂—a wavering supporter of T₂—is one of them. Now, something about T₁ makes I₂ “realize much more completely than heretofore the justice of T₁’s claim to be sustaining and advancing the original exemplar team’s style of play in “the best possible way”” (ECC 189–90). This “tips the scales” for I₂ thus bringing about his conversion to being a supporter of T₁, yet other supporters of T₂ need not be persuaded, even if those same reasons have had “a comparable influence” on them, although not as effective. However, the reasons behind I₂’s change of allegiance has “shaken them” or, at least, brought awareness that their team “must make a comparably effective adaptation of its style of play if it is to keep their unwavering support.” Moreover, although supporters of other teams (T₃) have not been affected that much in this case, “they have at least been made to ‘sit up and take notice’”. (ECC 190.) This is Gallie’s artificial example of a justified conversion, even if it is indeed “rather maddeningly unspecific” (Criley 2007, 39).

A piece of evidence or an argument inducing an individual conversion is assumed to have a *comparable* influence on those who do not undergo conversion. The influence is thus a matter of degree or quantity rather than of kind or quality¹⁷⁹. The reason why others do not waver enough to convert is that *they* have evaluated the matter in *their* particular, although not quite as marginal, appraisive situations, and are still unconvinced—the *scale* has not yet tipped for them. The general idea is intuitively attractive, yet it seems that the assumption of comparable influence is premised on a rather artificial and problematic notion that the playing styles of different teams can be placed in a bipolar continuum

¹⁷⁸ This denotes the sort of parlance that is very typical to Gallie (cf. ECC 192).

¹⁷⁹ This is my interpretation, and a rather straightforward one. For another view, Criley is content to note that the reader is left guessing “what sort of specifications of styles of play might fit the pattern that Gallie describes, and what it might mean to say that team T₂ has a style of play (...) that stands midway between the others” (Criley 2007, 39).

upon which some styles are in the middle while the “distance” between other styles is longer – as if it could be quantitatively measured in the first place¹⁸⁰.

Gallie’s notion of the “logical force” of arguments and evidence is not particularly clear either. It is evident, though, that the term is meant to capture a persuasive and/or convincing effect of arguments and evidence on disputants, the effect which determines whether disputants convert or not, and that settles the force-part. But what about “logical”? Gallie’s reference to the “logical equipollence” of different descriptions of a concept (see ch. 6 intro) needs to be considered. Here, Gallie is likely thinking that the distinct descriptions of a concept’s usage are logically equivalent in at least one of the following senses: 1) they are equal in power, force, signification, or application; 2) there is a sameness of signification of two or more descriptions which differ in how the descriptions are outlined. Presumably, there are different sorts of logical equipollencies in general. For example: “some A” and “not no A” make up an equipollent pair, and so does the obversion “every A is B” – “no A is non-B.” This suggests the following: even if two or more descriptions of how a concept is to be used are differently presented, they refer to the same thing in a manner implying that, as such, one description does not force itself to be accepted more than the other. They are “equal in logical force,” if there are no extra considerations to be had which would break the tie convincing/persuading to choose one description over another.

Let us then recall that Conditions (II) and (III) presumably make it possible to have “a multi-dimensional description or classification of certain facts,” and that Gallie thinks that it is not reasonable to prefer one description/classification of *facts* as such to another. However, by substituting “achievements for facts” we should find ourselves in a situation in which “for the purpose of moral or aesthetic persuasion one style of description or classification may very definitely be preferable to another which is logically equipollent with it” (ECC 174n2). In other words: there are different ways to classify facts but appraisive considerations come into play when one needs to decide which different multi-dimensional description or classification to prefer. Two (or more) different descriptions in which different facets of a valued achievement are put in different ranking orders should not be considered *equivalent* to each other. After all, they are *different* ranking orders. The extra considerations that tip the scale, or break the tie, between otherwise logically equipollent alternatives (that are backed by various arguments and evidence, or in which facts are classified or described multi-dimensionally) are provided by one’s particular appraisive situation. This will bring about an individual conversion in some cases but not in others, because

¹⁸⁰ Perhaps a (value) community of language-users share enough background to understand (and accept) why others are using the concept the way they do. This way the range of proposed uses can be considered humanly “likely” (ECC 193/PHU 188) or “historically and logically permissible” (PHU 210), while different uses require different value commitments (also in terms of depth). When Gallie is read charitably enough to suggest that there is a common, though vague, standard that governs the applicability of an essentially contested concept, his remarks on comparable influence or logical force become more palatable (see esp. 12.1; 18.1).

not everyone “breaks the tie” the same way as each looks at the issue from the standpoint of their particular appraisive situation. The “logical force” of an argument or a piece of evidence is felt differently¹⁸¹.

When Gallie is read very carefully, he appears to state that *only* those conversions which are brought about by one particular argument or a piece of evidence capable of also being “recognized to have a definite logical force” by other rival parties are *justifiable* given a person’s/group’s previous information and grounds on using a concept in a particular way (see ECC 190). If such a ripple effect is required, users of a concept need to mutually attribute at least some relevancy to those considerations that lead to (justifiable) conversions in the first place. Gallie can come to this conclusion a lot easier when the following assumptions and simplifications are in place: (i) the (rational) influence of arguments and evidence put forward, i.e., their logical force, is comparable; (ii) various uses of a concept can be evaluated on a comparable scale. With (i) and (ii) it would become possible to assert that, (iii) when the arguments and evidence that can bring an individual to change the way the concept is used are recognized by others as relevant, they can bring about justified conversions in this and in other cases depending on each particular appraisive situation. In fact, I dare to say that (iii) is the conclusion that must be drawn based on what Gallie originally says, even if Gallie himself fails to do so clearly, especially in non-artificial terms.

I wager that many of Gallie’s readers have grasped what he implies: the common agreement on what arguments and evidence are considered relevant renders the ensuing dispute *a reasonable disagreement* as long as the disputants infer correctly in the light of what they know and value. However, pretty much nobody has been ready to attribute such a claim to him, explicitly. That might be because Gallie’s account appears decisively *subjectivist*, or perhaps as non-cognitivistically expressivist, at first. Mark Criley (2007) points out that Gallie can be read as moving from one extreme position to another: according to the first position, the scope or force of argumentative, evidential or rational appeal is universal, and thus demands universal agreement; while according to the second position “only the individual’s values, convictions, judgments, or assertions can count as exerting rational force for that individual.” Criley thinks that Gallie is adopting the second position after the first position is discarded. This view seems to be premised on the assumption that Gallie strictly separates between the descriptive concepts and evaluative concepts, the latter of which can be responsive to descriptive features “in a way that reflects different weight or influence among the descriptive features.” (Criley 2007, 35–6, 42; see also 17.2.) Gallie is explicitly denying that “the notion of logical justification can be applied only to such theses and arguments as can be presumed capable of gaining in the long run universal agreement” (ECC 188), and he does not offer much as a substitute than the affirmation that everyone evaluates the matter in their

¹⁸¹ By substituting valued achievements with concepts, we can now easily agree with Pritam Baruah’s succinct statement that “[Gallie] takes reasons associated with the complex features of the concepts as the basis on which a particular contestant might convert” (Baruah 2014, 349).

particular appraisive situations. This may be taken to suggest that one can disregard descriptive facts altogether as only personal evaluative considerations are decisive in choosing between different descriptions of how to use a concept. Alternatively, behind every weighting of considerations there *must* be a non-rational reason for doing so (see Mason 1993, 59–61 esp. n34). All this sounds rather extreme, is this really Gallie's position?

Michael Stokes (2007) affirms that the assumption of the unobtainability of universal agreement "limits the role of rationality." Gallie ends up equating a person's commitment to one conception as being a matter of conversion, and the role that rationality comes to have is that it enables describing "a person's commitment to one conception rather than another as rational or right for that person." For example, when each conception of CHRISTIANITY is based on a different understanding of what it means to be Christian, a person may rationally commit to a group or sect that shares his understanding of it. Stokes also notices that, for Gallie, "it will be rational where other persons recognize the force of the considerations that led the person in question to form a new allegiance, whether or not it leads them to change their allegiance." Given the disputant's past commitments and actions, it is possible to determine "whether it is logical for a person who must commit to some conception of a contested concept to commit to one conception rather than another" (Stokes 2007, 696–7.) This does not convey the same extremism that Criley finds in Gallie. Individual rational judgment is constricted, in the first instance, to apply only to personally effective reasons for conversion, but that does not yet mean that those reasons would not overlap with non-personal that contribute to rationality in a fuller sense. That is where intersubjective agreement on certain considerations being valid over others comes along, only after which a conversion or a reason for the conversion can be properly called justified in Gallie's framework.

A continued use, or a change of use, of a concept is akin to any "unique decision" and thus greater or lesser degrees of rationality can be properly attributed to it. (ECC 191.) The idea is certainly not to claim that reason has no role in essential contestability, but instead of universal agreement Gallie attempts to ground it in both individual decision and common agreement on the relevancy of arguments and evidence. In stating that reason demanding and deserving universal assent "fails completely as a description of those elements of reason that make possible discussions of religious, political and artistic problems" (ECC 195) Gallie is not trying to show that the debate about essentially contested concepts is doomed to fail miserably because of the subjectivity that is involved. Instead, he is trying to save the possibility of discussing those matters in a rational manner (ECC 196). The account of justified conversions, as I have laid it out, denies that every subjective consideration is as valid as any other: the range within which people can justifiably hold on to a use, or convert to using the concept differently, is curtailed by common agreement. Gallie's thesis is not subjectivist in a radical or extreme sense.

Instead of placing reasonableness at the front, Gallie might be taken to suggest instead, in artificial terms, that supporters need to pay attention to

conversions taking place (including the reasons for those conversions) because they wish to secure and increase the total support of their own team (cf. ECC 190). In that picture, it would make perfect sense to be interested in incremental changes in shifting allegiances, if only to counter them with adjustments by one's own team. That conclusion should be resisted for a couple of reasons. First, it would contradict what Gallie says elsewhere, namely that the supporters of the different teams are not to engage in contestation "through any vulgar wish to be the majority party, but because they believe their favoured team is *playing the game best*" (ECC 171). Together with the affirmation that disputes involving essentially contested concepts are "sustained by *perfectly respectable* arguments and evidence" (ECC 169), I think it is clear that wanting to be the majority party or wanting to simply keep as many supporters as one can is not considered "perfectly respectable" by Gallie. Second, there is no mention of conversion as *the* reason to "sit up and take notice" as Gallie consistently refers to a particular performance of one of the teams or the like in this context. Valued achievements signified by essentially contested concepts can be sustained and developed, and disputing parties that appraise them positively have a reason to prefer that they are realized or furthered in the best possible way (9.1). Any political calculation – for instance, that gathering as much support as possible leads to the best realization – is (stipulated as) subordinate to that.

Assuming the reading I have currently proposed is right, the account of justified conversions has an interesting and potentially far-reaching corollary. Since the degree to which a relevant piece of evidence or argument affects the certainty with which one holds on to a use of a concept is determined by how everyone evaluates the issue from the standpoint of their own particular appraisive situations, the sum total of decisive considerations capable of bringing about conversions can be approximated as the common or shared range of all those particular appraisals that are mutually recognized. To the extent that one can disagree within that range – as Gallie certainly presumes – the disagreement in question is reasonable. The boundaries or the content of that reasonable disagreement, i.e., what the reasonable disagreement is about, are shaped and set by the range of appraisive considerations, or judgments, that are viewed as relevant by disputing parties even if they do not share those same judgments themselves. This implies a process in which individuals or groups collectively or communally settle for using the concept in question in conflicting ways. The account of justified conversions ends up setting the boundaries for that agreement: what could be called *the zone of reasonable disagreement* comes to be defined by those taking part in a rational dispute¹⁸². Gallie seems to be ready to

¹⁸² Boromisza-Habashi speaks of "zones of acceptable variability" instead, zones which "comprise interpretations and uses of the concept that a particular community of speakers find appropriate and acceptable" (Boromisza-Habashi 2010, 283). Furthermore, as Simon Evnine observes, "It is initially the character of (Gallie's) contests that sets apart the target concepts (or terms) and makes them of interest" (Evnine 2011, 120), and it is of considerable importance how the specifics are ultimately conceived. Those who prefer to read Gallie from the sociological or politological perspective may want to emphasize, for instance, the moment of decision that is involved, the communal aspect of this type of recognition, or

exclude competing views from the contestation by fiat of those who are “moderate and sane” and who mutually agree that the “issue is simply obscured or debased by the intrusions of lunatic voices” (PHU 188; cf. 9.1; see 13.3). Now (ir)rationality is determined the same way: by virtue of agreement of some. Gallie seems to be pulling justification out of thin air in a truly Munchausenesque fashion: disputants’ mutual agreement that they are not mistaken in assessing the relevancy of arguments and evidence makes the matter so.

The suggestion of the proper boundaries of contestation as being dependent on agreement of rival parties might remain a technical triviality if not for the fact that the structure of reasonable disagreement seems to translate rather directly to the conceptual level¹⁸³. Glen Newey goes as far as to state that “the thesis (...) supposes that political disagreement (...) masks underlying agreement, on the conceptual structures which Gallie hoped to lay bare” (Newey 2001, 259). Indeed, by requiring that the parties need to mutually acknowledge the relevancy of arguments and evidence behind conversions, Gallie states, in effect, that the range of employing an essentially contested concept is determined by mutual agreement. Since there is variance in views due to people appraising how to employ a concept in their particular appraisive situations, it is a common supposition that the conceptual structure of the now emerging (essentially contested) concept should be of the kind that allows reasonable disagreement. Newton Garver thinks that the role of essentially contested concepts is to “provide order and structure to a particular sort of adversarial discourse” (Garver 1987, 220), while Wibren van der Burg considers it an important aspect of Gallie’s theory that the function of characterizing a concept as essentially contested is that “it may explain why some disputes are endless and yet perfectly genuine” (van der Burg 2017, 233). Yet it seems to me that the matter could be framed the other way around given what Gallie says about justified conversions, and how the status of Conditions is best understood (cf. ch. 10): it is the role of a particular sort of adversarial discourse to provide order and structure to essentially contested concepts.

In conclusion, there is some reason to believe that Gallie is offering, or at least flirting with, a preliminary notion of reasonable disagreement with his

perhaps how the decisions that are made result either in the construction of social and political groups or to the ostracism of those who cannot conform, i.e., the unwanted, miscreants, and heretics; or, more simply, the unreasonable. By contrast, those who look at the matter from the epistemological side can quite easily understand this recognition in a more passive sense: the area of reasonable disagreement is formed by the considerations that are found valid by the people who are competent and intelligent enough to assess the evidence, even if everyone does so from their own standpoint. Perhaps there are other possibilities as well; Gallie’s quite sketchy remarks do not preclude that much in this respect.

¹⁸³ One worry here is that all this might not amount to no more than a stipulation or bad argumentation. We are speaking of a reasonable, genuine disagreement when the disputants recognize that others have arrived at their uses of a concept on reasonable grounds. A natural reply is that such mutual acknowledgment (of evidence as relevant, arguments as sound, and so forth) is no guarantee against a mistake or error. A very Galliean solution would be that there *could be* some disputes in which disputing parties are not mistaken. And that looks like a stipulation.

account of justified conversions. However, as has become clear during this section, the thesis of essential contestedness lacks robust description in epistemological terms, and there is simply not much one can say about the matter based on Gallie's texts alone. In chapter 13, I make a concerted effort to extract and further develop the operative sense of reasonableness as exactly as I can. I also continue discussing the idea of reasonable disagreement there (esp. 13.2).

CHAPTER 12: THE ELEMENTS OF CONTESTEDNESS

In the current chapter, I will analyze what I take to be the four central elements of Gallie's basic idea of essential contestedness: indeterminacy and uncertainty, contestation, essentiality, and irresolvability and endlessness of disputes. First, I scrutinize the issues related to indeterminacy and uncertainty by analyzing how ambiguity and vagueness may figure in essential contestability, and particularly in Gallie's essential contestedness (12.1). It goes without saying that not nearly every issue related to linguistic ambiguity and conceptual vagueness can be discussed here; most notably, perhaps, I will more or less skip the linguistic discussion that makes use of homonyms, synonyms, polysemes *et cetera* in discussing the related issues. Second, I will distinguish between contestedness and contestability based mostly on the ideas of Gallie's commentators, but I will endeavor to explain Gallie's original terminological choices as well (12.2). I will end the section by presenting, somewhat abstractly, how a word or term might acquire the quality of being contestable in the course of history. The third section, likewise, rests on the secondary literature: Gallie did not really specify what he means by 'essentially' in 'essentially contested concept,' and there are plenty of options to consider (12.3). The section ends with an important discussion about the essentiality of contestation in relation to broad human activities or whole domains of social life. And finally, I will turn to Gallie's qualification of the disputes as irresolvable and endless by discussing the different options for understanding what these characterizations entail (12.4). The four sections together make it amply clear that there is no real consensus concerning how the elements of essential contestedness should be understood, in general, or what Gallie meant by them, in particular. Despite that, I will end each section by presenting a viewpoint that I personally consider a preferred reading or otherwise theoretically especially insightful.

12.1 Ambiguity and vagueness

Ambiguity and vagueness may contribute to the contestability of concepts or terms by introducing indeterminacy. It is, however, doubtful that either notion can generate the relevant type of endless and irresolvable dispute on its own (see e.g., Zimmerling 2005, 18–20). That being said, both have a role to play in the process that Gallie describes as essential contestedness.

The difference between ambiguity and vagueness comes down to “a matter of whether two or more meanings associated with a given phonological form are distinct (ambiguous), or united as nondistinguished subcases of a single, more general meaning (vague)” (Tuggy 1993, 273). Vagueness is therefore “a feature of some *concepts* or, as one could also say here, *meanings*” while ambiguity is a characteristic of some *words* – ambiguity may be further defined as a “(logically) accidental identity of words standing for different ideas” (von Wright 1993, I: §7). A standard example of ambiguity is ‘bank’ as ‘financial institution’ in contrast to ‘bank’ as ‘land at river edge.’ The Sorites paradox with its heaps and non-heaps is the paradigmatic philosophical example of vagueness: a difficulty of deciding borderline cases is often viewed as the distinguishing feature. From another perspective, the meaning-to-word/term relation can be considered defective when it is ambiguous and/or equivocal while the meaning-to-referent relation is defective when it is vague in the sense of being “undenotative”¹⁸⁴ (Sartori 1984, 25–6). Both ambiguity and vagueness involve meaning, yet determining ambiguity involves assessment on the level of linguistic items while vagueness is more clearly a matter a matter of conceptual categorization, fixing the referent, and/or application (in a wide sense).

Sometimes ambiguity and vagueness are mixed up in everyday parlance or given different senses from the ones above. Loosely employed, ‘ambiguity’ often denotes a sort of obscurity or a lack of relevant knowledge. By ‘vague’ one might mean ‘too general and thus hard to determine’ or the like. However, a reduction in generality may not correspond to a reduction in vagueness, as Jeremy Waldron points out. TREE is more specific than LIVING THING, but it may be much easier to determine an object as a living thing than as a tree – think of a tree versus a bush (Waldron 1994, 522). In addition, ambiguity and vagueness are often wrongly attributed to both concepts and words, sometimes interchangeably. An expression is ambiguous if it permits different, specific, and distinct interpretations or meanings, but the same should not be said in the case of concepts; I see no reason for deviating from the standard way of treating a

¹⁸⁴ Sartori observes, however, that pretty much all words in natural languages are polysemic/polysemes. It suggests that the multiplicity of meanings might not be a defect as such while the entanglement of meanings, which results in confusion, is. Thus clarity, rather than univocity, should be the goal of disambiguation. In the case of vagueness, “the remedy consists of increasing its denotative and/or discriminating power.” (Sartori 1984, 26.) Sartori’s interest lies mainly in empirical concepts that are employed for information gathering research purposes (see Sartori 2009a).

concept as having *a* meaning, but *not many* meanings¹⁸⁵ (cf. Sartori 1984, 56). With many meanings, one is dealing with several different concepts instead of a single concept *if* it is not for the best to conceive those meanings under the umbrella of a single term for some purpose or the other¹⁸⁶. By referring to ‘ambiguous concept’ one might allude to there being at least two distinct concepts. Yet it would be better to speak of ‘confused concept,’ even if it could likewise be questioned what a confused concept would even be¹⁸⁷ (Ingram 1985, 42n4). In contrast, a concept that combines different contents or meanings in a tolerable and non-confused way (cf. 5.2), could be called a ‘multifaceted concept.’

Ambiguous *words* often give rise to disputes that are merely verbal. They are often “impediments to understanding” (Chalmers 2011, 517), especially when they “derive from some communicative mishap or other” and thereby reveal nothing of substance about the subject matter (Cohnitz and Marquez 2014, 3). If the parties to a dispute “agree on the relevant facts about a domain of concern and just disagree about the language used to describe that domain” (Chalmers 2011, 515) the disagreement they are having appears to be verbal. One hallmark of a verbal dispute is that resolving the linguistic issue evaporates the presumed nonlinguistic disagreement (ibid., 516). However, it does not appear that the disputes that Gallie is after would be satisfactorily resolvable by coming to terms concerning language. In general, getting to know what the proper context of an expression is can remove the ambiguity. In contrast, vagueness is not typically eliminated by getting to know all relevant facts or by clarifying a context of utterance, and the meaning of vague terms is reasonably clear to competent language-users in most contexts.

¹⁸⁵ The term ‘meaning’ is commonly used in connection to concepts in the literature on essential contestability, and in many other philosophical discussions as well. However, one could argue that ‘meaning’ properly applies to words whereas in the case of concepts one should refer to their ‘content.’ Given the prevalence of the former usage, and the fact that I extensively report and comment on the secondary literature that often either fails to make this distinction or does not do so explicitly, I continue employing both ‘meaning’ and ‘content’ in connection to concepts. This unfortunately tends to blur the lines between words, terms, and concepts, which is something one should keep in mind, especially in chapter 14 and afterwards. In my discussion of the viability of a concept-centered thesis of essential contestability in part four, I offer more to work with in terms of how to distinguish the relevant entities.

¹⁸⁶ David Tuggy gives an interesting example of vagueness in the case of ‘aunt’ as in the difference between ‘father’s sister’ and ‘mother’s sister,’ where “the meanings are intuitively united into one,” ‘parent’s sister’ (Tuggy 1993, 273–4). In the present context, ‘aunt’ serves its purpose of designating either a father’s sister or a mother’s sister as each is a parent’s sister but, in case we were to lack AUNT and PARENT altogether in the sense we have for them, we would have to make do with combinations of FATHER, MOTHER, and SISTER. Our concepts could be different, but we have decided to conceptualize our close relations in one way rather than another and we employ the respective terms accordingly.

¹⁸⁷ ‘Confused concept’ might serve as shorthand for ‘a term/word about which there is a conceptual confusion’ or ‘an alleged concept which actually hides distinct concepts.’ This draws attention to the problem of fusing distinct meanings under the rubric of one concept/term (see also Stokes 2007, 694). ‘Confused concept’ implies that the term/concept is presently and actively employed in a confused manner by different parties.

Vagueness gives rise to borderline cases, or cases about which one is uncertain. For instance, a male with the height of two meters is typically considered tall, and clearly so, but is he “tall” as a basketball player? Some contextual information is also needed in the case of vagueness – in this case, the standard for evaluating tallness is contextually supplied¹⁸⁸. That said, vague concepts do not invite confusions the way ambiguous words do. According to Waldron (1994), issues of vagueness typically arise whenever one encounters a continuum – e.g., of sensory data in the case of colors – with terminology that has, or aspires to have, a bivalent logic. However, that more or less requires that the more basic question about the word’s meaning [sic], or how it is used, has already been settled in some way¹⁸⁹: “vagueness anywhere presupposes determinacy somewhere else.” (Waldron 1994, 511, 516, 535.)

The characteristics of vagueness make it somewhat compatible with essential contestability of concepts, while ambiguity is clearly something that needs to be overcome. Vagueness may also be ineliminable in principle, as it seems possible to conceive puzzling borderline cases for practically every predicate that we attempt to define. According to Waldron, this is what Friedrich Waismann (1968) discussed and labelled as ‘the open texture’ in the article “Verifiability” (Waldron 1994, 522); it is conceivable that Gallie had this in mind with his re-characterization of Condition (IV) as persistent vagueness (6.2). It could be objected that the ineliminable existence of borderline cases does not necessarily amount to contestability of the most deep and pervasive kind since disputants might still agree on a set of central cases (see also Ingram 1985, 52). Waldron affirms that the image of borderlines suggests “a circle with a center, where everything is clear, and a circumference where things become uncertain.” However, people may also “disagree about how to draw the circle.” The latter disagreement is arguably more fundamental, conceptually speaking, than the simple borderline disagreement. (Waldron 1994, 520, 522.)

It is illustrative to present two very different views concerning the sharp boundaries of concepts. On the one hand, Waldron criticizes the attempts “to instill a form of exactness into our use of vague predicates.” The vague cases cannot be neatly divided into (1) clearly something, (2) clearly not-something, and (3) hard cases or borderline cases in which it is reasonable to say that it is one or the other. Instead, “True vagueness arises when there is hesitation or uncertainty about how to establish these three categories or where there is a

¹⁸⁸ Assessing whether a basketball player is tall might require one to know the sex of the player so that one can apply the right standard. But what does the sex have to do with it? Should the matter be determined instead by the physical demands of the sport or by the average height of the players who compete in a league? Many vague concepts may have a clear enough meaning but choosing the right standard can still be debatable.

¹⁸⁹ Waldron’s talk of vague words is a bit misleading, but I take his basic point to be that we cannot know whether a concept is vague unless we already know something about its use or application. Samantha Besson characterizes the issue in more absolute terms: “for a term to be vague, there must be *undisputed paradigms*, that is to say instances where the term applies in a clear and uncontested fashion” (Besson 2005, 76). Undisputed paradigms might not help in deciding without uncertainty whether the concept applies in other cases if we cannot confidently say what is common to all instances of the concept.

general uncertainty about whether a given case is a borderline case or not.” (Waldron 1994, 520–1.) On the other hand, Mario Ricciardi, who denies the essential contestability of concepts but understands it as a property of certain words, defends just the kind of tripartite approach that Waldron criticizes. This way “a word whose meaning is vague can have sharp boundaries and hence have precise logical properties without any second-order vagueness” while “[t]he area of vagueness is an area of suspended judgement for lack of criteria, not a mysterious third realm.” This is basically the reason why Ricciardi thinks “it is safe to say that one cannot make a judgement with an essentially-contestable-thing-in-the-mind.”¹⁹⁰ (Ricciardi 2000, 52–3.) Waldron’s and Ricciardi’s views may be taken to exemplify very different approaches to language and logic(al categories).

It is not always easy to distinguish between ambiguity and vagueness as sources of indeterminacy in actual cases. Tuggy states that the [genuine] cases of polysemy fall in between ambiguity and vagueness. The meanings of polysemes are clearly distinguishable, yet also clearly related. According to him, it is doubtful that there are clearly fixed boundaries between ambiguity and vagueness (Tuggy 1993.) For instance, disputes that appear to have at their center a terminological *ambiguity that is due to different levels of generality* may pose problems for analysis. An easily understandable dispute could arise when one claims that “cats are especially suitable domestic animals” and the other understands cats to include tigers as members of the *Felidae* family. However, an apparently similar case of terminological ambiguity could arise over the *proper* level of generality regarding a contentious moral or political issue. One’s take might be rejected either as too general or not general enough. In a dispute about whether SOCIAL JUSTICE should be applied universally or more locally, clarifying the intended scope may do very little to resolve the fundamental issue, and the choice directly affects conclusions.

Another complication is related to the fact that words/terms and matching concepts are first learned in situations which may differ from person to person. One’s paradigm case of an animal that is learned during hunting trips with a parent is different from the paradigm case that is learned in a zoo, i.e., both core and penumbral cases are different. Here, vagueness “is a property of words’ meanings,” and if meaning is taken to “connote the way a term is used, this suggests that vagueness is relative to users” (Waldron 1994, 520). Determining when this type of indeterminacy slides into ambiguity can be exceedingly difficult both in theory and in practice. The fact that some words have technical meanings in addition to natural meanings—Waldron considers ‘economic efficiency’ as a notorious example (see Waldron 1994, 515–6)—may also be an

¹⁹⁰ For a view that accepts both the use of a competing conception of a concept and the use of a contested concept, see Stokes 2007 who also interestingly notes that “where the speaker has used the concept rather than a particular conception of it, we are not bound by the speaker’s understanding of that concept” (Stokes 2007, 693). I take that to mean that, for example in the case of a written constitution or other similar text, one has interpretative latitude concerning what freedom, liberty, equality, or other such things mean (and this could have been intended by those who framed the constitution in the first place).

instance of user-specific vagueness. A term may be used in a certain technical sense in order to achieve some theoretical, or even practical, aim in a genuine dispute in which different aims clash with each other, even if others arguably attach different technical or natural senses to it. The difference in senses suggest ambiguity, yet the different senses could also be closely related as historically sanctioned alternative meanings of the word/term.

Having the working definitions of ambiguity and vagueness at hand, we can now turn to Gallie's thesis. David-Hillel Ruben has criticized Gallie's reference to ambiguity in *ECC* as "confusing" (Ruben 2010, 259; *ECC* 172, n1). As a move towards setting things straight, I now present how Gallie has employed 'vague' and 'ambiguous' in various articles, after which I turn to discuss their connection to essential contestedness.

In "The Limitations of Analytical Philosophy" (1949), Gallie discusses whether it is possible to identify the sufficient conditions of the proper use of various "mental verbs," e.g., 'believe,' 'think,' 'choose,' 'desire.' These mental verbs are "*vague*, in one strictly specifiable sense" of the word¹⁹¹: "we are unable to tell whether any such verb, as used in the vast unordered variety of its possible contexts, is or is not ambiguous." The situation is due to us having no "*general criterion*" for using mental verbs properly¹⁹². Gallie notes that it is possible to analyze 'believing' from pragmatist/behaviorist or intellectualist viewpoints. In the light of such analyses, 'believe' *could* be ambiguous, "[b]ut we are not in a position to assert this confidently." Differences revealed by rival analyses may be "accidental" or due to some unrelated factors present in the contexts in which the verb is used. Thus, for all we know, all proper uses of the word 'believe' may share a "a hard central core of meaning" but we just cannot tell what it is. (Gallie 1949, 42.) Therefore, the specific sense Gallie attributes to vagueness, in 1949, is the inability to tell whether one is dealing with ambiguity.

The above position on vagueness shifts the discussion to the direction in which Gallie is describing our phenomenological experience or epistemological limitations, instead of what could be described apart from our situatedness that is characterized by uncertainty. In an even earlier article, "Solipsistic and Social Theories of Meaning" (1938), Gallie argues that language is not as much fixed as it is continually revised in the light of novel and unpredictable information that others can provide in a process of mutual question-asking. The idea seems to be that one can refer to an object vaguely, even if one does not yet know how the reference is to be ultimately or fully specified. Still, one may have good reason to believe that the needed information is forthcoming, which makes it possible to

¹⁹¹ For Gallie, the ordinary sense amounts to possessing "no means whatever of deciding how it will be used, or what its consequences will be if it is used, in certain contexts" (Gallie 1949, 42). 'Consequence' is apparently used here in a pragmatist fashion: the meaning of the concept of 'x' boils down to the practical bearings of using the term 'x.' For Gallie's relation to Peirce and pragmatism in connection to vagueness, see Viola 2019, esp. 242ff; see also 2.4.

¹⁹² This is reminiscent of what Gallie says in *ECC* regarding the absence of a general principle for deciding between the contested uses of essentially contested concepts (e.g., *ECC* 177, 189). Compare also to Gallie's talk of "what is the criterion of 'relevantly similar contexts'" (ART 101; or CRITICS in 11.2).

intend to refer to the whole of the object even if that whole is not inferable from one's present information and experience (see esp. *ibid.*, 75–7). Tullio Viola (2019) notes that the Gallie's views in 1938 are very similar to Peirce's conception of vague signs. The reason why Gallie was not completely satisfied with the notion of family resemblance [see 11.2] was that "[t]he Peircean conception of vagueness probably appeared to him a more accurate way to articulate his anti-essentialism than the metaphor of family resemblance." (Viola 2019, 242; 244.) In any case, the specific sense Gallie attributes to vagueness, in 1938, is connected to uncertainty and incompleteness of information.

Uncertainty that comes with vagueness does not have to be a paralyzing mindset. Vagueness can be a conceptual asset when the tolerance for uncertainty is required; for example, in making scientific hypotheses that involve theoretical entities that cannot (yet) be pinpointed accurately. In discussing Peirce's notion of vagueness, Viola points out that vagueness may play a role as the "engine" of inquiry:

It is precisely the presence of vagueness that explains in which sense a unitary intellectual content may remain stably at the center of our inquiries, while it gets further specified over time. Vagueness thus confers a directionality to semiotic and cognitive processes. Inquiry carries us from a stage of indeterminacy and ignorance to a stage in which beliefs are more precise, general, and true. Viola 2019, 237

In *Peirce and Pragmatism*, Gallie remarks that "in attempting to render a vague view more precise" one easily "strip[s] it of such truth as its original vagueness contained" (Gallie 1952, 64). This may be interpreted as a criticism of *undue* disaggregation or disambiguation of a concept (cf. 5.2), which would neatly combine the previously mentioned senses of vagueness into one: one is dealing with vagueness when one is uncertain whether possibly distinct meanings should be kept under one "vague" concept. The emphasis on uncertainty with respect to vagueness may strike one as out of place, yet the view that understands vagueness in terms of uncertainty that no fact or further criterion can dissolve is not uncommon (see e.g., von Wright 1993, I: §7; Waldron 1994, 513, cf. 517–9).

Although the similarities between Gallie's treatment of mental verbs and essentially contested concepts should not be exaggerated, there is a running theme of uncertainty or skepticism in both *ECC* and the 1949-article, which fits well with the skeptical basic character of Gallie's specific thesis of essential contestedness (Swanton 1985; 1992; see 13.1). Furthermore, according to Gallie, "the most urgent question which mental verbs present to philosophy is: how can we discover, or decide, whether any given mental verb is or is not ambiguous?" (Gallie 1949, 43.) A key part of Gallie's argument in *ECC* is, of course, whether essentially contested concepts are genuinely contested or merely subject to confusion. Gallie also posits a "class of expression" that includes mental verbs in juxtaposition to terms that belong to "a well-developed science" in the earlier article (Gallie 1949, 38), and that surely rings familiar to anyone who is acquainted with *ECC* (esp. *ECC* 167, 196–7). Gallie admits frankly that he does not know how to define the class of expression he talks about (Gallie 1949, 38). I consider it quite plausible that Gallie continues utilizing and developing some of

his earlier ideas to fruition in *ECC* and in *ART*—with the important difference that “the class of expression” under scrutiny has been changed to better support what he otherwise wants to say (e.g., in juxtaposition to natural sciences).

Gallie asserts, in *ECC*, that any essentially contested concept is *persistently vague*, since a proper use of such a concept by one person in one situation affords no sure guide concerning how the concept is used by another person in another future situation (*ECC* 172n1; 6.1). As concerns *ART*, Gallie views “artistic achievement, or the persistence of artistic activity [that the concept signifies],” as open. The achievement/activity looks to be persistently vague in the sense above because “at any one stage in its history, no one can predict or prescribe what new development of current art-forms may come to be regarded as of properly artistic worth.” (*ECC* 174, 182, 186; see also 6.1.) *DEMOCRACY* is similarly characterized as “extremely vague,” the vagueness which “reflects its actual inchoate condition of growth.” Since essentially contested concepts are meant to be concepts of human activities, or at least intimately connected to such activities (see 11.3), the open-ended nature of the activity is transferred to the concept that is vague in Gallie’s specific sense.

We may also recall that Gallie sees it as crucial to ask, in *ART* (11.2), what the criterion for “*relevantly similar contexts*” is when assessing a painting in terms of its immediate context and other recalled or imagined relevantly similar contexts (*ART* 101; or see *CRITICS* in 11.2; cf. Gallie 1949, 42.) Gallie poses a similar question in an earlier essay, “The Function of Philosophical *Æsthetics*,” and the relevant context of the question is art-criticism: “How much comparison is useful or justified in criticism, and comparison *within what limits?*” (Gallie 1948, 315). Both relevancy and similarity are vague notions¹⁹³, but the difficulty of assessing whether certain borderline cases fall under the concept is not the most pressing issue here. The question of which “contexts” should be taken into account is more directly about determining where to extend the concept *and* according to which criteria. Earlier, I also drew attention to a remark by Gallie in which he appears to equate *ART* with “the field of fruitful comparison between the different arts” (*ART* 113; 11.2). The field of fruitful comparison is of course the same thing as the sum of relevantly similar contexts for assessing “the artiness” of some object, and the boundaries of human activity that is centered around art as a normative ideal come to be shaped by what people consider reasonable to consider art. The concept that stands for the category of that human activity, *ART*, is persistently vague in Gallie’s specific sense: in encountering potential (and

¹⁹³ It is worth noting that Gallie routinely employs vague terms in connection to how disputants are to judge the matter at hand. The artificial criterion on which the resolution of contestation hinges—the team that plays the game best, i.e., the way the game is meant to be played, is the true champion—is quite determinate, yet the term ‘true,’ and the notion of ‘playing the game as it is meant to be played’ are vague in the appropriate context. The corresponding notion of sustaining and developing the valued achievement (of the original exemplar) in the optimum fashion (9.1) is similarly vague. ‘Optimum fashion’ can be understood as a vague term as it admits a range of means, which are evaluated and ranked according to some (obscure or contestable) standard. The same goes for a couple of other relevant expressions like ‘the true line of descent’ and ‘more orthodox’ (*ECC* 177–8).

perhaps completely new) instances of the activity, there is ineliminable uncertainty concerning how to properly categorize those instances *and* on what grounds; whether to include them within the category or to exclude them as things that are too different¹⁹⁴. The matter becomes plain when people disagree on what things are truly art: when different things are claimed as ‘art’ or judged as having widely diverging artistic worth, it is hard to shake the feeling that one is dealing with some sort of ambiguity.

As far as Gallie’s explicit Conditions are concerned, the complexity of an essentially contested concept, as a conceptual matter, may be seen to give rise to vagueness while its varying describability, manifesting as different ways of presenting what is at issue, introduces ambiguity at least initially (ECC 172, n1). David Boromisza-Habashi (2010, 277) even dubs Condition (III) as “Ambiguity” – which is thus understandable despite the fact that ambiguity should not be a feature of a concept. Essentially contested concepts are anything but ordinary, though, and I think it is possible to argue for a thesis that utilizes the fluidity of the boundary between ambiguity and vagueness. The formation of an essentially contested concept could then be understood as a process in which different descriptions of the component parts of a valued achievement, the descriptions which are, in this sense, “*initially* ambiguous” (ECC 172, n1), are transformed into a vague concept that unifies potentially quite distinct meanings/descriptions (cf. 14.2). Certain sets of conceptual criteria might be considered *either* as evidencing confusion *or* as unified (cf. 18.5), depending on how concept-users choose (or have chosen) to group things together or are (or have been) persuaded to do so.

12.2 Contestedness/contestability

Gallie names the phenomenon that he is after as “essential contestedness.” Concepts that are involved in disputes manifesting essential contestedness are called “essentially contested concepts.” Some have pointed out that instead of *contested* concepts Gallie should have spoken of *contestable* concepts and so it would also make sense to speak of essential *contestability* instead of essential *contestedness*¹⁹⁵. That being said, ‘essentially contested’ and ‘essentially contestable’ are frequently used interchangeably (Clarke 1979, 124) without much attention to the distinction. The current section does the opposite, and I will also introduce ‘essential *contestation*’ to cover both poles of the distinction without meaning to preclude other options. That being said, ‘essential *contestation*’ draws attention to the dimension or process of active contestation.

¹⁹⁴ See also Gallie’s highly similar discussion regarding ‘science’ (Gallie 1957, esp. 122, 126).

¹⁹⁵ Those who prefer the modalized notion of essential contestability, or ‘contestable’ instead of ‘contested,’ include e.g., Gray 1977, Freedman 1996, Väyrynen 2014.

The term may be taken to further imply that it is contestation that is essential instead of contestability or contestedness of a concept¹⁹⁶ (cf. 12.3).

The distinction between contested and contestable can be extracted from Gallie's texts although he pays it only scant attention. The most relevant passages are:

I shall first set out in some detail a highly artificial example of an essentially contested concept, with a view to showing how any proper use of this concept is in the nature of the case contestable, and will, as a rule, be actually contested by and in another use of it... ECC 169

But when we use, or rely upon, our concept of art in live criticism, when we press or resist the claim of a particular work or genre or style to be regarded as 'art', we will inevitably be using the term in a contestable (and often as not in an immediately contested) way. What we say can easily be recognised as appreciation or criticism from the (excessively one-sided) 'configurationist' or 'expressionist' or 'communicationist' point of view. ART 113–4

In *ECC*, Gallie insists that not only *can* the uses of essentially contested concepts be contested but they also *will be* contested, while, in *ART*, Gallie states more moderately that a use of a term (denoting an essentially contested concept, e.g., 'art' denoting ART) is not actually contested in all circumstances. In the latter case, the term is used in a way that makes it liable to become essentially contested – even if that fact would not be admitted by the concept-users (PHU, 173). The first formulation is somewhat at odds with the second one.

Collier, Hidalgo and Maciuceanu (2014) acknowledge Gallie's distinction in *ART*, and they identify several commentators who employ the term 'contestable,' yet only in one instance does their usage correspond clearly with Gallie's¹⁹⁷. They state that it is the definition of essentially contested concepts as "inevitably involv[ing] endless disputes about their proper uses on the part of their users" (ECC 168/PHU 158) *per se*, "rather than any of the seven criteria, which explicitly states that the concepts are, in fact, contested." (Collier et al. 2006, 214.) That is not completely accurate. They overlook the part of Condition (V) that requires disputing parties each to recognize the fact that their own use of the concept is contested by others (ECC 172/PHU 161). Contestedness cannot be recognized without it being present, therefore contestedness appears to be already entailed by (V). Wibren van der Burg has proposed, relatedly, that (V) should be modified to only refer to the pragmatic criterion that there actually is a contest while concepts that meet the four semantic criteria given in the form of (I) to (IV) have potential for contestation. Those concepts thus are, in the current sense,

¹⁹⁶ Merriam-Webster defines 'contestation' by simply linking it to lexical entries for 'controversy' and 'debate.' The further information given reveals that 'contestation' essentially means 'an act, instance, or state of contesting.' Both 'contest' and 'contestation' can be traced to the Latin verb 'contestari' which means 'to call to witness.' (Source: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/contestation>, August 14, 2019.)

¹⁹⁷ Collier et al. find the usage adopted by Freedon (1996, 60) the most similar to Gallie's. Other uses that they mention are Shapiro (1989), Care (1973), MacIntyre (1973), Gray (1977), and Freedon (2004).

essentially contestable, but their potential for contestation need not always be realized (van der Burg 2017, 232, 239).

To call a concept 'contested' amounts to suggesting its actual contestedness, or that it will be contested (Clarke 1979, 124), or that there are "actual conflicts on a level of ideational awareness" (Freeden 1996, 60). One possible sense of 'contestedness' is that the usage of a concept is contested and has been contested throughout its history. According to John Gray (1977), all "interesting and important contestability theses go far beyond this weak version in which the fact of a concept's contestability can be established by empirical means alone." The cultural and historical variability manifesting in the actual usage cannot serve as the *criterion* for the concept's essential contestability. Recording the fact that the application of the concept has been previously disputed is not enough (Gray 1977, 338; see also Abbey 2005, 463.) If contestation is "essential" to the concept, it makes sense to consider it as something that is deeply associated with all uses of the concept. Essential contestation needs to be distinguished from contestation that "is simply a matter of contingent fact" (Ehrenberg 2011, 212).

To call a concept 'essentially contested' could be taken as a strong claim that the concept is necessarily contested with no option of being uncontested, i.e., it becomes contested inevitably. If the necessity of contestedness is inferred from the empirical fact of contestedness, one is committing a fallacy, which Terence Ball claims a serious problem for an "essential contestedness thesis" rendering it "itself contestable and logically vacuous" (Ball 2000, 35). According to him,

one cannot derive a claim about essentiality from a (set of) empirical or contingent statements (or in an older idiom, an analytic statement from a synthetic one) (...) the thesis of *essential* contestability is circular and commits the fallacy of *post hoc, ergo propter hoc* (...) all that can be inferred from an enumeration of individual instances of disagreement, no matter how long the list, is that there *have been* disagreements, and not that there *must always* or *necessarily* continue to be. Ball 2000, 35; see also Ball 1993, 555–6; cf. Gray before.

Ball infers that "at most, all that can be concluded is that 'power', 'freedom', and the like, are (...) *contingently contested* concepts" (Ball 2000, 35; *contra* Syrjämäki 2011, 170n434). That seems a bit hasty as there appears to be room for *contestable* concepts, which Ball grants at a later date, even if it is still unclear whether Ball would accept a full thesis of essential contestability that makes the distinction in a sufficiently explicit manner¹⁹⁸. Moreover, Zimmerling (2005) remarks that Ball's "epistemological objection" resembles the argument against the rationality of inductive inference and that it is really strange to use it in a *conceptual*

¹⁹⁸ Consider: "Andrew Mason, taking issue with me, quite sensibly argues that political concepts are essentially *contestable*, albeit *contingently contested*. I accept this as a friendly amendment and a helpful clarification (Mason 1993, pp. 58–9)." (Ball 2006, 17n12; also Ball 2002, 29n5). Be that as it may, Ball's more general criticism seems to rest, at least for the most part, on a one-sided interpretation of what it means to be 'essentially contested' (see Palti 2005a, 113–5, 127; Syrjämäki 2011, 164–73; but see Ball 1993, 554–5).

controversy¹⁹⁹. It is as if we were dealing here with an empirical matter, and it could not be decided once-and-for-all “whether or not it will *in fact* be an object of controversy in the future.” That may be correct, but it is beside the point. (Zimmerling 2005, 23.) Given that Ball argues directly against an “essential contestedness thesis” it should be observed that neither Gallie nor anyone else of whom I am aware does actually claim that a concept’s contestability is inferred from its contestedness in this particular way (see also Syrjämäki 2011, 169–170).

The suggestion of actual contestedness, now or in the future, should not be taken to further imply that a contested concept must necessarily be contested at all times (Zimmerling 2005, 23) while a concept can be (essentially) contestable even it is not actually contested in a given usage, or when only some aspects of the concept are contested (Freeden 1996, 60.) Thus, it also seems reasonable to assume that the actual contestedness of one or another concept may temporally come to a halt (see e.g., Care 1973). Presumably, such a temporal halt, or the achievement of closure or consensus, “will not necessarily bring an end to its contestability (...) [or] foreclose all disputes about a concept” (Ingram 1985, 49). Gallie himself speaks of the theoretical possibility of contesting parties agreeing to “a moratorium on competition between their respective uses of the concept in question” (PHU 211). His phrasing leaves ample room for the view that an achieved closure on a concept could be ruptured again in right circumstances.

The modalized notion of essential contestability is often considered philosophically more interesting which favors focusing on contestable concepts/terms rather than contested ones (e.g., Väyrynen 2014, 471n1). In this context, ‘modalization’ comes down to stating that an essentially contestable concept would always remain contestable by necessity, for whichever reason²⁰⁰. In Ernest Gellner’s reading, Gallie’s focal finding is that the on-going debate as “a permanent disequilibrium between various elements within a complex concept” is not a contingent attribute but an “essential and inherent part of the very life of certain important concepts” (Gellner 1974, 95–6, 100). Such contestability cannot be eliminated by clarifying or defining these concepts anew without drastically changing the concept one is dealing with. In like manner,

¹⁹⁹ Zimmerling’s comments are made in reference to Ball’s 1993 article which does not include the bit about analytic and synthetic statements. Regardless, Ball may jump to a conclusion too quickly there. The underlying reasoning could be criticized roughly along the lines of Saul Kripke who warns against philosophers who assume that “if something belongs to the realm of *a priori* knowledge, it couldn’t possibly be known empirically. This is just a mistake. Something may belong in the realm of such statements that *can* be known *a priori* but still may be known by particular people on the basis of experience” (Kripke 1972, 35). Gallie is, at times, in step with this idea; see e.g., ART 112/PHU 17) about a conclusion made based on historical evidence and a direct phenomenological analysis (ART112) or a thoroughly functional analysis (PHU 177). However, Gallie might have confused *a priori* and necessity which were firmly established only later by Kripke, which could also explain Gallie’s use of ‘essentially’ (Evnine 2014, 125 or see 12.3; cf. Gallie’s reference to experience in ECC 174n2).

²⁰⁰ For instance, in the sentence “Necessarily, DEMOCRACY is contestable” the modal operator is ‘necessarily’ that “modalizes” the subsequent statement. See also Newey in 15.3 for a related objection in *de dicto* and *de re* terms.

Gray (1977) holds that an essential contestability thesis in its full or proper sense comes down to claiming that “a concept is variable” and “that its subject matter is in its nature such that there are always good reasons for disputing the propriety of any of its uses.” (Gray 1977, 338–9; see also 15.3.) These and similar observations concerning contestability overlap with essentiality-related concerns (12.3).

In contrast, Zimmerling (2005) offers a more moderate reading. She has no doubt that the *de facto* contestedness that Gallie describes is an empirically contingent matter. What Gallie and many others seem to have in mind with contestability, however, is that essentially contested concepts are “especially contest-prone.” It is highly *likely* that they are being contested at any particular time and “contest about them *can never be excluded*” owing to the lack of arguments to settle such disagreement once and for all. This might make it more appropriate to speak of ‘contestability’ and of ‘essentially contestable’ concepts. (Zimmerling 2005, 23.) Zimmerling herself ends up rejecting a (Lukesian) thesis of essential contestability, but her view illustrates how contestability is not always understood in terms of the logical status of a concept as necessarily contestable. Collier, Hidalgo and Maciuceanu (2006) note in similar fashion that with ‘contestable’ one might expect contestation over a concept, but they add that it may not be occurring at the time the concept is analyzed, which makes a longer-term view essential. The requirement of a longer-term view raises several questions concerning concepts as continuous entities, some of which I will later address.

Collier et al. consider Michael Freeden’s (1996) notion of decontestation valuable for understanding the conditions under which the potential for contestability is not realized (Collier et al. 2006, 214, 236). Sami Syrjämäki finds it helpful as well, and he states that the idea is already present in Gallie’s thinking, at least in *ART* (Syrjämäki 2011, 139–40). ‘Decontestation’ means that concepts can be fixed, or decontested, in different ways as part of the wider conceptual constellations that order ideas, i.e., ideologies, the nodes of which concepts are (see also 17.5). This also means that the more precise conceptual content becomes determined in connection to a variety of other (political) concepts. But now it seems to me that arguing for an understanding of a concept always requires decontestation, which means that from a longer-term perspective, a “contestable” concept must consist of actual instances of such contestedness, i.e., the decontested uses of the concept. A concept’s contestability is thus not lost from sight at the moments of decontestation: the contours of the concept’s contestability become visible by focusing on those instances of decontestation. There is thus a need for a perspective that is not unlike the higher-order recognition that Gallie calls “an intellectual feat” (ECC 192; 7.1) which is connected to understanding that comes from considering such an appraisive concept’s uses “as display its growth and development” (ECC 198). In other words, to grasp the nature of essentially contested concepts one needs to understand them as contested *and* as contestable.

According to Barry Clarke (1979), by referring to a contest [or contestedness], one refers “to a current state of affairs or to some definite future event.” Claiming that a concept is contested “is to attribute significance to the contest rather than to the concept.” In contrast, referring to a concept as contestable is to say that there is some property about the referent which renders the concept polysemantic and which may (or may not) give rise to some contest in the future²⁰¹. Claiming that a concept is contestable is to ascribe a part of any contest to the concept, and thus the concept contains some sort of “internal conflict of ideas.” Whether this ideational conflict leads to an actual conflict is less significant than the fact that the concept has the inherent potential to generate disputes. (Clarke 1979, 123–4.) By claiming that DEMOCRACY is contested, one could thus refer to a current contest about DEMOCRACY, or perhaps to a contest in which DEMOCRACY is centrally involved. However, a claim of contestability would entail a judgment that the property (or, perhaps a predicate) of “being democratic” is special in that it *may* give rise to future contests. This is an alternative way of saying that a concept is (essentially) contestable because of the nature of its subject matter (see also 15.3).

Some hold that Gallie’s thesis serves best as providing a framework of analysis of *de facto* contested concepts, and “not as criteria according to which we can determine what concepts are (or can be) subject to essentially contestation”²⁰² (Boromisza-Habashi 2010, 277). According to Ehrenberg, “essential contestation is itself simply a framework for understanding complex concepts,” and it should be applied and assessed on the basis of how well it is able to provide a greater understanding concerning those concepts (Ehrenberg 2011, 211). For Ehrenberg, the descriptive criteria or conditions of essentially contested concepts are “subordinate” to the function of understanding why some disagreements are pervasive (van der Burg 2017, 244). Such framing becomes that much more defensible if it is the case that the ascription of the status ‘essentially contested’ is an epistemological hypothesis rather than a metaphysical claim.

Contestedness itself is often regarded “as a fact that makes further attempts to clarify the concept unnecessary (...), if not entirely futile” (Zimmerling 2005, 18). That stance might be more widespread among laymen than academics, but people’s intuitions on how to respond to contestedness might vary considerably. Some variation could be field-specific. The fact that Gallie’s ideas have been relatively well-received in political theory and legal theory, for instance, attests to the character of their subject matter but possibly also to institutional

²⁰¹ It is not evident that one should expect to find in a straightforward fashion *the* property of a concept that explains its contestability. If a contestable concept has a cluster character in the Wittgensteinian family resemblance sense, there is no single property that all instances of a concept must necessarily share. One could of course argue that all instances share the property of being instances of a contestable concept, but it would not do any explanatory work. Gallie refers to properties on a couple of occasions (ECC 171/PHU 159; PHU 174, 175; ART 104, 105, 111) but in so doing he does not add much in terms of clarification or substance, I think.

²⁰² For other, roughly similar views see e.g., Waldron 2002, Collier et al. 2006, and Ehrenberg 2011. In contrast, see e.g., Freedman 1996, 59.

willingness to tolerate dispute and difference. That does not foreclose differences concerning the applicability of an essential contestability thesis. The fact that conflicts in politics are often interest-based and ripe with irrational factors while legal debates often involve reasonable, though conflicting, interpretations of what the law demands, may explain why an essential contestability thesis emphasizing justification has not been subjected to as heavy criticism in legal theory as in political theory (van der Burg 2017, 241–4).

In the literature on essentially contested concepts, one is hard-pressed to find actual definitions for contestability. That is unfortunate as it is not always clear how authors distinguish between, for example, ‘contestable,’ ‘disputable,’ and ‘questionable.’ Jeremy Waldron (1994) is a notable exception with his definition that is clearly inspired by Gallie²⁰³:

A predicate P is contestable if (1) it is not implausible to regard both "something is P if it is A" and "something is P if it is B" as alternative explications of the meaning of P; and (2) there is also an element e* of evaluative or other normative force in the meaning of P; and (3) there is, as a consequence of (1) and (2), a history of using P to embody rival standards or principles such as "A is e*" and "B is e*."²⁰⁴ Waldron 1994, 513

How exactly complexity and evaluativeness result in essential contestability is a complex and controversial matter. In Waldron’s definition, (2) is meant to capture the idea that a contestable term has a favorable normative meaning; “e*” equals ‘ought to be promoted’ or something similar (Waldron 1994, 513). Together (1) and (2) cover Conditions (I) to (III), and with (3) Waldron introduces an explicit socio-historical dimension. It seems that (1) and (2) are not jointly enough to distinguish contestable expressions from those multidimensional expressions that are not particularly contestable (e.g., ‘joy’) but which require appraisal of complex factors (see 17.4).

For Waldron, contestability is one form of indeterminacy in addition to ambiguity and vagueness, either one of which “is likely to become contestability if there is a history of political argumentation about the meaning of the term.” There is a fine line between contestability and ambiguity: one could behave like the other, and it is possible that ambiguity becomes contestability when a discussion about the proper meaning of a term has moral or political relevance. This way the stakes of the debate contribute to the process that transforms ambiguity into something qualitatively different, i.e., contestability. (see Waldron 1994, 514, 516, nn 9, 10.) From an alternative standpoint, even if the potential contestedness, i.e., contestability, could be located elsewhere—for

²⁰³ One common interpretation of Gallie is that the history of essentially contested concepts, or of their past more specific uses, provides the ground for their present contestability (see esp. ART 110–4; PHU 174–7; see also 18.4). I also agree with Besson (2005, 73n30) that ‘essentiality’ of contestability is implicit in Waldron’s account.

²⁰⁴ A predicate might be viewed as a linguistic expression that is needed for ascribing properties to objects, and unlike a non-linguistic property, it has a meaning. Yet a predicate can also be understood, as is perhaps most often the case in philosophy, as a property that a subject has or is characterized by. It can therefore be true of something—unlike concepts in isolation.

instance, in the criterial conflict that is roughly based on the cluster structure of concepts (Ingram 1985: see esp. 17.5)—what sets in motion the actual contestedness of a concept instead of it remaining contestable is that possible contradictions (e.g., between criteria) would in some way have to matter for society (Ingram 1985, 53; see also Gray 1977, 332). Moreover, Waldron’s emphasis on a historical dimension suggests that the contestability originates in an intersubjective process with a temporal continuity, and it depends on what is considered plausible by those who end up using the predicate in a fashion that embodies rival standards or principles (see also 17.1; 18.1).

I think Waldron’s conception is quite sensible. At first, different uses of a word/term might be taken as conflicting speaker-meanings or as evidencing completely distinct concepts. As time goes by the boundaries of variance are established and stabilized, and the terminological versatility becomes generally acknowledged and accepted. Different uses now make up the term’s “standard general use” as Gallie would have it (ECC 169; 11.3), or, as Hans-Johann Glock sums up the issue, “there is a pervasive practice of using these expressions in *value-laden* manner” (Glock 2008, 206). Those who employ the term mutually recognize that the term refers to one and the same concept, albeit a contestable one, and rivalling standards and principles come to be conceived as part of the same evaluative continuum as the aspects of one and the same valued thing—this is likely what Gallie himself also had in mind but failed to clearly articulate²⁰⁵. Nobody needs to be in control of the overall process, although it does not have to be completely without rhyme or reason either, and that leaves room for externalist views. The conceptual practice may have a specific purpose, and initially “ambiguous” elements could be combined under the rubric of one term/concept for some practical, evaluative, animating, or inferential reason (cf. 18.2). If different conceptions are widely treated as plausible alternatives for each other, we seem to have contestability on our hands despite the possibility of claiming that there is a confusion.

In the case of verbal disputes, different meanings are most often easily disambiguated with enough contextual information, but in the case of historically produced contestability, an apparently “ambiguous” term-use reflects established cultural positions and/or rival normative standards while the dispute may have an undeniable point and stake. In David Chalmers’s broad interpretation of verbal disputes, their nature does not depend on the propositions alone; “it also depends on the parties to the dispute, and in particular on their background of agreement or disagreement” which makes it clear that “we cannot just speak of a “verbal question,” independent of context” (Chalmers 2011, 519; cf. 12.1). If one were to disregard a cultural and historical context in which terms are used by real persons, i.e., the side of pragmatics broadly understood, in many cases it quite easy to conclude that there is a verbal

²⁰⁵ Compare this to the following passage: “That Religion, when used as an entirely general term, expresses what may come to be—or may progressively be more and more recognised as—an essentially contested concept, seems to me highly likely” as well as to the discussion that follows it (PHU 168ff).

dispute going on since disagreeing parties simply mean different things with their terms. However, when the context is properly considered, it often is the case that some differences in meaning are suddenly “acceptable” at least to the extent that one would not be willing to characterize the dispute as verbal.

The requirement of a genuine evaluative continuum is decisive. Andrew Halpin (2001) takes up the possibility that “we have an essentially contested term due to the diversity of instances that the fluid term democracy has been extended to cover, from direct Athenian democracy to representative Westminster democracy, and beyond.” However, he suggests that one would be better off by speaking of essentially contested *terms* instead of essentially contested *concepts* as here ‘democracy’ identifies different things and variously expresses distinct ideas that match with those things. In contrast, if there were “a recognised source providing us with the features of democracy,” it would be possible for ‘democracy’ to identify one thing which is then understood variously, although disambiguation of that one thing into distinct ideas would still be possible. (see Halpin 2001, 156, 160–1.) For Gallie, the original exemplar plays the role of providing the features of the achievement signified by the concept (8.1; 17.2), and a broad tradition could perhaps fill that role in some cases (see 14.2), although whether, in fact, that takes place in a given instance can hardly be decided in advance by a theoretical argument.

In conclusion, Gallie’s choice to formulate his points primarily in terms of contestedness instead of contestability might be considered an unfortunate oversight. The reason why that might be a conscious choice on Gallie’s part could be related to his insinuation that a concept’s essential contestedness is a historically acquired characteristic and, as such, limited to relatively few human activities (cf. 11.3; 18.3; 18.4). Ruth Abbey identifies “an element of becoming to essential contestedness: if such concepts were once univocal, then something has happened to change their status” (Abbey 2004, 478). In any case, if the history of suitable terms/concepts or activities is riddled with conflicts, then contestedness may also be viewed as an essential part of those histories as we have come to know and understand them. Here we come perniciously close to a genetic fallacy. The idea that comes next could nevertheless be that one comes to grasp a concept’s present contestability only in reference to its past contestedness, else one would not grasp why distinct meanings are brought together under one word/term. Without the sense of history, and/or the relevant knowledge of the human world that one inhabits, one would end up wrongly concluding that there is a straightforward ambiguity or confusion. ‘Essential contestedness’ could thus be a somewhat apt name for a process in which the historical contestedness results in the present contestability in Waldron’s sense. However, it is worth stressing that Gallie’s thesis has usually been interpreted as being about contestability or potential contestedness, not the kind of actual contestedness that is suggested here.

12.3 Essential with respect to what?

Gallie calls the phenomenon that he is after “essential contestedness.” Concepts that are involved in disputes manifesting essential contestedness are called “essentially contested concepts.” Here, my focus is on the alternative senses of ‘essentially’ instead of ‘contested.’ To a large extent, the differences result from how the overall thesis of essential contestability is understood, yet wider theoretical implications are only introduced sporadically and in a general fashion.

The way ‘essentially’ is understood mostly determines the location of contestedness/contestability and/or disagreement (see Waldron 2002, 149). However, it is not clear to what exactly ‘essentially’ refers, which has generated much criticism (Garver 1990, 251). It is commonplace to refer to essences of concepts, even if only to criticize such a view, and thereby it is often assumed that ‘essentially’ applies to ‘concept,’ in which case Gallie’s theory would concern a concept’s essence, i.e., its ontological status (Wichlacz 2013, 40²⁰⁶). The on-going debate is now “of the very essence of the concept” as its necessary rather than contingent attribute (Gellner 1974, 95–6), and hence “the proper ground for contest is the essence of the concept” while “[o]ur disagreements inhere in that concept” (MacDonald 1976, 381; see Kuyper 2016, §3.1; *contra* Clarke 1979). Christine Swanton (1985) views a thesis of essential contestedness as grounding inevitability and endlessness of contests in features of the concept itself, and these features supposedly render contests incapable of being rationally settled (Swanton 1985, 813–4; see also Graver 1990, 251). I call this point of view of essential contestability *concept-centered*, and I will subject it to an extensive analysis in part four.

‘Essentially’ could be taken to imply an acceptance of conceptual essentialism. John Gray and Robert Grafstein point out that the realist discourse that is centered on essences looks to be inconsistent with the conventionalist implications of essential contestability (Gray 1983, 96; Grafstein 1988, 14–5, 24²⁰⁷). Gallie’s reference to the original exemplar (8.1) and especially to the sustainment and development of its valued achievement (9.1) could be taken to suggest a (perhaps unwilling) commitment to a form of essentialism (cf. Gray 1978, 390–1). In this vein, Ernest Gellner thinks that Gallie is implicitly betraying his own idea when

he talks as if, behind each ‘essentially contested concept’, there was, hidden away in some Platonic heaven, a non-contested, unambiguously defined and fully determinate concept or exemplar (...) will *that* Exemplar be uncontested, and terminate all further discussion? Gellner 1974, 99; cf. Stokes 2007, 690n22; also 8.2

²⁰⁶ Monika Wichlacz rejects the idea that Gallie was talking about conceptual polysemy or unclear cases of a concept’s use (*contra* Clarke 1979, 123).

²⁰⁷ That being said, Grafstein argues that “there is a version of realism that in fact is very congenial to the idea of essential contestability” (Grafstein 1988, 11).

Ruth Abbey interprets Gallie in a similar fashion: the valued achievement is “contained in the original, uncontested version of the concept,” and/or there has been a “consensus over a concept” which later breaks out as a debate (Abbey 2005, 466, 468). This is problematic if one does not make it painstakingly clear what is meant by such a concept and its versions, how they figure in contestation, and how the original concept would be incapable of ending the later disputes. I doubt that one can construct a viable thesis of essential contestability on that ground. It should also be said that Gallie appears to be somewhat hostile to essentialist views. For instance, he criticizes the idealist theories of art as committing the essentialist fallacy and speaks trenchantly of “essentialist infirmity of philosophers,” i.e., of “the demand that any method or technique they employ shall be universally applicable” (Gallie 1948, 302–1; 317).

Some commentators are hesitant to read too much into Gallie’s phraseology. Kenneth Ehrenberg maintains that ‘essentially contested’ is *a term of art*, and it is not used to invoke some metaphysical understanding of essentiality (Ehrenberg 2010, 210). Or as Peter Ingram views it, ‘essentially’ is used by Gallie in its everyday sense of ‘necessarily’ instead of a stricter philosophical sense; hence “an essentially contested concept is only one that necessarily has a very large number of contested applications” (Ingram 1985, 42). Not all commentators are as fastidious about Gallie’s original intentions; nevertheless, I think that there is truth to these observations. I grant that Gallie articulates his views obscurely enough to generate worries, yet any claim that he is self-evidently subscribing to this or that conception because he employs ‘essentially’ should be taken with a grain of salt.

However, there is a relatively strong case to be made against Gallie on the subject of essentialism. Gallie does not question which criteria of a concept are relevant, only how to appraise them (5.2). This is because the criteria stem directly from the features or component parts of the valued achievement that is signified by the concept (5.1; see esp. 17.2). But now it seems that the requirement for the mutual appreciation of the criteria (7.1) in the dispute extends to how the disputants are to view the component parts of the valued achievement as well. Here, it does not matter anymore whether there is some past exemplar or not. The worry is that Gallie’s account of what is required of disputants comes down to setting a concept’s criteria in stone in advance which is antithetical to far-reaching and deep contestation. I therefore propose adopting *the non-essentialism requirement*: essentially contested concepts need to be products of active intellect without the past or eternal version of the concept as a necessary counterpart. The past can inform and affect concept-users, yet no *one-to-one* modelling with past achievements, exemplars, or conceptualizations is required. Rival parties have their beliefs and make their judgments here and now, and they are free to both form concepts and employ them accordingly.

Those who do not consider the talk of essentiality warranted typically end up rejecting the overall thesis in unambiguous terms. Notable exceptions to this are Simon Evnine, who interprets Gallie’s contests as fights over ownership of traditions (and thus not over concepts per se), to which such contests are *endemic*

although not strictly speaking essential²⁰⁸ (Evnine 2014, 119); and Michael Freedon, who has put forward an argument according to which certain concepts are not essentially but *effectively* contestable (Freedon 2004). For Freedon, ‘essentially contestable’ suggests more than necessity by which he means “inherent necessity, logical necessity, necessity that transcends time and space, necessity that is extra-social and extra-political” (Freedon 2004, 3) while the notion of essential contestability is about the epistemological, psychological, and logical restrictions in making sense of [the real or external worlds]” (Freedon 1996, 59). Evnine suggests, on his part, that Condition (V) functions as a kind of reference fixer for the term ‘essentially contested concept’: “it may not be a necessary truth that an essentially contested concept satisfies condition V, but given the way the concept of an essentially contested concept has been introduced, it is perhaps close to being *a priori* that an essentially contested concept satisfies condition V” (Evnine 2011, 125). As I understand it, Evnine means that the relevant notion of *a priori* can be illustrated in statement form: if there is such a thing as an essentially contested concept, it is used aggressively and defensively. It would thus be *epistemically* necessary that ESSENTIALLY CONTESTED CONCEPT, as the notion is understood in the first place, denotes a class of concepts that are aggressively and defensively used, i.e., contested. If that is so, ‘essentially contested concept’ becomes a second-order concept that refers to those first-order concepts that, among other things, actually satisfy the condition of being aggressively and defensively used. It may be a different matter, whether any concept that we employ is necessarily (essentially) contested, metaphysically speaking²⁰⁹.

For ‘essential’ to have a distinctive meaning, though, some contestations, conceptual or non-conceptual, have to be ‘non-essential’ in comparison. John Gray identifies the subject matter of the suitable concept as such that “there are always good reasons for disputing the propriety of any of [the concept’s] uses” (Gray 1977, 338). Connolly observes to the same effect that ‘essential’ has been *interpreted* to mean that the disputes are not only centrally important but also “*demonstrably* interminable rather than reasonably expected to be so” without no rational grounds that can guide and inform these debates (Connolly 1993, 230). It is no wonder, then, that essential contestability has been viewed as a position that commits one to a radical relativism (Clarke 1979, 125), even if the case cannot be plausibly made against Gallie (13.5).

Freedon mentions contestability that is *culturally essential* “in the human worlds as we know them” (Freedon 1996, 59). If many of our normative/evaluative judgments are unfailingly accompanied by contestability that is an ineliminable feature of our current social and political life, we could perhaps take it as a restriction that is in place for making sense of *our* world for

²⁰⁸ The idea that the disputes are endemic is shared by Ehrenberg 2011, 211. See also MacIntyre 1967, 286 for a view that “[c]onceptual conflict is endemic in our situation, because of the depth of our moral conflicts.”

²⁰⁹ Regarding the definitions of the notions ‘*a priori*’ and ‘epistemically necessary,’ see Kment 2017.

all we know, and hence essential²¹⁰ (see also Ingram 1985, 53; but cf. Gray in 13.3). As William Connolly sees it, the appellation of the thesis does not matter as long as it properly accentuates “the internal connection between the concepts imperfectly shared in a way of life and the contestable standards, judgments and priorities which help to constitute that life” (Connolly 1993, 230–1). Essentialism returns now in another guise, which is not that surprising, were one to consult Gray: for him, all talk of essential contestability conceals an essentialist thesis that attributes the very indeterminacy and partial indefinability of human nature as constitutive features of human social life (Gray 1978, 402). That sense is still consonant with the previously set non-essentialism requirement, and I will term it *Cultural Essentialism* for further use²¹¹.

The word ‘essentially’ can be considered as the qualifier of contestation in other ways as well. There is some immediate plausibility to the notion that ‘essentially’ refers to the deepness and pervasiveness of the contestation in question. In a crude interpretation, disputes are to be expected and they are particularly heated with no resolution in sight. Those who have sought to identify the philosophical kernel of essential contestability are typically in agreement that it is a clear mischaracterization: “the ‘temperature’ of the disputes will be neither here nor there” (Väyrynen 2014, 474n8; see also Waldron 1994, 529). In the more refined view, contestation extends to the core of what is at issue. According to Waldron²¹², ‘essentially’ indicates that the dispute over the concept is “a dispute that goes to the heart of the matter,” and thus it is not “merely a dispute about marginal or penumbral cases between persons who are clear about the concept's core” (Waldron 1994, 529). I will refer to this sense by *Contested Core*.

Adopting *Contested Core* opens a thesis of essential contestability to the charge that the whole issue is due to a conceptual confusion. That worry is compounded if one further understands the disputes manifesting essential contestability as generating “rival paradigms” (Waldron 1994, 529; Besson 2005, 72). As I see it, it is one thing to claim that people disagree about both marginal and paradigm cases, and quite another to understand the dispute as *producing* rival paradigms. In the former case, it is still possible that the process of disputing the matter is at least sometimes centripetal while the latter process appears completely centrifugal. The danger is that the assumption of a single concept becomes a matter of faith. It should be established clearly and in unequivocal terms what provides the required unity to contestation, or to the concept as the object of contestation, if it is not the common core of the concept. Without further

²¹⁰ Later I am going to present how contestation can be thought essential to a concept. But here we glimpse a possibility that disputes involving the sort of concepts in which we are interested can also be essential to something other than concepts (e.g., to the fabric of social life).

²¹¹ In the current section, I will use italicized capitals to name the four basic senses of ‘essentially’ that can be identified in Gallie’s texts, especially in *ECC*.

²¹² Waldron thinks that Gallie’s main thesis urged against the assumption that something has necessarily gone wrong when there is disagreement on the meanings of words (Waldron 1994, 530). He suggests three *non-exclusive* notions for the strict interpretation of ‘essentially’ of which this is the first one. See also Waldron 2002, 149–50, 160.

qualification, adopting *Contested Core* appears to also result in rejecting the possibility of stating essential contestability in terms of *the concept/conception distinction*, the distinction that is often taken to require a shared core concept, no matter how abstract or unspecified, that connects more specific conceptions together (see 17.3).

Contestation is often viewed as so essential to a concept that without the proper sort of contestation there would not be a concept of that kind. The ongoing debate would be the life of an essentially contested concept, rather than being something contingent to it (Gellner 1976, 96; ECC 169); for instance, under this interpretation holding a concept as essentially contestable means “that its proper range of uses is inherently a matter of irresolvable dispute” (Gray 1983, 76). These views make way for another sense of essentiality, i.e., *Via Contestation*, or the conception that it is widely understood amongst concept-users that contesting other uses of the concept is the appropriate way to employ it. The basic idea therefore is that contestation over a concept is essential to (essentially) contested concepts rather than that the concepts whose essences are contested are essentially contested. This is what Leslie Green thinks: if the argument about an essentially contested concept were to cease “we would have better reason to think that we had lost the concept than that we had resolved the dispute” (Green 1987, 18; see also Waldron 1994, 529).

Via Contestation is further specified in different theses. For example, Lukes’s view of the essential contestation of politics is that “to engage in such disputes [over the proper use of the concept] is itself to engage in politics” (Lukes 2005, 30). What is captured here is the centrality of the dispute to the concept itself (Ehrenberg 2011, 255) and with respect to the conceptual practice in question. Waldron (1994) takes a linguistic route in observing that the idea of “essential” contestability “can be taken to indicate that contestedness is part of the very meaning of the expression in question.” This does not prevent a person from taking a firm stand in the related controversies, yet someone who does not realize the proper role of contestedness “has not understood the way the word is used.” For example, “the most striking rule for the use of “freedom” in the modern world” is “that it is a verbal arena in which we fight out our disagreements about the nature of human agency and autonomy.” Although we have a habit of thinking of meanings as things that are necessarily agreed upon – and, as such, tied to a consensus among a term’s users – Gallie investigates the possibility that “meaning may be tied (conventionally) to the existence of a controversy (or a range of controversies)” (Waldron 1994, 529–30; cf. Waldron in 8.2.) In this view, (i) concepts become sites for contestation, including disputes over other related things/concepts; and (ii) the meanings of these concepts are to an important extent a result of how contestation over them is carried out.

David Boromisza-Habashi’s (2010) view is akin to Waldron’s. Contestation is considered ‘essential’ “if the concept’s meaning can only be identified by means of tracing all of its contested uses.” Boromisza-Habashi thus emphasizes Gallie’s remarks that are related to the historical dimension of essential contestability. Perhaps even more interestingly, he further points out that, by

implication, “the act of defining an essentially contested concept like ‘democracy’ means, in effect, that the speaker producing the definition inevitably becomes a contestant.”²¹³ Essentially contested concepts function also as discursive resources that are utilized “for positioning oneself and one’s group against a rival group of contestants.” (Boromisza-Habashi 2010, 278.) The contest is thus not simply about referential meaning but

about (1) communal norms shaping meaning-in-use, about (2) which group will be able to control the meaning of the contested concept, and, as a result of having achieved control over meaning, (3) which group will be able to position itself as the guardian of communal norms. Put briefly, the contest mobilizes and highlights the reflexive function (Taylor, 1997, ch. 6) of essentially contested concepts. Boromisza-Habashi 2010, 278

If accepted, Boromisza-Habashi’s view would go a long way in explaining why contestation over certain concepts might be *inevitable*. By learning or acquiring a concept one would also inherit tensions and disagreements that come with it: a particular conception could be situated on the map of available, yet controversial positions, and thus any attempt to fix the concept by adopting one conception over another would be contestable. However, according to Simon Evnine – who, rather similarly to Boromisza-Habashi, localizes contestation as taking place within a tradition and over the ownership of that tradition – it is merely “highly likely that groups will evolve that prioritize the elements of [the exemplar’s] internal complexity differently” (Evnine 2014, 125; see also 18.4). That in mind, it may be possible to understand the above type of contestation as *essential* but only derivatively: if oppositional membering is an essential feature of our social life, then contestation of concepts in that function would also be essential to that life²¹⁴. Evnine himself calls the potential for contest as “endemic to, and a very deep fact about the nature of, human traditions” (ibid., 135). Overall, the current train of thought naturally leads to combining *Via Contestation* with *Cultural Essentialism*²¹⁵.

²¹³ Or as Gallie says, “[w]hat we say can easily be recognised as appreciation or criticism” from any one-sided point of view (ART 113–4; quoted before).

²¹⁴ Boromisza-Habashi states that “One of the chief meanings-in-use of concepts in any speech community is their capacity to align those who use them with local normative systems of sociality,” and that “the use of concepts is (...) one of the most significant resources available to cultural members to achieve membering (...), that is, positioning oneself in talk as a legitimate member of a cultural community” (Boromisza-Habashi 2010, 278). It is easy to see how oppositional membering generates controversies, and even requires contestation as identities are based on difference (see e.g., Connolly 1991/2002).

²¹⁵ Most theoretical contributions to the literature on essentially contested concepts appear to combine different senses in various ways. Samantha Besson (2005), for example, can be seen to bring together elements from both *Contested Core* and *Via Contestation*: the relevant type of disputes can generate rival paradigms and criteria of application, but it is also “part of the very meaning and essence of the concept to be contested and to raise questions as to its nature.” However, disagreements surrounding the meaning of the concept are not irresolvable as parties are assumed to share a minimal though decidedly not complete understanding concerning the concept’s scope of applicability. (Besson 2005, esp. 72, 89; further discussed in 17.4.)

The final sense of essentiality is *Function of Contestation* which I take to entail that “the contestation is what makes the term useful to its users” (Ehrenberg 2011, 214). In Waldron’s more specific formulation, the disagreement about proper meaning is “in some sense indispensable to the usefulness of the term, that it serves some purpose [or important function] associated with the contested expression” (Waldron 1994, 530, cf. 540). As I see it, the users as a group should be understood broadly. The useful functions of contestation are likely intersubjective or cultural, which of course does not preclude their individual utility. This is well expressed in Gallie’s statement that contesting ART may lead to widening one’s aesthetic sympathies while being at the same time essential to art-criticism and to how we make aesthetic judgements²¹⁶ (11.2). Waldron interprets Gallie as concluding that

certain terms are important and valuable not despite their contestedness but because of it. Far from contributing to semantic confusion, the disagreements occasioned in the use of *art* play a worthwhile role in social, intellectual, and cultural life. Waldron 1994, 531

Function of Contestation further divides into at least two specific senses:

Essential End: contestation has a function in furthering an end(s) that is/are considered essential to a given activity, practice, or institution, within which the term/concept is contested and/or which is signified by, or otherwise centrally involves, the term/concept;

Essential Contestation: contestability, or contestation, is a constituent/constitutive of an activity, practice, or institution, within which the term/concept is contested, and/or which is signified by, or otherwise centrally involves, the term/concept.

Cultural Essentialism could also be included in the bunch as far as it is understood in a *Function of Contestation* sense. Overall, the senses of essentiality discussed in this section are not exclusive; for instance, that the contestedness of an expression could be considered useful to some function in social life while that expression’s semantic meaning is tied to its contestedness. Contestation over the predicate ‘is political’ is one candidate, certainly.

As to the other two senses, *Essential End* coheres well with how Gallie appears to envisage the role of Condition (VII) as justifying, together with (VI), the continued use of an essentially contested concept. To see that, let us recall that only the combined employment of the concept can be properly justified (9.1). Since essentially contested concepts are characteristically used aggressively and defensively against other uses (7.1), it follows that the justification of the combined employment of the concept comes down to the justification of the

²¹⁶ Waldron (1994, 530–2) makes use of Gallie’s original example in a simpler and less recondite form. In the case of disagreements that seem to be the part and parcel of the activity of art-criticism, “an understanding of art is enhanced, rather than impoverished, by the continuing debate among artists, art critics, and aesthetes about what art “really” is” (ibid., 532).

overall, continuing contestation that consists of those aggressive and defensive uses. Now, contestation over the concept is justified when it “enables the original exemplar's achievement to be sustained and/or developed” (ECC, 180; 9.1). *Essential End* translates the Galliean conception to the context of activities, practices, and institutions within which such contestation takes place by linking the following three things: (i) contestation of a concept that leads to the development of a valued achievement, (ii) the development of the valued achievement as an end that is essential to the activity, and (iii) the activity itself as an undertaking, practice, institution *et cetera*. The example of the arts being enriched by contestation over what art truly is serves as the paradigmatic case of *Essential End*. One may certainly disagree whether art is so enriched, in fact. Casting *Essential End* aside might also be preferable to those who shy away from the liberal optimism that appears to be inbuilt in Gallie's thesis, and which is partially evidenced by the assumption that disagreement is beneficial (9.2; 13.2; 13.3). In any case, there is no need to identify or argue for a specific developmental trajectory, only that stagnancy in terms of complete agreement would be counterproductive.

The sense *Essential Contestation* is most clearly present in the passage about one having opponents as an essential feature of the activity one is pursuing (ECC 192). A bit later, Gallie states in an abstruse manner that “our concept of the activity” in and through which our particular judgments are manifested “is of an essentially contested character” (ECC 195; cf. 11.3). Here it is useful to observe that John Gray identifies the “peculiar reflexivity” as one of the three features of essentially contestable concepts: (a) “When we say that politics or morality are essentially contestable concepts, we are saying in part that what is a political situation is a political matter, while what counts as a moral question requires a moral judgement” (Gray 1978, 393; see also (b) and (c) later). The reflexivity is a sort of feedback loop (see also 17.4), and it makes sense to think that *Essential Contestation* comes down to it in one way or another.

There are two sides to the constitution of activities through contestability. On the one hand, we would rightly consider an activity like politics as unrecognizable without contestation²¹⁷ –Gallie himself has once noted that politics is “an essentially continuing activity in which final conclusions are never reached” (Gallie 1960, 36). On the other hand, contestation is also the mode through which the activity of politics as practice is constituted by determining its appropriate boundaries and character (see also MacIntyre 1973, 6–7). This marks a difference between contestation as an essential part of an activity and contestation constituting the boundaries of an activity. As I see it, this does not necessarily entail the kind of anti-realism according to which our conceptualizations constitute the activities in question directly or by themselves. Since there is a feedback loop at the level of judgment, it could perfectly well be

²¹⁷ ‘Politics’ as an activity or practice, or what counts as political, can of course be defined differently (e.g., as a practice within which common concerns are addressed and taken care of); but it does not detract from the more general point I make concerning the contestability of judgments in connection to broad human activities.

so that people who judge things differently also act differently, and it is the latter, roughly, that transforms practices under question rather than the conceptions formed of them²¹⁸.

Gallie makes two suggestions concerning the broad activity of art, or the arts: (i) if we happen to come across a society that showed uniformity in its aesthetic valuations, we should be inclined to say that its artistic life is “of an unhappily stunted kind”; (ii) and we might even question whether “they had an adequate appreciation of works of art at all” in our sense of the term (ART 114.) Here, Gallie seems to suggest that the contestation over what constitutes art is an essential feature without which the arts would be unrecognizable *to us*, and thus (i) and (ii) reflect both *Essential End* and *Essential Contestation* – perhaps implicitly even *Cultural Essentialism*. Unfortunately, Gallie does not properly distinguish between art-criticism and the arts. The disputes over what counts as ‘art’ can be considered as an essential part of art-criticism because to ask such questions, one may contend, is to engage in the activity of art-criticism in the first place. It is also sensible to say that “one’s conception of what is art is itself an artistic matter” as we can conceive of describing things as art as depending on one’s aesthetic values and sympathies. Nevertheless, the reflexivity involved in making aesthetic judgments does not shape the boundaries of the practice or activity of art-criticism although it conceivably does so regarding the arts, when the arts is understood as the most general category that is related to aesthetic judgments. Politics, morality, the sphere of the sacred or spirituality, and aesthetics could perhaps be considered as sufficiently broad activities for contestation over DEMOCRACY, SOCIAL JUSTICE, CHRISTIANITY, and ART²¹⁹.

Let us next consider the other two features that Gray suggests for essentially contestable concepts: (b) “specific uses of essentially contested concepts bear an internal relation to definite forms of social life, of which they may, indeed, be partly constitutive;” and (c) “differing uses of essentially contested concepts hinge upon opposed metaphysical commitments about mind and action and so about the nature of human nature and society”²²⁰ (Gray 1978, 393–4; see (a)

²¹⁸ In the current study, I try to steer clear from looking at the matter from the kind of realist or anti-realist perspective that immediately decides the viability of an essential contestability thesis as well. As Robert Grafstein observes, we ordinarily “equate opposition to essential contestability with realism and support for essential contestability with antirealism” (Grafstein 1988, 25). See also Grafstein 1988 for a more nuanced discussion of realism, anti-realism, and constitutivism in the context of essential contestability, and see especially pages 12–5 and 22–3 for the discussion that is closely related to the above point in the body text.

²¹⁹ Gallie expresses doubt about finding “essentially contested concepts of the same level of generality, or with the same wide bearings upon human life” (PHU 190), as the live examples, which suggests that the live examples are surrogates of sorts for certain broad activities or spheres of life. The fact that Gallie draws a sketchy connection between essential contestability and moral judgments (see PHU chs. 9–10) further supports the current argument, even if Gallie himself might not have been fully aware or able to articulate what was going on.

²²⁰ Gray identifies an essentialist thesis in essential contestability: “it is the very indeterminacy and partial indefinability of human nature which is constitutive of human social life” (Gray 1978, 402; cf. Gray in 13.3). See MacIntyre 1973 for similar ideas (discussed in 6.2 and criticized by Grafstein 1988, 10n1; 14ff).

before). The suggestions (i) and (ii) above can now be understood to flow from our metaphysical commitments, or how we perceive the human nature and the nature of society. Together with reflexivity (i.e., the feature (a)), Gallie's reference to a category of human activity (11.3) starts to finally make better sense: particular uses of a concept that aim to delineate the boundaries of a very broad human activity *either* contribute to forming the commonly acknowledged boundaries of those activities *or* involve and invoke values that relate to how the boundaries of activities have been formed. The former are uses of the most general concepts we possess that could stand for such activities while the latter are more specific, "sub-ordinate" concepts. John Gray perspicaciously points out the disanalogy

between concepts designating whole domains of social life – concepts like the political, the economic, art or religion – and concepts designating specific social objects and practices such as voting, contracts, poetry or prayer. Whereas, for a form of social life to exist at all, certain concepts delimiting the economic from the sacred, or areas of morality from areas of prudence or aesthetics, must be treated as uncontested, it is precisely because contestability can break out in respect of some of these basic boundary concepts that concepts designating specific social objects and practices tend to become contested. Gray 1978, 394

Arguably, Gallie is not careful enough in connecting various activities to presumable contestable concepts, which is illustrated by how he refers to achievements, activities, and concepts loosely, even interchangeably (11.3). It is therefore not totally uncharitable to read Gallie as confusing contestability within an activity with the contestability of a concept that denotes that activity.

Gray's overall interpretation of essential contestability appears to turn Gallie's thesis on its head: instead of pinpointing the characteristics of concepts that bring about essential contestability, the new focus is on how the boundaries of "whole domains of social life" are determined and conceptualized, or how the ever-present possibility of questioning it lends contestability to more concepts that designate social particulars. In Gray's words: "a concept moves into an area of essential contestability when any use of it involves taking up a partisan, non-neutral standpoint with respect to rival forms of life and their associated patterns of thought"²²¹ (Gray 1978, 394). The further challenge that this view faces is how to theoretically situate *conceptual contestability* when controversial judgments could very well be about conflicting rival forms of life rather than conflicting concepts.

The preceding analysis along with considerable textual evidence suggests thinking about essential contestability primarily in terms of judgments made in connection with, or while engaging in, certain human activities that somehow accommodate a great many opinions rather than in terms of concepts as such – for instance, think of Gallie's advice against holding that the "uniformity of judgment and appraisal" is necessary or even desirable "in many fields of activity"

²²¹ Michael Freeden has argued that, rather than being essentially contestable, certain concepts are effectively contestable. I view his notion as compatible with *Essential Contestation*, and mostly because Freeden now considers contestability as effectively ineliminable vis-à-vis a thought-practice. I will discuss this further in 18.3.

(ART 114). It might be a bit hasty conclusion, though, since Gallie's interest is predominantly on academic theoretical and definitional disputes. Perhaps the contestability of our concepts is indeed conditional on the nature of certain human activities in connection to our form of life, but after one has arrived at certain conceptualizations, the contestability that the concepts acquire is of an independent nature much in the same way that language is both dependent on practice and independent of it²²². The concepts that are used in certain academic fields have such independent status, especially as part of theories in which they are further determined, yet they cannot cast away their nature as that which they more fundamentally are: concepts that aim to make sense of the proper boundaries of human activities, directly or indirectly. I view this notion as insightful. But is it already too broad to be informative or useful?

12.4 Irresolvability and endlessness of disputes

The intractably controversial subject matter and rationally irresolvable [and endless] disputes over the merits of rival moral and political concepts or principles are hallmarks of essential contestability (Gray 1978, 392). In the current section, I will discuss how that could be understood in addition to presenting more specific ways of understanding endlessness and irresolvability of disputes that manifest essential contestedness/contestability.

I will start with two preliminary observations. First, Gallie seeks to show that there are genuine disputes that are not "resolvable by argument of any kind," yet they are "sustained by perfectly respectable arguments and evidence." This means that the proper use of essentially contested concepts "inevitably involves endless disputes about their proper uses on the part of their users." (ECC 169.) As was already discussed (11.4), Gallie does not think that that the rational arguments and/or the assessment of the evidence have no place in irresolvable disputes. Second, in *Artificial*, Gallie states that "there are no official judges or strict rules of adjudication" (ECC 171) for deciding who are the champions. Despite that, the spectators are tasked with judging which team has played the game best. It is sometimes misleadingly said that Gallie does not provide any criterion for settling the disputes (see e.g., Swanton 1985, 815). Instead, we should distinguish between the *presence* of a criterion in a dispute and the *capability* of that criterion to resolve or settle the dispute once and for all. The artificial criterion for settling the disputes is 'which team has played the game best' (see 11.1), the non-artificial approximation of which is to find out which use of a concept best captures the valued achievement in the current circumstances (while Conditions hold). Thus, one way to approach the endlessness and irresolvability

²²² See also 12.4 about the conceptual tension between a popular conception and the experts' definitions.

of disputes is to ask how the common acceptance of Gallie's chosen criterion for settling disputes would impart the disputes their special character²²³.

The orthodox interpretation of Gallie locates the endlessness and inevitability of disputes in those features of the concept which render the disputes incapable of being rationally settled (see e.g., Swanton 1985, 813–5; Bryant 1992, 58; see ECC 188/PHU 183). However, Gallie also speaks of “apparently endless disputes” (PHU 158/ECC 169, 190) and “seemingly endless disputes” (PHU 177) in addition to “inevitably endless disputes” (PHU 158/ECC 169, 196), which contributes to the ambiguity over the strength of the claim to which Gallie is committed (see esp. PHU 211; quoted later). According to Mark Criley (2007), Gallie supposes that, even though the justification of contesting uses can be assessed rationally, the application of standards of evidence, cogency, and argument will never bring the dispute to a resolution, *as a matter of fact*. In addition, Gallie “seems” to make a stronger claim still, i.e., that “the standards of evidence, cogency, and argument *are always and in principle insufficient* to fix a correct resolution to the dispute.” (Criley 2007, 20.) These readings illustrate two main forms of irresolvability that are identified in the literature: (i) irresolvability as a matter of fact or contingency; and (ii) irresolvability as a matter of principle or necessity. It is not perfectly clear what type of irresolvability Gallie originally had in mind²²⁴. At minimum, it covers argumentation and exchange of reasons, i.e., reaching agreement by rationally grounded argument.

There is a clear reason why no advocate of essential contestability should consider irresolvability *solely* a linguistic issue. On the one hand, linguistic obstacles like ambiguity or miscommunication are either straightforward to resolve or they lead to conceptual confusions (12.1; 14.1). On the other hand, in the case of locating irresolvability in the difficulty to determine whether one is dealing with vagueness or ambiguity (perhaps as a lead-in to contestability²²⁵,

²²³ Gallie states that there is no general method or principle (ECC 178–9), or that it cannot be found or fixed (ECC 189, ECC 177), for deciding between conflicting uses once and for all. But since Gallie arguably provides a criterion, even if it is incapable of settling the question, I resolve the apparent contradiction by distinguishing between the criterion's presence and its capability to resolve the dispute.

²²⁴ Chris Ranalli points out that ‘rational irresolvability’ is multiply ambiguous: “we might have in mind that (i) there's no *epistemically* rational way to resolve the disagreement; or that (ii) there's no *practically* rational way to resolve the disagreement; or further still that (iii) the disagreement isn't resolvable by way of *argumentation* and the *exchange of reasons* (e.g., paradigmatic rational methods or ways of resolving disagreements. (...) In the first case, an epistemically rational resolution is simply taking the attitudes they epistemically ought to take towards the contents they disagree over (...) For example, in light of their disagreement, in might be that they ought to be conciliatory, downgrading their degree of confidence; or it might be permissible for them to retain their confidence. The second case can be read as adopting the course of action they practically ought to take, in light of their practical reasons, given their disagreement (...) And, in the third case, it registers the impossibility of reaching agreement by way of rationally grounded argument.” (Ranalli 2018).

²²⁵ See also Fogelin (1985) who warns of the dangers that come with coupling the requirement to avoid ambiguity and vagueness with the deductivist prejudices, or with the idea that “the only good argument is a good deductive argument.” This may lead one to not only

see 12.2), the issue at hand is primarily that of conceptual unity rather than linguistic meaning (see 12.1). Real-world cases of essential contestability might involve a degree of linguistic indeterminacy that contributes to their obstinacy, but that is of no particular interest to us.

I will now turn to discuss disputes as necessarily irresolvable. Gallie's idea has been understood to be that "there is something conceptually or logically undecidable" (Ruben 2010, 259; see Freedon) about the disputes, that they are "in principle unresolvable" (Väyrynen 2014, 473n8²²⁶), or that 'essentially contestable' suggests "necessity that transcends time and space" (Freedon 2004, 3). For instance, Kenneth Smith (2002) assumes that no concept could be essentially contested without disagreement among the various parties involved, and that disputes over the application or the meaning of an essentially contested concept can *never* be resolved. Once a concept is essentially contested it cannot cease to be so²²⁷. (Smith 2002, 331.) More generally, there are two options: (a) an essentially contested concept has features or characteristics that render it necessarily contestable (Swanton 1985, 813–5; Swanton 1992, 4; but cf. Besson 2005, 72); (b) an essentially contested concept is constituted by a disagreement over both its meaning and application (or something sufficiently similar).

It is commonly thought that Gallie is after (a), i.e., he grounds the inevitability, rational irresolvability, and endlessness of the contestation over the proper use in the features or characteristics of the concept. This interpretation is supported by the way Gallie structures his argument, especially in *ECC*: there is no denying that Gallie's focus is on listing Conditions, even if it is a bit obscure whether all of them should be understood as characteristics of a concept (see intros to chs. 7–9). Moreover, rationally irresolvable and endless disputes appear to be decisively centered on essentially contested concepts (*ECC* 169), which leads one to look for answers in their special nature. So far, however, I have uncovered neither a characteristic nor a set of characteristics that would render ensuing disputes over the employment of a concept *necessarily* irresolvable, endless, and yet genuine.

Option (b) accepts a basic idea that a concept can be considered contestable due to its inherent characteristics. The difference to (a) is that (b) admits a possibility that were a term/concept not contested so, we would have no reason to identify that concept as an essentially contested concept. This accords with the

distinguish good informal arguments from bad ones but to reject all arguments as bad. (Fogelin 1985, 1–2.)

²²⁶ Väyrynen maintains, though, that his own argument indicates "why essential contestability doesn't imply in-principle unresolvability" (Väyrynen 2014, 473n8).

²²⁷ Arthur Gautier might have something like this in mind when he states that "The emergence of philanthropy in France shows that an ECC—which philanthropy certainly is today (Daly 2011)—may not be contested at inception despite its potential to generate disputes" (Gautier 2019, 109). The problem with this view is that it is hard to see what the grounds are for claiming that the later, arguably essentially contested concept is the same concept in the past when (i) it was not essentially contested; and (ii) merely the same word was used. See Ingram (1985, 54) for a similar suggestion in terms that are not quite as problematic.

intuition that were contestation revolving around some term to cease permanently, or perhaps even for an extended period, the concept that is *actually* employed by people after the cessation is hardly essentially contested, or perhaps not even contestable in a relevant sense (see also Green 1987, 18; Ehrenberg 2011, 212n5). The option (a) could further imply a type of conceptual essentialism or realism that presents the matter as if parties to a dispute involving an essentially contested concept are forced to employ that concept as it exists independently of the disputants. In contrast, (b) conforms better with the non-essentialism requirement (12.3) by making a less sweeping claim that does not exclude employment of other kinds of concepts which still aim to represent the same object, topic, or subject matter. Facing a conceptual disagreement, it is always at least theoretically possible to disambiguate conflicting uses and “multiply” concepts/meanings (e.g., ART₁, ART₂) or to simply coin new words that embody new definitions that come to replace the previously contested term (e.g., ‘art,’ ‘schmart’). However, Gallie would certainly oppose these methods as mechanisms of dispute resolution (Norberg 2014, 5; cf. ECC 168), and some think that is because he intends ‘endlessness’ to have a very strong sense (e.g., Ruben 2010, 259). More practically still, coining new words could also be met with mock and ridicule by rival parties who would continue viewing their dispute as “important and unavoidable,” even while acknowledging its irresolvability (Waldron 1994, 531). The option (b) localizes the phenomenon of essential contestability to a disagreement. It is weaker than (a) but it has no problems in accepting the disambiguation or disaggregation of a concept as *one* possible resolving strategy; the “resolved” concept has simply changed beyond recognition.

Then there are those who are unhappy with the characterizations of endlessness and irresolvability. First, as curious as it may sound, both irresolvability and endlessness can be understood as a contingent matter of fact. Both John Gray (1977) and William Connolly (1993) affirm that the possibility of a conclusive rational resolution cannot be denied, even if the required means to achieve it are not known today. Gray considers it important to weaken a thesis of essential contestability so that no claim is made “that definitional disputes about essential [sic] contested concepts are inherently unresolvable by reason.” Instead, rival positions in political philosophy “hinge on differing answers to substantive questions in other areas of philosophy,” and these questions could be susceptible “susceptible of a conclusive rational resolution.” (Gray 1977, 346.) Connolly holds that the universal criteria of reason, and/or the pertinent norms of responsibility that are imperfectly shared, do not suffice to definitively settle contests over essentially contested concepts although they provide “some common leverage for limiting the range within which these contests can rationally proceed.” Based on the history of political discourse and our best current understanding of language, we may reasonably expect that “space for contestability will persist in the future,” even if the irresolvability or interminability of the disputes cannot be demonstrated – the requirement of the latter is a misapprehension caused by “ambiguities lodged within the predicate

'essential'." It is thus not irrational to deny *essential* contestability, but it has not much bite without offering an alternative that is "capable of withstanding the charge of contestability." (Connolly 1993, 197–8, 225, 230; see also 13.1.) In this picture, it is possible that debate on a concept could end in the future.

Second, in his critical discussion of Alasdair MacIntyre's (1973) suggestion that there is essential contestability in certain areas of social inquiry, Norman Care (1973) takes exception to the alleged endlessness of the disputes over social concepts. Although social scientists do not typically achieve a common understanding, a *practical or temporal closure* halting the contestation of the concept is possible in the contexts of various institutions: "we bring debates to an end in these contexts—at least for a time—in such a way as to answer for ourselves certain of the basic questions about the character of our institutions and practices" (Care 1973, 14). In this picture, a closure on a concept is an intermittent affair rather than a logical, future possibility, and hence the dispute over the concept is not really endless, even from a current standpoint. Still, the possibility of a temporal closure does not automatically entail that the dispute is resolvable, once and for all. Andrew Mason (1993) sees rationality as having a role in resolving disputes over a concept's application, but that those disputes "cannot be resolved by arguments of the sort that every reasonable person with sufficient logical skills must accept." (Mason 1993, 13–14; see also 50ff.) It is especially noteworthy, of course, that Gallie himself clears room for a theoretical possibility of a practical agreement: "it is always possible that the contesting parties will, whether in the interests of moral unification or for other reasons, agree to a moratorium on competition between their respective uses of the concept in question" (PHU 211). It is important to observe that, even if Gallie admits such a moratorium, he is not deterred from characterizing disputes over essentially contested concepts as irresolvable and endless.

The possibility of temporal closures in the context of various institutions and other such social arrangements brings forth a question of whether there are such "closures" at the individual level. I think that holding on to a particular use can be considered as such. It is certainly a temporal state in Gallie's view (see 11.4). If this is accepted, more far-reaching practical closures on how the concepts are used become less mysterious. That would only mean that one conceives of the possibility of more than one person being persuaded to employ a concept in a certain way, which I consider a very reasonable thing to assume. Here, one could further distinguish rhetorical *persuasion* from rational *conviction* (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1971) in a way that presents temporal and practical closures as tied to persuasion while the once-and-for-all resolution would be a matter of logically conclusive reasoning. The rhetorical effect of being persuaded can thus serve in place of absent philosophical justification enabling further inferences and practical action. Although Gallie does not distinguish between justification and persuasion explicitly—he speaks of "rational persuasion" because he seeks those instances of being persuaded (i.e., conversions) that are justified (ECC 188; see also 11.4)—nothing stops us from doing so. Here we can take a cue from Thomas Nagel who points out that justification "is a normative

concept: arguments that justify may fail to persuade, if addressed to an unreasonable audience; and arguments that persuade may fail to justify" (Nagel 1987, 218). Practical closures are audience-specific but none the less important for that.

Others flatly deny the special character of Gallie's disputes. For instance, the expression 'essentially contested concept' has been deemed an excuse used by social theorists who fail to acknowledge that the failure to reach agreement is due to much more mundane factors (see Rhodes 2000, 1). More interestingly, John Kekes (1977) puts forward a thesis of essential contestability that is highly congruent with Gallie's points in many respects, although he rejects the endlessness and irresolvability of disputes. For Kekes, essentially contested concepts are *solution-concepts*: the usage that most likely leads to "the solution of the [shared] problem that prompted the debate" should prevail as that is in disputants' interests. Kekes talks about how arguments about democracy could proceed towards a rational solution. The rival parties are presumed to share an understanding that comes down to agreement on a general statement, like "democracy is the form of government in which principal authority rests with the people and they exercise that authority directly or through a representative body." The shared understanding enables getting the debate going, whereas various factions start disputing the matter by "stressing the importance of universal franchise, party politics, equality, and so on." (Kekes 1977, 84–6.) In this view,

The arguments are about the means for reaching the ideals. It is this community of interests and consensus about what would satisfy it that makes debates about ECCs rationally tractable. The logic of the situation is that if the participants recognize a common problem and share a sense of values in some specific domain, then their disputes can be rationally settled. Kekes 1977, 86; cf. Garver 1978, 163–4

Kekes elsewhere affirms as well that "the contest over the proper use of [essentially contested concepts] is value-charged" and rival parties "lay claim to the concept because they regard it as of great importance which interpretation prevails" (ibid., 76). The problem is that, in establishing how a means-dispute is perfectly resolvable, Kekes eliminates the value-ladenness or the interpretive aspect of the issue almost completely. Although the answer to how we should properly weight democratic features might be a solution to some problem arising in the course of human, social life, it is unclear whether any ideal is even agreed upon in the form of the general statement (see above), or between evident adherents while excluding clear dissenters, so that the ensuing dispute can be considered simply as a means-end disagreement (see also Garver 1978, esp. 165–8 for similar criticism against Kekes).

By explicitly replacing Gallie's idea of an evaluative disagreement regarding the criteria that are derived from the original exemplar (ibid., 85), Kekes rushes to speak of disputants who "share a sense of values" which dismisses the possibility that one could still disagree just as much as before concerning which aspect of the normative ideal of democracy is to be preferred over others. I think Kekes is right to insist that a shared common interest or goal

introduces rational tractability to a disagreement, but that does not yet mean that there would be no evaluative differences left. The dispute in question may not be *either* about placing right conceptual characteristics over others *or* about related values. Intractable controversy about terms like 'justice,' 'freedom,' and 'democracy' may express disagreement that is "at once conceptual and substantive" (Gray 1977, 391), or conceptual, normative, and substantive (Besson 2005, 16, 71–2; see also 14.1).

What brings about the irresolvability and endlessness of disputes? Andrew Mason (1993) identifies two basic standpoints that inform us why political [sic] disagreement is so pervasive:

(...) *the imperfection conception* [which] assumes that when political disagreement arises at least one party to the dispute is mistaken; and that with sufficient time, patience, impartiality and logical skills, political disputes could be settled to the satisfaction of any reasonable person who is sincerely engaged with them. Mason 1993, 2

and:

(...) *the contestability conception* [which] maintains that political disagreements are intractable because rational constraints on the proper use of political terms allow for a variety of different applications of them: so long as there is some measure of freedom of expression, disagreement over their proper use will inevitably arise. Mason 1993, 3

Many contemporary explanations or theories for intractable disagreement do not strictly fall into either of these categories; even Gallie's thesis is not a clear-cut example of the contestability conception (Mason 1993, 4). A highly important feature of the imperfection conception is that it appeals to a theory of error, or that the disagreement is brought about by a mistake by one of the disputants. This precludes the possibility of all parties being justified in their views, which is probably why most proponents of essential contestability are inclined to accept the contestability conception. Mason observes that each conception appears to draw some of its plausibility from the other one's weakness: the imperfection conception suffers from the sheer implausibility that major disputes could be resolved to the satisfaction of every reasonable person, while one might recoil from the contestability conception because of the fear of committing to an unacceptable form of moral relativism (*ibid.*, 12). Even so, the distinction is ideal-typical while actual accounts or theories typically mix elements from both conceptions.

The specific way the endlessness and irresolvability come to the fore is, of course, determined differently by each distinct thesis of essential contestability. For Gallie, the function of characterizing a concept as essentially contested is the possibility of explaining why some disputes are endless and yet perfectly genuine (van den Burg 2017, 233). In part four, I will investigate various options for the origin of essential contestability in terms of both their inherent structure and specific function. In the rest of the section, however, I will discuss how the origin of endless and irresolvable disputes can be located to a specific kind of

judgment that is rendered when rival parties appraise an original exemplar's valued achievement and compare their view to those of others.

I have already discussed the idea of the original exemplar (ch. 8). Now, it suffices to note that the original exemplar's achievement is malleable or variously realizable in changing circumstances. The original exemplar also functions as an acknowledged authority in a dispute, and the disputants are expected to judge, evaluate, or "appraise" (4.1) how to sustain and develop the original exemplar's achievement to the optimum (9.1). In this context, the relevant sense of appraisiveness is roughly that of evaluating similarity or faithfulness to the original exemplar's achievement in the changing circumstances (see esp. Ruben 2010; 2013). From a different point of view, one may easily take Gallie to intend that the original exemplar provides rival parties with an authoritative list of salient features of a valued achievement which are only then evaluated and weighted by the disputants (cf. 5.2; esp. 17.2). Yet the judgment on how the features are to be weighted is predicated on a more basic judgment of qualitative similarity between the original exemplar's valued achievement and the way one's use of a concept furthers that achievement.

David-Hillel Ruben (2010) maintains that the idea of individuating and counting beliefs and practices of an individual, moreover of groups, is "highly artificial" and the question of which party is the most faithful to the original exemplar cannot be settled by appealing to "qualitative similarity even of centrally important beliefs and practices." Ruben contends that nothing useful can be said in a general way about the degree of similarity needed for one sub-tradition to be a successor or the true successor of an earlier tradition. This is because "each tradition may set the limits of permissible variation for itself, so that the criteria for membership become internal."²²⁸ (Ruben 2010, 268-9.) Simon Evnine (2014) has argued in like manner that the so-called essentially contested terms or concepts are involved in contests over inheritance (of a tradition) that turn on heirship. These disputes cannot be settled decisively since "there simply is no determinate answer to which, of two conflicting parties, is the rightful heir of the earlier tradition part [or stage]." Secession or heresy is a constant threat for any human tradition, and such disputes are very real. They only appear definitional because rivals are keen to present the matter that way: if the point of contention were defined in the way they propose, they would win the contest of heirship analytically. (Evnine 2014, esp. 133-5; see also 18.4.) Inability to resolve questions like who the true or rightful successor/heir *to* the exemplar is, who the proper members *of* the tradition are, and/or who gets to speak *for* the tradition, is now understood to give rise to endless and rationally irresolvable disputes.

Religious disputes can be taken as paradigm instances of disagreements in which similarity or faithfulness to the original exemplar is an overwhelmingly important concern for rival parties. Examples include dogmatic disputes

²²⁸ Note the affinity to a Lukesian view that views essentially contested concepts as located within particular moral perspectives. In addition, Ruben's position is compatible with David Boromisza-Habashi's (2010) point about essentially contested concepts playing a role in oppositional membering (12.3).

between branched sub-traditions, and situations that require following in the footsteps of a spiritual figure: "Who are the true successors of the prophet Muhammad, Shia or Sunni?" or "What would Jesus do?"²²⁹ But it is important to realize that there are also other applications of basically the same idea. Consider Alasdair MacIntyre, who takes under scrutiny the normative debates about the character of science, politics, and education. A crucial feature of arguments

in which what is at stake includes both our ability to draw a line between authentic sciences and degenerate or imitative sciences, such as astrology and phrenology, and our ability to explain why "German physics" and Lysenko biology are not to be included in science (...) is the way in which "dispute over the norms which govern scientific practice interlocks with debates over how the history of science is to be written. What identity and continuity are recognized will of course depend on what side is taken in these latter debates; but since these debates are so intimately related to the arguments about the norms governing practice, it turns out that the dispute over norms and the dispute over continuity and identity cannot be separated. As with natural science, so also with politics and with education. MacIntyre 1973, 7

This can be understood as a case in which the original exemplar is interpreted broadly as a tradition with its norms and values rather than as a single exemplar. It also brings into mind the previous criticism that essential contestability appears to be a taxonomy problem²³⁰. But why exactly that is so?

In a newly added passage in *PHU*, Gallie discusses how RELIGION can be considered an essentially contested concept. The reason appears to stem from the different emphases (or weights) that are "placed upon elements of cult and of doctrine, of personal salvation and of social cohesion, of moral comfort and metaphysical illumination" (PHU 168). Yet these are mostly *purposes* that a religion can have, or what it has to offer for its practitioners, rather than pure descriptive "indicators" or "recognitors" of religion (cf. 16.4). I think this perspective helps in clarifying why essential contestability may appear as a taxonomical problem. If such contestability commonly manifests through mutually excluding definitions (cf. 11.2) or uses of a concept that are put forward in connection to broad intellectual enterprises like aesthetics and political

²²⁹ Ruben gives an example of the Jewish tradition, within which the Divine Origin of the Pentateuch, i.e., the first five books of the Bible, is centrally important (as belief) to Orthodox Jews; for other Jews it is not central at all. The significance attributed to connecting a valued achievement to a past exemplar can also become a somewhat overriding concern, and many religions may be a case in point. Furthermore, Dale Eickelman observes interestingly that new innovations are often best defended in the Islamic tradition by denying that any innovation has taken place. Public reasoning stands as a related example: although it has a long tradition in Islamic jurisprudence, "both Sunni and Shia awareness of this tradition is deflected by claims that anything new actually originated in the valued past of the time of the Prophet Muhammad." (Eickelman 2015, 136, 139.) This gives food for thought that waging disputes in this fashion is a cultural feature, the traces of which lead to religious disputes. In fact, that is also what Eugene Garver (1990) suggests, though he substantiates the claim with historical examples that are merely schematic, as he himself acknowledges.

²³⁰ For instance, K.I. MacDonald (1976) understands Gallie as focusing on "competing hurrah noises" that aim at evaluating how close some instantiations of particulars are to some accepted exemplar. The ensuing problem of the weighting of the attributes comes very close to a taxonomy problem. (MacDonald 1976, 381.) See also 6.2.

philosophy (cf. e.g., ECC 168; PHU 148), each contesting definition or concept-use can be thought to serve some additional purpose(s), whether theoretical, moral, or something else (cf. Gray 1978, 392–3 or see 6.2). The dispute is as much, and sometimes perhaps even more, about how to assess the import of those purposes in connection to how a categorization is made. Or, as MacIntyre states, “the dispute over norms and the dispute over continuity and identity cannot be separated” (MacIntyre 1973, 7) in the case of continuous social particulars – and so why not also in the case of categories of on-going human activities (cf. 11.3)? These considerations again emphasize the context in which the concept is used rather than what is encoded in the semantics of the concept alone (cf. ch. 10).

More generally, the essential contestability view, in which the identity and continuity of practices, traditions, or institutions are centrally at stake, can be called *the admittance to a tradition thesis* – ‘tradition’ is now understood broadly to cover social particulars that admit membership or successorship. A key feature of such a thesis is, I claim, that the dispute of interest does not turn on any specific conceptual matters but rather on how the disputants stand in relation to a specific tradition, group, or movement that is organized around a valued achievement. The admittance to a tradition thesis thus tends to discard concepts as the primary object or vehicle of contestation, or that is at least the case with Ruben and Evnine, who I identify as exemplifying this strand of essential contestability theses²³¹ (Ruben 2010, 261; 2013, 35; Evnine 2014, 119).

Some of Gallie’s formulations suggest that this is what he is after. In *ECC*, Gallie offers scant remarks about sustaining and developing the valued achievement or “the exemplar’s way of playing” in a “truer” or “more orthodox” way (ECC 177), which invites consideration of successorship as a key factor. In “What Makes a Subject Scientific?” (1957), Gallie’s answer to the question posed in the title is the following: the fact that a subject has been accepted into a scientific tradition (see also Syrjämäki 2011, 146). This is relevant since *SCIENCE* is one of the few candidates that Gallie takes into consideration for possibly being essentially contested (compare PHU 155 with PHU 190). In addition, in *ART*, Gallie situates essentially contested concepts to “any field of activity in which achievements are prized because they renew or advance a highly complex tradition” (ART 114; see also 11.2). It would now be possible to ask, “what makes a work of art artistic?” The answer could be formed along these lines: the fact that such a judgment or evaluation finds support within the arts or the broad tradition

²³¹ Here I need to present a couple of notes that become clearer with the respective discussions later. First, it is worth noting that understanding essentially contested concepts specifically as interpretive concepts (see 16.4; see also 18.3) might gel particularly well with the admittance to a tradition thesis. That is, of course, because interpreting what properly falls under the concept can now be perceived as a tradition-specific act that draws from what the members of the tradition already share. Whether or not they necessarily agree on all that is shared, it is still something to which they can appeal, and on which they can build their argumentative cases. Second, in the terminology that I adopt in part four, the admittance to a tradition thesis fails to uphold *Concept-Object* that underpins a concept-centered thesis (see ch. 15 intro), which is why it cannot be considered a potential way of cashing out a concept-centered thesis of essential contestability. That is the reason it is not given more attention as a viable alternative there.

of art (including philosophical inquiries to the nature of art) makes a work of art artistic.

For a similarity-judgment to have an impact on the terms on which parties consider their dispute to be resolved, it could be that all disputants must be animated by concern for the continuation of the tradition or be suitably interested in how that is done²³². Ernest Gellner (1974) observes that if the *belief* in the existence and authoritativeness of the original exemplar is at the crux of Gallie's requirement of the original exemplar, the definition becomes too restrictive. It would preclude, for instance, contestation between those advocating different Marxist conceptions if they do not "subscribe to a kind of apotheosis of the historic Marx" (Gellner 1974, 96). On the one hand, the problem is an overly-restrictive kind of historical-mindedness (Ingram 1985, 41-2). On the other hand, requiring such acknowledgement of authority practically confines essential contestability to partisan intra-tradition affairs rather than inter-tradition disagreement that many take as the quintessential case of essential contestability. It would also seem that the real argument is not *about* the concept that is thereby essentially contested, but something else—although that may not necessarily mean that such concept would not be centrally *involved* in such a debate in some other fashion²³³.

Similarity can be considered a problematic notion in its own right. Nelson Goodman offers a scathing criticism of similarity and its uses in philosophy in "Seven Strictures on Similarity" (1970). For our present purpose it is enough to observe that (i) the determination of similarity is relative, variable and culture-dependent; (ii) in determining identity, a degree of similarity might not be decisive, but a similarity in a certain respect (which requires further judgment); and that (iii) "the grouping of occurrences under a work or an experiment or an activity depends not upon a high degree of similarity but upon the possession of certain characteristics" (Goodman 1970, 26). Goodman also criticizes a view according to which similarity could be equated with, or measured in terms of, possession of common characteristics. He sees the notion especially fruitless in the case of intensional properties, "for identifying and distinguishing intensional properties is a notoriously slippery matter, and the idea of measuring similarity or anything else in terms of *number of* intensional properties need hardly be taken seriously" (Goodman 1970, 26 italics added). I take him largely to mean that the number of intensional properties of any object is, in principle, limitless.

²³² Some disputes between academics appear to be like this. Hans-Johann Glock states that the rationalistic conception of analytic philosophy in effect turns 'analytic philosophy' into an honorific title, "one that signifies what has come to be known as an essentially contested concept." Glock observes that most advocates of a rationalistic conception "proffer it with an *apologetic* intent, as part of the defence of analytic philosophy." Those who engage in determining who deserves the laudatory title of an analytical philosopher (cf. Gallie's 'the champions' in *Artificial*) while sharing the rationalistic conception do not question whether it is a good thing. (Glock 2008, 204-7.) As Christopher Bryant points out, the original exemplar not only ensures the sameness of topic, but it also "promotes the quest for perfect realization" (Bryant 1992, 59).

²³³ For the distinction between 'about' and 'involved,' see 14.1.

Regarding the counting of only important or salient properties, Goodman simply observes that importance is a highly volatile matter and thus “quite incapable of supporting the fixed distinctions that philosophers so often seek to rest upon it” (Goodman 1970, 27).

Goodman’s last point accords with the spirit of Ruben’s opposition against individuating and counting *some* beliefs and practices as presumably decisive, while (i) and (ii) illustrate why similarity-judgment can hardly be reduced to a simple evaluative weighting of pre-given features as Gallie appears to be presenting the matter (see esp. 17.2). Instead, it is a complex judgment that could also require considerable attention to a pragmatic context. ‘Similarity of something to something’ as a criterion by which to decide on a matter is vague, and considerations that could become relevant are scarcely bounded beforehand. That being said, if faithfulness or true succession to a past tradition, to its exemplar(s), and/or to its characteristic values is indeed at issue, it conceivably results in an ever-present possibility of appraising the matter differently than can be captured by any fixed definition – enter Gallie’s relatively obscure remark that “the point of view from which our appraisals are made (...) would seem always to be of the kind I have called ‘essentially contested’” (ART 114; see also 11.2 for context).

To see better why that appears to be the case, let us start with observations by Charles Kalish, but now from a pronouncedly more psychological standpoint:

Concepts give rise to expectations and perceptions of relatedness (...) [t]he similarities and expectations generated by concepts are kinds of experiences; they are features of the conceptualizer’s mind. They are not, in and of themselves, expectations or beliefs about objects in the world. As such, the similarities are neither right nor wrong. People perceive many associations (...) The perceived similarities are not defeasible because they are not claims or inferences about anything. Kalish 2016, 520

It seems that Kalish is speaking of mental associations at the level on which they are not, or cannot be, ordered as belief-statements or rule-like expectations. As associations that just spring to mind, they are neither right nor wrong. For example, WHALE and FISH encode many of the same associations, so people perceive the two to be similar (Kalish 2016, 520). However, perceptions of association and similarity are of interest because “they are used to guide behavior and inference” (ibid.). For example, an association that whales and fish are similar may lead one to infer that they both breathe water. That is incorrect, and the flaw can be traced to the association between whales and fish. WHALE and FISH are empirical concepts, and the inferences that are made on the basis of empirical concepts can be checked relatively easily against the world. If WHALE in one’s possession contains the feature “is fish” (and not just an association) it is relatively easy to come to a conclusion that one’s use of that concept is “wrong” or deficient because it does not represent the world correctly or accurately.

Opposing judgments of similarity to the original exemplar might be guided by different mental associations that further guide related beliefs and inferences. In linguistic terms, these “features of the conceptualizer’s mind” might be approximated as connotations that are attached to a term – some may find it most

reasonable to speak of lexical effects (e.g., Cappelen 2018, ch. 11) – and they are not typically considered as part of a term’s (core) meaning²³⁴. However, there appears to be no direct way of checking, *uncontestably*, the accuracy of individual inferences that are made by employing a (presumably) first-order essentially contested concept²³⁵, and that for three reasons: (a) the relevant type of a concept is linked to different descriptions that can be given of it (ECC 172; 5.1); (b) the concept’s conceptual content is determined reflexively (12.3; 17.4); and (c) the personal associations of similarity cannot be easily identified and separated from the culture- and context-specific effects (cf. Goodman above). As the criteria of a concept are subject to negotiation, what is at once merely an individual association (or connotation) may later become a proper feature of a valued achievement that is signified by the concept. The past usage of the expression or term that stands for the concept may be such that it has admitted and established many such once-associations as part of what is combinatorially tolerated under what is essentially a cultural concept (see also Waldron’s view of historical contestability in 12.2).

Philosophers with their specific definitions are not taken as experts to whom one should defer when deciding between different uses, and that could be so even if they could reach a consensus in practice. From one perspective, Kalish (2016) observes that “experts have no special claim or power to determine descriptive concepts” even if it is possible that “an expert’s usage may be part of the associations encoded in a concept, perhaps a very salient or significant part.” Instead of deference, “descriptive concepts imply responsiveness to experts.” The difference between empirical and descriptive concepts looks to be one of attitude: the possessor decides whether she thinks that the concept in question is empirical or merely descriptive (Kalish 2016, 522). This accords with how Gallie depicts, in *ART*, the process in which some great individuals may have an influence on how others come to grasp *ART*, or what is more generally of aesthetic value. But there are no ready-made authorities, institutionally backed or otherwise. Rather, specific “expert” or philosophical usages make their exclusive claims – expertise is exclusive by definition – from which others choose, or by which they are influenced.

From another perspective, Andrew Mason (1990) identifies two external features that may explain why there does not appear to be much convergence in areas of discourse like ethics and politics: (i) consensus is not regarded as important by practitioners of certain disciplines; (ii) the latitude granted in using certain terms is a result of being inducted into a form of life that involves coercive

²³⁴ Some of the intractability of disputes could be attributable to this fact. That being said, if the complexity is the result of various subjective connotations, and the difference between rival parties is one of connotation rather than denotation, it could perhaps be argued that “there is no reason to regard them as *disagreeing* – any more than there is a disagreement between persons who use ‘Hyde’ and ‘Clarendon’ to refer to the same individual” (Newey 2001, 253). It does seem, however, that essential contestedness or contestability goes well beyond mere reference-fixing or correctly labeling objects as what they are.

²³⁵ I assume the inferences are not deficient in some general way; for example, by exhibiting incoherence in relation to other related inferences.

socialization in which one learns to use the terms correctly. Both cases can be said to involve the short reach of intellectual authority that is socially and historically contingent matter.²³⁶ (see Mason 1990, 93ff; see also Mason 1993, 64–68.) It seems to me that Kalish’s and Mason’s perspectives could reinforce one another. I find it plausible that descriptive concepts are employed more frequently in disciplines (and discourses) in which the reach of the intellectual authority is relatively short. Thus, the discipline-specific conceptual employment that admits more disagreement would not be solely due to socialization to the particular conventions of the discipline but would also have a basis in general conceptual characteristics. Establishing that as a fact would require much more research, of course.

We can now make a full circle back by observing that the tension between a vague popular conception of a concept and the much more precise, but exclusive, definitions of experts can be also understood as a tension between “similarity-based” concepts or conceptualizations (e.g., a prototype and a set of exemplars) and “non-similarity-based” concepts or conceptualizations (e.g., a theory or a definition)²³⁷. Depending on one’s theory of the nature of concepts (or concept-like entities), these classes of concepts can be understood to be of different kinds of representation, yet concepts nonetheless (see e.g., Machery 2009, esp. ch. 3). It looks clear that Gallie considers concepts as something that can be represented or grasped in multiple ways (e.g., through definitions, theories, and what is termed as a popular conception). But if the difference between “similarity-based” and “non-similarity-based” marks a relevant difference in kind, it becomes suspect on that count alone (not to mention differences in content) that a dispute *at this level* (i.e., popular conception vs. expert definitions) could be accurately called a contest over a single, shared concept despite the presence of the same word or expression. This reinforces the need to delve deeper into how essentially contested concepts are structured or organized.

All in all, if the *commonly accepted* criterion for resolving the dispute is the determination of qualitative similarity (or faithfulness/true succession) to the original exemplar, and the claim on that basis cannot be made without contestability *ceteris paribus*, it is at least plausible that the ensuing disagreement could be endless and irresolvable. The present approach locates the origin of

²³⁶ (i) and (ii) relate to the original findings by Paul Seabright and Sabina Lovibond which Mason discusses more comprehensively. Furthermore, in the same context but in a different work, Mason (1993) distinguishes consensus-seeking from persuasion and observes that “[p]ractitioners of discipline may aim to persuade without aiming at consensus.” It would thus be possible to affirm that persuasion is “a fundamental goal of moral and political discourse even if we deny that consensus is so as well.” (Mason 1993, 65–66.) This coheres quite well with what I previously said in this section about the possibility of making a distinction between rhetorical persuasion and rational conviction. The clear difference is that Mason speaks of the matter at the more general level while I focus on what could take place at the level of individual disputants.

²³⁷ This attests to a fact that Gallie’s thesis stands at the crossroads between the classical view of concepts and the prototype view that was influenced by Wittgenstein but that was still yet to come when Gallie made his views known (see also 2.3).

contestability to a specific limitation in our epistemic position, a limitation which has only rarely been noticed in the literature on Gallie and essentially contested concepts. However, if that also leads to the admittance to a tradition thesis of essential contestability, concepts as the primary objects of contestation seem to disappear.

CHAPTER 13: THE REASONABLENESS OF ESSENTIAL CONTESTATION

The previous two chapters (11, 12) extend the discussion of Gallie's seven Conditions (chs. 4–9), and together they describe the key ingredients of essential contestedness, even if not always from a unified perspective. The two remaining chapters (13, 14) tackle explicitly with various concerns and issues that may crop up concerning essential contestedness. I have already suggested some ways to modify and extend Gallie's basic ideas, but I will do so in a more marked fashion from now on.

Chapter thirteen deals with the issues related to the reasonableness of (essential) contestation. One key issue is about the coherency of the notion of essential contestability. It has been claimed that essential contestability is simply an inconsistent idea: one cannot honestly claim one conception or use of a concept as superior to others *while* holding that the matter under dispute is essentially contestable (13.1). It has even been argued that the notion of essential contestability is self-refuting or that it otherwise commits to a pernicious sort of radical relativism (13.5). Essential contestability is often connected with the idea of reasonable disagreement, but that idea too comes with a theoretical baggage. The common theme in these lines of criticism is that the one who accepts a thesis of essential contestability—either as a reflective disputant or as a philosopher analyzing the phenomenon—has not considered the issue through to its logical conclusion. It therefore makes sense to distinguish between the internal perspective of disputants and the external perspective of an analyst while trying to gauge the appropriate rational response to the alleged contestability. I also make a couple of observations about the epistemology of disagreement and examine the sense in which the reasonableness implicit in an essential contestability thesis is practical rather than cognitive (13.2). After that, I move to assess the rationality and reasonableness of the disputing parties more directly. First, I evaluate the extent to which Gallie is advocating a definitive ethical conception of reasonableness and whether the thesis rests on liberal self-understanding (13.3). Then, I identify a transitional conception of individual rationality that is operative in justified conversions and argue that the general

mode of reasoning and argumentation that coheres with that conception is of an *ad hominem* type (13.4).

I should warn the reader in advance that I do not articulate one reasonableness-related key component of my preferred thesis of essential contestability until chapter 18: the idea of decision-based reasonable disagreement. That is because I do not want to confuse it with my examination of Gallie's original ideas, a discussion that seeks to elucidate the thesis of essential contestedness in addition to drawing attention to where it needs to be complemented or corrected. Nonetheless, I make occasional remarks on the matter here and there in the following sections. The idea of decision-based reasonable disagreement is motivated by, and indeed based on, my on-going investigation in part three, especially in this and the next chapter.

13.1 The superiority of a single use/conception

According to one common line of criticism—let us call it *the simple inconsistency objection*²³⁸—for someone genuinely holding the essential contestability view there is no sense in engaging in a contest which cannot by its nature be won or lost (Gray 1983, 96; Zimmerling 2005, 25; see also Connolly 1993, 226). The specific charge of inconsistency is most often related to the notion that accepting essential contestability/contestedness precludes rational disagreement concerning which use of a concept, or conception, is the best or the superior (cf. e.g., Clarke 1979, 125). By the simple inconsistency objection, one can thus target the motivation to have a dispute when one is aware of its true nature. The objection is also applicable in the case of a theorist who argues for the superiority of her view while acknowledging that the matter is essentially contested or contestable²³⁹.

It is important to be clear about the claims made by a thesis of essential contestability. Christine Swanton (1985) distinguishes between a relativist and a skeptical version²⁴⁰. *The relativist version*, the gist of which is that no interpretation

²³⁸ Ruth Zimmerling (2005, 24–6) identifies two inconsistency objections that can be directed against Gallie and Lukes: the simple inconsistency objection discussed here and the sophisticated inconsistency objection which I cover later (17.3). These are from Christine Swanton (1985), who defends Gallie and Lukes against the former and criticizes them based on the latter.

²³⁹ Andrew Mason identifies a problematic position that can be considered a special case of the latter. In this position, a theorist claims that the particular interpretation of an essentially contested concept for which the theorist argues is *not* superior in comparison to other interpretations. (Mason 1990, 84, 86.) That is indeed problematic, and I do not think that anyone would consciously embrace it. Thus it serves more as an argumentative contrast in the style of “See, this is what your position leads to!” Furthermore, it should be noted that I add to the current discussion of superiority in the next section (13.2).

²⁴⁰ Swanton speaks of ‘essential contestedness’ instead of ‘essential contestability.’ In a later and more limited reprint of her 1985 paper, Swanton describes Gallie’s and Lukes’s theses as the epistemological version and the ontological version respectively (Swanton 1992, 4ff).

of the concept of X is the best conception of X, Swanton attributes to Steven Lukes. *The skeptical version*, however, is attributed to Gallie. Its central claim is that, for any interpretation of the concept of X, there is no warrant for the belief that the interpretation is the best conception of X. According to Swanton, both theses assume that there is at least one concept of X, which is central to political theory and which admits of a variety of interpretations that are understood as rival conceptions that are aggressively and defensively deployable against each other²⁴¹. (Swanton 1985, 813–4; see also Mason 1993, 50.) In Swanton's view, Gallie does not therefore explicitly deny that there are correct uses of concepts; rather, he contends that we are not in a position to decide which one of the conflicting views is the best. This imparts an epistemological tone to Gallie's main claim that is missing from some of the interpretations that connect essential contestability to rivalling normative views.

As to the issue of superiority, Swanton maintains that neither Gallie nor Lukes need to assert that all possible interpretations "will inevitably be the subject of "endless" dispute once thought about" (Swanton 1985, 815). That would indeed make the debates pointless as contests, as no conceptions could be rejected on the grounds that some other conception is better. According to Swanton,

The theses of essential contestedness, as stated, are weaker than this: though there is no best conception, or none knowable to be the best, some conceptions may nonetheless be better than others. While affording no criterion for determining the best wheat, contests have point because they separate the wheat from the chaff; and this separation is an endless process because political theorists are always in the habit of adding to the chaff. Swanton 1985, 815; see also Syrjämäki 2011, 144; Collier et al. 2006, 221; *contra* Rhodes 2000, 15–16

Gallie's remark that "greater or lesser degrees of rationality can be properly and naturally attributed to one continued use, or one change of use, than to others" (ECC 191/PHU 186) supports the interpretation that Gallie indeed sought to make room for comparative rational evaluation between different uses. Wibren van der Burg considers the fact that Gallie allowed conflicting conceptions to be defensible by good arguments reason enough to deny that Gallie's position is either relativist *or* skeptical; instead, his view is in support of "legitimate pluralism" (van der Burg 2017, 236–7).

Furthermore, Michael Stokes (2007) more generally claims that the rationality does not depend upon "having an ultimate measure of what is best" and we do not need to have "a best conception to understand the claim that one conception is superior to another." For example, we can be led to value one conception as better than the other when it advances the same factors as the other conception does, only better; or as long as it does not sacrifice any values the other does not sacrifice. The lack of a right answer does not undermine the notion of a contested concept; the only thing the notion requires is that "the concept be sufficiently rational for us to have some understanding of the ways in which the

²⁴¹ The concept/conception distinction is discussed in 17.3.

concept is contested and to be able to understand the nature and strength of arguments for conceptions which we do not accept.” (Stokes 2007, 699, 702.) Ruth Zimmerling (2005) acknowledges that “it is generally correct to say that the existence of a criterion for comparative judgments (‘better’) does not necessarily depend on the existence of a criterion for judgments of superlativity (‘best’).” Since comparative judgments do not require one to possess the criteria for judging between the different uses of the concept once and for all, the simple inconsistency objection rests on the specifics of each thesis.

Jeremy Waldron (1994) somewhat hesitantly thinks that, although one cannot expect to prevail comprehensively in these disputes, one can realistically believe that by continuing to contest the matter: (1) others may take one’s considerations more seriously; (2) it is possible to explain why alternative views are not as persuasive as is commonly thought; and (3) one will also have a say in the matter in the imaginable future even if one would expect the disputes to be practically endless. (Waldron 1994, 533–4.) In Waldron’s view, the awareness of what is taking place appears to come down to the following:

Someone who has these hopes will acknowledge that he is engaged in a debate whose richness and usefulness stems only partly from his own contribution; but he will aim to show that this rich and useful fabric of argumentation culminates in the desirability of according greater recognition to his view.²⁴² Waldron 1994, 534

Waldron’s interpretation is a good reminder that disputes manifesting essential contestability also have a practical dimension which may contribute to one’s motivation to participate in contesting the matter. Whether that practical dimension also contributes to their rationality depends on requirements placed on rational disputes. In the same vein, we should be mindful of the possibility that one’s motivation to engage in contesting the matter stems from the hope that conclusive reasons to prefer one or the other position would reveal themselves during that disagreement – or after having that disagreement a thousand times. As I previously presented, not every advocate of an essential contestability thesis thinks that the relevant disputes are *necessarily* endless, even though there may be every reason to suppose that they are irresolvable for the foreseeable future (see 12.4).

Zimmerling concurs with Mason (1993) that explaining the problem away with the help of comparative judgments is not available in the case of Lukes’s relativist version²⁴³. (Zimmerling 2005, 25.) Indeed, it is the Lukesian version that

²⁴² Waldron’s description of what is happening here employs the sense of essentiality of contestation that he identifies more generally, i.e., the one that corresponds with *Essential End* that I distinguished from *Essential Contestation* in 12.3. Waldron’s points, when suitably rephrased, can also be marshalled to support a thesis of essential contestability that entails *Essential Contestation*. The discussion concerning the benefits of contestation is also relevant at this juncture (esp. 9.2).

²⁴³ ‘Relativism’ enters the discussions on essential contestability every now and then. Unfortunately, there is no general consensus on what relativism entails, and this seems to be especially true when someone is accused of being a relativist. We may roughly say that relativism “is the view that truth and falsity, right and wrong, standards of reasoning, and

has drawn the most criticism in terms of being inconsistent in the present sense²⁴⁴. In his reply to K.I. MacDonald, Lukes claims that it is not inconsistent to hold the following two opinions at the same time: “(i) that the concept of power is essentially contested and (2) that the three-dimensional conception [i.e., Lukes’s own view] is superior to the others” (Lukes 1977, 419). This remark and the brief discussion that accompanies it (*ibid.*) suggest that Lukes and his critics might be talking past each other. This is possibly because they understand the essentiality of contestation differently, yet it is instructive to see why exactly Lukes has attracted the criticism.

Brian Barry questions whether there can be any room for rational arguments with respect to claiming one conception of power as superior to others, if the concept of power is essentially contested *on account of irreducible value-conflict* (Barry 1975, 252). The three conceptions of power²⁴⁵ that Lukes (1974) distinguishes all originate in a particular moral perspective, and “criteria of rationality and justification in morals are themselves relative to conflicting and irreconcilable perspectives” (Lukes 1974, 178, 186–7). In a later work, Lukes describes essentially contested concepts as “perspective-related concepts,” the interpretation of which depends upon “background interests and assumptions, including moral and political judgments” (Lukes 1982, 305). The later characterization is milder than the former, from which it seems to follow more clearly that “there is no objective or even shared standpoint from which one of these views [i.e., the three conceptions of power] is, or can be justifiably regarded as, superior to others”²⁴⁶ (Mason 1993, 52). If the standards for evaluating the

procedures of justification are products of differing conventions and frameworks of assessment and that their authority is confined to the context giving rise to them” (Baghrarian and Carter 2018). The denial of the framework-independent vantage point [such as Lukes’s] is a characteristic claim by relativists, and “one main attraction of relativism is that it offers a way of settling (or explaining away) what appear to be profound disagreements on questions of value, knowledge and ontology” (*ibid.*, §1.1). The specific relativist claims can be understood to be of the form “X is relative to the parameter P,” and P can be called ‘the relativizing parameter.’ Such a parameter often involves people, their beliefs, cultures, or languages. On this basis, Gallie’s thesis clearly has some relativist elements, yet it is still useful to make a finer distinction in the case of the ultimately correct uses of concepts.

²⁴⁴ See esp. Barry 1975; Gray 1977, 333–5; Mason 1990, 84–6; Mason 1993, 51–53; Zimmerling 2005, 20–25. However, see Terence Ball (1993) who explicitly argues that not only does Gallie’s thesis fail in this regard but that others who take their cue from Gallie (like Connolly and Lukes) do not practice what they preach either (Ball 1993, 556; see also Mason 1993, 51). Ball’s argument is based on a misunderstanding of Gallie’s thesis which unfortunately has led him to mischaracterize it in some respects. For an extensive criticism of Ball’s position, see Syrjämäki 2011, 166–173. Connolly’s response to the criticism is briefly discussed at the end of the current section.

²⁴⁵ These are the one-dimensional, the two-dimensional, and the three-dimensional conceptions of power, the last of which Lukes prefers. For the specifics, see Lukes’s *Power: a Radical View* (2005); see also 1974, 186–7.

²⁴⁶ Mason also notices an even later development in Lukes’s views, namely his focus on incommensurable values, goods, and options rather than the employment of incommensurable conceptual schemes. As Mason reads Lukes, this is not enough: Lukes still

justification of views are perspective-specific, there is no common standard or criterion on which to lean in arguing that other disputants should hold one's conception as superior. If each party persists in arguing for the superiority of their conception while invoking the criteria or standards that only they accept, it is difficult to see how that dispute could be both rational and genuine.

The present issue is noticed by John Gray (1977) as well. If Lukes's own three-dimensional conception of power is rationally preferable to the one- and two-dimensional conceptions, it is not merely more consonant with a particular value scheme, or a moral perspective. Lukes is instead claiming that his three-dimensional view accommodates certain features of social reality that are neglected by the other two views, and he arrives at this conclusion by comparing how these views fare on a number of issues. Thus, if there are rational arguments capable of showing the inadequacy of the alternative conceptions, POWER cannot be essentially contested "in the sense that rival uses of it express conflicting moral and political commitments between which reason cannot arbitrate." (Gray 1977, 334.) Swanton, as well, views the Lukesian argument for essentially contested concepts as relying on the notion of incommensurability (Swanton 1985, 821-3). She frames the matter a bit differently from Gray, but the conclusion is similar: one is faced with a dilemma in which "an appeal to incommensurability supports the thesis that concepts are essentially contested at the cost of denying that they are contested" (Swanton 1985, 823). The point of the simple inconsistency objection is that one cannot have one's cake and eat it too.

Nevertheless, Swanton also offers a more positive reading of what Lukes could be after. The Lukesian view does not need to be unstable, let alone incoherent, because Lukes "may deny any notion of moral truth or verisimilitude against the background of which the notion of 'best conception' makes sense" (Swanton 1985, 815-6; also 1992, 9-10; *contra* Mason 1993, 51-2). Robert Grafstein (1988) joins the defense of Lukes by observing that scholars may agree concerning how to assess the strength of conceptual schemes yet still adopt different schemes and hence different definitions of power. One does not need to understand truth as "conceptually relative," and thus one could become rationally convinced that another conceptual scheme is superior "so long as there is a shared standard of success." One definition could lead to "more truths or more general truths" than another. (Grafstein 1988, 18.) The assumption of the shared standard of success is crucial for Grafstein's defense of Lukes, but it is a tricky matter. While it is fine to perceive various scholars accepting and operating under some shared, external standard of success, the situation could be quite different outside research settings. Moreover, an essentially contested concept as a concept signifying a valued achievement may wear such a standard of success on its sleeve: how to appraise correctly which aspect or factor is worth sustaining and advancing in a given case is exactly at the heart of the dispute.

In any case, I think that Gray's argument is quite sound as far as it goes. Its force does not come from habitually presuming that all comparisons are

appears to be committed to a view that the incommensurability involved leads to the absence of any correct way of balancing between the different claims. (Mason 1993, 53.)

impossible if there is no best conception to be had; rather, it tackles a deeper issue. As I have come to understand the reasoning behind Lukes's thesis, it involves the claim that a thing T is claimed as a concept/term/predicate C relative to conflicting and irreconcilable perspectives P. What Swanton refers to above as the relativist version is the additional claim that no thus-relativized interpretation of C is the best conception of C. In Lukes, this claim is grounded on the idea that the criteria of rationality and justification in morals are themselves relative to conflicting and irreconcilable perspectives. Thus, we get: T is claimed as C relative to Ps, and as the criteria of rationality and justification in morals are relative to Ps, no singular claim of 'T is C (in morals)' can be assessed as more rational or justified than another when each claim is associated with its own irreconcilable perspective. The problem is that this view does not offer any mediating perspective that would allow rational comparison between the different perspectives, neither internally nor externally to a dispute (see also Mason 1990, esp. 85). It fails the incommensurability qualification (see 6.2): for there to be contestation of any kind, there must be a mutually intelligible conceptual frame, or background, within which that contestation is carried out. If the criteria of rationality and justification are tied to values and/or moral perspectives that are irreconcilable, there does not seem to be any mutual frame of reference within which the merits and flaws of different claims, which originate within particular perspectives, could be assessed and adjudicated. All this renders the subsequent disagreement irresolvable—which, true enough, is partly the idea—but only at the cost of precluding comparative rational judgments as well.

The kind of conflict that we seek cannot be ineradicable in a sense that the competing views have their own incommensurable bases of justifications (see also Gray, 1977, 334; also 13.5). The lesson to be learned here is that *rational* preferability requires a standpoint capable of connecting or transcending at least some otherwise potentially conflicting elements so that the possibility of even a partial agreement is preserved²⁴⁷. Lukes (1974) himself suggests the need for a more objective ground than that with which particular perspectives are able to provide us, which might then set *some* limits to (unbounded) moral relativism. Interestingly, the things Lukes refers to in this regard are "those prescriptions for conduct which have a special superiority and legitimacy in a culture (...) those regulative concepts which the members of a community apply to activities and relations of central concern to them," and "the very act of identifying a set of principles, judgments, action, etc. as *moral*." Lukes also wonders whether the last point commits us to some assumptions concerning morality and its role in regulating social life, and finally to some non-contestable definition of morality. (Lukes 1974, 187–8.) Despite their other differences, Lukes appears here to be making a connection to morality as a social activity or domain that is similar to Gray's own view (cf. Gray in 12.3).

²⁴⁷ For instance, in Rawls (2005), the notion of public reason appears to fulfill a similar (theoretical) function.

Where does this leave us in terms of essential contestability and, in particular, with Gallie's original thesis? First, if one were to bite the bullet and accept that rational comparisons between the different uses of a concept, or its conceptions, are categorically impossible, then the shared concept would be rendered an article of faith. It is one thing to understand what the other party is claiming, but if there is no way of assessing any sort of merit between particular uses or conceptions, there is consequently no way of evaluating their respective standing as categories or representations of the thing represented. This is even more so in the case of a concept that signifies a valued achievement. However, Gallie does not propose any exclusive conception of a concept to be preferred over others. He does argue *against* exclusive or monist conceptions, which is not a philosophically neutral position (see Gellner 1974; Gray 1978), but it does not really amount to taking a particular stance in a first-order dispute. If anything, he is valorizing and validating contestation itself (cf. 13.3).

In addition to Swanton, Andrew Mason (1993) likewise states that one can consistently claim a concept as essentially contested while holding that one conception or interpretation is superior to others. An essentially contested concept may admit "a variety of different interpretations more than one of which are reasonable" [*contra* Newey 2001; 15.3]. Mason's more specific argument exploits the distinction between 'being reasonable' and 'making a mistake,' which clears room for "the idea that a person may make a reasonable judgment but not the judgment that is on balance the best." In this case one is arguably making a mistake, a failure which is best regarded as a lack of judgment (comparatively speaking). The sense Mason attaches to the lack of judgment is exemplified by an exercise of judgment in the practice of science, the judgement about which incommensurable scientific theory to choose, at the time that the choice had to be made. (see Mason 1993, 13-4, 52-6.) Mason understands his view as differing from Swanton and Gallie in that a defender of an essential contestability thesis could now reject both the relativist and skeptical versions of a thesis and argue that one conception of an essentially contested concept is better than others (cf. ECC 191/PHU 186).

Second, when Gallie attributes the essentially contested character to "the point of view from which our appraisals are made," (ART 114) one might take it as the affirmation of incommensurable perspectives that the disputants have adopted. However, Gallie qualifies it as something that needs to be conceived as taking place "[i]n any field of activity in which achievements are prized because they renew or advance a highly complex tradition" (ART 114), which implies a common frame of both description and evaluation, as vague or general as that frame could be. In addition, Gallie's account of justified conversions (11.4) should dispel any doubts that Gallie is arguing for the incommensurability between disputants' particular appraisive situations or more specific claims. On the contrary, the opposing claims are subject to rational assessment, as this is the only way anyone can become rationally convinced that one's earlier view was

somehow deficient in comparison to a new conception²⁴⁸ (see also 13.4). One's objection could be, of course, premised on the assumption that essential contestability implies just the sort of irremediable conflict that precludes all rational comparisons. But that is not the claim made by all proponents of the thesis, and certainly not by Gallie.

Third, Swanton (1985) points out that Gallie's thesis can admit that "there may be a best conception of x without its being possible to justify any claim to have discovered such a conception." This is made possible by assuming that "truth conditions are not necessarily to be identified with assertability conditions." Even if Lukes's thesis were to be false, Gallie's thesis could be true, as Gallie is only claiming that it is impossible to find "a general principle" (ECC 189) for deciding between the cases. (Swanton 1985, 814.) Although Gallie is categorically skeptical of the possibility of arriving at an ultimately best conception, he does not claim either that there is no truth of the matter regarding the domain of essentially contested concepts or that each and every use of the concept is equally rational or practically applicable. Arguing for one's view may be quite sensible, even if one is not convinced that any view can ever be established without contestability. I do not think that it is inconsistent to hold the idea that one's (or anyone's) preferred use of a concept cannot be determined as the best once and for all while admitting that its merits in representing the social reality accurately can be assessed from different standpoints (cf. PHU 210). If there were *no way* of explaining why one conception could be better than the other for *any reason* in terms that the other *might* accept, it would certainly pull the rug out from under the notion that one is dealing with a rational disagreement. I also think that one should be very careful of not exaggerating the demands of rationality that are placed on individuals. The rationality of holding a view in a dispute might not require much more than that one's claims are in some way supported by the evidence that is cited *and* that none of the competing claims is conclusively proven as right.

It is of interest to see how another theorist in addition to Lukes or Gallie has met the simple inconsistency objection. William Connolly (1993) engages in a substantive discussion of such allegedly essentially contestable concepts as POLITICS, POWER, and FREEDOM, and he contends that the thesis he endorses does not include the claim that a particular reading of an essentially contestable concept can be presented as demonstrably superior. Instead, the thesis claims

- (1) that a conceptual contest involves rival parties who accept some elements of the concepts in common;
- (2) that the common resources of reason and evidence available can illuminate these debates but are insufficient to reduce the number of interpretations rationally defensible to one;
- (3) that a strong case can sometimes be

²⁴⁸ It follows that Gallie's views are incompatible with extreme forms of non-cognitivism (e.g., a strict emotivism) even if he thinks that the right kind of dispute is not resolvable by argument of any kind. In this respect, Mason's and Gallie's positions are actually quite close to each other, although Mason hesitates to affirm it (Mason 1993, 55-6). This also shows how both accounts can be viewed, in Mason's terminology, as mixes of the imperfection conception and the contestability conception (cf. 12.4), even if Gallie does not ground disagreement in an error theory or in the presence of mistakes.

made within this remaining area of contestability in support of a particular reading. One argues for one's reading within this space but does not claim to demonstrate its validity. Connolly 1993, 226–7²⁴⁹

The notion of the area of contestability that Connolly invokes is similar to the zone of reasonable disagreement, the idea that I have found between the lines of Gallie's account of justified conversions (see 11.4). Connolly is able to locate such an area with relative precision instead of leaving the matter at the abstract level because his interest lies in the terms of political discourse, specifically. This allows Connolly to state that "There is no contradiction in first affirming the essential contestability of a concept and then making the strongest case available for one of the positions within that range. That's politics." Deciding is imperative in politics. And "even though the available resources of reason and tradition are insufficient to determine the outcome," it is possible to acknowledge the contestability of the decision which contributes to keeping dissident perspectives alive even after a political settlement. (Connolly 1993, 227.)

In general, while one accepts the essential contestability of the matter, there is a difference between maintaining that a specific conception is "merely" superior and maintaining that it is demonstrably superior. According to Mason (1990), it would not take huge revisions from Connolly to accept a position that none of the conceptions of an essentially contested concept are demonstrably superior, and hence the disagreement between the conceptions is reasonable, while there is a conception that is justifiably superior in that it is favored by the strongest of reasons. As a result, the parties who are not persuaded to endorse the justifiably superior conception need not be unreasonable although they are mistaken²⁵⁰ (see Mason 1990, 85–6). The approach is not without its issues as Mason himself points out: the idea that there is a form of reasoning in some areas that establishes a justified conclusion (i.e., backed by the best reasons) while it is also reasonable to reject that conclusion is problematic (ibid., 87–8). Yet it does appear that Gallie as well may have something like this in mind with his notion of a particular appraisive situation: its theoretical function is to provide the disputants with different sets of reasons within the framework of which they may be persuaded to put more weight on some rather than other criteria. The clear difference is that whereas Mason speaks of reasonableness to not accept what is currently indemonstrable but ultimately the justified conclusion²⁵¹, Gallie refers to the disputants who are presently justified to hold on to their concept-use. Mason tries to save the sense of reasonableness by acknowledging that there

²⁴⁹ For Connolly, essentially contestable concepts appear to be a kind of range concepts concerning which there are various positions one can hold, and that conceptual contests can occur even when the rival parties do not share all the elements of the disputed concept. It may be argued that Gallie does not have this much latitude given the way his thesis is specifically formulated (cf. e.g., 17.2; 17.5).

²⁵⁰ This is also one way to deal with the problem that arises from understanding reasonable disagreement as requiring two (or more) incompatible doxastic attitudes regarding a proposition (cf. 13.2) while retaining the reasonableness of disagreement in a qualified sense.

²⁵¹ Mason's reference to the Kuhnian theory-choice between two alternatives that are both reasonable *at the time* is illuminating in this respect (see Mason 1990, 86–7).

could be a fact of the matter that is supported by the best reasons. Gallie avoids taking a stance on that question, and he tries to root the justifiability of the disputant's choices (to hold on or to convert) in the dispute and/or in the mutual relation between the disputants and in what *they* consider reasonable.

In anticipation of the next section, let me say that one should not jump to the conclusion that the resources and standards of rationality that we share do not leave any room for any kind of reasonable disagreement that is both conceptual and substantive. If that were the case, we should routinely find ourselves in situations in which commonly available means of rational assessment have left just one contender on the stage. Even if the universal agreement were always a worthy goal – which is plausibly not the case in certain domains of thought like aesthetics – there are areas (like morality) where disagreement is so widespread that it threatens realistic or objectivist presumptions of the existence of (moral) facts towards which opposing views should converge on pain of irrationality²⁵². Simply doubting the justifiability of those objectivist presumptions does not yet entail that all sorts of reasoned arguments (e.g., about morality) would be considered altogether impossible as well. Analogously, a thesis of essential contestability need not partake of any stronger skepticism to get off the ground. However, if it were conclusively established that the disputes over the proper way of employing concepts turn on independently existing facts, the room for reasonable disagreement would dwindle fast. But we are not there yet, and perhaps we never will be (cf. 12.4), and so the uncertainty remains.

13.2 Rational response(s)... from two perspectives

In the previous section (13.1), I argued that the simple inconsistency objection fails to question the meaningfulness of engaging in disputes that bear the hallmarks of essential contestability. There is no necessary inconsistency, not to mention a simple one. Still, the criticism is forceful enough to require a more

²⁵² This way of arguing is commonly termed 'argument from disagreement.' In addition, the metaethical debate between cognitivists and non-cognitivists, or between realists, relativists, and expressivists, is ongoing and it is conducted in good faith by reasonable persons by all accounts (see e.g., Rowland 2021, part 1). It is of course difficult to show the reasonableness of that particular debate, and that is partially because some of the philosophical positions that are involved often differ on a very fundamental level regarding the very principles one would need to appeal in order to justify the assessment of reasonableness. Still, I think that one can at least reasonably doubt that any of the parties are going to show that their preferred philosophical conception is demonstrably superior to all other alternatives. Each appear to have their particular merits; the way they have attracted proponents throughout intellectual history attests to that. Maybe someone will come up with an ingenious philosophical solution that settles all remaining questions and worries. Yet, one's confidence, or sometimes perhaps preference, that there *must* be (real) normative properties, for instance, the properties that correspond one-to-one with our normative concepts is simply not enough to eliminate the overall uncertainty that enables a thesis of essential contestability.

thorough examination of what the appropriate individual standpoint or response would be when facing endless and ultimately irresolvable disagreements. That is something that a satisfactory account of essential contestability arguably requires (Garver 1990, 253–4). This section starts by taking up the discussion where I left it at the end of section 11.4. There, I presented that Gallie’s account of justified conversions effectively argues for the zone of reasonable disagreement that holds between the disputants (11.4). The more general idea of reasonable disagreement thus requires a closer scrutiny, and that also serves as a bridge to further analysis of disputants’ conduct in the disputes that manifest essential contestedness.

In epistemological terms, a *reasonable disagreement* is a situation in which two or more people “have a disagreement and each is reasonable (or justified) in his or her belief”²⁵³ (Feldman 2007, 201). According to Glen Newey (2001), *the reasonable disagreement thesis of essential contestability* assumes that “[t]he concepts’ interpretations may be (a) mutually inconsistent (b) individually reasonable, and (c) such that there is none which is justifiably regarded as superior to its rivals.” Newey criticizes it of requiring “an untenable account of the conditions of concept-possession for contested concepts themselves” (Newey 2001, 247–8). I will return to Newey’s objection in section 15.1. His criticism is forceful, but it requires a specific contextualization that is the subject of part four.

At the end of *ECC*, Gallie characterizes his own undertaking as finding “reasonableness in the pursuit of inevitably endless conflicts” (*ECC* 196). Moreover, his suggestion that only those conversions are reasonable that are brought about by “perfectly respectable” (*ECC* 169) arguments and evidence, the logical force of which is mutually recognized (11.4), might be taken to entail that the disputants share the relevant evidence. In the literature on essentially contested concepts, it is also commonly assumed that a dispute does not originate in an error or mistake by any disputing party. For Gallie, a properly sympathetic historical account of how ART came to be would amount to explaining “how and why different and to all appearances radically opposed aesthetic standpoints have been favoured by, to all appearances, equally intelligent and knowledgeable people” (*ART* 107). At no point does Gallie even hint that one of the disagreeing parties would be mistaken; if there is a human shortcoming involved it is common to all those who embark on contesting the matter. These observations are significant because *epistemic peerhood* in a reasonable disagreement is defined along the dimensions of shared evidence and competence for processing that evidence:

- (i) [the epistemic peers] are equals with respect to their familiarity with the evidence and arguments which bear on that question, and

²⁵³ There has been quite a lot of discussion about reasonable disagreements recently, and especially through the notion of peer disagreement. Despite a few related remarks that will follow, I leave the more technical discussion outside the present inquiry. Feldman and Warfield (2010) present a brief overview of related research questions while Frances (2014) and Matheson (2015) conduct more extensive forays into issues surrounding reasonable peer disagreements. Among the early contributions that have shaped later positions in the debate are Kelly (2005; 2010), Feldman (2006), Christensen (2007), Elga (2007), Lackey (2010a; 2010b).

(ii) [the epistemic peers] are equals with respect to general epistemic virtues such as intelligence, thoughtfulness, and freedom from bias. Kelly 2005, 175; cf. Christensen 2007, 188–9; Feldman 2007, 201

The notion of epistemic peerhood requires considerable idealization, and there are different ways to cash it out²⁵⁴ (see e.g., Matheson 2015, 21–5). Nevertheless, if a person affirming essential contestability would deny either (i) or (ii) as holding, he should be ready to answer why the persistent nature of disagreement does not originate in a deficiency in *that area* rather than in some special conceptual characteristic. There are undoubtedly variants of the essential contestability thesis in which parties to a dispute are considered, in effect, as epistemic peers. At least for the time being, let us assume that disputes manifesting essential contestability are (reasonable) peer disagreements.

With peer disagreements, of special interest are the questions (i) whether the same evidence, subjected to the appraisal of competent judges, can reasonably result in different doxastic attitudes (i.e., believing, withholding judgment, disbelieving); and (ii) whether the response of those who have adopted conflicting doxastic attitudes can be considered reasonable in some other manner in domains like ethics, politics, religion, and philosophy. (Sosa 2010, 278–80.) Much of the debate on peer disagreements has been about what is the proper rational response by disagreeing parties when they face a disagreement with an epistemic peer (e.g., conciliation, remain steadfast, some hybrid view). By contrast, when there is a clear asymmetry between epistemic positions, it is of course reasonable to either defer or remain steadfast based on a situation. For example, an expert or guru most often has a reason to hold on to one’s belief steadfastly when she becomes aware of a disagreement with a layperson who is her epistemic inferior²⁵⁵. It should also be noted straightaway that practically no one is denying that two persons could not both be reasonable when they have reached their conclusions based on different and possibly misleading evidence.

The requirement of shared evidence turns out to be a very demanding one. Richard Feldman (2005) points out that, “[i]f multiple ways of dealing with the evidence can be reasonable, then people should be able to recognize that fact,” yet he is perplexed about to what it would amount to say that several conflicting views are “ok.” If the other’s view is a rational response to the evidence, what is there to rationally deny about that view or how to disagree with someone who takes an acceptable option? Surely one cannot reject that option as wrong. (Feldman 2005, 21.) Feldman has also famously defended “The Uniqueness Thesis,” i.e., “the idea that a body of evidence justifies at most one proposition

²⁵⁴ It is an open question whether the current epistemological debates on peer disagreement are actually capable of providing us with a needed kind of insight concerning much messier real-world disputes (cf. Feldman and Warfield 2010). The example cases that are utilized as intuition pumps are typically very far apart from what essential contestability is conceivably about, and they may not generalize across all contexts even if theorists were able to reach a consensus on simpler cases. Gallie certainly utilizes artificial or imaginative examples, but they do not really amount to highly idealized circumstances.

²⁵⁵ The distinction can be made between epistemic inferiors, peers, and superiors (see Frances 2014, 44–51).

out of a competing set of propositions (...) and that it justifies at most one attitude toward any particular proposition." With respect to any proposition, and given a body of evidence, one is justified either to believe it, disbelieve it, or suspend judgment about it. Two or more epistemic peers cannot reasonably come to different conclusions if they have shared their evidence. (Feldman 2007, 205, 213.) David Christensen consciously echoes Feldman's notion by advocating instead "Rational Uniqueness," i.e., "the view that there is a unique maximally epistemically rational response to any given evidential situation" which is meant to stand in opposition to a "live-and-let-live" attitude (Christensen 2007, 190-2, 210).

To the extent that Gallie's disputes are evidential in the relevant sense, it is now easy to see how the above presents an obstacle for comprehending the conflicting responses of disputants as rational or justified. In any essential contestability thesis, a default response to a disagreement by rival parties is that they should hold on to their views steadfastly. The intractability of the disputes involving essentially contested concepts is, after all, a consequence of the disputing parties persisting in their claims that their use of the concept is the correct one (ECC 168/PHU 157) while recognizing that it is what they should do (ECC 172/PHU 161; or see 7.1). In the case of justified conversions, a conversion can be viewed as an individual act of comprehension that the balance of arguments and evidence has been on a different side all along (11.4). One may have been mistaken in the past, but now it is perfectly sensible to hold on to the new usage just as steadfastly (but cf. later). Feldman's points about handling evidence reject the view that the disputants can rationally arrive at conflicting doxastic attitudes toward a proposition.

There are a few ways to respond to the present difficulty. First, the issue can be deflated in a couple of ways. On the one hand, one might simply assume that the parties do not share the same evidence. However, there does not have to be anything special, epistemologically speaking, in a disagreement that simply reflects opposing conclusions that are reached based on different evidence. Making such a concession may only serve to detract from what is of interest in essential contestability in the first place. On the other hand, it is easy to agree with the Uniqueness Thesis when parties are assumed to share the relevant evidence in abstract. It is quite unclear, though, what sort of evidence is even relevant when judging the proper way of employing an essentially contested concept. When an appraisive concept like ART, or the term 'art,' is honorifically employed as part of aesthetic judgment, various arguments and evidence may very well be presented and considered by the disputants. What counts as evidence in matters of taste despite its level of cultivation? For instance, consulting art books conceivably helps but there does not appear to be a direct enough link between *that* evidence and particular aesthetic judgments. The problem with this approach is that it contradicts Gallie's premise that disagreeing parties appeal to perfectly respectable arguments and evidence (ECC 169/PHU 158), as that implies that there is a way of assessing what counts as 'perfectly respectable'.

Second, one could tackle The Uniqueness Thesis directly by arguing that although disputing parties can be understood to share the same evidence (in ideal circumstances), a given body of evidence that plausibly has to do with choosing one use of a concept over another is either permissive or inconclusive in a way that does not recommend suspending judgment about the matter. That could create room for the disputants to remain steadfast in their views instead. According to Thomas Kelly, the argument for The Uniqueness Thesis

relies on the assumption that the relation of evidential support should be understood as a two-place relation ("E supports P") as opposed to a three-place relation ("E supports P relative to background Z"). (...) So what the permissivist should claim is this: (i) the relation of evidential support is best understood as a three-place relation, and (ii) there is no uniquely rational starting point for all agents. Kelly 2014, 308–9

It seems to me that Gallie could easily endorse the kind of claim Kelly assigns to permissivists. After all, the conception of a particular appraisive situation is a key part of Gallie's account of justified conversions (cf. 11.4). It is at least equally clear that Gallie's original point is not about evidential support. Nevertheless, the advantage of understanding evidence as permissive is that one's awareness of a disagreement does not necessarily put rational pressure on one's doxastic attitude toward a disputed proposition—as there is no uniquely rational response to that evidence. In other words: becoming aware that one is a party to a peer disagreement does not necessarily create a defeater for one's doxastic attitude [or, for remaining steadfast in believing or disbelieving]²⁵⁶ (Matheson 2015, 53).

Charles Larmore (1996) thinks that we need not suspend judgment concerning fundamental questions of value even in the face of reasonable disagreement. It is possible to "determine that a view is reasonable, though false," when it "may have been arrived at sincerely and in accord with generally accepted forms of reasoning, yet against the background of existing beliefs that our own viewpoint judges as false." To call our own background beliefs into doubt "we need some positive reason to think they may be false, one that we must be able to recognize as such by our own lights; for that, after all, is the standpoint from which we judge." More generally, one has "good reason to believe more than what reasonable agreement with others can secure." (Larmore 1996, 171–3.) One may wonder whether all the arguments and evidence that are presented in connection to the various uses of the concept are indeed effective from the standpoint of each concept-user even if they were considered relevant in principle.

It is relatively uncontroversial that people with different background knowledge may respond differently to the same evidence and still be considered reasonable in some qualified sense. That may not work if the sense of reasonable disagreement that we are after must reflect the characteristics of peer

²⁵⁶ It is somewhat controversial whether there is such "evidence" or whether the sense of being justified in believing something significantly changes in proposed instances. The matter cannot be further discussed within the limits of this study.

disagreements. From that perspective, one needs to determine whether higher-order evidence that one is having a peer disagreement defeats one's original doxastic attitude (of remaining steadfast)—and thus stands as the kind of “positive reason” Larmore demands above. Conciliationists say yes, and they often recommend giving equal weight to opposing beliefs and/or suspending judgment as a rational response to a peer disagreement (e.g., Matheson 2015). Not everyone agrees, of course. For instance, one's privileged access to relevant personal information, especially in the case of radical disagreements, can be seen to create an additional defeater for the defeater (of one's doxastic attitude) that comes from awareness of having a peer disagreement²⁵⁷ (see e.g., Lackey 2010a; 2010b). One may object, in turn, that such access to personal information either counts as evidence that the other parties do not have an access, and thus all evidence is not shared, or that they too may appeal to *their* personal information, and as epistemic peers they are just as reliable to get it right. And so forth. To cut the long story short, the matter hinges on how strictly one should set the boundaries for reasonableness and/or epistemic peerhood.

Third, Andrew Mason (1993) differentiates between objective and subjective notion of what constitutes a rational reason for holding a belief. On the objective notion, considerations need to be connected in the right way to the available evidence. When the evidence is shared, a reason for one person counts as a reason for another person. On the subjective notion, considerations need to be connected in the right way to one's other beliefs. What counts as a reason depends on a person's actual beliefs. Both notions include both bad and good reasons, a matter which is determined by their connection to evidence or held beliefs; depending on the case, the connection is stronger, weaker, or totally non-existent. All in all, it is central that rational explanations “must make a person's acceptance of a belief *intelligible*.” (Mason 1993, 98–9.) Gallie favors the subjective notion of reasonableness as far as conversions and their rationality is concerned, but he also draws an argumentative contrast to the objective sense of reasonableness that ultimately remains unattainable at least without contestability. There are times when Gallie explicitly frames the relevant sense of reasonableness in terms of (historical) intelligibility rather than correctness or justifiability (e.g., ART 106). It needs further unpacking to what exactly that conception of reasonableness amounts (cf. later; see also esp. 13.4).

Given what was previously said about the zone of reasonable disagreement, the boundaries of which are set by mutually acknowledging the relevancy of arguments and evidence to which the disputants appeal (see 11.4), I think there is a need to add a third notion to Mason's binary distinction above, one that is characterized by intersubjectivity or communality. It is decision- or acceptance-based reasonableness that requires considerations to be connected to what is accepted by both one's rivals and oneself, but which does not claim objectivity that transcends what is mutually acknowledged. The possibility of such

²⁵⁷ An example of a radical disagreement in the current sense is that there are two persons who disagree whether $2+2=4$. One may now have privileged personal information that one knows basic math, that one is not suffering from a serious cognitive impairment, and so on.

objectivity is not denied, it is merely doubted. That is the primary sense of reasonableness behind the thesis of essential contestability that I end up proposing (see 18.1; see also 13.4). Of course, it is one thing to claim that people may have different reasons for adopting their conflicting views or beliefs, quite another to say that they are rationally held when confronted with a disagreement with an equally competent appraiser who has the same evidence at his disposal. However, there may be no telling in advance what counts as decisive or even evidence *in a particular dispute* manifesting essential contestedness since that appears to be determined by the disputants (cf. 11.4). In other disputes, the same arguments and evidence might lead to a different outcome which suggests that multiple ways of dealing with the same evidence might be fine after all, in a sense. The notion of peer disagreement does not seem to be applicable here either (cf. Frances 49–51): how can we identify our peers (or inferiors and superiors) in ethical matters, for instance? If we cannot, we cannot be aware of having a peer disagreement and do not thus feel rational pressure for a specific rational response. Those disputes in which disagreeing parties can reliably assess their relative epistemic positions are probably not cases of essential contestedness to begin with.

Fourth, contemporary epistemological discussion about peer disagreements is premised on the assumption that one deals with beliefs. Cognitive scientists could now point out that there is a clear difference between beliefs and concepts: in order for two persons to entertain beliefs about X, they have to possess the concept of X (cf. Baruah 2017, 143–4). Even if the persons possess the same concept, e.g., TIGER in that they correctly identify the same animals as tigers, they can certainly have opposing beliefs about tigers: one person may believe that tigers are cannibalistic as a species while the other person does not believe that. The Uniqueness Thesis concerns those beliefs rather than the concepts needed to have the beliefs, and thus it does not directly pertain to a view about *such* concepts (but cf. 15.1; see also ch. 16). From another perspective: one can wonder what the uniquely rational doxastic attitude on a proposition is, but then the issue is not with concepts of which that proposition consists. In this framework, unlike a concept, a proposition is commonly considered a bearer of truth or falsity. It is the meaning of a declarative sentence that is either true or false, and thus it is easy to accept the conclusion that a given body of evidence can support only one doxastic attitude towards it – the evidence either manages to show what is the case, what is not the case, or the evidence is inconclusive. Concepts are not states of affairs that can be supported by evidence better or worse, they identify “state of affairs,” or phenomena, as what they are. A disagreement over *how to identify some thing as something* is arguably different from a disagreement over a fact (expressed by a declarative sentence)²⁵⁸.

²⁵⁸ Compare with Mark Criley, who rather hesitantly states what he understands to be Gallie’s position: “we will ultimately see that Gallie appears to be committed to the view that in such disputes, despite the convictions of the participants, no party to the dispute could be correct, simply because there cannot be a fact of the matter about the detailed content of a contested concept” (Criley 2007, 20–1). Criley views Gallie as distinguishing strictly between (factual) descriptive and (appraisive) evaluative contents of a concept (17.2), which leaves

There is another complication, though. It stems from the fact that disputing parties are disagreeing about which use is the best. They are certainly portrayed as having beliefs about that matter and those beliefs are understood to not impinge on the dispute's rationality (since higher-order awareness of the nature of the dispute is presumably possible; see ch. 7). Now the disagreement can be framed as involving doxastic attitudes towards propositions about the correctness of opposing uses of a concept (e.g., I believe/do not believe *that* a concept-use X is the best). An advocate of an essential contestability thesis would now have to make a case for why conflicting doxastic attitudes towards such propositions are possible, or to relinquish the part of the thesis that concerns parties having an endless and irresolvable disagreements with full awareness and without anyone making an error. Biting the bullet would render the thesis unrecognizable.

Interestingly, Gallie himself appears to suggest that remaining steadfast in the face of disagreement might indeed be the proper response when he asserts that suspension of judgment would be the way to deal with essential contestedness if only it were possible for a disputant, "for an indefinite length of time, to withhold his support *from any of* [a concept's] *possible uses*, i.e., to take up an entirely uncommitted attitude" (ECC 191/PHU 185). The impossibility of finding "a general principle for deciding which of two contestant uses of an essentially contested concept really 'uses it best'" (ECC 189/PHU 184) certainly speaks for the suspension of judgment as the epistemically responsible move. When uncertain, it is often for the best to take a step back, bide one's time, and not rush to a definitive conclusion that is inadequately justified. But that may not be practically feasible in the disputes that Gallie has in mind. Consider:

[t]he exigencies of living commonly demand that "he who is not for us is against us", or that he who hesitates to throw in his support or make his contribution on one side or the other is lost – not just to one of the sides that might have claimed his support – but to the game and to the day. ECC 190-1/PHU 185

If the choice of using an essentially contested concept this or that way primarily involves practical assessment, the previous challenges that arise from the Uniqueness Thesis and reasonable/peer disagreement could lose much of their sting.

Is this a proper counter to the demand for the suspension of judgment? One might object that Gallie should bracket real-world practical considerations, motivations, and other forms of "messiness" because they are not relevant to the cognitive assessment of what *is* the best use of a concept. The disputants clearly offer arguments and evidence for how they take the matter to be. I read Gallie as choosing a much different track. As there is no general principle for deciding the matter uncontestably, rival parties turn to what they have: the evaluations they

contestability completely to the evaluative/normative side. Is Gallie further saying that there is no fact of the matter concerning which use is the best, or is he saying that since our factual assessment does not enter into it, we are not in a position to say what the fact of the matter is? It depends on one's perspective, but there clearly is some room for interpretation.

themselves find plausible, i.e., the evaluations that originate in their particular (marginal) appraisive situations (11.4). The practical considerations are the impetus that nudges disputants to cast off their uncertainty, and the suspension of judgment is overruled by *a decision that needs to be made* because to *not* decide is also a kind of decision. There is a clear difference between practical actions or choices and beliefs: “Facing a choice between bringing it about that p and bringing it about that not-p, you may have no sufficient reason to prefer either over the other, in which case you might well be free to take your pick” (Sosa 2010, 278). Instead of having three options from which to choose, one now has only two; do X, or do not do X: “Suspending judgment just doesn’t exist when it comes to an action” (Frances 2014, 67).

Peter Railton (2000) distinguishes between two senses of a rational choice: (i) a *well-reasoned* choice is, or could in principle be, “supported by a chain of deliberation in accord with norms of good reasoning” while (ii) a choice *appropriately responsive to reasons* is rational “whether or not it is supported by such deliberation.” In some cases, to be appropriately responsive to reasons “would involve prompt and decisive selection of one option and moving on” while by stopping and deliberating about whether to deliberate the chance might be missed: “In such cases, the two senses of ‘rational choice’ come apart in practice.” (Railton 2000, 6.) Given how Gallie characterizes the rationality of conversions and the exigencies of living, it looks like the sense of a rational choice he has in mind corresponds with the latter characterization. The reasons that are relevant pertain to opposing parties reaching a practical decision about how to use a concept.

The idea that practical considerations affect how we form and employ concepts has long intellectual roots. Paul Chilton (2008) draws attention to Aristotle’s question in book three of *Politics*: “How should we define ‘citizen’?” Chilton observes that Aristotle goes on to give a definition for “practical purposes,” and he takes that to suggest that Aristotle acknowledges the contingency of the term. (Chilton 2008, 225.) What I want to propose is that the uses of essentially contested concepts are, furthermore, contingent on the need to advance practical purposes. Given the close connection between essentially contested concepts and broad human activities and practices or whole domains of social life (11.3; 12.3), it is natural to view these concepts as instruments for effecting related purposes. In this picture, remaining uncertain to the degree of suspending one’s judgment, even if only in the face of ultimately inconclusive arguments and evidence, is not really a virtue. It could be taken instead as indecisiveness bordering on intellectual feebleness with respect to certain human activities or ways of life, which may further lead to practical impotence.

Holding on to one’s views steadfastly does not thus mean that personal evaluation and convictions come to overrule and replace the (allegedly proper rational) response of suspending judgment; that would be irrational indeed. Instead, the matter in dispute is of such human significance that *to not use the concept* is not really an option; one’s slightest inclinations and adherences could be enough to tilt the scale. John Kekes holds that “It is simply a fact of life that

one has to have some, possibly inarticulate, attitude toward oneself, others and society, and nature. The debates over [essentially contested concepts] concern the question of what these attitudes should be" (Kekes 1977, 78). From a more straightforward perspective still: how could one avoid employing a concept *in some way* if a situation requires its application? Concepts identify and categorize things, and our conceptual frameworks let or make us see the world in some rather than the other way. We do not always voice our differences, yet they are still there, lying in wait only to erupt in conflict every now and then. Essential contestability could thus be latent in our significant relations.

An interesting perspective is offered by Michael Freedon (2004) who raises the issue of *the suspension of disbelief* as an act of the methodologically unreflective "believer, of the political discussant, not of the analyst of political concepts." It is what one does when choosing a *plausible* interpretation (in absence of the one that is *true*) after deliberation, and it amounts to denying essential contestability given the issue at hand. (Freedon 2004, 6-7.) To give more context, Freedon identifies three "axiomatic positions" that compete in the field of political theory:

- (1) A concept may be true (or false)²⁵⁹
- (2) A concept may be agreed on by the exercise of rationality (...)
- (3) The meaning of a concept (...) may be plausible (or implausible) without being either (1) or (2). (Freedon 2004, 4.)

The third option, which Freedon associates with essential contestability, does not necessarily lead to extreme or radical relativism (cf. Clarke 1979, 125-6; or 13.5), but it does not recognize anything beyond plausibility either²⁶⁰. Freedon considers a counterargument, according to which *any* of several *plausible* interpretations could in principle be agreed on, and thus they could not be essentially contestable (as this would collapse into option (2)). However, Freedon continues, the position (3)

does not hold that the act of agreement clinches a position. It does not maintain that the plausible interpretation is right; it is more likely to imply that one would accept it as a sensible and attractive argument or definition, perhaps as the best of available arguments or definitions, rather than a knock-down one. Freedon 2004, 4

The idea is that the plausibility of the argument and an agreement on the argument are separated from the circumstances that make that argument conclusively right. This is the manner and the sense in which an argument can remain essentially contestable—or, as Freedon prefers, it displays *effective contestability*. The believer may still assume that there is a fact of the matter in the

²⁵⁹ I am not sure whether this is simply loose talk on Freedon's part or whether he already assumes something about how concepts figure in different (belief-like) propositions that match with the presented claims. In any case, concepts should not be thought as truth-apt as representations or categories (e.g., Olsthoorn 2017, 157), and the context in which "a concept" or a related inference is assumed as either true or false should always be determined precisely.

²⁶⁰ Plausibility itself could be regulated, for example, through cultural assumptions.

nature of the case, but this does not have to affect the choice or the adoption of one's views. Freedden notes that believers "do not have to give up their beliefs, *because* they may be methodologically naïve (...) or, even if they are aware of the [essential contestability] thesis, because they prefer certain beliefs to others in the here and now" (Freedden 2004, 6).

Now it seems that there is no compelling reason to understand the suspension of disbelief as an act that is found *only* in the repertoire of the methodologically naïve, even if such an operation would not be advisable for the analyst in an inquiry. The point is that, as a political discussant, naïve or non-naïve, one needs to cast aside the urge to suspend judgment in order to arrive at a belief concerning a practical matter, as temporary as that belief might turn out to be (cf. later). The exigencies of living, indeed, often demand that one needs to have an informed opinion (ideally), based on which one can either act or support actions by others even while having doubts. This resonates nicely with the characterization of essential contestability by John Gray as "an area of choice, uncertainty and commitment" that remains when all arguments have been adduced (Gray 1978, 387). "All arguments" can be taken to refer to either (i) all the possible knowledge and evidence that can possibly pertain to the case or (ii) what one has available, and what one can do with it in the current circumstances. Requiring (i) leads us unable to demonstrate that there is an area of essential contestability, as the finite and limited beings we are. Settling with (ii) means localizing essential contestability thus rendering it a contingent occurrence instead of a universal phenomenon or feature.

In an important sense, Gallie's thesis is about a local rather than universal phenomenon. At one point, Gallie refers to the composition of the use of any essentially contested concept as "[t]he peculiar complex of loyalties, oppositions and recognitions of permissibility" (PHU 211). In other words, that which is considered as essentially contestable by rival parties falls within the area of committed choice; and the choice to commit to this or that conception is made after all the relevant things have been laid out. It is also an area of uncertainty; when one starts to waver in one's views, the uncertainty is actualized on a personal level. From a point of view outside the dispute, the area of uncertainty encompasses all the contestants; none of them are safe from undergoing a conversion in the right circumstances. The kicker is that this area of uncertainty and committed choice is also the zone of reasonable disagreement, although reasonableness is understood a bit differently from what was described in the beginning of this section. This goes beyond what Gallie originally states but I argue it is a logical extension.

That is not all that Gallie says about the reasonableness of disputants' conduct (broadly understood). He characterizes different conflicting uses, or adherences to such uses, as logically possible or humanly "likely" (ECC 193/PHU 188), or as "historically and logically permissible" (PHU 210). The latter characterization is often overlooked (possibly due to it being located outside chapter eight of *PHU*), and thus it is best to quote the accompanying passage in full:

anyone who recognizes that his own use of, say, the concept of democracy is essentially contestable, will, of course, believe that his own use of it is the right, in the sense of the orthodox one, but he will not be in a position to arraign other contestant uses and users of it as morally wrong and therefore to be won over simply by moral argument to his way of thinking. His attitude can only be that, while logically and historically permissible, these other uses of the concept are mistaken and their users unfortunate. PHU 210

There is no need to go into what Gallie likely means by 'logical' in the above (see 11.4 instead). Historical permissibility is a more interesting notion, and it seems to mostly come down to the understanding of how the concept came to be (ECC 198; see also 13.4; 18.4). This is the stance taken by "the historian" who aids the simple art-lover:

Heaven knows which, if any, of these conflicting voices is right, or how, if at all, their different points of view could be reconciled. But I think I can tell you how this separation of points of view came to be. I cannot solve your problem, but I can tell you more or less how it arose." (PHU 171-2; or see ART 107-8; 11.2.)

This is by no means a stringent constraint on individual rationality: we can certainly understand the plausibility of different conceptions from such a historical perspective even if we were to be ready to proclaim ourselves as being right here and now (see also 13.4).

Overall, the appropriate response to essential contestedness could now consist of the following points: (i) even if one is not in a position to state that one use of a concept is ultimately correct, one can deem other uses worse (cf. 13.1); (ii) the recognition of essential contestability entails *not* supposing that there is a simple argument that everyone is compelled to accept on the pain of irrationality; and (iii) one is justified in holding steadfastly to one's own view, even if only in the minimal sense that it would not be manifestly unreasonable to do so given that we are dealing with concept employment in connection to highly significant practical matters. Gallie still attracts criticism like the simple inconsistency objection (see 13.1) for two main reasons: (a) Gallie does not refrain from employing starker terminology either; (b) Gallie often vacillates in his descriptions of essential contestedness. It is to the latter issue that I turn next.

There are *two different perspectives to essential contestedness*: one that accounts for disputants' inability to arrive at uncontestable views (or a point of view *external to a dispute*); and one that describes what takes place between the disputants in such a situation (or a point of view *internal to a dispute*). In *ART*, Gallie explicitly distinguishes between the standpoint of philosophers and the standpoint that "art-lovers and enthusiasts" and "protagonists or camp-followers in some movement of critical opinion" have when they think and speak of art. Philosophers should try to do justice to the many-sidedness of the issue and condemn exclusive views or uses of a concept as hopelessly one-sided (*ART* 113-4), even if they often fail to do so. Moreover, Gallie holds that the awareness of the true nature of the dispute amounts to a higher order "intellectual feat" while the lower order recognition is solely focused on the aggressive and defensive uses of the concept (*ECC*, 192; ch. 7). A feat is someone's

accomplishment, and thus we are dealing here with how disputants *may* respond to essential contestability instead of how they *are* responding to it. The intellectual feat in question looks to be what Gallie expects from philosophers and other such analysts, but Gallie is not disparaging those engaging in the disputes in a more hands-on manner in any way. From the external perspective to a dispute, there is no general principle for deciding between competing claims (ECC 177–8, 189–90). From the perspective internal to a dispute, all disputants evaluate the matter from their particular (marginal) appraisive situations, which are conclusive for them (ECC 191; 11.4). Within the internal perspective it is possible to further distinguish between the first-person viewpoint and the second/third-person viewpoint when one is discussing how the disputants relate to each other.

Ernest Gellner (1974) maintains that, by adding Conditions (VI) and (VII), Gallie tries to “be all at once both inside and outside the human situation.” By adopting the external viewpoint, Gallie speaks as if there would be a final argument for settling contestation over essentially contested concepts or a criterion for terminating disagreements. In this, Gallie’s account is reminiscent of “the dialectic,” or the notion which understands past developments in the life of the concept as *aufgehoben*, i.e., finally eliminated and incorporated in later solutions. (Gellner 1974, 99–100.) I think it is correct to say that Gallie is painting a picture of historical continuity and contestation of concepts, but that does not necessarily mean that the past conflicts are somehow eliminated when they are subsumed into a single concept. Rather, the concept carries tensions and conflicts with it, although the exact manner in which this occurs is murky. Still, Kenneth Ehrenberg points out that to “allow that there is no best conception is to step outside the advocacy for our own conception in order to describe the debate as a whole,” and such external, descriptive viewpoint is contemplated by Gallie (Ehrenberg 2011, 220). This is accurate; the implicit assumption of a perspective that can transcend the particularity of users’ specific viewpoints does some theoretical work in the thesis of essential contestedness²⁶¹.

Problems arise when the two perspectives are needlessly conflated: an idea of an essentially contested concept that “moves equivocally between a participant’s and an observer’s point of view” is incoherent (Waldron 1994, 533). Unfortunately, exactly that appears to occur when Gallie speaks of the best use of the concept which leads to the simple inconsistency objection (see 13.1). In general, the problematics that relate to the disputants’ awareness or lack thereof (see esp. 7.2; 9.2; see below) appear to stem directly from the mutual arrangement of the two perspectives, and this necessitates distinguishing between them

²⁶¹ Gallie’s approach appears similar to the theoretical standpoint that is sometimes attributed to various non-cognitivist moral theories, or as Alan Thomas relates David Wiggins’s critical observation: “they invite us to combine the realistic intuitions of our first personal perspective on values with a reflective awareness that actually human values are a projection” (Thomas 2006, 49). Gallie does not take a stand concerning the metaphysics of values, and he insists that personally expressed convictions are subject to a degree of rational evaluation. That being said, one might still doubt that Gallie has to commit to a form of expressivism, especially if he is not understood to make a relativistic argument (cf. 13.1).

properly. The crucial theoretical distinction can be made between the perspective of those analyzing the phenomenon and the perspective of disputants, believers, and partisans who engage in a dispute (Freeden 2004, 6). The distinction can then be concretized if needed; for instance, by separating philosophical dispute over concepts from the forms of engagement which serve “some propagandist or other purpose” (Mason 1993, 51).

Paraphrasing Freedon a bit, a philosopher – who holds that a concept is true or false (see before) – may object to a thesis of essential contestability on the grounds that a believer cannot both accept essential contestability and still claim to be right. However, a proponent of the thesis, according to which the meaning of a concept may be plausible (or implausible) without the concept being true or false, can entirely agree with the philosopher; it is the believer who claims to be right in the matter, not the proponent of the thesis per se. Furthermore, according to Freedon, the essential contestability thesis is the analysis of an empirical phenomenon: “the *believer* claims to be right while the *analyst* disputes that.” The philosopher objecting against the thesis “generously accords the believer the status of an analytical philosopher,” but “the believer is either unaware of the possibility of essential, or even non-essential contestability or he is ignoring the possibility that his beliefs may be wrong, and he is then mistaken.” (Freedon 2004, 6.) This is an easy answer to the simple inconsistency objection, and other awareness-related problems could be resolved, of course, by assuming that the rival parties are either not aware of the true nature of their dispute or they are willfully ignorant of it. On his part, Gallie maintains that the awareness of the true nature of the dispute (7.2) may lead to a raising of the level of arguments (9.1), from which it follows that one can presumably be aware of the dispute’s true nature *while* participating in it. Therefore, the criticism of inconsistency has legs to it even if Freedon, on his part, appears keen to move the goalposts so that essential contestability can be given a marked empirical or politological spin. That being said, one could certainly argue for the sensibility of Freedon’s views independently of what is typically seen to be at issue in philosophical debates.

In some essential contestability theses, the difference between the two perspectives is vital. If essentially contested concepts are shaped in the course of a given dispute or argument rather than having their status determined independently, there is a danger of losing sight of them completely when the matter is examined from the external perspective. According to Eugene Garver, essentially contested concepts cannot be separated from the rhetorical arguments in which they figure and are endowed with their character (see Garver 1978 in 13.4; cf. Garver 1990 in 17.3). The unity of the rhetorical *argument* and *debate* is what gives unity to the *concept*, which is why “essentially contested concepts are essentially contested concepts no longer (...) when the neutral spectator tries to settle matters that can be settled only by agreement, through argument, of the participants” (Garver 1978, 163, 165–166). The perspective internal to a dispute is privileged simply because the external perspective has no bearing on the issue.

By contrast, some read Gallie as circumscribing the discussion of essentially contested concepts to pertain solely to philosophical and scholarly contexts²⁶². Norman Care (1973²⁶³) points out, correctly, that the importance of a thesis of essential contestability is somewhat limited if it turns out that certain concepts are essentially contestable for social scientists but not for those who participate in institutions and practices. In that case we could be dealing with “a difficulty in one parish of inquiry – that of inquiry into social life – but not, in principle, a difficulty in social life itself.” In the latter case, the thesis bears on the ways prospects for social reform and progress are understood, which would be an outcome of great importance. As participants in social life (rather than as social inquirers) we can achieve temporal or practical closure, even if the answers sought are sometimes *established* through institutionalized argument, debate, and conflict (see also Care in 12.4). The contestability encountered as participants could be understood as stemming from the fact that *our* decisions ensuing from social debate are time- and circumstance- bound but in no way would our conceptualizations amount to transcending the circumstances of *our* social life. According to Care, though, this does not limit the ability of the social sciences to produce interesting generalizations, and it is moreover doubtful whether the working vocabulary of the social sciences is either non-existent or radically incomplete in a problematic way due to essential contestability. (Care 1973, 14–6.)

I agree with Care that a viable thesis of essential contestability does not necessarily pose as significant a threat, or even a challenge, to social science or other forms of systematic rational inquiry as one might initially presume. There are endless ways of classifying or categorizing the world, and the concepts that prove to be fecund for the concerns germane to the purposes of the scientists seem to be quite different from the kind of popular conceptions that Gallie was especially after. There is no denying that concepts or other representational tools can be sharpened to better serve a specific purpose, but that purpose need not be the same to which essentially contested concepts are put. In short, the concepts used by analysts might be different from essentially contested concepts in terms of both their structure and function.

In conclusion, as concerns both this section and the previous section, much hinges on how one understands what it is to be right or the best in connection to the two perspectives on essential contestability. If ‘right/the best’ means ‘the best once and for all without any doubt whatsoever,’ certainly no one person, if intellectually honest, would simultaneously affirm essential contestability and claim to be right. Earlier, I suggested that individual practical considerations and personal conviction do not preclude or substitute for rational reasoning and assessment; they rather complement it by clearing the way for a decision when there is simply not enough evidential basis for choosing between the alternatives

²⁶² E.g., Collier et al. 2006, 215 citing ECC 183, 169; but see ART 113, also quoted before. The most unambiguous support for the current interpretation is found in PHU 148.

²⁶³ Care specifically discusses MacIntyre’s (1973) position concerning essential contestability, and in the current study I present some of Care’s ideas in a more general form.

otherwise. From a standpoint of practical rationality, such decisions need not be arbitrary (cf. Mason 1990, 88). If that is acceptable, and I think it is, I do not see why one could not acknowledge the essential contestability of the issue (in this case especially the fact that others are indeed situated the very same way), be uncertain, and still follow one's conviction if, and indeed *as*, that is what one needs to do. Whatever the disputants more specifically decide can be subject to reasonable disagreement, but such a disagreement differs in some important respects from how the reasonable disagreement is most often understood in contemporary social epistemology.

Gallie himself appears to assign a different character to the awareness of the true nature of dispute that sidesteps the determination of the contested matter in terms of right and wrong. The rightness or correctness of views is now conceived as a matter of historical intelligibility and permissibility – the norms guiding the permissibility of holding on to one's use of a concept would thus be social and cultural – and thus in that respect much like the plausibility conception that Freedman offers (see before). Comparative, not decisive, superiority would be possible by substituting the (absent) general principle for a standard provided by one's particular appraisive situation, both in the case of individuals and groups, as uncertain and contestable as such evaluation of historical permissibility might be. Even if we were to consider that type of contestation essential or interesting enough, it would still remain a mere suggestion without a more precise articulation.

13.3 Reasonableness as (liberal) self-understanding; be a fan, not a fanatic

Gallie's disputes might not be reasonable disagreements in the contemporary epistemological sense of peer disagreements (13.2), but it appears that he has a clear conception of how rival parties should conduct themselves in a reasonable manner. It is commonly assumed that Gallie's views are pronouncedly liberal in this respect, a claim that I evaluate next.

In response to a self-raised worry that the awareness of the true nature of the dispute could lead to the annihilation of rational and civil discourse, even the disputants themselves, Gallie replies that too much credit is given to "the reasonableness of those who will employ reason only given the prospect of eventual knock-out victory (...) The relevant fact is, rather, that evil men always want quick victories" (ECC 194). In *PHU*, Gallie expands on this by assuring that "those who love the truth in any field" or "[t]he true religious devotee, like the true democrat or man of genuine goodwill," are "willing to wait and work till the last day to effect a genuine conversion to [their] point of view" (PHU 189). In addition, the recognition of essential contestability (specifically, of DEMOCRACY) can have considerable moral importance, "since it points to an area which calls for moral tolerance and, more specifically, for the abatement of the normal

exercise of the will-to-agreement" (PHU 210–11). And then, of course, we have Gallie's often quoted exhortation against submitting "oneself to the chronic human peril of underestimating the value of one's opponents' positions" (ECC 193/PHU 188). Together these passages make it sufficiently clear that Gallie strives to present rivals who conduct themselves in a suitable manner as reasonable, a conduct which also appears to contribute to goals that liberals often hold dear.

The liberal undertone of the thesis of essential contestedness has not gone unnoticed in the secondary literature. The matter is typically examined in loose connection to Condition (VII), and Gallie's position is commonly taken to be that the recognition of essential contestability increases the quality of debates, promotes tolerance within the intellectual life (with variations e.g., Garver 1990; Connolly 1993, 11; Gray 1978, 389; see also 9.2), and "will tend to undermine an intolerant fanatical belief that one's political opponents have nothing worthwhile to say" (Gaus 2000, 41; see also Abbey 2005, 466). The very notion of essential contestability appears to draw on key liberal values such as free speech, toleration of dissent, belief in progress, and so forth (Abbey 2005, 477; Gellner 1974, 98). The concern with the ways to prevent existing value conflicts from completely erupting while still affirming value pluralism has been of widespread concern in liberal thought especially since the Second World War²⁶⁴. It is no surprise, then, that some theorists claim that essential contestability reflects "the pluralist, morally and politically polyarchic character of contemporary Western liberal society" (Gray 1977, 337; see also Lukes 1974, 177–8; cf. later).

Not all share Gallie's liberal optimism (e.g., Gaus 2000; see also 9.2), and some criticize the role it plays in his thesis. Ernest Gellner contends that Gallie defines history in terms of a continuous, liberal discussion while falling victim to a kind of parochialism that celebrates moderate, reasonable discussion and toleration of others' views as a way to remove obstacles from the path of progression²⁶⁵ (Gellner 1974, 109–10). William Connolly points out that the presumed benefits of the reciprocal recognition of essential contestability "flow from the assumption that rationality, fragile as it is, is helped, not hindered, by heightened awareness of the nature and import of our differences" (Connolly

²⁶⁴ Rousseau can be considered an important historical antecedent as he stresses the need for theological toleration because it is impossible to live with one's neighbors if one believes them to be damned (Nussbaum 2011, 13). In the Rawlsian view, political liberalism "starts by taking to heart the absolute depth of [the] irreconcilable latent conflict" in people's conceptions of their good that entail the transcendent element of not admitting of compromise (Rawls 2005, xxiv–xxvi). The recognition of irreconcilable disagreement over comprehensive doctrines as thus conceived is "an enduring feature of contemporary societies and hence an ineliminable element of their political institutions" (Bohman 1995, 253). Or, as Larmore states, "The insight that has proven so significant for liberal thought is that reasonableness has ceased to seem a guarantee of ultimate agreement about deep questions concerning how we should live" (Larmore 1996, 168).

²⁶⁵ For Gellner, who takes into account the overall context of *PHU*, Gallie's thesis is first and foremost an argument about historical understanding.

1993, 42²⁶⁶). It does seem evident that Gallie considers the continuation of amiable contestation and debate in the teeth of essential contestability as a mark of reasonableness. Gallie's thesis could thus be (re)framed as an attempt to grapple with the fact that controversy cannot be eliminated from discussion among reasonable people (e.g., Larmore 1996, 168), and that is done by conceptualizing the existing situation anew in a way that helps one to make peace with the situation rather than to just resign oneself to it. Nevertheless, Gallie also briefly considers the option that rivals who become disillusioned and aware of the true nature of the dispute might make "a ruthless decision to cut the cackle, to damn the heretics and to exterminate the unwanted" (ECC 194). However, this is supposedly "simply a possible causal consequence," and hence being "in no way logically justifiable" and having "no logical relevance" to Gallie's analysis (ECC 194).

Is the assumption of increased tolerance that follows from the reciprocal recognition of essential contestability any more justifiable? That can be doubted, especially because Gallie's disputants are not assumed to detach themselves from the contested issue, quite on the contrary (13.2; 13.4). Eugene Garver, who professes a thesis that strongly emphasizes the role of dispute and (rhetorical) argument, charges Gallie with overenthusiasm: there is no universal duty to treat disputes as involving essentially contested concepts, and how one's opponent is regarded is "a more mundane matter of argumentative tactics, rather than a principled decision based on epistemological or moral duty" (Garver 1990, 259). To be fair, Gallie himself does not directly argue for increased toleration; what he gives us instead are mostly his personal observations and predilections concerning human reasonableness. If the aim is to produce such an argument, I think that it would be better to understand increased toleration as the upshot of being aware that one's epistemic situation is that of pervasive uncertainty instead of assuming that the absence of an ultimately correct position, or the non-existence of relevant moral or political knowledge²⁶⁷, is reason enough to be tolerant. Doubting one's capacity to reach definite conclusions typically goes along with intellectual humility and hesitancy to pass judgment (on a person). This conception connects with an understanding of Gallie's overall thesis as skeptical rather than as relativistic.

In any case, Gallie's optimism appears to have its limits, a fact that is noted by his readers very rarely. As already discussed (9.1), Gallie may be ready to exclude "more or less lunatic fringe-fanatics" and other extreme elements from the disputes in which essentially contested concepts come to take their

²⁶⁶ Connolly himself is critical of practices of rationality for their claims to self-sufficiency, and he sees essentially contestable concepts as having a productive role in ethical and political life by creating more social space for difference. For Connolly, "the problem of evil in politics" is not about irrationalism as much as it is about closed practices of rationality. (see Connolly 1993, viii-x.)

²⁶⁷ See e.g., Alan Thomas (2006) who contends that "Whether or not there is moral knowledge does not make people authoritarian or tolerant." More generally, the question of the existence of moral knowledge must be detached from the cross-cutting issues of autonomy and freedom. (Thomas 2006, 12.)

characteristic form (see PHU 188–90). Many commentators, like Garver, interpret Gallie as unreservedly calling for inclusion so that the quality of arguments could be raised. Garver objects in a critical tone that there are cases in which “dignifying one’s opponent by treating opposition as competition over an essentially contested concept would be foolish” (Garver 1990, 263), but he is closer to Gallie’s own position than he realizes. I do not mean to doubt Gallie’s liberal sentiment, but he is not embracing difference of opinion and the potentiality of reason in order to transcend conflicts as simplistically as Garver assumes. This calls for an explanation that leads to a slight detour, though one that is highly relevant for the main concerns of my study.

The exclusion of fringe views from the dispute could have significant theoretical consequences, and some of Gallie’s remarks support drawing such further conclusions. Take his statement that

one can well imagine cases in which moderate and sane representatives of two or more contestant parties could express agreement as to where the *real* issue between them lies, and agreeing that this issue is simply obscured or debased by the intrusions of lunatic voices, from whichever side. Here we have the best result that, very often in this life, can reasonably be looked for: namely that a given contest can at least be identified with the best elements that take part in it. PHU 188

The emphasis Gallie puts on ‘real’ implies that the proper domain of essentially contested concepts is not the sum of all possible views by any number of people. That becomes clearer with the discussion that follows. First, Gallie offers what seems, by the context, to be yet another formulation of Condition (VII). According to Gallie, “we must accept that every proper contestant use of such a concept (...) can be justified on the ground that, and to the extent that, people can be found who regard it and can rationally defend it as the best possible development of the original exemplar’s aims” (PHU 189). This passage, like the quote above, is a new addition to the revised *PHU*-version of the thesis, and it is especially notable because of its emphasis on both people and their rational capability. Second, Gallie observes that the amount of historical appreciation (sic; see 13.4; 18.4) shown by any particular interpretation of an essentially contested concept will vary enormously. In practice, he adds, “we would all recognise the need of a lower limit beneath which the supporters of some exotic interpretation must be assigned to the lunatic fringe” (PHU 190). All this casts Gallie’s exhortation that one should not consider *any* rival use lunatic (ECC 193/PHU 188) in a new light. And indeed, a closer examination reveals that he thinks it is imprudent to do so in many cases, not that he means to include all remotely possible views under one essentially contested concept.

The above coheres reasonably well with Garver’s proposal that advocating a version of an essentially contested concept is a tactic, though of a special kind:

To treat one’s opponent as possessing another version of a single essentially contested concept is (...) to include that opponent in a single community of discourse. To refuse to recognize the opponent as possessing a competing conception of a single essentially contested concept is (...) to erect a boundary between one’s community of discourse and that of one’s opponent. Garver 1990, 263

The quote from Garver also illustrates where the theoretical line between agonism and antagonism can be drawn in Gallie's framework (see also 9.2). Gellner (1974), in turn, pays attention to the matter of how the boundary between contestants and non-contestants is drawn. He points out that many may consider the continuous competition over the concept as "an unmitigated nuisance." These potential disputants who just happen to lack faith in the [competitive] process may be intolerant and illiberal, yet should they not be kept "within the classification, rather than [ruled] out by definition?" (Gellner 1974, 98.) Gellner raises this issue in connection to Condition (VII), surprisingly, and by doing so he manages to draw attention to an often-overlooked role the condition plausibly has in shaping the boundaries of the proper contestation over essentially contested concepts.

It does indeed seem *ad hoc* to rule out *some* of the competing or contesting voices in favor of others when no one is able to know who is ultimately right. Given the label 'essentially contested,' on what grounds could unwanted views be screened²⁶⁸? The gut reaction is to reiterate that only reasonable conceptions are admitted to the dispute. How could anyone object to reasonableness as the criterion? There are a couple of issues. First, simply stipulating reasonableness would leave us with an explanatorily trivial account. Second, any general test or criterion of reasonableness may be unavailable without accompanying contestability, *a fortiori* for the advocates of essential contestability thesis. One may now want to retort that the determination of the proper boundaries of the dispute over any given concept is a substantive matter that requires case-by-case analysis. Fair enough, but this does not really explain how far and wide such screening extends, how it takes place, and whether the parameters of the process itself can be contested. Gallie's original idea of avoiding conceptual confusion by connecting the unity of an essentially contested concept to the optimum sustainment and development of a valued achievement also fails in circumventing or setting limits to contestability (see 9.2).

In the current study, I claim that the reason why Gallie emphasizes the importance of competition ultimately stems from how the status of essentially contested concepts is constituted and how their unity is determined (see esp. 14.2; cf. below). More specifically, I favor an interpretation according to which the status and content of essentially contested concepts are determined as a function of views that are admitted to the dispute by the disputing parties. In addition to the present considerations, this interpretation is further supported by the requirement that the reasonings behind those views are accepted to some degree as relevant by all the disputants. The views that are included form what can be called the zone of reasonable disagreement (see 11.4). However, the point is not to elevate reasonableness over any other consideration but to embrace contestability and to affirm that the reasonableness of views is determined *in the*

²⁶⁸ Here one hears echoes of the central problematic that is commonly associated with liberal thinking, i.e., how one should deal with illiberalism and intolerance—a matter famously articulated by Karl Popper in *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (1945) as the paradox of tolerance.

course of debating their merits. In that process, unreasonable conceptions or uses of concept come to be excluded from the further discussion and debate. Given how the status of essentially contested concepts is determined, the distinction between reasonable and unreasonable views comes down to how the matter is perceived in the particular (marginal) appraisive situations of the disputants. The reasonableness of different uses of a concept is still to be determined case-by-case, but the account is no longer explanatorily trivial. The account depicts the process by which essentially contested concepts are *formed*. This realization also forms the backbone of the essential contestability thesis that I argue for, the one centered around the idea of decision-based reasonable disagreement (see 18.1).

Moving on, given that Gallie's essential contestedness appears to reflect liberal values prevalent in contemporary societies, it may be considered a manifestation of a *liberal self-understanding*. By this, I broadly mean the personal preference and/or political culture calling for the organization of the various spheres of a society according to key liberal and democratic principles. Such self-understanding involves normative expectations concerning oneself as well as others. The connection between reasonable disagreement and essential contestedness/contestability, as tenuous as it may be in some variations of the thesis, gives us reason to presume that essential contestability is also connected to liberal thinking. In fact, Charles Larmore holds that at the heart of "the self-understanding of liberal thought" lies "the recognition that reasonable people tend naturally to disagree about the comprehensive nature of the good life" (Larmore 1996, 153, see also 168, 173–4). This should not be confused with the idea that "[p]art of what makes a society free and democratic is reasonable disagreement among the members and their political traditions" (Tully 2000, 473). The latter relates more to the practical conditions of liberal democracies, or to the liberal democracies as they are constituted, rather than to what I am more precisely after here, which is the way a liberal mindset meshes with the way certain concepts are contested. On that note, one might be tempted to associate the elusiveness of the ultimately correct conception, from which presumably follows the impotence to argue for one specific view, with the sentiment captured by the adage that a liberal is someone who cannot take their own side in an argument or quarrel²⁶⁹. This is not a particularly good characterization—liberalism is not merely a doctrine of toleration (Nagel 1987, 217) nor it is inherently skeptical (Larmore 1996, 174). However, the degree of impartiality that liberal principles truly require is a contested topic.

Despite their mutual differences, many liberal thinkers advocate ideas similar to Gallie's. On the one side, Chantal Mouffe (2000) states that the aim of democratic politics is to construct 'them' as adversaries whose ideas we combat instead of perceiving them as enemies to be destroyed. In addition, "To accept the view of the adversary is to undergo a radical change in political identity. It is more a sort of *conversion* than a process of rational persuasion." (Mouffe 2000, 101–2.) Mouffe notes that the disagreement concerning the meaning and implementation of liberty and equality cannot be resolved through deliberation

²⁶⁹ The adage is often attributed to Robert Frost, e.g., by Nagel 1987, 215.

and rational discussion. On the other side, Jürgen Habermas (2006) echoes Gallie in his discussion of the benefits of genuine dialogue between secularists and those subscribing to religious beliefs: "If both sides agree to understand the secularization of society as a complementary learning process, then they will also have cognitive reasons to take seriously each other's contributions to controversial subjects in the public debate." The understanding of tolerance in pluralistic societies demands that both believers and unbelievers, when dealing with people of a different faith or no faith, "should grasp that they must reasonably expect that the dissent they encounter will go on existing." (Habermas 2006, 47, 50.) These brief examples illustrate well how Gallie's thesis reflect aspects of liberal political culture and its ethical and moral demands.

But must one be a liberal to acknowledge essential contestability? Gallie appears to say as much when he discusses CHRISTIANITY and surmises that its conformity to "condition (VII) might be agreed (...) not only by liberal Christians, but by liberal spirits of other (or even of no) religious persuasions" (ECC 181). This alone is not enough for one to conclude that essential contestability is a thoroughly liberal notion. Consider, for instance, Gallie's reference to the true religious devotee (PHU 189 or see before) who chooses to carry on contesting the matter instead of decimating their opponent. I think this could be understood just as easily in as being accordance with the Great Commission of the Christian church (Matthew 28:16–20) that urges one to "go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I [i.e., Jesus Christ] have commanded you." From this perspective, the objective that is shared by Gallie's disputants is to convert others to the true faith, and not to be ecumenical for its own sake. Both the language and the logic of conversion are exclusive, and they hardly add up to the kind of toothless relativism that is sometimes attributed to liberalism; neither is the drive to convert others part of the liberal self-understanding in its ideal form. However, were one to assume that the thesis of essential contestedness is quintessentially liberal and Gallie enables the exclusion of fringe elements from the debate in the name of reasonableness, Gallie's thesis is imbued with the type of rationalism that has arguably been part of liberalism since Locke²⁷⁰.

John Gray (1977) has presented a more precise argument to the effect that essential contestability and liberalism go hand in hand. Acknowledging the essential contestability of our concepts "is to abandon absolutist claims in respect

²⁷⁰ More currently, political liberals in the mold of Rawls appear to share similar premises. Some Rawlsian arguments can be read as "an attack on the traditional view of reason: an attack on the idea that reasonable people can all (or at least sufficient numbers of them) be brought to agree solely through the use of reason on the same philosophical doctrine" (Dreben 2003, 319; esp. Rawls 2005, 37). However, both Rawls and Gallie assume that rational discussion and debate is still possible within certain reasonable limits (cf. Rawls 2005, II: §2). This stance is well illustrated by Amartya Sen (2009) who considers reasoning and impartial scrutiny essential in matters of justice although they may leave "conflicting and competing arguments that are not eliminated." The need for reasoned argument "is not compromised in any way by the possibility that some competing priorities may survive despite the confrontation of reason." (Sen 2009, viii; cf. Swanton in 13.1.)

of all of them” and to suggest the appropriateness of epistemological and moral pluralism. This presumably leads to tolerance of diversity, and to promoting a mutual conceptual enrichment through maintaining permanent dialogue. But if most of the concepts of social and political thought have an essentially contested character, that can only be in a social environment marked by profound diversity and moral individualism (e.g., in contemporary Western liberal societies). Thus, “any given concept acquires a contested character along with the occurrence of certain definite changes in social structure”²⁷¹ and in order to identify a concept as essentially contested one seems to need “an accurate knowledge of the sociological and historical contexts, and the recurrent situations and systems of practices, in which the concept is used.” Gray further maintains that “the study of essentially contested concepts is inseparable from the study of the various dimensions (linguistic and conceptual, for example) of social change itself.” This is not about some weak conformity of essential contestability to liberal values and attitude; rather, the society must have been structured in a certain way for its people to entertain the idea of essential contestability. That is why “[t]o identify a concept as essentially contested is to say a great deal about the kind of society in which its users live,” and the notion of essentially contested concepts emerges within the moral and political perspective of pluralist liberalism (Gray 1977, 335–7.)

Gray does not offer much more in support of the claim that the thesis and its central elements are intelligible only for those who live within the characteristically liberal social structure. He points out, however, that we can identify primitive social orders or societies in which essentially contested concepts are unknown, or “in which it is indeed the case that the conditions under which a term acquires its meaning and the conditions under which it is used correctly are all but identical” (Gray 1977, 336). In a later article, he is more careful in stating that it “is at least conceivable that there should be a society in which concepts (...) never acquire a contested character”²⁷² (Gray 1978, 394). We should now recall that that Gray himself understands an essential contestability thesis as resting on a metaphysical conception of human nature that is constitutive of social life (ibid., 393–4, 402; 12.3). As I understand his position, essential contestability is predicated on the possibility of contesting the boundaries of the whole domain of social life, and the contestation allows the

²⁷¹ To avoid misunderstandings concerning the strength of Gray’s claim it should be noted that, in the quote, Gray specifically uses the expression ‘along with’ in contrast to ‘because of.’

²⁷² Gray (1978) also brings up the possibility of identifying a liberal society “not by its adherence to any ideal, but rather in the fact that it comprehends contending ideals, between which it is the business of politics to arbitrate.” Gray surmises that this option is available for someone like Isaiah Berlin, who acknowledges the contestedness of FREEDOM: “liberalism is likely to be conceived as expressing the meta-theoretical claim that a collision of incommensurable ends is an ineliminable (and perhaps also, the defining) feature of political life.” A few passages later, Gray asserts that he treats the openness concerning the potential applications of “the equal-liberty principle” as a characteristic of liberalism, and this is “not unconnected (...) with the thesis that social and political concepts are essentially contested.” (Gray 1978, 388.)

expression of rivalling ways of life as well as reflects them. On that basis, Gray's defense appears to come down to the following alternatives: that (i) there may not be rivalling ways of life in some hypothetical societies at all; or that (ii) potential disputants *either* have distinct and uncontestably applicable terms for all the distinctions they need to make in expressing their views in connection to their rival ways of life *or* they do not consider it worthwhile to discuss those matters at all. According to this "extended" argument, the contestability would not need to be an issue in a certain society as the potential contestability of the term usage might never occur to potential disputants.

Much of what Gray says can be granted. The *nature* of certain types of terms/concepts can very well be a by-product of our time, culture, and history as Reinhart Koselleck's discussion of *Sattelzeit* nicely illustrates (e.g., Koselleck 2002). One cannot really rule out the decisive influence of the social order and its characteristic moral considerations either, or as Raymond Williams describes complex interconnections between meanings/concepts, words, and social relations:

In the matters of reference and applicability, which underlie any particular use, it is necessary to insist that the most active problems of meaning are always primarily embedded in actual relationships, and that both the meanings and the relationships are typically diverse and variable, within the structures of particular social orders and the processes of social and historical change. Williams 1983, 22

In addition, Gellner's (1974) previously mentioned concern that Gallie defines history in terms of a continuous, liberal discussion is akin to Gray's observation in that, by doing so, Gallie circumscribes humanity too narrowly. The world of reasonably smooth continuous traditions that are yet open to change while valuing their own diversification and pluralism is an admirable one. Gallie is "is right to praise such a world, but wrong to offer it, implicitly, as a general account of history." (Gellner 1974, 104, 110, see also 101.) In essence, both Gray and Gellner draw attention to the fact that Gallie's thesis appears to rest on a metaphysical thesis concerning the human nature or society that Gallie envisions in perhaps far too restricted liberal terms.

Does the notion of essential contestability necessarily require a *particularly* liberal society or people? It is evident that the liberal society may be more conducive to keeping certain disagreements open, but it is a false opposition to contrast the pluralist liberal society with the imaginative community that exhibits uniform social life with nothing in between. At the end of *ART*, Gallie advises against thinking that the "uniformity of judgment and appraisal" is necessary or even desirable "in many fields of activity" but behind it is certainly a more nuanced idea than the simple endorsement of liberality or its rejection (*ART* 114). One could easily conclude that a community that exhibits uniform social life is simply foreign or alien to us which should not be equated with non-liberality per se. Second, appealing to factual circumstances can give us merely *prima facie* guidance concerning the contestability of certain concepts as the information we may get that way concerns a term's/word's contestedness (12.2). Appealing to counterfactual circumstances as an intuition pump is a different matter, yet the

people in Gray's imagined society do not share the same concepts with us yet use them in a different and non-contestable way; in fact, they do not use the same concepts at all. *If* contestability is an integral part of the inherent structure of a concept, it seems that we are dealing with quite different concepts, and it is not clear on what grounds—or based on what comparison—Gray draws his conclusion. I will offer two alternative examples for consideration: (a) we would not assume that small babies possess JUSTICE, yet we are not drawing *similar type of conclusions* on that basis; (b) we would not characterize past Roman and Greek societies as particularly liberal, yet it is perfectly *conceivable* that disputes involving JUSTICE and about justice, there, can evidence similar enough features that Gallie attributes to essential contestability.

Having said that, a *localized* reasonable disagreement thesis of essential contestability (cf. 13.2) could happily grant that essential contestability is not a universal feature but something that may or may not arise in specific contexts like in particular communicative exchanges, movements, traditions, and perhaps, indeed, societies, and cultures. That is also the *type* of thesis I personally end up endorsing as the most defensible variant of essential (see 18.5).

The nature of the relation between essential contestability and liberal thought can be reasonably viewed in different ways but it is undeniable that Gallie's thesis has a liberal undertone, if not a liberal foundation. I have explored a couple of alternatives for the ways in which essentially contested concepts could be imbued with a liberal undercurrent or how their contestability might reflect the values of a liberal society. One might also argue that my specific interpretation of essential contestability— i.e., that the status of concepts as essentially contested is determined as a function of individual or group views that are admitted to the dispute by the disputing parties—is especially liberal as it relies on how willing the disputants are to admit other views that conflict with their own as reasonable. I will grant that to be the case, *if* what is meant by 'liberal' is the readiness to carry out a disagreement in which one considers intelligible/reasonable, at least some views to which one does not subscribe. That being said, my conception rejects hyper-partisanship along with the antagonism that it entails while favoring a type of agonism that aims to leave considerable room for rational assessment.

13.4 The transitional rationality and the ad hominem mode of argumentation

In this section, I will discuss the conception of rationality that is operative in Gallie's thesis. The account of justified conversions (11.4) aims to illustrate how a continued concept-use or conversion to another use could be conceived of as rational. Here, I will build on Gallie's views though I will go beyond them in many important respects. In short, the conception of rationality that I argue is the most suitable for the purposes of essential contestability is transitional while

disputants argue for their views in an *ad hominem*-fashion (to be distinguished from *ad personam*).

In a new *PHU*-passage, Gallie states that the rational explanation of the concept-use, or the change of use,

is possible (...) in much the same way that (...) an individual's change of social role or of allegiance to a social norm is often something that is entirely intelligible or followable, for all that it cannot be brought under any general principle or law. *PHU* 184

At that point, Gallie also makes a direct reference to chapter four of *PHU* in which he discusses historical understanding, i.e., the mode of thinking that comes down to the appreciation of human aims, choices, valuations, efforts and deeds that are attributed to individuals acting alone or in concert with others; on their own behalf or as representatives of their group, cause, or nation (*PHU* 75–6); but not in accordance with some general principles or laws that have predictive power. For the present purpose, it suffices to say that historical understanding aims to make some sequence of events or actions sensible, intelligible, or, more precisely, *followable* in the sense one follows a game or story (*PHU* 84, 89–90, 97). This type of historical explanation is a “progressive observation,” the point of which is “that the event can now be followed as part of a still developing whole to which it belongs” (*PHU* 90). The same basic idea is also present in *ART* in which Gallie sets to consider the possibility that different aesthetic theories with their alternative viewpoints each succeeds in emphasizing “some facet or feature of works which is a necessary, and perhaps easily neglected condition of artistic excellence” (*ART* 106). It is now

incumbent upon the historian, not indeed to show that its tenets are right or justifiable, but at least to show that they are intelligible – are of a kind that quite intelligent men could naturally find persuasive and, up to a point, sensible and illuminating. *ART* 106

To sum up, both concept-uses and conversions from one use to another are intelligible and/or followable. As far as assessing them requires historical understanding, one way to do so is to give a historical explanation as a progressive observation.

I argue that the notion of rationality that is operative in Gallie's thesis is *transitional*, a notion which I draw from the works of Alasdair MacIntyre and Charles Taylor. Roughly speaking, Taylor's observations are especially relevant when determining the type of rationality manifesting in individual conversions while MacIntyre's points are more clearly about transitions between different traditions or other wider conceptual frameworks (see MacIntyre 1988). For this reason, I focus on Taylor's views here²⁷³.

²⁷³ I should also note that Taylor's discussion draws from MacIntyre's ideas, but I will omit cross-references between the two. In addition, I do not mean to imply that Taylor should be viewed as accepting an essential contestability thesis. In fact, in Taylor's view, the *ad hominem* mode of reasoning that he describes and defends in the article is, at least in principle, capable of bringing about moral agreement (Taylor 1993, 213). Interestingly, though, Taylor (1993)

In “Explanation and Practical Reason” (Taylor 1993), Charles Taylor describes the rationality of a transition from one committed conception or view to another. The respective performance of rival positions can be judged by considering how they face reality but also by comparing them with each other. This way one can make sense of how rival positions *deal with each other* in addition to how they *deal with facts*; in the former case, the arbitration between positions is made possible by portraying transitions between the positions as gains or losses. Moreover,

It may be that from the standpoint of Y, not just the phenomena in dispute, but also the history of X, and its particular pattern of anomalies, difficulties, makeshifts, and breakdowns, can be greatly illuminated. In adopting Y, we make better sense not just of the world, but of our history of trying to explain the world, part of which has been played out in terms of X. Taylor 1993, 216

As an example, Taylor brings up the move from Renaissance sub-Aristotelian views to Galilean theories of motion. On the one hand, although the terminology and the basic assumptions of the latter cannot be translated to the framework of the former, the Galilean theories seem to be able to make sense of the motion-related problematics besetting the sub-Aristotelian views. It is thus possible to trace “a rational path from one to the other” in virtue of what the pre-Galilean view already accepts. The relation between the views is *asymmetrical*: one can move from Aristotle to Galileo while realizing a concrete gain in understanding, yet the move from Galileo to Aristotle is not similarly possible. On the other hand, both theoretical frameworks nevertheless have their own built-in criteria for success which determine the overall purpose of the theory to which they pertain. In the case of Platonic-Aristotelian tradition the criteria for success relate to “moral vision and attunement,” whereas post-Galilean understanding seeks “manipulative power.” According to Taylor, we are lacking criteria here: “there are no decisive considerations which *both* sides must accept,” in which case one or the other would need to alter their “first principles of science.” (Taylor 1993, 214–21.)

In Gallie’s terms, there is no general principle for deciding between different options (ECC 177). The introduction of new criteria or principles for evaluating the matter is certainly possible, but a losing party could reasonably object that those criteria do not accord with their own criteria of success, or the elementary purpose of the theory itself. The matter remains contestable. Taylor thinks that the transition can be justified, but the task is not to *convince* someone who holds one conception steadfastly, undividedly and without confusion. Radical conversion “from one ultimate premise to the other,” is not in question, as that “would indeed be irrational.” (ibid., 221). One needs to rather show that the person who holds a presumably inferior conception could not undividedly

could provide resources for conceiving essential contestability differently as a problem stemming from the application of the apodeictic and the foundationalist model of reasoning to those conflicts, the proper evaluation of which would require *ad hominem* reasoning and the affirmation of strong evaluations (cf. esp. ibid., 221).

and without confusion *repudiate* the benefit that is to be gained by adopting a new conception. No specific *anomaly* is required for bringing about the defeat of an earlier conception, but there can be something it should have taken into account—in the above example, the undeniable success of mechanistic science.

When we ask why that is the case, “we are led to recognize a human constant, namely, a mode of understanding of a given domain, D, which consists in our ability to make our way about and effect our purposes in D.” Taylor borrows a term from Heidegger by calling such human constant ‘pre-understanding.’ We may increase our knowledge by making this pre-understanding explicit, the knowledge which is “intrinsically linked with increased ability to effect our purposes, with the acquisition of potential recipes for more effective practice.” There are links between understanding and practical ability, and the “mediating element is something deeply embedded in the human life form, of which we are all implicitly aware, and which we have to recognize when made explicit.” (Taylor 1993, 209, 220–1.) Now, in arguing for the reasonableness of the new conception one would thus not be appealing to independent criteria outside the framework of one or the other conception, but one would be appealing to an implicit understanding in form of life. This is an example of the *ad hominem* (or especially here: *ex concessis*) mode of reasoning/argumentation that is highly relevant for the present purpose (see later). However, one does not have to be convinced by Taylor’s particular grounding of the possibility to make comparative judgments in this case. As Taylor himself admits, in many cases the appropriate human constants are difficult to establish, if they help at all (*ibid.*, 222). That said, there needs to be *some* ground in the case of essential contestability.

The above model of rational transition is attractive especially when the evaluation between different views, conceptions, or uses of concepts, is understood in terms of their differential performances. The relevant type of evaluation is close to what Georg Henrik von Wright (1993) calls ‘technical goodness’ and which is distinct from ‘instrumental goodness’:

An attribution of instrumental goodness *of its kind* to some thing presupposes that there exists some purpose which is, as I shall say, *essentially associated* with the kind and which this thing is thought to serve well (...) When members of a kind *K* are classified as technically good or not good, better or inferior *K*'s, it is presupposed in the value-judgments that membership of the kind is essentially tied to ability to perform a certain *activity*. von Wright 1993, II: §2, §9, see also I: §5.

In the current sense, assessing instrumental goodness moves the focus to fundamental purposes, which are directly at odds in the case of the Platonic-Aristotelian tradition and post-Galilean understanding. By contrast, technical goodness is related to ability, capacity, or skill in some activity or art which could become the mediating element that is closely connected to the human constant that the disputants both recognize. However, Taylor rightly observes that a human constant or some other shared consideration still serves as an operative criterion for deciding between the cases (Taylor 1993, 223). Exactly that appears to be absent in genuine cases of essential contestability: a shared criterion for

judging the rationality of a transition would still be a general principle for deciding between the cases, even if that criterion were not an internal part of either of the contested instances. Arguably, *some* criterion is needed for comparative assessment even if one could not hope to establish one's conclusion as uniquely justified (cf. 13.1). A human constant or a shared pre-understanding can serve as the needed criterion when it is not able to settle a disputed matter outright and once and for all (see also 18.3). In some disputes, appealing to an implicit understanding in form of life might be enough to convince one's opponents; in others, not so much. In a good number of them it should render a person's use of a concept intelligible.

Taylor (1993) introduces another possibility: the transition between the views is not shown to be a gain based on a shared criterion, "rather it is shown to be a gain directly, because it can plausibly be described as mediated by some error-reducing move" and the transition can be directly identified "as the overcoming of an error." Assuming that we think a transition "consisted in the removing of a contradiction, or the overcoming of a confusion, or the recognition of a hitherto ignored relevant factor (...) we would be confident of the superior performance of Y because we know that Y is a gain over X." Taylor mentions unexpected sensory perceptions and double-checking them, transitions from uncertainty about our feelings to confidence in them, and "some of our gains in moral insight" as everyday examples which prove themselves to us as the overcoming of an error. (Taylor 1993, 223-4.) According to him, these examples

are, of course, all biographical. They deal with transitions of a single subject, whereas the standard disputes I have been discussing occur between people. And they are often (in the first case, always) cases of inarticulate, intuitive confidence, and hence arguably have nothing to do with practical *reason* at all, if this is understood as a matter of forms of *argument*. Taylor 1993, 224

As I see it, we have a vested interest in the accuracy and correctness of our beliefs, conceptions, and judgments about the world, and that is why a biographical transition that one perceives as correcting an error also becomes *self-justifying* from the standpoint of the one undergoing the conversion. Assuming that one shares at least some common concerns in form of life with one's peers, and one does not suffer from extraordinary insensitivity to such concerns, a reasoning behind a self-justifying and personally error-reducing conversion by another is also intelligible *and* followable even if one were not persuaded by the same reasons oneself.

Concepts are not typically thought as truth-apt, but they can represent their objects in better or worse ways depending on one's purpose. An analogy between a map and a conceptual tool kit, or framework, is often made, because it points towards a key function of concepts: they enable navigation of the world by identifying objects/entities, their properties, and relations holding between those objects/entities. Presented with two maps, it is perfectly rational to prefer a map that is more consistent: the map that leads you consistently to the same places is

better than the map that leads to you to different places more or less arbitrarily²⁷⁴. It is likely that the conceptual maps we all use on a daily basis are not able to portray our social reality without some inaccuracies or inconsistencies; any irregularities or “misprints” we identify can be a reason for us to start looking for a map in which the mistake is rectified. From a personal point of view, the identified need for change justifies that change immediately, and the relation between the past and the current conceptual map is conceived as asymmetrical²⁷⁵. By contrast, a differential judgment is required for evaluating the same transition from the third-person perspective, since the grounds present in the self-justification are now absent. One needs to introduce a criterion, or perhaps a relativizing parameter, and that can be contested accordingly.

The possibility of looking at the matter from two different perspectives does not change the fact that one needs to start from what is accepted as correct by an individual when one hopes to explain the rationality of *conversion*. Taylor (1993) contrasts *apodeictic* reasoning to practical reasoning of an *ad hominem* character. The *ad hominem* mode of reasoning starts from the fact of human beings being committed to certain goals, views, and conceptions. In contrast, the apodeictic mode of reasoning typically strives for neutral evaluation by detaching a person from their held convictions and beliefs. Taylor is especially critical of the assumption that the apodeictic mode of reasoning is “the only game in town,” as the foundationalist perspective or Cartesian conception would suggest. (Taylor 1993, 211–4; see also 224–5, 230.) My present focus is, however, on the role *ad hominem* reasoning plays in essential contestability, the relevance of which to essential contestability looks rather obvious. How else could Gallie’s disputants, who evaluate matters in their particular appraisive situations, reason things through? In the case of the two theories of motion mentioned previously, “the decisive arguments are transitional—they concern what each theory has to say about the other, and about the passage from its rival to itself” (Taylor 1993, 217). After all, when a conversion takes place, a person “sees, or claims to see, more clearly and fully why he has acknowledged and followed the exemplar’s style of performance all along.” Given that person’s particular marginal appraisive situation, “his recognition of value is conclusive for him, although it is merely impressive or surprising or worth noticing for others.” (ECC 191; or see 11.4.) Here the person undergoing a conversion is identifying the transition directly as the correcting of an error. As was the case previously, the individual’s transition consists in the overcoming of a confusion or the recognition of a hitherto ignored relevant factor, and there is no need to consider the conversion as radical or irrational.

To see the matter in this way also accords well with Gallie’s remarks concerning historical understanding at the beginning of this section. The

²⁷⁴ Gaus (2000, 38) is using a similar example while discussing essential contestability.

²⁷⁵ I grant that it is conceivable that a person may be of the opinion that their current understanding is somehow deficient in comparison to their past understanding. I tend to think, however, that a person in that situation would not claim to be right while appealing to their current understanding in the kind of dispute that Gallie describes.

judgment one makes from the third-person view is indeed a kind of “progressive observation.” When views, conceptions, beliefs *et cetera* can be attributed to a person or a group, subsequent changes can be understood in terms of a continuum that is intelligible and followable. In other words, the rationality of conversion is made possible by tracing a rational path between the past and the present view. Even if one were to reject the conclusions that are drawn as unreasonable, the actual conversion can be understood as rational when one takes into account the personal starting point of the converting individual and their reasons for converting – i.e., the arguments and evidence that have induced the conversion – are considered relevant to the case at hand (cf. 11.4).

Interestingly, it is also possible to identify a legitimate way to employ rhetorical *ad hominem* arguments. This complements our understanding of the many ways disputants attempt to persuade others with the arguments and evidence they have considered, indeed reasoned, to be decisive in the case at hand. The *ad hominem* type of rhetorical argument can be understood as the “argument from commitment” and it has systematically been confused with the personal attack type in philosophical writings (Walton 1998, xiv). When an argument from commitment is employed “a proponent cites the commitment of the respondent as a reason why he (the respondent) should accept a certain proposition that can be inferred from that commitment” (ibid., 106). Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1971) have distinguished between arguments *ad personam* and *ad hominem*. The former involves a personal attack intended to discredit an opponent while the latter is directed at the particular audience; in the case of *ad hominem*, the speaker knows that their argument is “without weight for the universal audience.” According to Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, an argument of the *ad hominem* kind can be qualified “as rational, while admitting that the premises under discussion are not accepted by everyone.” These premises “fix the framework within which the argument unfolds.”²⁷⁶ (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1971, 110-1.)

In the current sense, *ad hominem* reasoning and argumentation accord especially well with a thesis of essential contestability that conceives the reasonable boundaries of essential contestation as the function of those views that are admitted to the dispute (13.3; see esp. 18.1). There are, of course, myriad rhetorical exchanges that involve *ad hominem* argumentation – e.g., “Halvar, since you call yourself a contemporary painter, you should certainly be interested in these new techniques that are in vogue right now!” – but it is still quite straightforward to see how this type of argumentation is relevant in Gallie’s disputes. *Ad hominem* argumentation is thus a means of persuasion that may induce conversion. On the other side of the equation, in order to become convinced one must reason things through, and the relevant mode of reasoning is *ad hominem* as it is described by Taylor. In Gallie’s terms, the matter is appraised

²⁷⁶ Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca link the examination of *ad hominem* argumentation with another subject, i.e., agreements particular to certain argumentations, for this reason. According to them, “the premises in argument consist of propositions accepted by the hearers.” (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1971, 104, 111.)

from the standpoint of one's particular appraisive situation. These last points suggest what one may have already suspected: although nothing stops the disputants from arguing for the universal audience while they try to persuade others to come around to their preferred view, it is probably not as effective as the mode of argumentation that takes into account the *ad hominem* character of reasoning. In more concrete terms: to persuade people, one needs to adapt one's argument to their already existing convictions and views. This can be combined with the previous finding (see 12.4) that the rhetorical effect of being persuaded can serve in place of absent philosophical justification (enabling further inferences and practical action). If no arguments that can secure the conviction of the universal audience are available, *ad hominem* reasoning and argumentation take their place when suspending judgement is not a practical option (cf. 13.2).

Lastly, Eugene Garver (1978) has put forward the notion of an *essentially contested argument* as a bridge between rhetorical argument and essentially contested concepts. More precisely, an "essentially contested argument is what Aristotle calls a rhetorical argument." What are the features that endow rhetorical arguments with this new status? Rhetorical arguments are directed toward determining a particular judgment or a decision to act, and not toward establishing a general rule like dialectical arguments. All rhetorical arguments necessarily involve the passions and characters of the disputants and judges, but one aspect of rhetorical arguments as essentially contested arguments is that, "in a debate involving rhetorical arguments it is the arguments, not something extraneous [e.g., speakers' motives or moral purpose], that are contested." In an important sense, "no rhetorical argument ever *settles* anything about the values and beliefs involved in the argument," but rather, a "decision may become a precedent, but a precedent is then only part of the material for the next argument, never an established truth that makes further debate unnecessary." (Garver 1978, 156-7). I take Garver's thesis to be a variant of what I call a *processual conflict thesis of essential contestability*, the key hallmark of which is to focus on the kind of argument and dispute the rivals are having as constitutive of essential contestability (see also Garver in 17.3).

Garver's overall characterization, above, ties in rather nicely with the way *ad hominem* reasoning and argumentation could manifest in Gallie's disputes as a particular type of arguments. It also coheres with my later framing of that type as decision-based reasonable disagreement, in which disputing parties argue based on (also Aristotelian) *endoxa* in a way that results in a conflictual popular conception as a plateau for further contestation (see 18.1). And finally, it is worth noting that understanding disputes and conversions in terms of transitional rationality and *ad hominem* argumentation and reasoning does not determine beforehand that these disputes involve, or the conversions are due to, either irrational or rational considerations.

13.5 Radical relativism, self-refutation, and other criticism

Essential contestability has been claimed to lead to radical relativism (Clarke 1979; *contra* Kurki 2010, 372; Syrjämäki 2011, 143) or to the impossibility of meaningful communication altogether (Ball 1993, 2002; *contra* Syrjämäki 166–73). Gallie did not think so, evidently (ECC 196), and he sought to create room for rational debate with the account of justified conversions (11.4; Syrjämäki 2011, 143–4) and to strengthen the rational basis for progressive competition (Collier et al. 2006, 235). Gallie's thesis is skeptical rather than relativist (13.1), yet given the severity of the criticism, the claim that Gallie's thesis results in (radical) relativism needs to be examined separately. If Gallie *were* to endorse a thesis that commits to advocating radical relativism, one might still be able to speak of conceptual differences, but there would be no point in framing what takes place as contests (Connolly 1993, 230).

Barry Clarke (1979) argues that essentially contestable concepts introduce "radical relativism into all discourse using such disputable concepts." His claim is broadly built on the assumption that "the principle of individuation for some disputed concept rests on some view of linguistic autonomy or on a view that language is socially determined." In this framework, a concept's essential contestability goes with linguistic autonomy, while arguing for essential contestedness implies a strong view of structural determination outside the inherent structure of a concept. (Clarke 1979, 124, 126.) I must admit that I find Clarke's reasoning somewhat opaque²⁷⁷, but I will attempt to briefly summarize his argument that accepting essential contestability leads to radical relativism.

On one horn of the argument, asserting that "a concept is essentially contested is to claim that conceptual disputes reflect social disputes" and "it must rest on some claim that locates all meaning outside the concept itself and in society." When the locus of meaning is outside the concept in the society, the meaning that reflects the social disputes is socially determined. In addition, if one were to argue that the *contest* is 'essential' instead, "then it is not the concept that is 'essentially contested' but what the concept represents; and this can only be maintained by claiming that some contests are structurally necessary." Here we arrive at a view that these concepts and the language used to express them are socially determined. On the other horn of the argument, Clarke straightforwardly assumes that the essential contestability of a concept forecloses any claims of superiority of one conception over others. Therefore, if someone argues for such superiority, he must mean to say that the concept is essentially contested instead – and that would result in the view of language as socially determined. But if it is *contests* that are "essentially disputed" rather than *concepts*, the claim that one conception is superior to others "must be understood to mean only that

²⁷⁷ Clarke's argument is directed against Steven Lukes (1974/2005; 1977) and K.I. Macdonald (1976), and thus one should not expect it to be perfectly applicable in Gallie's case. Nevertheless, Clarke ends up making claims regarding essential contestability, in general, and that requires attention.

it has won a contest.” (Clarke 1979, 124–5.) In this case there are no intellectual grounds for deciding superiority; the contest and its outcome are structurally determined here as well.

Clarke examines what he considers as possible options only to conclude that they all lead to the position in which concepts, contestation, and language have to be understood as socially determined in a strong sense. He clearly views this as much too controversial and wrong-headed to be acceptable. Clarke does allow that one may make sense of the notion of an essentially *contestable* concept but, as a consequence, “any one idiosyncratic usage of an essentially contestable concept would be as valid as any alternative idiosyncratic usage” as he already assumes that essential contestability forecloses any comparative evaluation between the different conceptions. According to him, it is simply inconsistent to view concepts as essentially contestable without embracing radical relativism. Furthermore, it creates an additional problem since now “the notion of an essentially contestable concept would itself be contestable, indeed essentially contestable.” (Clarke 1979, 126.) Unfortunately, Clarke does not substantiate the possible grounds for such a claim. One does not have to assume automatically that all, or even most, theses of essential contestability are obviously self-referential (see also Connolly 1993, 227–9; but cf. Gray below).

I also doubt the significance of Clarke’s main argument that rests on the sharp distinction between concepts whose meaning is variable but is something completely distinct from the outside world, and the conception that leaves no room for the conceptual variation as it is taken merely as a matter of social determination. Clarke jumps too quickly to his conclusions. We are not bound to think that the world would not set at least some limits to how contestable concepts are used, which provides normative purchase to criticize certain uses while favoring others (see also 5.2). Michael Freeden specifically addresses “those who regard the essential contestability of political concepts as a cloak for relativism” and urges them to appreciate that the notion does “not allow for infinite variety or unfixity” (Freeden 1996, 67). In any case, Clarke’s real target is the Lukesian variant of the essential contestability thesis, and Lukes may be more susceptible to this criticism than Gallie (see Lukes 1977, 419; Grafstein 1988, 18; see also Swanton 1985; Besson 2005, 74; Stokes 2007, 699; 13.1). Christopher Bryant contends, though, that Clarke is wrong to charge Lukes with incoherency, and that “Clarke’s mistake is to identify contestability with arbitrariness” (Bryant 1992, 59). That is indeed Clarke’s biggest mistake, I think, and it results in a distinction that is much too sharp to be useful, or even relevant, in the case of essential contestability²⁷⁸. Furthermore, there is a variety of different senses of both ‘essentiality’ and ‘contestability’ put forward in the literature (12.2; 12.3),

²⁷⁸ This is well captured by one of Clarke’s objections to Lukes’s position: “Either he means that power is essentially contested, in which case reference to concepts, including the concept of power, is redundant; or he means that the concept of power is essentially contestable, in which case the radical relativism that follows implies that there are no grounds on which his position can fulfill his claim that it is superior to other theories of power.” (Clarke 1979, 126).

and simply choosing one sense that supports one's argument to cover all possible theses of essential contestability is surely ill-advised.

John Gray's (1977; 1978) argument concerning the potential conceptual relativism or "skeptical nihilism" (1977, 343) of an essential contestability thesis is arguably stronger than Clarke's. It helps in setting limits for a viable thesis of essential contestability. First, Gray (1977) attacks the notion that the potentially unsharable disputes about the proper application of concepts have their basis in the indeterminacy and open texture of concepts denoting human actions and social situations. He argues that the only way there can be definitional disputes unsharable by rational argument "if problems of radical translation and loss of meaning effectively prevent any among the disputants from plausibly contending that his description and explanation of the actions of the observed agent must be privileged over those of his rivals." To claim this is to claim that there are conceptual frameworks which are rationally incommensurable, and one ends up subscribing to "an ambitious thesis of conceptual relativism." (Gray 1977, 341.) Although there are other ways to skin the cat with regard to openness and indeterminacy (cf. 6.2; 12.1), I have no particular issue with what Gray is saying here. That is especially so when he adds that a "strong interpretation of essential contestability in terms of incommensurability, then, is self-defeating in that it dissolves the generic identifying criteria of the concept and prevents us from characterizing the conflict as a definitional dispute" (ibid., 342). This is another reason why I argue for adopting the incommensurability qualification (6.2; see also 13.1). Moreover, it is evident that Gallie did not advocate for the incommensurability thesis given what he wanted to achieve with the account of justified conversions (11.4).

Second, Gray (1978) criticizes the notion that the concept would be essentially contestable by virtue of its norm-dependency or norm-invoking function. He summarizes the main argument as follows:

For, whereas contests have a point only when there is something that is not treated as contestable, Gallie's claim that concepts are essentially contested in virtue of their norm-invoking functions effectively precludes debates about these concepts from susceptibility to rational settlement for as long as we accept the view - endorsed by Gallie - that the ultimate questions of morality and politics cannot be answered by an appeal to reason. Gray 1978, 392

I share the general concern of Sami Syrjämäki (2011, 145), according to whom Gray dismisses the aspect of Gallie's thesis that pertains to the rational discussion and debate between the alternative uses of concepts. Gray does not really consider the possibility that one could comparatively evaluate the merits of alternative options in the absence of a uniquely appropriate judgment (see 13.1), and thereby he ends up selling Gallie's account and its potential a bit short.

Third, Gray (1977) problematizes the relation between "the two levels of essential contestability," i.e., "between the first order essential contestability of a given concept, and the second order, critically reflexive essential contestability of any identification of the concept as being of this kind." If there are concepts that we know to be essentially contested, the concept of an essentially contested

concept cannot itself be essentially contestable. The same goes for the notion of essential contestability that cannot be essentially contestable in the second order sense. If we were to know that disputes about whether or not a concept is essentially contested are rationally unresolvable, and that thereby we have applied the criteria, or the concept, of essential contestability correctly, we would end up failing to identify essentially contested concepts in the first order sense. "In short, a two-tiered essential contestability thesis is self-defeating." Gray further contends that the two-tiered contestability may be a sensible choice when it is put forward as a lead-in to "a radical Pyrrhonian skepticism," or the like. But even if one were unwilling to go this far, Gray suspects that "a first order essential contestability thesis, if true, entails a strong variant of conceptual relativism whose radically skeptical consequences are not much weaker than those of a thesis of the two-tiered variety." One clear reason for Gray's suspicion appears to be that "advancing a strong variability or contestability claim" or "the claim that there is no definitive way of resolving disputes about a concept's proper application" means endorsing "a definite philosophical perspective with regard to the nature and limits of rational discussion, at least with respect to the concept under consideration." This is not a neutral viewpoint but a philosophically partisan understanding which may render any characterization of a concept as essentially contested as "so deeply and radically nonneutral that it must itself be seen as essentially contested." (Gray 1977, 338-9, 342-3.)

I concur that a thesis of essential contestability like Gallie's offers a philosophically partisan understanding concerning the character of the dispute – it is *a* philosophical thesis after all. Affirming that character in the case of a given dispute would moreover ratify or provide "a theoretical elaboration of the self-description of one group of partisans," as would other accounts of the same debate (Garver 1990, 261). Nevertheless, a thesis of essential contestability does not have to be of a two-tiered variety. Gallie gives us a set of conditions for identifying suitable (first-order) concepts as essentially contested concepts (at the second-order level). While that may be theoretically controversial, there is no pressing reason to believe that *the same set of conditions* need be applied to concepts of both orders. This should be clear enough; for instance, ESSENTIALLY CONTESTED CONCEPT does not signify a valued achievement, while JUSTICE, as a first-order essentially contested concept, allegedly does. Similarly, the second-order OPEN CONCEPT that denotes the class of open concepts does not have to be open itself. In addition, affirming essential contestability means understanding at least some concepts as variable, but that variability does not have to come down to arbitrariness, especially regarding the concepts' structural characteristics. They do not suddenly turn out to be very different kinds of concepts than they are, for instance, closed or not-essentially contested. Gray's argument does not offer further support for the claim that a thesis of essential contestability is self-refuting.

One reason why Gallie's thesis may strike one as being of a two-tiered variety could be that Gallie's elucidation of essentially contested concepts as distinguished from confused concepts, and thus identified as what they are, is

problematic because the identification appears to involve a similar type of contestability that presumably renders the first-order disputes so intractable (see 9.2). That general worry has also been raised by Eugene Garver: “arguments about whether to call something an essentially contested concept seem simply to reproduce on a more abstract plane the initial dispute that the idea of essentially contested concept was supposed to account for” (Garver 1990, 252). One may disqualify *Gallie’s thesis* on this basis, but it is a theoretical problem to be solved rather than a clear feature of *essential contestability* that would render the general notion self-refuting. Many shrink from essential contestability because it implies some kind of conceptual relativism that they find tough to swallow. Even if that were the case—it does appear one can avoid making overtly relativist claims (13.1)—the relativism can be of a domain-specific kind without extending to all rational inquiries or conceptualizations; including the identification of certain concepts as essentially contested.

Milja Kurki rejects the view that the acceptance of the essential contestability of concepts would necessarily lead to adopting “a relativistic position on concepts’ ability to capture the world—that all conceptual interpretations or theories are as good each other.” She notes that it may be impossible to base essential contestability thesis on radical relativism²⁷⁹ (Kurki 2010, 372). In this, she is joined by Robert Grafstein who denies that (non-realist) radical relativism can conceive of a common ground to a contest, and that is why it stands in opposition to essential contestability (Grafstein 1988, 25). In contrast, Collier, Hidalgo, and Maciuceanu (2006) find the concern with relativism reasonable, but only if concept analysis aims to establish unambiguous meanings prescriptively—and they consider it implausible to suppose that the meaning of concepts is “inherently fixed and stable.” If the goal of analysis is “to give a realistic account of complex concepts and their dynamic patterns of change,” the framework developed by Gallie remains a benchmark for alternative approaches to conceptual analysis. In any case, Collier et al. do not think that Gallie’s thesis is a straightforward affirmation of conceptual relativism. Rather, it “calls for a certain humility in declarations about conceptual meaning; a concerted effort to keep discussion of concepts within the framework of reasoned discourse; and serious consideration of what it can mean to establish such a framework.” (Collier et al. 2006, 214, 234.)

Syrjämäki (2011) rejects the label of relativism, radical or otherwise, suggesting instead that the thesis amounts to “some kind of perspectivism.” The central characteristic of that standpoint is the absence of universal or general criteria, or effective argument, for deciding which “of the different concepts of liberty, democracy, art, etc. are the best.” By engaging in comparative and

²⁷⁹ Here Kurki cites Gray’s incommensurability criticism, namely the passage in which Gray says that “unless divergent theories or worldviews have something in common, their constituent concepts cannot be ‘contested,’ even though their proponents are in conflict” (Gray 1977, 341–342). On this basis, Kurki interprets Gray to maintain that “it is in fact *impossible* to base essential contestability thesis on radical relativism” (Kurki 2010, 372) which looks to be a slightly skewed interpretation of Gray, who merely remarks that such thesis (characterized by conceptual relativism) would be “ambitious” (Gray 1977, 341).

contrastive analysis of an appraisive concept and its progenitors (ECC 198) from different contexts or perspectives, “it is sometimes possible to demarcate more or less rational or productive efforts,” and “to acknowledge the rationality of competing concepts by recognizing that their use is historically and logically (i.e., coherently) permissible.” (Syrjämäki 2011, 144.) It is noteworthy that Syrjämäki seems to understand essential contestability in terms that allow contestation over multiple concepts (see also *ibid.*, 172) and thereby grounds the viability of a thesis differently to, or in a more relaxed fashion than, many others who have criticized or defended Gallie. Apart from that, Syrjämäki’s position in this matter resembles William Connolly’s view according to which the universal criteria of rationality that are available to us limit and inform conceptual contests of an essential kind although they are insufficient to resolve such debates determinately (Connolly 1993, 230, 197–8; or see 12.4).

Apart from referring to contestation between *different* concepts, I think that Syrjämäki is quite right in what he says²⁸⁰. Disputants’ particular appraisive situations can be understood as playing a central role in the account of justified conversions, and thus in Gallie’s overall thesis. It is thus not far-fetched to say that Gallie advocates for some sort of perspectivism, which may be one reason why certain postmodernist thinkers have found Gallie’s thesis appealing (cf. 2.6). Perspectivism as an epistemological view could be further coupled with a metaphysical, anti-realist conception to form a position according to which different conceptualizations comprised of different perspectives constitute the social particulars or practices that the concept denotes. However, as should be evident by now, Gallie is not putting forward a thesis that clearly subscribes to a Nietzschean sort of perspectivism nor to a stark anti-realism: despite what some have assumed, Gallie is relatively moderate in his views. He does not discuss essential contestability in terms of truth, and neither is he advocating a thesis that subscribes, or even unconsciously commits, to radical relativism.

It is unclear, then, what gives rise to the accusations of pernicious relativism leveled at Gallie. Here I present one possible way of considering the situation. The typical philosophical approach to determining and distinguishing a concept is to provide a definition for it. The special challenge that essential contestability poses is that particular definitions are routinely contested on the grounds that they do not suffice to define *the concept in question*, properly. Owing to this, the usual and readily available way of denoting the concept one is using, i.e., a definition, does nothing to erase or resolve the dispute as *the disagreement in question* persists, and moreover it persists about a single concept. The presence of possibly diverging definitions does not therefore entail multiple concepts, and thereby the existence of diverging definitions becomes a matter to be explained rather than something that would inform us how things stand in a given

²⁸⁰ The default position of a thesis of essential contestability is that there is a single concept that is contested, and affirming otherwise at least requires an additional argument, I think (14.2).

disagreement²⁸¹. The challenge is to bring the (unified) concept and the disagreement together without explaining the matter as an error or as a psychological tendency such as, for example, the proneness to remain "engagé" (Swanton 1985, 813). But since Gallie assumes that the valued achievement signified by the essentially contested concept is not reducible to any of its "exclusive" definitions (11.2), it now appears that the valued achievement constantly eludes the disputants' attempts to grasp it (see also Besson 2005, 72). Furthermore, in the inverse case in which parties agree on a common definition, the valued achievement would still slip from their grasp: the contingent fact of agreement would not make the definition adopted any less exclusive if the concept in question is essentially contested. Now nobody appears to be able to grasp the issue in question. Put this way, the accusations of radical relativism and skeptical nihilism start to seem more reasonable. It is not evident, though, that this makes Gallie's thesis particularly radical. The valued achievements like art, social justice, or even Christianity and democracy when they are understood in aspirational terms (cf. 11.3), may just be that hard to define once and for all, and a thesis of essential contestability simply reflects this fact.

²⁸¹ See *ART* (109, 113n12) and *PHU* (156, 171, 173, 176) for how Gallie speaks of 'definitions.' Strikingly, *ECC* does not contain any explicit mention of 'definition' in the relevant sense.

CHAPTER 14: THE GENUINENESS OF DISPUTE AND THE UNITY PROBLEM

In this last chapter of part three, I will examine the nature of disputes manifesting essential contestedness. I will start by offering a few general characterizations, but the specific focus is on finding out whether the kind of disagreement that Gallie describes is a genuine disagreement, or whether its origin lies in confusion (14.1). Rival parties might not, in fact, contest one and the same concept. In that case, persisting in claiming that one's use of a concept is better than others would amount to talking past each other. What reason do we have for presuming that the disputes revolve around one and the same concept? What kind of concept could stand as an object of contestation? What conceptual elements, if any, are contested or contestable? I call this knotty set of issues *the unity problem* (14.2).

I do not provide many final answers in this chapter as that is my objective in part four. In addition, most of the things that I have introduced in part three – concerning, for instance, the reasonableness of disputes and disputants' responses or how essentially contested concepts relate to broad human activities – come together only at the end of the fourth part when I articulate my preferred take on essential contestability. However, I am quite confident that at the end of the current chapter one should have an adequate grasp of Gallie's original thesis.

14.1 Genuineness of Gallie's disputes

Disagreements come in various shapes and sizes, and some disagreements are important, while others not so much. It is commonly thought that essential contestability is meant to involve disputes that have considerable practical or theoretical significance, and the thesis is most frequently applied to the kind of intractable social, moral, and political disputes in which the stakes are potentially very high. It is not always clear what grounds these assumptions other than Gallie's characterization that we are dealing with valued achievements. It is

possible that the weight of substance has led some to pay less attention to other significant disagreement-related aspects that are more formal.

The word ‘disagreement’ may apply to different things. In one sense, persons can be said to disagree when they are engaged in a dispute in which *one is actually denying what the other is asserting*. In another sense, persons could also be said to disagree when their beliefs, statements *et cetera* are in some sense *incompatible although there is no actual dispute going on* between the persons. (Cohnitz and Marques 2014, 2.) Which particular perspective is utilized in analyzing essential contestedness is consequential. In the first instance, at least nominal attention needs to be paid to the mutual relation of disputants as participants to a dispute. In the second instance, it might be possible to do away with the rival parties completely since their disagreement can be reduced to opposing claims, beliefs, and statements. In the former sense, disagreement can be approximated as an *activity* that people engage in while, in the latter sense, disagreement is considered as a *state* that obtains²⁸². Those who understand arguments as a structure of propositions can consider disagreements perfectly well as states while others, like Robert Fogelin, emphasize that an “argument is produced by the activity of arguing and arguing is something people do” (Fogelin 1985, 3).

There are good reasons for conceiving Gallie’s disputes as active rather than static: to be an essentially contested concept is *to be used* aggressively and defensively (7.1); the contestation is characterized as a *continuous* competition (9.1); Gallie even goes on to state that the fact that one has, and presumably *will continue to have*, opponents “is an essential feature of the activity one is pursuing” (ECC 192). Robert Grafstein (1988) understands essential contestability more generally as something that is opposed to “inert disagreement over definitions,” because the essential contestability of concepts reflects political struggles. The adversarial [and active] relation emerges when the distinction becomes politicized. (Grafstein 1988, 23.) Gallie himself, however, attaches far more importance to historical understanding and backward-looking perspective. For example, in *LOVERS* (11.2), the simple man comes to realize that various past attempts to use and define ART, exclusively, have led to the current *state* of affairs, or to the essential contestedness of the concept. The relevant sense of the state is that of an ongoing disagreement, but it is a state nevertheless, which lends a nuance to the active-static distinction. As I see it, essential contestability, in general, is most plausibly viewed as contestation that is not about mere differences of opinion or latent oppositions; instead, disagreement is ongoing

²⁸² The distinction between ‘state’ and ‘activity’ is borrowed from John MacFarlane’s *Assessment Sensitivity* (2014, 119) with minor modifications. MacFarlane himself credits Cappelen and Hawthorne (2009, 60–1) for the distinction. In general, theorists who employ ‘disagreement’ or ‘dispute’ do not always speak of the same things. Plunkett and Sundell, for example, reserve the term ‘dispute’ for activities and ‘disagreement’ for states (of rational conflict) (Plunkett and Sundell 2013b, 10). Partly because of the heterogeneity of the secondary literature on essential contestability, I have decided against adopting that or a similar sort of specialized usage.

even if not always actualized, and can always be localized to certain social, historical, or cultural circumstances.

Many commentators understand Gallie's thesis in particular, or a thesis of essential contestability in general, as advocating a sense of contestability that goes deep into the very center of the concept, for example "into the heart of conceptual meaning" (Besson 2005, 71) or "it is contestation at the core" (Waldron 2002, 149; see also Gray 1983, 95). Intractable controversy about terms like 'justice,' 'freedom,' and 'democracy' expresses disagreement that is "at once conceptual and substantive" (Gray 1977, 391), or conceptual, normative, and substantive (Besson 2005, 16, 71-2). The ensuing disagreement is not adequately resolvable by multiplying meanings (Ruben 2013, 33-34) or by recourse to stipulative or lexical definition (Gray 1978, 391). Samantha Besson underlines how pervasive a conceptual dispute we should expect by stating, with respect to JUSTICE, that the relevant type of disagreement is not only "over the *application* of the concept of justice or over its *limits*, but over the core *content* of justice itself and what makes a particular instance an application of the concept." These disagreements are "pivotal" and they "cannot simply be explained in terms of a mistake on criteria for the correct application of the concept." (Besson 2005, 70.) That kind of disagreement appears to be about both a concept's intension and its extension, which would indeed make it worthy of the appellation 'essential contestability.' The problem is that it is no longer clear (a) what provides a concept with a unitary identity if everything can be contested; or (b) how such a "concept" can be a focal point of a genuine dispute.

Gallie's strategy for dealing with the possibility of conceptual confusion is a curious one: in addition to listing additional conditions for essentially contested concepts (i.e., VI and VII), he attempts to convince the reader that the sort of dispute that he has in mind is genuine. Specifically, Gallie seeks to show that there are endless disputes "which are perfectly genuine" even if they are "not resolvable by argument of any kind." Gallie understands the genuineness of disputes to mean, positively, that they are "sustained by perfectly respectable arguments and evidence," and that they are "of such a character that the notions of evidence, cogency and rational persuasion can properly be applied to them." Negatively speaking, he explicitly denies that the possibility of obtaining (ultimate) universal agreement is a necessary criterion for the genuineness of arguments or disputes. Those urging for the criterion of universal agreement have either neglected the existence of essentially contested concepts or have failed "to examine in any detail the peculiar structures of the arguments to which their uses give rise." (ECC 169, 188-9; PHU 183.) The account of justified conversions comes closest to a detailed examination of such structures (see 11.4), and Gallie explicitly introduces it for establishing the genuineness of disputes.

However, establishing the reasonableness of changing one's mind does not yet amount to genuineness. Even though individual positions would be subject to rational force or assessment, the dispute itself may not necessarily be genuine or rational (Criley 2007, 41-2, see also 37ff; cf. 11.4; 13.2). This raises a suspicion that Gallie seeks to sidestep certain thorny issues by shifting the question, or he

simply misses other possible ways of understanding what is going on (cf. the Shared Meaning Task later). For all the talk of conceptual confusion, Gallie offers quite little in terms of guaranteeing the genuineness of *conceptual* disagreement; *a fortiori*, if one is not convinced that Conditions (VI) and (VII) can do their intended share in avoiding it (8.1; 9.2). The rationality and intelligibility of the *mode* in which disputants present their arguments and evidence in support of their case (13.1; 13.4) goes only so far *if* the disputants continue talking past each other.

Merely *apparent disagreement* can and should be distinguished from *genuine disagreement* (Cohnitz and Margues 2014, 2). The situations of talking past each other, miscommunications, conceptual confusions, and verbal disputes are merely apparent disagreements as far as essential contestability is concerned. These disagreements are, in principle, rationally resolvable by eliminating the conflict-inducing linguistic issues by bringing in more information concerning what is meant in a particular context (12.1); an option which is more or less rejected by Gallie (ECC 169) as well several commentators (e.g., Gray 1978, 391). It would be tempting to conclude that the fact that rival parties persist in disagreeing supports the understanding that their dispute is genuine; they would have already eliminated the linguistic issues that should be relatively easily resolvable. Yet the mere fact of dispute does not preclude error on their part and is not enough to banish the specter of confusion. In fact, not much can be gleaned from the mere absence or existence of a disagreement as that “does not establish anything about the existence of indeterminacies or vice versa”²⁸³ (Besson 2005, 65). That being said, if a disagreement in question is merely apparent, Gallie’s commentators have invariably taken it to preclude essential contestability of the issue under dispute. This underlines the close connection between the idea of essential contestability and a particular understanding concerning the nature of relevant disputes.

Differently named “types” of apparent disagreements are rather closely connected to one another. David Plunkett characterizes talking past each other as a case “where there is a dispute, but that dispute turns out not to actually express a disagreement, given the facts about how the speakers differ in what they mean by their words”²⁸⁴ (Plunkett 2015, 835–6) Per the definition, there does not appear to be much daylight between talking past each other and a verbal dispute (cf. 12.1). Andrew Mason (1993) presents a slightly different scenario that he calls “the ordinary conception of miscommunication,” i.e., “one person fails to communicate with another if she presents an argument with premises which the other doesn’t accept.” He also notes that the notion of miscommunication at work in the current instance “might provide a small part of the explanation for

²⁸³ The form of Besson’s argument is similar to the claim that one cannot derive/assume a concept’s contestability from its contestedness (cf. 12.2).

²⁸⁴ It should be noted that by ‘disagreement,’ Plunkett means “something that involves a kind of rational conflict in mental states (...) The paradigm case here is of two people holding rationally conflicting beliefs, such as, most straightforwardly, when one person believes a proposition that the other person believes the negation of.” (Plunkett 2015, 835–7.)

the intractability of moral and political disputes but it would be of limited interest." The miscommunication thesis does not threaten the idea behind essential contestedness, but it gives reason to view moral and political *terms* rather than *concepts* as essentially contested. (see Mason 1993, 93–6.)

If the considerations or judgments of one party are deemed totally irrelevant by the other party, it can thus be taken as a form of miscommunication when the parties end up disagreeing. Relatedly, Samantha Besson observes that nowadays it is very common to presume that "the possibility of agreement and disagreement does not only imply a pre-existing verbal understanding" but that "understanding itself implies not only *agreement in definitions*, but the possibility at least of *agreement in judgement*" (Besson 2005, 81–82; e.g., Gray 1978, 391). In one variant of this general position "in order to disagree about a concept, parties must at least share criteria about how to apply the concept thus implying the possibility of agreement" (Besson 2005, 82n88 citing Beiner 1983, 141). The idea that the premises of the argument should not be too different looks to be made of the same cloth. These are the sort of concerns that likely drove Gallie to require mutual appreciation of different criteria by the disagreeing parties (cf. 7.1: see also ch. 7 intro). Since it seems that the disputants that Gallie describes do not actually agree in judgments, at least not completely (cf. 6.2; 17.5), there is reason to rethink how stringent that requirement should actually be (e.g., cf. substantive disagreement later).

In the literature, what is entailed by contestation over a concept is rather often taken for granted, which makes it difficult to ascertain how the status of concepts as objects of contestation is understood by each author. William Connolly's characterization is a welcome exception: "When the disagreement does not simply reflect different readings of evidence within a fully shared system of concepts, we can say that a conceptual dispute has arisen" (Connolly 1993, 10). It is unclear to me how stringently Connolly himself understands the requirement of "fully shared system of concepts," as sharing concepts fully seems to leave no room whatsoever for disagreement. Given his other views, I suspect that he has a shared language as a common repository of meanings, or something similar, in mind instead. The point about different readings of evidence is more straightforward since it rules out factual disagreements or empirical oversights. In the same vein, if essential contestability came down to determining concepts' extensions or their applicability to the case at hand, the disagreements would not be about the concept (Rhodes 2000, 10–11). In contrast, the kind of disputes we are looking for do not turn on how facts are perceived in each situation, even if disputing parties were to be citing facts in support of their claims. A conceptual dispute could, however, involve judgments of whether the concept "fits" with the facts of the case, when rival parties are disagreeing *about the set of criteria* according to which that fit is determined, or the concept is applied. (see Criley 2007, 7–8.)

David Miller (1983) observes that concepts such as FREEDOM and DEMOCRACY that are used to make "political appraisals" involve dispute about what arrangements satisfy them, but it is not generally disagreement over the

results of *applying* an existing standard. In those cases, it is not easy to conclude that the dispute would not be both about the concept itself (e.g., its meaning) and how the (shared) concept should be applied. (Miller 1983, 39–42; cf. Criley 2007, 7–8; Besson 2005, 80–1.) Besson (2005) holds that disagreement about essentially contestable concepts cannot be identified either with purely conceptual or with purely normative and substantive disagreement. Conceptual disagreement “revolves around the broad meaning or delimitation of a concept” while normative disagreement is “disagreement about the actual application of normative concepts and the evaluations they imply.” (Besson 2005, 16, 47, 71.) Gallie does not appear to be much interested in disputes in which the concept’s applicability to actual objects or entities is contested, such as whether some actual government is democratic or not (see 11.3), even if essential contestedness may also manifest in disputes that appear as such²⁸⁵. The essential contestedness goes deeper.

There looks to be two distinct ways a concept could figure in a genuine conceptual dispute: as an object of a dispute, or as involved in a dispute. Wibren van der Burg remarks similarly that “the debate may be both at the general level of the concept itself or merely at the level of implications,” and that in the latter case “the concept [of X] is only indirectly or implicitly contested” (van der Burg 2017, 239n40). When a concept is the *object* of a dispute, the dispute is about what things fall within the concept’s purview/extension, or how the concept’s intension should be formed, or its characteristics organized. A claim that a concept needs to be disaggregated or disambiguated is an example of the latter, as are disputes that can be characterized as definitional— e.g., what characteristics a concept has or how it is linked to adjacent concepts. When a concept is *involved in* a dispute, the dispute can be explicitly about how the concept is understood or applied *or* the concept may be present without necessarily being the main topic. The talk of essential contestedness might require, though, that the conflict in question has its roots or otherwise is essentially affected by disagreement on how disputing parties understand the concept. A wider variety of disputes is now allowed, including those in which the primary dispute is substantive but resolving it satisfactorily is not possible without resolving some conceptual issues as well. These disputes are often messier than the ones involving explicit conceptual claims only.

Samantha Besson (2005) distinguishes between three main sources or layers of potential reasonable disagreements: the *verbal* or semantic level, the *conceptual* level, and the *normative* level²⁸⁶. According to her, “agreement on the terms of a

²⁸⁵ Consider also Morris Weitz’s summary of Gallie’s argument: “There are certain uses of certain concepts, best revealed in argument and disagreement which may remain ultimately unresolvable, that can be explained only by the presence of an essentially contested concept (...) Disputes about why or whether x is a work of art, or y is a democracy, or z is a Christian life, or what art, democracy or a Christian life really is, revolve around essentially contested concepts” (Weitz 1972, 102). The keywords are ‘presence’ and ‘revolve around’ instead of assuming that the dispute is strictly about application as such.

²⁸⁶ Besson makes the distinction in the context of discussing the possibilities for reasonable disagreements concerning justice in general, and the justice of a legal rule more specifically.

concept is a prerequisite for further conceptual or normative agreement or disagreement." However, a misunderstanding concerning "concept-words" does not constitute disagreement, strictly speaking; instead, it "is merely a lack of agreement about which concept people are using and not of agreement about the concept itself despite the appearance." (Besson 2005, 47–8.) Besson claims, however, that in disagreeing about justice there is usually not a verbal misunderstanding involved in that rival parties would be referring to different concepts:

It would be unacceptably superficial therefore to gloss such cases by claiming that our opponents are refusing to speak our language, for we usually have no difficulty understanding that contesting claims of justice actually raise questions of justice; they are *right* claims of justice even though they might not be *right*. Besson 2005, 75

This exhibits a right sort of sentiment, I think. It would certainly be poor form to regularly gloss over vital issues simply on terminological grounds. More importantly, a philosopher could insist that those who cry for freedom, yet are unable to distinguish properly between positive, negative, and social freedom, are confused when they talk about freedom. But that would surely be foolish if not outright absurd in everyday life as we seem to have no problem in identifying many instances of "cry for freedom" as demands for justice in normal contexts. We know this, and still the question persists exactly why there would not be a need for conceptual disambiguation, if there appear to be good grounds for it due to presumed differences in meanings that are attributed to words/terms. Besson herself prefers to dissociate a minimal understanding of a concept that is shared by all contestants, thus enabling further debate on the topic and full understandings that remain essentially contestable (Besson 2005, 82ff; see 17.4).

To mention one interesting option, Susan Hurley (1989) proposes that essentially contested concepts *characteristically, and not only conceivably*, admit of substantive disagreement. There is no clearly fixed boundary between conceptual and substantive differences of opinion with respect to contested applications. Since the "[e]xtent of agreement or disagreement in form of life is signaled by a variety of uses," the concepts' incontestability, conceivable contestability, or essential contestedness can be determined in relation to how much agreement there is in form of life. In other words, "the distinction between conceptual and substantive difference is drawn by reference to practices." For instance, in discussing uncontested concepts like ADDING 1 TO 4 or REDNESS, Hurley remarks that "complete agreement in application characterizes agreement in form of life." She further notes that, with respect to these cases, they do not admit substantive disagreement: "the sense in which the practice "speaks for itself" in enabling us to distinguish conceptual from substantive difference is clear: no persistent substantive difference, or mistake, is possible; persistent differences must be conceptual." (Hurley 1989, 45–8.) In this picture, complete enough agreement in form of life could be taken to explain the contrivedness of the case in which we would doubt our conceptual capability to recognize justice-claims in normal contexts while any genuine disagreement would involve

altogether different concepts. The problem is that we are not always certain whether there actually is sufficiently complete agreement in form of life, and the absence of a clearly fixed boundary between conceptual and substantive differences contributes, plausibly, to the intractability of certain disagreements. But it seems that this could also introduce a sense of stability to the dispute: whenever it appears that disputants have drastically different views, they could try to find a common ground by checking how others understand things on *either* a conceptual *or* substantive side of the argument. By going back and forth they may be able to better approximate where the real disagreement between them lies, and how far it goes²⁸⁷.

It is often maintained that disagreements centrally about/involving evaluative or normative words or terms can be genuine only when the meaning of the relevant words and terms is shared by the disputants. If Halvar is arguing that the Sharpshooters are good at bowling, and Benny is denying it, then in order to rationally disagree they need to share the meaning of 'good'; otherwise they are just talking past each other because their conflict arises from their different ideas of 'good.' In the latter case they can both be right at the same time, and thus there is no real disagreement²⁸⁸. *On this basis*, it is tempting to argue that the fact that a communicative exchange, or a dispute, is a genuine disagreement also necessarily means that speakers/disputants mean the same things by the words they use. *If* Halvar and Benny do share the meaning of 'good,' but they disagree nevertheless, their disagreement can easily be both substantive and genuine; perhaps they subscribe to different moral theories which would explain their conflict.

An argument in which semantic conclusions are drawn on the basis of how we intuitively understand meaning to function in disagreement involving normative words/terms is a type of argument from disagreement²⁸⁹ (Plunkett and Sundell 2013b). Plunkett and Sundell (*ibid.*) identify a project common to many philosophers who work on the semantics of normative and evaluative

²⁸⁷ I think that many arguments in which people are actually interested in what their opposition says go like this. "So what do you think is just? But would you not agree that X is just? So, does that mean that you think justice involves Y? But does that exclude Z as unjust?" and so forth.

²⁸⁸ The contextualist explanation of disagreement is perhaps the most common regarding disagreements of taste: people presumably have subjective taste so by 'good' they simply mean different things. The clear downside is that this loses the element of disagreement because different propositions are affirmed or denied.

²⁸⁹ Plunkett and Sundell discuss the matter in length, and my brief example of Halvar and Benny follows their lead, roughly. See also for their analysis of Hare's (1963/1952, §9.4) famous example of cannibals and a missionary that Hare presents in *The Language of Morals* (Plunkett and Sundell 2013b, 1-3). The point of Hare's example is that some clear cases of moral disagreement could not be identified as moral disagreements if the meanings of evaluative words were primarily descriptive. The cannibals and the missionary have different standards for calling a person 'good.' For the cannibals, 'bold and burley and collect more scalps than average,' while the missionary applies 'good' to 'meek and gentle and do not collect large quantities of scalps.' If they now aim to describe or represent the world with their judgments while using 'good,' we must hold that they mean and refer to different things. They thus talk past each other. (Rowland 2021, 70-2.)

terms, or *Shared Meaning Task*. Its general purpose is to elucidate “how people with very different substantive views about the extension of a term (...) could nonetheless be genuinely disagreeing with each other when they have a dispute couched partly in those terms.” It often amounts to “figuring out a meaning of the term that could be shared by all parties to those disputes” and that, “despite the systematic variation in usage, allows for the conceptual coherence of their respective views of what falls into the extension of the term.” (Plunkett and Sundell 2013b, 25.)

The assumption of shared linguistic meaning as something that is necessary for the genuineness of disputes may be a mistake, though. That is because the stability of the subject matter may have nothing to do with “with the linguistic question of whether competing claims about that subject happen to be communicated semantically or pragmatically” (Plunkett and Sundell 2013b, 13). In general, engaging in an argumentative exchange “presupposes a background of shared commitments” which can guide or steer the discussion, although they are not the subject of it (Fogelin 1985, 3–4). One can easily imagine argumentative exchanges that are opaque to outsiders since what is literally said does not appear to make sense while the disputants themselves are aware of what is going on. In those cases, sticking solely to literal statements and their propositions is not enough to understand what is communicated, and thus sharing the meaning of terms that figure in those propositions is not crucial for the genuineness of the dispute. This is the salient point that we need to take with us from the case of Halvar and Benny.

Gallie appears to adopt the basic premise of the *Shared Meaning Task* without much fanfare. The clearest reference to it is found in Gallie’s discussion concerning the possibility of conceptual confusion, i.e., when the imaginary dissident objects that there does not appear to be any real ground for maintaining that the term/concept in question “has a *single* meaning, that could be contested” (ECC 175/PHU 164; emphasis by Gallie). Gallie responds by contending, in terms of *Artificial*, that one team would not be referred as “the champions” if the disputants did not believe that the teams were playing the same game, and thus “[t]he context of any typical use of ‘the champions’ shows that it has thus far a single meaning as between its different (contestant) users”²⁹⁰ (ibid.). Gallie goes on to acknowledge that the concept-users might still be mistaken, yet it still seems that Gallie understands the sharing of meaning as a precondition for the kind of genuine contests that he has in mind. Mason observes that Gallie fails to appreciate that “[t]here may be something [genuinely] at issue between two people who disagree over the proper use of a term, even if it does not express the same concept for each of them” (Mason 1993, 85). What Plunkett and Sundell describe, above, as taking place instead is certainly a live possibility for Gallie as

²⁹⁰ Michael Rhodes holds that this move is “unacceptable,” since one should not respond to the charge of ambiguity with “an empirical account of how contestants can be said to be playing at the same game” (Rhodes 2000, 14). From a certain linguistic-philosophical or logical perspective, it indeed does seem that Gallie is mixing the intensional and extensional contexts with each other. Another possibility to consider is that it illustrates an attempt to extend the theoretical focus from semantics to pragmatics.

well (see also 15.2). However, Gallie also states that “the importance of men’s differences over the meanings of democracy and social justice cannot be waived aside by a stroke of the ‘meta-ethicist’s’ pen”²⁹¹ (PHU 191). Now Gallie appears to be affirming *both* that there should be a single meaning in order to have a genuine dispute *and* that the disputes over two of his live examples involve multiple meanings. The question becomes: how do the multiple meanings fit in with the univocality of a concept?

We have now arrived at a crossroads in terms of how Gallie is to be interpreted. One might conclude that, by plural form ‘meanings,’ Gallie is actually referring to different conceptions or various more specific variants of a concept that are to be separated from a core concept and its shared meaning. According to Pritam Baruah, “The relevance of Gallie’s account rests on its twin claims of explaining the phenomenon of a single concept having differing conceptions and in explaining why there exists genuine persistent disagreement about certain concepts” (Baruah 2014, 330). Alternatively, perhaps Gallie aims to illustrate how meanings come together in a process of contestation, in which their mutual ambiguity is somehow subsumed or “transcended” under the rubric of a single contested concept despite the ongoing disagreement. In both cases, the relevant philosophical insight, or “enlightenment of a much needed kind” (ECC 168), would be captured by positing a *certain kind of concept* that is able to encompass what appears to be mutual contestation over it²⁹²—to be mutually contested is the concept’s standard general use after all (11.3). For the sake of theoretical housekeeping, I will call the first approach *the concept/conception approach* while the second approach is named as *the unifying process approach*. I will end up favoring a version of the latter approach (18.5), but many have understood the matter in terms of the former (see esp. 17.3). Be that as it may, it has not yet been established conclusively that the best account of disputes that allegedly manifest essential contestedness is that the disputants simply employ different, although perhaps semantically similar, concepts rather than contest a single concept. Here we have the makings of *the unity problem*, to which I will turn next.

²⁹¹ In the current paragraph that is located at the very end of *PHU*, Gallie also problematizes the universalizability criterion (see also ECC 195). He views the universality criterion suspect because one either considers personal adherences as part of an “in a similar situation” judgment, in which case the universality criterion is trivial, or, if that is not the case, the criterion becomes inapplicable in “a great many important issues.” I am not going to address the issue of universalizability (conditions) of ethics and/or practical judgments in the current study.

²⁹² This is very close to what Ronald Dworkin, who is familiar with Gallie, seems to have in mind when he posits an interpretive concept (Dworkin 2011, ch. 8; see also Plunkett and Sundell 2013a, esp. 246). For the conception of interpretive concept, see 16.4 (see also 18.3).

14.2 The unity problem

To have a genuine dispute all rival parties are required to disagree about the same thing, otherwise they are just talking past each other. Yet concepts do not seem to be the kind of entities that can easily serve as an object of contestation. In principle, there are infinite number of ways to conceptualize both concrete and abstract things, and it could be further thought that each and every difference, however minor, can be understood as marking a difference between different concepts. She has her concept, he has his, and never the twain shall meet... as the shared object of a genuine dispute. The unity problem is concerned with the unity of the concept which is essentially contested/contestable, or how a single shared concept can become contested to begin with.

The possibility of conceptual confusion is a basic objection to essential contestability (Stokes 2007, 690; also esp. Gray 1978, 391), and it stands as the main motivator behind the attention paid to conceptual unity. In part four, I will present the unity problem in the form of two challenges to what I call the concept-centered thesis of essential contestability. However, essential contestability is not always conceived in such terms, and the specificity of the unity problem springs from the way in which the elements of the problem and its conceivable resolution are theoretically framed in a given thesis²⁹³. In the current section, I discuss how Gallie and several of his commentators cover the matter, each of whom views the solution and perhaps even the problem in slightly different ways.

The unity problem in Gallie is addressed in two different ways. The first solution is the justification of the continued use of a concept that Gallie views as a matter of distinguishing essentially contested concepts from those concepts that are radically confused (esp. chs. 8, 9). A part of it is what I call 'situational justification': the disputants may mutually understand themselves as contributing to the same valued achievement through contestation, and hence contesting the issue aggressively and defensively is now justified from the standpoint of the disputants (9.1). Nonetheless, motivation to contest the matter in a certain way does not guarantee that the dispute involves a single unified concept. As the notion of the original exemplar is problematic (8.2), and the account of justified conversions does not appear to go much beyond a mutual agreement that some set of concerns is relevant without a straightforward stipulation (cf. 11.4), Gallie's answer on this front does not offer a respite from the unity problem.

²⁹³ The unity problem could turn out to be a complete non-issue for some theses of essential contestability. Some view an essential contestability thesis primarily as a framework for conceptual analysis rather than a statement that defines a certain group of contested concepts (e.g., Ehrenberg 2011; Collier et al. 2006, 212, 216). In some interpretations it is not clear whether there is a shared concept at all: consider, for example, a remark that ambiguity is a cornerstone of essentially contested concepts (Gautier 2019, 124). Furthermore, if a thesis of essential contestability is understood as an ideal typical sketch, or Conditions as ideal-typical, (van der Burg 2017, 240n49, 254n97) there is no actual instance of an essentially contested concept that would fit perfectly with the otherwise chimerical theoretical notion.

The second possible solution to the unity problem can perhaps be located in an explanation of how initial ambiguity between different descriptions of a valued achievement is transformed into eventual unity in the form of a single concept (ECC 172n1; see esp. 7.1; 12.1; see also later). It is commonly assumed that at stake in Gallie's essential contestedness is *a* concept, not several distinct concepts (e.g., Gellner 1974, 95; Kekes 1977, 73; Swanton, 1985, 811; Ingram, 1985, 42; Ruben 2010, 259). Not all scholars share this view²⁹⁴, nevertheless, to resolve the current issue satisfactorily one is required to illustrate how a concept can accommodate contestation within itself and what kind of a concept is centrally involved in disputes that have the hallmarks of essential contestability. The negative answer is that there is no such concept, or that what is called essential contestation could only take place between different concepts (see 15.1; 15.2).

Many commentators treat the avoidance of conceptual confusions and the unity of concept together, although the specifics vary. Wibren van der Burg (2017) distinguishes between these two aspects explicitly: "Gallie introduces [Condition (VI)] for two reasons: to provide a contested concept with a certain unity, and to distinguish it from radically confused concepts"²⁹⁵ (Van der Burg 2017, 240). That (VI) would have a "bonding function" is also surmised by Ruth Abbey who considers (VI), or something having the same role, as "necessary to explain why the divergent meanings of an essentially contested concept should be considered as variations upon a single concept rather than as different ones" (Abbey 2005, 468).

Mark Criley (2007), who himself analyzes contested concepts more generally in terms of their competing conceptions²⁹⁶, describes what takes place in terms of equivocation. Like many others, he considers Gallie as contending that the presence of authoritative exemplars provides enough basis for answering

²⁹⁴ Some locate concepts in terms of wider conceptual relations or constellations (Connolly 1993; Freedman 1996), and there also those who appear to understand essential contestability to admit disputes about multiple concepts (e.g., Garver 1990, 258; Syrjämäki 2011, 172; Gautier 2019, 123). Eugene Garver (1990) denies altogether the presumption that the idea of essentially contested concepts "would come equipped with anything resembling a demarcation criterion to determine which concepts are essentially contested and which are not." A concept's status as essentially contested depends on the argument, not on the concept itself. That is a matter for partisans, not theorists, to decide. (Garver 1990, 258; see also 17.3.)

²⁹⁵ Van der Burg continues that the "unity of the concept may partly be found in Connolly's idea of cluster concepts." [see 17.5]. Other things he considers viable are: Waldron's idea of a solution-concept (see later); referring to a generally accepted formulation of the fundamental idea; referring to some common minimum elements; or a combination of the last two. (van der Burg 2017, 240.) Of the latter two, one could mention John Kekes's view (Kekes 1977) as an example along with Samantha Besson's conception that combines them in the form of "minimal understanding" (Besson 2005).

²⁹⁶ Criley sets four conditions for contested concepts, the first of which is "The Univocality Condition," i.e., "A contested concept is a single concept, used univocally across a community over time, rather than a collection of several distinct or shifting concepts." It is noteworthy that "this condition insists upon both synchronic and diachronic univocality." The other three conditions are the indeterminacy condition, the conception condition, and the competition condition. (Criley 2007, 8–12.) These are not offered as a direct interpretation of Gallie's original concerns, although Criley comments extensively on Gallie's thesis as well.

the objection that one is dealing with conceptual confusion. However, Criley is not convinced that (VI) is able to guarantee the univocity. He lists different possibilities concerning how an exemplar for a concept could be considered not only minimally authoritative, as Gallie is content to leave the matter, but robustly so: the status of the exemplar is considered “unimpeachable and indefeasible” as an instance of the concept; it cannot be reasonably denied that that the exemplar is an instance of the concept; the exemplar is necessarily a perfect or superlative exemplar in terms of its gradable quality; the concept was (originally) introduced through a reference-fixing baptism exercised upon the exemplar; and, resemblance or similarity to the exemplar is constitutive of what it is to be the concept. Criley points out that even if we would assume that the original exemplar would have all these features, it would not still “provide sufficient grounds for showing that the parties are engaged in a dispute over the same concept.” (Criley 2007, 27–8, 30.) The simple reason for this is that any authoritative exemplar can serve as an exemplar for a(ny) number of concepts, not just one. To illustrate this, let us set The Sharpshooters, The Speed Demons, and The Curve Kings, and their original exemplar, The Bowlers (or see 3.3), as a backdrop for the present criticism. Criley’s acute observation can be rephrased as follows: if The Bowlers is the authoritative instance of how to play the game in terms of accuracy, speed, and swerve, it can certainly serve as an exemplar to ACCURACY-BOWLING, SPEED-BOWLING, and SWERVE-BOWLING, and not just to BOWLING²⁹⁷.

Interestingly, Criley further observes that there is considerable merit in Gallie’s first (i.e., ECC 175), or easy, answer to the objection of conceptual confusion²⁹⁸, although Criley would modify it to require that “parties to the dispute are *committed* to employing a single concept in common.” Nevertheless, he does not think that this course is available to Gallie in the end. What would be needed is “to give weight to other parties’ convictions” concerning the concept, and a concept user’s own deliberation about correctness “must involve some measure of deference or accommodation of prior patterns of use and judgments of others whom they take to be employing the same concept but with whom they disagree.” (Criley 2007, 32.) This underlines the social or communal aspect of essential contestability which can be gleaned from Gallie’s original thesis – as I have done previously – but I think Criley somewhat underestimates the fecundity of Gallie’s writings in this respect. Moreover, the need to agree at some level, as a foundation for a disagreement that takes place possibly at a different level, is a more general concern which is often voiced in this context (e.g., Miller 1983, 42; Besson 2005, 84).

Michael Stokes and Tullio Viola also point toward the (original) exemplar(s) or tradition as the key elements in determining whether one deals with a

²⁹⁷ By this I do not mean to say that the contested concept in *Artificial* is BOWLING (see 11.1 for reason). I merely use the example to clarify what Criley is after rather than to shed light on the artificial example itself.

²⁹⁸ The simple answer Criley means is close to the situational justification before, but there is more to it (cf. later in this section).

contested concept with a unitary character, and their specific views contain elements that render them partly resistant to Criley's criticism. Stokes emphasizes that various conceptions of a contested concept are all "attempts to interpret the exemplar or tradition and use it to determine what adherence to the tradition requires of us now" (Stokes 2007, 694). If such a unifying exemplar or tradition is lacking, we have a confused concept at hand²⁹⁹. That way one's situatedness in relation to a tradition and its demands looks to be decisive, and tradition/exemplar has a dual role in unifying disputes as well as providing (part of) their substance. However, stating that essential contestability takes place against the backdrop that affords enough unity to what is debated is not much of an explanation since we are interested in the exact way it supposedly happens. Here the kind of externalist perspective on semantics that was previously suggested by Criley could be more helpful: the attempt to interpret a tradition is not enough while deferring to the usage of a (linguistic/value) community or to shared commitments of a tradition already suggests how different uses may converge toward at least a partly shared concept. Which views or ways to employ the concept should be considered authoritative is, of course, often precisely at issue (see e.g., *LOVERS* in 11.2), but the communal or traditional norms can at least provide the boundaries within which disagreements are carried out.

Viola's (2019, 247–8, 250) proposal is similar to Stokes's but Viola also considers (VII) significant in this context. Discriminating between different conceptions of contested concepts is enabled by virtue of interpreting historical examples or exemplars differently, the examples that are occasioned by "inherently vague" traditions. In Viola's Peircean reading of Gallie, more weight is nevertheless placed on vague signs and their meanings (cf. 2.4). Vague signs have an ability "to single out with relative accuracy the object to which they refer, even though they are still unable to characterize it with precision." Together with (IV), this may contribute to explaining why essentially contested concepts involve "both agreement on what we are talking about when we employ them, and disagreement on how exactly we are to characterize their meaning." The agreement is enabled by "an original exemplar that provides an unambiguous anchoring to their meaning," and the meanings are articulated "on the basis of their faithfulness to some examples coming from the past." All in all, Viola thinks that the unity is conferred on a concept by virtue of all contesting parties referring to the same historical exemplars/examples. Without a sufficient emphasis on a shared tradition or communal commitments, Viola's position is susceptible to the criticism that historical exemplars cannot fulfill that role. In addition, in its ordinary sense, vagueness tends to bring about borderline or cut-off point disagreements, and disputes on essentially contested concepts would be confined to a pre-existing continuum governed by a standard. That is no hindrance were one to assume that the problem at hand were akin to a scientific measurement issue, in which case an eventual agreement would be achievable at

²⁹⁹ Stokes attributes this to both Gallie and Dworkin (see also 18.3).

least in principle³⁰⁰. But it does fit ill with the basic idea of essential contestability that does not expect such agreement; quite on the contrary.

In any case, vagueness does appear to have a role in Gallie's essential contestedness (12.1), which may guide us also regarding an underlying design of essentially contested concepts, but it needs to be understood in somewhat atypical manner. A characteristic feature of vagueness is that a linguistic community is undecided about how to determine the matter at hand, exactly. They still understand what others are after when they come to different conclusions because they share a common meaning of the concept as a way to tackle with a range of determinations that find their place on a shared scale or continuum. Essential contestability is an area of choice, uncertainty and commitment that remains when all arguments have been adduced (Gray 1978, 387; 13.2). Regarding a given concept-use, there are those who are practically certain that it is the use to be preferred, those that are wavering in their views while leaning this or that way, and those who are practically certain that it is the wrong use while their own preferred use is the correct one. The trichotomy resembles the tripartite division of vague cases to (1) clearly something; (2) clearly not-something; and (3) hard cases or borderline cases in which it is reasonable to say that it is one or the other (see Waldron 1994, 520–1).

Now, as Jeremy Waldron contends, "True vagueness arises when there is hesitation or uncertainty about how to establish these three categories or where there is a general uncertainty about whether a given case is a borderline case or not" (Waldron 1994, 521; see also 12.1). In the case of essentially contested concepts, a similar uncertainty covers each case of concept-use, which means that none of them can be clearly and uncontestably placed in one of the three categories above from the perspective of the undecided community. At the same time, it is assumed that the community validates those uses as proper ways to employ the concept – disputants form a community/society of sorts by virtue of mutually appreciating how others are employing the concept (7.1) – and hence we come close to what Waldron terms as 'true vagueness.' Traditions could thus be "inherently vague" (Viola above) in that transitions from one preferred use to another may take place against a background of a set of considerations or assumptions that are considered reasonable by the disputants, and which together form a complex standard which vaguely sanctions how various uses are differentiated on a continuum that is vaguely unified. Gallie's assumption that arguments and evidence have a comparable logical force upon how they affect the disputants is near nonsensical without presuming something like a flowing continuum between positions³⁰¹. Why even assume that there is such a common scale available when rival parties evaluate the matter from their own, possibly

³⁰⁰ It cannot be overruled that the idea of optimum is a residual of Gallie's Peircean influence (cf. 2.4), and that leads him to assume that various conceptions of essentially contested concepts converge towards an improved, although not necessarily completely conflict-free, category or concept. But what kind of category or concept would a conflicted category or concept be?

³⁰¹ I have already stated my reservations concerning both the comparability of the logical force and the distance between the contested uses in 11.4.

very different, particular appraisive situations? This could be the reason why, i.e., much in the same way as vague concepts presume a common standard, *the combined employment* of an essentially contested concept does so as well when it is understood as constituting *a single concept* (cf. later in this section).

Jeremy Waldron (2002) suspects that continuing to refer to the exemplar's achievement might be too constricting as regards what bestows unity to a contested concept. At least some essentially contested concepts could be considered solution-concepts instead. On this account, *RULE OF LAW* is the "the concept of a solution to a problem we're not sure how to solve" while competing conceptions are rival proposals for either solving it or "for doing the best we can in this regard given that the problem is insoluble." (Waldron 2002, 158.) John Kekes (1977) states that people are confronted and need to cope with very general problem-areas, one of which "yields goals having to do with politics, morality, the law, manners, and mores." The rival parties share the need and the goal, but they are divided on how to respond in the best possible way. (Kekes 1977, 78; cf. 12.4.) Kenneth Smith appears to have something similar in mind when he views "mutually contested concepts" as a part of "the same general set of concepts" that is concerned with "the same general problem." (Smith 2002, 335, 340-1.) Overall, the idea of a solution-concept illustrates that there might be different ways to distinguish essentially contested concepts from those that are merely confused (van der Burg 2017, 240). The contestation over a concept can now be viewed as a continuous process of seeking a solution to a shared problem or challenge, which shares elements with Gallie's situational justification of the continued use (9.1). The solution-aspect of a concept could be considered as its practical or animating point (18.2), depending on the actual intentions of the disputants. Sometimes it may be difficult to tell whether conflicting uses are actually answers to a shared problem (cf. e.g., Gautier 2019³⁰²). A point-based explanation or analysis might help either in distinguishing otherwise very closely related concepts or by combining superficially different word usages under the rubric of one concept.

It could be further argued that essentially contested concepts are solutions to problems that arise in form of life, within broad human activities, or in a broad domain of social life. That would explain an impression of how certain (type of) concepts seem to "demand" of us an answer to a problem to which they also

³⁰² Arthur Gautier (2019) discusses contestation over *PHILANTHROPY* and *CHARITY* and the related conceptualizations in 1712–1914 France. Although the author does not appear to consider it a problem, it is difficult to tell whether there is enough unity between contesting uses of 'philanthropy' and 'charity' by the contestants for one to speak of a genuine conceptual contestation over the same or unified concept, *PHILANTHROPY*, the concept the author claims is essentially contested. Of course, it is possible to posit such a concept as a part of a historical narrative, and/or from an external perspective (13.2), but that would not justify disregarding how the disputants themselves most likely view the issue, or the problem, at hand. A heated dispute involving a set of related words is normally not enough (yet compare with identifying structural patterns of term-use in 16.3), but the case would be much stronger if that variety in the usage could be explicitly framed as revolving around a common problem.

appear to be the answer³⁰³. Kekes sees here the key for distinguishing essentially contested concepts from radically confused ones: the argument between disputants is “an essential contest” when they “agree about the general description of the domain they are contesting, and if they share the problem the solution of which prompts the debate”³⁰⁴ (Kekes 1977, 84). This is a promising way to be reasonably sure of the sameness of topic across different uses of presumably the same concept. The requirement that the problem and its general setting are shared or agreed upon is not a trivial requirement by any means: it is easy to conceive how this could become an issue across different cultural contexts or when attempting to assess the sameness of topic diachronically. The thing is, though, that the sameness of topic does not necessarily amount to using the same concept, only that the dispute is genuine in that respect.

Concerning the second way to address the unity problem in Gallie, i.e., the move from initial ambiguity to a single contested concept, the landscape is almost completely barren as far as the secondary literature is concerned. Practically nobody has tackled the matter head-on, or if that has been the intention, the contribution has been much in line with what I have already presented. Conditions (III) and (V) (5.1; 7.1) are the most pertinent here, and they illustrate an often-overlooked facet of Gallie’s thesis. As part of the formulation of (III), Gallie asserts that an achievement accredited by a concept is “initially variously describable.” The re-written (III), however, states that “any essentially contested concept is liable initially to be *ambiguous*,” because disputants may apply the concept while having different descriptions of the accredited achievement in mind. This is immediately qualified by a statement that “initial ambiguity must be considered in conjunction with condition (V),” and it is noteworthy that Gallie emphasizes the word ‘initial’ here as well. (ECC 172, n1.) Unfortunately, Gallie does not return to this issue explicitly at any point in *ECC* or in the revised *PHU*-version. What follows is my explanatory reconstruction of what Gallie could have had in mind presented mostly in his own terms.

Gallie’s first, or “easy,” response to the possibility of conceptual confusion is stated in the terms of *Artificial*: “no one would conceivably refer to one team among others as ‘the champions’ unless he believed his team to be playing better than all the others *at the same game*”³⁰⁵ (ECC 175/*PHU* 164). In *PHU*, Gallie clarifies why he sees (III) as a necessary condition by basically reiterating the

³⁰³ This does not have to mean that the problem-element and the demand-element (etc.) are encoded some way in the concept/term, only that those concepts have a certain role or function in our current way of life in respect of its practical requirements. This role or function can thus be located in the pragmatic context in which the concept/term is employed to make sense of those requirements.

³⁰⁴ Kekes has also some other very specific conditions for essentially contested concepts which most commentators would probably view as too limiting (see Kekes 1977).

³⁰⁵ Gerald Gaus observes that “One of the characteristics of most games is that those with whom we are playing also understand themselves to be playing the game. The players have a shared understanding of the rules and similar expectations about what sort of responses are appropriate and which are not” (Gaus 2000, 16.) Gallie’s response appeals to this common characteristic of games, at least rhetorically.

requirement of mutual appreciation of different criteria that belongs to (V), the fact which underlines that Gallie took these two Conditions as working in tandem. Combined with the possibility of weighting the criteria differently, this suggests that “when play began on the first morning of the first day—how supporters would group themselves around different factors would have been anyone's guess” (PHU 162). If Gallie means to say that without proceeding to contest the concept, or “playing the game,” we have no concrete idea of how each side applies the concept in practice, it is not very remarkable.

For another way of understanding what is going on, let us first recall a part of Condition (III), i.e., “prior to experimentation there is nothing absurd or contradictory in any one of a number of possible rival descriptions of [the valued achievement's] total worth” (ECC 172/PHU 161). Gallie now seems to say that, lacking comparison of their judgments, people can conceptualize a valued achievement as they please. Everyone has their own preferred description in mind, but until they are compared critically, there is nothing more to that. This is the initial stage, or the first stage, that precedes actual contestation, and it must be distinguished from the second stage, or “the experimentation stage,” in which rival parties present and consider the arguments and evidence while they advocate for their own view or concept-use (see also 5.1).

If there is ambiguity involved in the initial stage, as Gallie clearly states, there are also multiple concepts or distinct conceptual contents without real unity³⁰⁶. The present task is to understand how Condition (V) helps in overcoming that. It has gone unappreciated in the secondary literature, but Gallie strongly implies that Condition (V) transcends or transforms the initial ambiguity of different descriptions (of the component parts) and presumably enables a genuine dispute involving a single concept (cf. 12.1; 14.1; 18.1). In the initial stage, different concept-uses or conceptual contents come into conflict with each other, uses which have different “functions” for their users (ECC 169/PHU 157) and which thereby could be applications of distinct concepts. In the second stage, the combined employment of possibly different concepts is considered to form a totality, a single concept. The formation of an essentially contested concept can thus be understood as a process in which different initially incompatible descriptions (of component parts) of a valued achievement are combined, and by virtue of being combined transformed, into a single concept that is vague in Gallie's technical sense (see also 12.1). Initially distinct conceptual contents are now ranked against each other on the same evaluative continuum (cf. before). It is only in this second stage, the stage of contesting the concept by ranking its different aspects, that one can properly speak of an essentially contested concept.

I think my discussion in this chapter finally explains what has been called Gallie's “confusing use of ‘ambiguity’ in describing his own position” (Ruben 2010, 2010). But since Gallie fails to articulate the distinction between the two

³⁰⁶ The re-written Condition (III) states that “any essentially contested concept is liable initially to be *ambiguous*” (ECC 172n1; or see 5.1), but that is either a mistake or a turn of phrase/a term of art on Gallie's part: there are no ambiguous concepts as ambiguity is attached only to words and expressions (12.1).

stages, the above sort of movement between the stages and what it suggests is typically presented in metaphorical terms or not noticed at all. An additional clue for the need to make the current distinctions is provided by Gallie when he refers to the standard general use (11.3). The standard general use itself consists of mutually contesting and contested uses of the concept, and it can be more straightforwardly understood as the combined employment of the concept. Now there is no going around it: that combined employment of the concept *is* the essentially contested concept understood as one totality or whole. However, grasping essentially contested concepts as consisting of different uses does not depend on viewing them as “vague” in the present sense. Nevertheless, the kind of contestability of which Waldron speaks as one form of indeterminacy in addition to ambiguity and vagueness is a good complement to this view (Waldron 1994; or see 12.2), and I will later argue for a similar scheme myself (see 18.5).

There are a couple of commentators who have viewed the question of the unity of essentially contested concepts in somewhat similar terms to what I have presented as Gallie’s solution (as obscure as Gallie makes it). Susan Hurley connects Condition (V) with the avoidance of conceptual confusion explicitly, while (V) and (VI) refer to (some of the possible) “practices that contribute to agreement in form of life” (Hurley 1989, 47; *pro* Baruah 2014, 348–9). In a less Wittgensteinian fashion³⁰⁷, Ernest Gellner characterizes essentially contested concepts by pointing out that the concept-users recognize that “the relative importance of the various criteria is itself unsettled and open to dispute (...) and is held by them to be compatible with the admission that what is at stake is *one* concept, variously interpreted, rather than simply a multiplicity of overlapping concepts” (Gellner 1974, 95). So Gellner, as well, is connecting (V), and its requirement for mutual appreciation, with the required unity of the concept.

Speaking of “agreement” or “admission” highlights an important facet of what is taking place. To be an essentially contested concept is to be contested in a dispute aggressively and defensively (7.1), yet it is by virtue of admission into contestation (cf. 13.3; see also 18.1) that different descriptions that *aim* to describe the same valued achievement are transformed into a single concept, albeit a complex one—Gallie himself stops just shy of stating this. That way those descriptions, the presence of which, at first, suggested that their proponents have quite different things in mind, are now combined under the rubric of one concept/term as valid alternative takes or interpretations on the valued achievement accredited by the concept/term.

³⁰⁷ As stated before, Gallie has acknowledged his former sympathy for the notion of family resemblance (ART 101; see also 2.3; 11.2). In the present context, it may be of further interest to note that, in “The Function of Philosophical *Æ*sthetics” (1948), Gallie states that “the test of whether two people have read the *same* sentence or symbol is always a kind of coherence test in respect of their subsequent practice as well as a consistency test in respect of the language or symbolic system to which the sentence in question belongs” (Gallie 1948, 310). How much of that theoretical stance is carried to *ECC*, *ART*, and *PHU* is a somewhat open question.

I argue that the present explication sets the proper context for another obscure assertion by Gallie, namely that “the unity of an essentially contested concept may be said to reside” or “made manifest” in a conception of sustaining and developing the valued achievement to the optimum (PHU 167). An alternative interpretation that is plausible enough is hard to come by. Perhaps rival parties are convinced that their combined employment of the valued achievement leads to its optimum development? That was found problematic (9.2). Perhaps Gallie is saying that there is an achievement that is developed through several contributions, and thus those contributions must be about the same thing? That is fallacious (9.1). The disputants might share a common goal of developing the achievement, in which case they would be predisposed to get to the bottom of the matter, but even that would not make manifest the unity of *concept* without further argument. I will later produce a modified version of that argument (ch. 18). In the meantime, we have little besides the idea that the unity of an essentially contested concept resides in contestation over the concept—as that is the way the combined employment of the concept can lead to its optimum development according to Gallie. Given the obscurities and problems that come with Gallie’s invocation of the optimum development (cf. 9.1; 9.2), any hope of developing *Gallie’s* conception of essential contestability further rests on the possibility to make sense of how the unity resides in the contestation without making it contingent on the particular development of the concept.

PART 4: REINTERPRETING ESSENTIAL CONTESTABILITY

CHAPTER 15: CHALLENGES TO A CONCEPT-CENTERED THESIS

To characterize a concept as ‘essentially contested’ or ‘contestable’ is often taken as an argument that “for certain concepts there are problems of meaning or application” (Clarke 1979, 123). Terence Ball, for example, views Gallie as contending that a concept is ‘essentially contested’ when its meaning and criteria of application are forever open to dispute or disagreement (Ball 1993, 553), which is a good approximation of what is commonly understood as the central claim of a thesis of essential contestability (see e.g., Besson 2005, 70–71). Yet commentators’ views vary regarding what exactly takes place. Gallie has been understood as claiming, for instance, that some concepts cannot be defined universally or once and for all (Syrjämäki 2011, 137), and that a concept is essentially contestable, properly, when all or any of its components are contestable (Freeden 1994, 52, 57). All in all, most discussants view essential contestability as a form of contestation that is somehow woven into the very fabric of the concept rather than being merely about applying the concept differently. Unfortunately, due to theoretical and terminological differences between authors, not every position maps easily onto others.

In part four, I specifically examine the general viability of *a concept-centered thesis of essential contestability*. The key feature of the concept-centered account is that the endlessness and inevitability of disputes are not understood to originate externally but arise from within the features of the concept itself, those features which render these disputes incapable of being rationally settled (Swanton 1985, 813–4). As I see it, the main characteristics of the concept-centered framing are the following two assumptions:

Concept-Object: the actual object of contestation is a concept/term.

Concept-Structure: the locus of contestation inheres in that concept/term owing to its special characteristics and/or how the concept is inherently structured or organized.

For the present, I will assume that a concept-centered thesis needs to be true on both counts. The main difficulty with understanding Gallie’s original thesis along

these lines is that the last three Conditions do not seem to be on the same level with the others (see ch. 8 intro; esp. ch. 10). It has led critics to eschew some Conditions, or even all of them, while often favoring the first four as the central defining features of essential contestability (see e.g., Väyrynen 2014, 474). In turn, that has led to emphasizing the semantic side of Gallie's argument in contrast to his more pragmatic observations concerning how the concepts are employed in disputes and in relation to broad human activities with temporal continuity – even nearing what could be considered a part of the human condition (cf. 12.3). The reason for that choice is understandable: Gallie appears to introduce (I) to (IV) as the ground for why contestedness/contestability arises in the first place, while (V) describes the mode of contestation, and (VI) and (VII) are solely the finishing touches for distinguishing essentially contested concepts from those concepts that are confused. If this is the argument, it makes perfect sense to try to find the true source of contestability in (I) to (IV). However, it should also be equally obvious that essentially contested concepts *as Gallie understands and describes them* cannot be identified by appealing to (I) to (IV) alone. It suggests that essentially contested concepts cannot be identified solely by their semantic content, which would make it impossible to capture the nature of essential contestedness by referencing the meaning dimension of terms/concepts alone.

As I see it, both *Concept-Object* and *Concept-Structure* are problematic in their own right, and I plan to give them a fair shake in what follows. In the end, I will propose that a concept-centered thesis of essential contestability becomes more viable as a unique philosophical thesis if *Concept-Structure* is discarded and replaced with

Concept-Function: essential contestability arises due to a special way in which a concept is employed.

This means that the type of concept-centered thesis that I perceive as the most viable among the alternatives, as far as it goes, is a combination of *Concept-Object* and *Concept-Function*. In part four, I draw even more heavily from the secondary literature in order to illustrate why that looks to be the case, and I will end up proposing a thesis that I view as best able to capture the concept-centered approach to essential contestability while staying true to Gallie's original insights.

My investigation in part four is divided into four chapters that are followed by the final chapter, *Conclusions*. The first two chapters are shorter ones (chs. 15, 16), and they aim to set the scene for two more extensive discussions that are to follow (chs. 17, 18). I will start by presenting two challenges to a concept-centered thesis (15.1; 15.2) after which I present desiderata for an essential contestability thesis that is worthy of the appellation (15.3). In the chapter that follows, I will offer a general take on the nature of concepts, and how one should keep tabs on whether at issue are words or terms instead of concepts (16.1; 16.2). There are numerous general theories on the nature of concepts, but this is not the study that aims to choose between them. Of special importance is section 16.3, where two additional and very broad methodological perspectives to concepts are introduced. The choice made at that juncture is already indicative of how likely one is to accept the essential contestability of *concepts*. Chapter seventeen is an

extended critical examination of the structure of essentially contested concepts, and of whether the way these concepts are organized can be the source of essential contestability. Most of the alternatives that I discuss have been proposed in the literature, and I aim to draw new connections between them to make more general points. As it turns out, there is no clear way of guaranteeing the essential contestability of concepts by appealing to their special structure. That is why, ultimately, I am going to look for essential contestability elsewhere, namely in the specific way of using the concept or in the context of that use, and that discussion takes place in the final chapter before Conclusions (i.e., ch. 18). There, I am also making an argument for my preferred interpretation of essential contestability (18.5).

The current chapter thus aims to introduce more precise objections and challenges for a concept-centered thesis of essential contestability to overcome. I will present two different perspectives to the issue of genuine conceptual contestation, both of which challenge a fundamental assumption of essential contestability: that the disputing parties are employing and contesting the same concept when a dispute arises.

The first challenge is a variant of the unity problem (see 14.2), but now the focus is more precisely on conditions of possessing and sharing an essentially contested concept. One could object that parties to a dispute cannot claim at the same time that the shared, or mutually possessed, concept (i) admits a variety of interpretations and (ii) is disputable (15.1). This criticism makes use of the notion of individuating concepts by their possession conditions, and thus it is importantly different from the simple inconsistency objection that is more broadly concerned with the meaningfulness of having a contest while facing an endless and irresolvable dispute (cf. 13.1).

The second challenge is that the central characteristics of the kind of dispute in which essentially contested concepts are presumably involved are better explained by assuming the presence of multiple concepts. This account is a direct counter to the demand that those criticizing essential contestability views should put up or shut up, i.e., they should offer a theory of their own that is able to “withstand the charge of the contestability” (Connolly 1993, 229). However, I do not aim to present a full theory that thoroughly explains all contestability-related matters. Rather, I aim to move the ball back into the court of those advocating for essential contestability of *concepts* by presenting, in section 15.2, two alternative explanations for what takes place in Gallie’s disputes: (a) disputants are dealing with a persuasive definition (Stevenson 1937; 1938), or (b) the dispute in question is an instance of metalinguistic negotiation (Plunkett and Sundell 2013b).

In the third section, I will discuss what is to be expected of a thesis of essential contestability as to the depth and scope of contestation (15.3). To how strong a position must one commit in stating that this or that matter is subject to essential contestation? I will examine some of the previous proposals from the literature in addition to suggesting an alternative perspective that illustrates how disputes over a concept’s application may also threaten the (implicit) understanding that the concept has a stable core. These are later compared to

specific attempts to cash out essential contestability in either structural or functional terms (see chs. 16, 17).

15.1 The 1st Challenge: the possession and sharing of contested concepts

For a dispute to be genuine, rival parties are required to disagree about the same thing, otherwise they are talking past each other. Presumably, the object of the dispute is a concept, yet concepts are tricky entities as objects of contestation. Many of the proposals I have already discussed were arguably too general in that they made a case for the claim that disputing parties are speaking roughly of the same *topic*, but not necessarily about the same *concept*. It could be further argued that one needs an independent criterion for individuating and distinguishing concepts in general, so that it can be checked whether disputants are indeed contesting the same concept regardless of its more specific nature. This idea is exploited in the first challenge to a concept-centered essential contestability thesis to which I turn next.

Glen Newey (2001) contends that different variants of the essential contestability thesis³⁰⁸ run into trouble with the notion P, or “[i]t is a necessary condition of the distinctness of any given concept C that it is individuated by its possession-condition(s),” the requirement which Newey himself considers a necessary part of any plausible account of possession conditions. Yet an essential contestability thesis, or the claim that “[t]here are certain key concepts in political argument, which are essentially such that they both (a) admit of a variety of interpretations, and (b) are disputable,” looks to be inconsistent with P. That is because P means, in effect, that any concept is possessed by meeting its unique possession conditions. But if the rival parties “differ in linguistic and other dispositions, such as patterns of assent to sample propositions referring to the concept under dispute, or the referent of the concept,” then it is possible for each disputant to distinguish a distinct concept, the possession conditions of which correspond to their unique differential patterns of assent and dissent. This would mean that the concept that is under dispute, according to an essential contestability thesis, will not be individuated by its possession conditions. (Newey 2001, 249.)

It should be further noted that the current problem cannot really be circumvented with the help of a type-token distinction as it only passes the buck without resolving anything. Newey’s criticism has force basically because loosening the possession conditions to allow two or more different

³⁰⁸ Newey makes certain assumptions concerning the general content of, and the explanatory claim made by, an essential contestability thesis that I do not think Gallie shares or to which an advocate of a thesis of essential contestability necessarily need to commit. That is why I present his criticism selectively both here and elsewhere in the study. For Newey’s full criticism against a thesis of essential contestability in his chosen terms and framework, see Newey 2001.

interpretations would mean that the shared possession conditions would fail to provide a full account of concept-mastery if different ways to employ and understand the concept lead to differential truth-value assignments to pairs of propositions by (presumably) competent concept users. One might think that this is, in a sense, what essential contestability is all about. The problem is, however, that the shared possession conditions would apply equally to both interpretations/uses, in which case it would not be possible, even in principle, to recognize the concept as applying in one set of circumstances rather than in another. There would be no reason to favor one use over the other. (see also Newey 2001, 248–9.)

How is the first challenge different from the simple inconsistency objection (13.1)? According to the first challenge, for someone genuinely affirming the essential contestability view there is no sense in engaging in a contest which cannot by its nature be won or lost. This argument usually takes the form that accepting essential contestability or contestedness precludes the possibility of rational disagreement concerning which conception is the superior. The emphasis is not on the concept but on how meaningful it is from the perspective of rival parties to continue having a dispute one considers irresolvable and endless. In contrast, the possession objection against essential contestability focuses on the conditions in which one is capable of individuating one use of a concept as more justifiable than another if they are both justified uses of the concept to begin with. This issue arises out of what we might think about concepts as entities, rather than what we might think of the proper response by the disputants in the face of irresolvable and endless disagreement.

To give just one example of how what is presented here may pose a challenge to an advocate of essential contestability, consider John Gray's statement that the denotation of an essentially contested concept is "non-contingently indeterminate," and that this fact is also acknowledged by the users of the concept (Gray 1977, 332). Essential contestability could inhere in a concept in the following manner: if the mastery, or improved understanding (ECC 197–8), of an essentially contested concept means that one must acknowledge the term's denotation as non-contingently indeterminate, that feature becomes an ineliminable part of how to apply the concept.

We may now identify a couple of issues. First, assuming that one's acknowledgement of the indeterminacy of the denotation is not merely nominal—as in, those mastering how a corresponding linguistic expression is used do not simply learn the meaning of the expression that is widely shared, but the acknowledgement involves commitment to certain judgments (as is the case in disputes Gallie and others describe)—it might entail the kind of higher-order recognition that all parties cannot realistically achieve while they claim their own use of the concept as the correct one (see 7.2). That might not be a big issue if such contingent determinacy of denotation is rephrased in terms of comparative superiority, in which case non-contingent determinacy would be comparable to the once-and-for-all superiority (see 13.1).

What is said above brings the second problem into relief. Since the disputants are now arguing, aggressively and defensively, for their view as contingently determinate, they would need to hold the concept as non-contingently indeterminate and contingently determinate at the same time. The wiggle room appears to run out completely when the matter is stated in terms of the first challenge. *Either* rival parties fail to master the concept that is non-contingently indeterminate when they are using it determinately in contesting other uses, *or* the concept allows indeterminate denotation which is reflected in its possession conditions that one needs to meet in order to master the concept. The former case can be explained as an error while there is nothing to disagree on in the latter case, concept-wise. On the one hand, if one of the disputants is in error, that party is not justified in using the concept steadfastly in that way. On the other hand, all the ways to use the concept that are sanctioned by its possession conditions are proper, conceptually speaking³⁰⁹. These observations, however, do not preclude other types of disputes, like value disagreement, in which the concept is merely involved without being contested at the conceptual level; rival parties' disagreement over the denotation does not necessarily reflect a conceptual disagreement.

Given that essentially contested concepts are intended as a new grouping of concepts that appear to be individuated in an extraordinary way by Gallie, the first challenge is exactly what we should expect. If we are to accept Eugene Garver's (1990) reading, one of Gallie's insights is "that disputes involving essentially contested concepts not only use those concepts but are disputes in which their possession and rightful use is at stake." With it comes the paradox: "Once one identifies an essentially contested concept, it is no longer an essentially contested concept" (Garver 1990, 252, 254). Newey's criticism, predicated on the validity of possession theory, aptly lays out the fundamental theoretical ambiguity that usually accompanies a thesis of essential contestability. It gives us a strong incentive to favor a conception that does not individuate essentially contested concepts according to their possession conditions³¹⁰.

The first challenge can thus be rephrased as a question: how are concepts individuated in a concept-centered thesis of essential contestability? The requirement of the original exemplar, as Gallie presents it, arguably fails to do the job, especially because there is no guarantee that one instance does not stand as an exemplar for distinct concepts (Criley in 14.2). Gallie's more refined

³⁰⁹ By contrast, like Richard Rowland more generally points out, attributing the cause of disagreement to indeterminacy may make all participants doubly wrong on the issue: they are wrong about their own position, and they are wrong that either of the positions is correct (Rowland 2021, 40).

³¹⁰ It must be said that possession conditions somewhat suggest themselves as the appropriate frame of analysis in the case of essential contestability. That is because the notion of *using* a concept against some other use implies that there are contestants who have either a concept or multiple concepts in their possession that are then pitted against each other; or "Gallie's original article itself makes explicit and relies upon the proprietary metaphor of ownership, possession, and use we invest in concepts" (Garver 1990, 256n14). It is another thing, of course, how far the metaphor should guide us.

solution to the unity problem by virtue of moving from initial ambiguity of opposing descriptions to the unity of a single, contested concept is mostly suggestive and still much too imprecise. I will attempt to answer the question, and by doing so meet the first challenge, in two central ways: by individuating concepts that are capable of accommodating essential contestation by their special structure or organization of characteristics (ch. 17), or by individuating concepts by how they are employed, or in what specific context (ch. 18). This does not add up to the global rejection of the utility of possession conditions. Edouard Machery observes that philosophers commonly assume that there is a single correct way of individuating concepts, although there does not appear to be any explicit discussion of why that must be (Machery 2009, 33–4). If one were to reject the possession conditions as far as the individuation of essentially contested concepts is concerned, that would not yet entail that one is simultaneously arguing against the reasonableness of the possession-conditions in individuating other types of concepts; unless one also presumes that all concepts are individuated in the same way. I see no reason to presume that all concepts accord with essentially contested concepts as to their individuation.

15.2 The 2nd Challenge: genuine disputes that involve different conceptual contents

The second challenge states that *the kind of* dispute in which essentially contested concepts are presumably involved can be better grasped without assuming the involvement of a single, shared concept. This does not come down to affirming that the conflict between parties is due to a conceptual confusion, however. Rather, the idea is to describe conflictual exchanges in which different conceptual contents are attributed to the same expression, but the dispute itself is still both conceptual and genuine in a fashion which is, per the challenge, applicable in the presumed cases of essential contestability. The standpoint that emerges from the present discussion is set up to challenge the notion that essential contestability is the only game in town, and that it should be at least provisionally accepted as there are no real alternatives in sight. Appreciating properly what I am after requires some illustration, though. For that purpose, I present two alternative ways of conceiving what is going on in essential contestability – in terms of either C.L. Stevenson’s conception of persuasive definition or the notion of metalinguistic negotiation by David Plunkett and Tim Sundell³¹¹.

In “Persuasive Definitions” (1938) Stevenson characterizes a *persuasive definition* as “one which gives a new conceptual meaning to a familiar word

³¹¹ It should be noted that Peter Ingram (1985) reads Stevenson’s account as capturing one of the ways a concept may become, in fact, essentially contested. As I see it, that stems from Ingram allowing an essentially contested concept as consisting of a number of concepts. Given that I consider Stevenson’s account a challenge to a concept-centered thesis that affirms *Concept-Object*, I take it that our views do not really differ on this point, and Ingram could accept my framing.

without substantially changing its emotive meaning, and which is used with the conscious or unconscious purpose of changing, by this means, the direction of people's interests." Stevenson's example case is a fictional narrative in which the word 'culture' becomes involved in contestation over its true or proper meaning. At first, 'cultured' is used in a hypothetical community to mean 'widely read and acquainted with the arts,' and it has become commonplace to use the term in a laudatory tone of voice to signify valued qualities. Then, an individual shows up dismayed that things such as reading and visiting museums should win praise while imaginative sensitivity was not really noticed or, at least, not given such a high and praise-worthy status. Now that person claims that the already established meaning of 'culture' has, in fact, not much to do with culture in the first place. Instead, the real or true meaning of 'culture' is 'imaginative sensitivity.' (Stevenson 1938, 331-2.)

According to Stevenson, the proposed definition was "no mere abbreviation; nor was it intended as analysis of a common concept."³¹² Instead, the individual's "purpose (...) was to redirect people's interests or admiration," not merely to express a personal evaluation. The word 'culture' was suitable for the purpose since it had already acquired a strong emotive meaning that awakened positive feelings and favorable attitudes in a habitual fashion when the word was used³¹³. In an earlier article, the emotive meaning of a word is characterized by Stevenson as "a tendency of a word, arising through the history of its usage, to produce (result from) affective responses in people." (Stevenson 1937, 23.) Moreover, the reference to "real" or "true" marks of culture, or being cultured, simply means that these terms come "to have the persuasive force of "to be accepted"," and the redirection of people's interest or admiration is to lead to the change in what they can and will accept (as true) regarding the matter in question. (Stevenson 1938, 331-4.) It is noteworthy that Stevenson attributes some of the word's susceptibility to be contested to the history of how it has been used. It helps if the common understanding regarding the meaning of the term has already been made vague by past metaphorical usage, and Stevenson thinks that words with strong emotive meanings are especially prone to it.

The persuasive effect of the new definition is double in that by using it one tries to dissuade people from admiring one set of qualities and persuade them to admire another. The label 'culture' is changed to match a new meaning or attached to a different conceptual content, but Stevenson emphasizes that he is solely concerned with "*definitions* which change interests," and only with those interest-changing definitions that are self-consciously persuasive. We could say that Stevenson is focused on argumentative, or aggressive and defensive, uses of words/terms with a possibly vague, ambiguous, obscure, or contested

³¹² By this I take Stevenson to mean that the definition in question is neither a simply another way to refer to the same conceptual content – e.g., as a matter of typographical convention – nor is it offered as an improved characterization of the issue in question – e.g., as an explicative definition.

³¹³ Positiveness and favorability are not required, only the strength of emotive response, as Stevenson's description of how 'fascist' with derogatory associations may be used in persuasion makes clear (Stevenson 1938, 335-6).

conceptual meaning and a rich emotive meaning that stays “roughly constant.” These words are under constant redefinition, and in that process “words are prizes which each man seeks to bestow on the qualities of his own choice.” Definitions, in general, redirect interests in different ways, but essential to the nature of persuasive definitions is the predominating intention or deliberate effort to change people’s interests. The employment of persuasive definitions is dynamic: it aims to bring about change in how things currently are. (Stevenson 1938, 332–7.)

The kind of disagreement Stevenson envisages in connection to persuasive definitions is a *disagreement in interest*. Disagreement in belief is typical of the sciences and it “occurs when A believes p and B disbelieves it.” Disagreement in interest is typical to ethics and it occurs “when A has a favourable interest in X, when B has an unfavourable one in it, and when neither is content to let the other's interest remain unchanged.” (Stevenson 1937, 26–27.) Stevenson more closely discusses different cases of disagreements in which parties share the criteria of application completely or incompletely and what that portends with respect to the disagreement’s resolvability. To cut a long story short, some of those disagreements can be resolved empirically while, in some, disputants may come to realize that they use different concepts. It is of utmost importance to note, though, that some disagreements concerning a concept’s application could be such that disputing parties are almost sure to realize that they employ the word with differing conceptual meaning, but that does not herald the end to their disagreement.

Let us assume that two persons use ‘just’ to refer to A and B, and B and C, respectively, but C (that is not shared), instead of B (that is shared), is the sole point of disagreement. Let us further suppose that both persons agree that some actual law that they have under scrutiny leads to B, but the second person (the one accepting consequences B and C as criteria) denies that the law in question is just while the first thinks the opposite. In this situation, the first disputant does not refer to C at all in his definition of ‘just,’ and the second disputant could only deny the law on account of C alone (as they agree about B). The first person is not really contradicted by his opponent, but Stevenson points out that, “even after the discrepancy in terminology is clearly realized,” he may feel “that he has been opposed from the very beginning” and his opponent’s statement needs to be refuted “as though this were necessary to support his own.” The first person can now argue that the law that is under evaluation *leads* to C, and the second person is therefore employing a faulty definition of ‘just’ in the first place. (Stevenson 1938, 346.) The questions arise: how could there be a need for such a counterargument, and why not just agree that the meanings that are attributed to ‘just’ are different?

Stevenson proposes that we can think of the above as a disagreement in interest. The first person who challenged the definition of the second person was not content with being unchallenged by the available evidence:

He wanted his opponent not merely to acknowledge certain consequences of the law, but likewise to praise it; and his opponent would not be praising it if he called it

“unjust”, no matter what conceptual meaning he assigned to the term. Stevenson 1938, 346

The purpose of persuasive definitions is to change people’s interest, not just to remain unchallenged in one’s own (cognitive) views. One thus attempts to arrive at an end in which others should feel forced to change their views. These disagreements play out within at least three dimensions. There is a *descriptive* conceptual meaning that is attributed to a term, and which serves as a target of a *pragmatic* attempt to change the meaning by appealing to a person’s *affective* orientation regarding the term and its related conceptual connotations. Rival parties are not detached, and they do not argue out of mere intellectual curiosity in disagreeing in interest³¹⁴.

The clearest point of contact between Stevenson and Gallie is in their descriptions of the conduct of rival parties to a dispute. If we are to believe John Kekes that the common feature of the debates that Gallie describes is that “everybody wants to appropriate the contested concept for his own use, even though he realizes that other participants have the same ambition” (1977, 72), it is natural to consider the first order of business as a struggle over the hegemonic use of a word or term with a clear evaluative and/or emotive meaning. In that function, essentially contested concepts would come close to what Ernesto Laclau has called empty signifiers³¹⁵. Ernest Gellner (1974) contends that Stevenson’s account would end up painting a misleading picture of what is actually taking place: Stevenson’s rival propagandists engage in “a simple and silly game” in which they “try to steal the positive load” of an emotively charged word. Rather, it is more often the case that a “complex notion is re-ordered, schematized, in rival ways with rival supporting reasons, by two or more opposing sides which do, however, share some ground, recognize the concept as ideally unique, and persist in the hope of converting each other.” (Gellner 1974, 103.) I think that Gellner does not appreciate the full import of disagreement in interest. One’s interest in changing conceptual contents need not be “silly” as ameliorative projects in relation to gender and race terms clearly illustrate³¹⁶.

³¹⁴ Stevenson himself observes that “people who disagree in interest would often cease to do so if they knew the precise nature and consequences of the object of their interest” (Stevenson 1937, 28) but he also introduces another type of disagreement, in which relevant empirical facts (or consequences) are not in dispute as both parties agree about them. The agreed facts fulfill the requirements of one position while the requirements of other position are fulfilled only partially. Yet the disagreement, supposedly, goes on: “The laudatory force of “just”, and the derogatory force of “unjust”, are still indicative of a disagreement in interest.” For Stevenson, this case “represents a disagreement which the empirical method may be wholly incapable of resolving.” (Stevenson 1938, 347.) It appears that this type of disagreement could be resolved in the future, and it is thus (potentially) resolvable, but there is no guarantee that this will happen with the (empirical) means that we have at our disposal.

³¹⁵ Laclau (1996; 2005). It should not be assumed beforehand that essentially contested concepts are necessarily used in hegemonic *political* battles even if their characteristic use is persuasive.

³¹⁶ For the exact sense that I have in mind, see Herman Cappelen’s discussion of Sally Haslanger’s proposal that we change the meaning of the word ‘man’ and ‘woman’ (Cappelen 2018, 12–4; cf. 17–8).

Andrew Mason (1993) notes that, according to Stevenson (1944)³¹⁷, moral and political disagreement characteristically occurs “as a result of disagreement in (non-moral) *belief* and partly as a result of disagreement in *attitude*.” In each disagreement, there are elements that can be settled with due time, effort, and patience, but there are also elements—in Stevenson’s case, moral attitudes—which contribute to the irresolvability of the disagreement. The priority is now given to the latter “in explaining deep and persistent moral and political differences.” (Mason 1993, 5.) What Mason describes bears resemblance to how Gallie splits the descriptive and evaluative elements of a concept (17.2), or how one’s particular appraisive situation is decisive in generating a conflict while the relevancy of arguments and evidence that pertains to the matter is mutually agreed (11.4). In any case, the most significant difference between Gallie and Stevenson is, of course, that Stevenson understands the dispute as being centered around a word or term to which different conceptual contents are attributed by defining them anew, whereas Gallie insists on speaking of concepts.

The second option to consider is the notion of metalinguistic negotiation. According to Plunkett and Sundell (2013b; see also Plunkett 2015), there are genuine and substantive disagreements over how the normative and evaluative terms should be used; disagreements which are worth having even though the disagreeing parties do not share the meanings of the terms³¹⁸. We are dealing with *metalinguistic usage* in “cases where a linguistic expression is used (not mentioned) to communicate information about the appropriate usage of that very expression in context.” In addition to this, by putting forward competing claims “speakers can, *via* metalinguistic uses of their terms, debate how it is those terms *should* be employed.” This dispute is termed as *metalinguistic negotiation* by Plunkett and Sundell, and it is this rather than the former notion that is pertinent to essential contestability. Metalinguistic negotiations may be largely tacit, but they regardless concern a distinctive normative question: how to use a word best, relative to a context. Concepts come into the picture by assuming “the meaning of a word to be the concept it expresses in the context,” and thus “a dispute about any of these matters reflects in some sense a disagreement about which among some set of competing concepts should be used in the context at hand.” Metalinguistic negotiations are thus (tacitly) about *concept choice*. (Plunkett and Sundell 2013b, 3–4.)

‘Metalinguistic’ in ‘metalinguistic negotiation’ means that the relevant information about the object of disagreement is conveyed through pragmatic rather than semantic means. The account of metalinguistic negotiation challenges the idea—briefly presented in 14.1 as Shared Meaning Task—that one can “reason from the fact that a particular exchange involves a genuine disagreement to the thesis that the speakers involved in that exchange mean the same things.” The disputes characterized by metalinguistic negotiation are assumed to be non-canonical, i.e., they do not center on *literally expressed* content, yet they

³¹⁷ *Ethics and Language*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

³¹⁸ For a criticism of the notion of metalinguistic negotiation, in general, and Plunkett’s and Sundell’s view, in particular, see Cappelen 2018, 170–9.

nevertheless reflect genuine disagreement. Genuine disagreement is expressed *via* disputes “in which the speakers literally express *compatible* contents.” (Plunkett and Sundell 2013b, 6–7, 9, 12, 24.) The compatibility does not entail complete agreement; rather, it means that there is no direct conflict between utterances or statements at the propositional level which means that the propositions that correspond to the opposing claims could each be true. The idea is that speakers/disputants can now use normative and evaluative terms with different meanings, or to express different concepts, without compromising the genuineness of their disagreement (*ibid.*, 18).

The stability of the subject matter of the disagreement is rooted in asking in what sense one should use the term in question, or what concept should be chosen in the current circumstances. Those participating in the dispute would be right to resist the outside characterization of their disagreement either as a verbal dispute or as a conceptual confusion – as one might surmise based on semantics alone. The parties to a metalinguistic negotiation can know perfectly well what they are doing and especially how significant it is to choose the “right” or “appropriate” concept to go with the word that appears to be at the center of contestation. In order to grasp why the disagreement over the employment of the correct concept can be worth having, one typically needs to consider the prevailing sociological and cultural facts concerning how, or in which functional roles that are tied to our thought and practices, the evaluative or normative terms/words are conventionally used (see Plunkett and Sundell 2013b, 20–1). The disputants would need to be aware of at least some practical factors that grant importance to deciding upon the matter this or that way; many decisions on this front are directly related to collective decision-making.

Plunkett and Sundell offer several examples of metalinguistic negotiations, and possible objections against them often originate in one’s conception of the nature of concepts or which theory of meaning is presumed. One of their examples is a linguistic exchange in which two persons disagree whether Secretariat – a racehorse who became the first Triple Crown winner in 25 years in 1973 – is an athlete or not. The idea is that the disagreeing parties may employ different concepts, say ATHLETE₁ and ATHLETE₂, when they disagree, and if that is so, the respective propositions expressed through their claims can both be true. But the disputants are not really talking past each other (cf. 14.1) as their dispute can still be rooted in the shared understanding of the stakes or, more simply, what is going on. In the example, at dispute is whether non-human animals should be called athletes so that they would merit the same type of recognition that we grant to human athletes, and hence ATHLETE₁ applies solely to humans while ATHLETE₂ is more inclusive in that respect.

It may be objected that there is no real dispute going on about what ‘athlete’ means, or perhaps even what its proper or primary sense is. Instead, the parties disagree whether the uncontested concept should apply to non-human animals as well to humans, or whether Secretariat falls within the extension of ATHLETE as a borderline case. Perhaps ATHLETE just underdetermines its extension in this regard (see Väyrynen 2013b, 145). One could respond that it is not all the same

whether one adopts ATHLETE₁ or ATHLETE₂ as the choice may effect changes of varying degree in other related or “nearby” concepts like ANIMAL, SPORT PROWESS, MERIT, AGENT/PATIENT *et cetera*. A disagreement between those who understand the dispute as conceptual and those who reject it could continue on these lines for some time. In their preemptive answer to an externalist criticism, Plunkett and Sundell stress that they do not ask the reader to assume that they have analyzed the debate correctly, and thus the idea that the speakers express different contents is not a premise of their argument. Rather, they state that “even if we *suppose* that the speakers mean different things by their words, we can still explain how those disputes have the properties that they do”³¹⁹ (Plunkett and Sundell 2013b, 26). It is in the same spirit that I utilize their conception as a critical contrast to essential contestability: can we explain some of the hallmarks of *those* disputes with the help of the idea of metalinguistic negotiation?

The perspective of metalinguistic negotiation is useful in throwing light on essential contestability as it enables going beyond the literal semantic content of an expression in characterizing the stakes in terms of an *exclusive choice* between different concepts³²⁰ (cf. e.g., ART 112; PHU 177). The idea that a thing under contestation is conveyed pragmatically clears room for a genuine dispute that does not have to come down to being either a confusion or about a shared meaning. One major reason for the attractiveness of Gallie’s thesis is that it appears to make it possible to genuinely disagree about a concept without assuming that disputing parties employ the concepts in the exact same manner or sense. However, when the *conceptual* disagreement is understood in pragmatic rather than in semantic terms, one could argue that there is no longer a need for a theoretical entity called ‘essentially contested concept’³²¹. The Secretariat example suggests that an underlying dispute in essential contestability may not be, strictly, *about* a concept or concepts – in the example, at issue was whether to grant a certain sort of recognition to non-humans – although one becoming persuaded to change one’s view would *involve* adoption of a new concept or a new way of using a term that now has different content³²². Disputes manifesting

³¹⁹ This attempts to evade an objection according to which, in this or that specific dispute, the speakers do actually express the same or shared content or judge the matter within the same context because of, for example, the causal-historical facts about the meaning of the word used.

³²⁰ On their part, Plunkett and Sundell urge theorists to simply hold “that there is some rational conflict in the mental contents accepted by the speakers involved, a conflict which might or might not be reflected in the semantic content of the speakers’ utterances.” (Plunkett and Sundell 2013b, 25.)

³²¹ David Plunkett states that there is no special reason why one should posit a new type of concept to explain those disputes that have the character of metalinguistic negotiations (Plunkett 2015, 850). Interestingly, Plunkett and Sundell also argue against Dworkin’s “disagreement-based argument” for interpretive concepts by offering metalinguistic negotiation as a better explanation (Plunkett and Sundell 2013a). Gallie’s thesis is similarly criticizable, although Gallie’s lack of explicitness makes it a harder affair. For a brief account of interpretive concepts, see 16.4.

³²² Compare with the distinction between disputes about a concept and a concept being involved in a dispute (14.1).

essential contestability are typically understood as both conceptual and substantive, and the conception of metalinguistic negotiation is one way to parse what is taking place. That which is of substance in a disagreement is conveyed pragmatically (e.g., should we grant a certain type of recognition to animals?), and the practical resolution of the dispute requires one to adopt a new concept (e.g., ATHLETE₂ to replace ATHLETE₁).

For the present, it is enough if the account of persuasive definitions and the notion of metalinguistic negotiation have cast doubt upon how the disputes described by Gallie should be explained. When Gallie talks of “a certain way of meaning, of influencing, of persuading, which has hitherto been either ignored or grossly underestimated” (PHU 158), he could thus be describing either option. As I view the matter, both accounts emphasize the significance of the pragmatic context in understanding exchanges that revolve around some word or expression but appear to involve different conceptual contents. This brings to the fore a possibility that should not be ignored: that there is not a single, shared, and essentially contested concept after all.

15.3 Setting the appropriate boundaries of essential contestability

In this section, I will try to explain more generally what would it mean to contest a concept essentially, or what should we expect of essential contestability that is worthy of its name. Essential contestability should cut to the heart of the matter, and it should encompass – more than merely be about – how exactly one should apply a shared or commonly agreed-upon concept.

John Gray (1977) holds that the strongest and most interesting variant of a contestability thesis, or essential contestability “in its full or proper sense,” “is to claim that [the] subject matter [of a variable concept] is in its nature such that there are always good reasons for disputing the propriety of any of its uses.”³²³ There is an alternative which is slightly weaker, though still strong enough to be of philosophical interest, and it commits one to showing “the inconclusiveness of debates about the criteria of correct application of a concept.” According to Gray, taking this second route “obliges one to support the claim that, since there are no logically coercive reasons for privileging one set of candidate criteria over all others, there is good reason to regard its proper use as disputable.” (Gray 1977, 338.) I think that Gray is right: essential contestability should go beyond the in-principle disputability of concept-application, even if Gallie himself would be understood to make that type of claim (cf. 17.2; see also Ruben 2010, 258–9). With that in mind, I consider it useful to ask whether it is only that the thing

³²³ Gray’s reference to the contestability of the subject matter might be reformulatable as a claim that the property of contestability is not attributed to the concept but to the topic. In the same vein, one can read Gallie as saying that the complexity of the valued achievement itself generates its various describability, or semantic variation that comes with the way it is conceptualized. The question becomes whether we should now say instead that certain topics involve, for all we know, irresolvable and endless disputes.

conceptualized “lends” contestability to the concept employed, or is it instead the case that the concept’s characteristics or the process of conceptualization, i.e., concept-formation, can serve as the source of contestability? For the latter type of contestability to be comparable in strength to what Gray considers the full sense of an essential contestability thesis, the contestation needs to reach the very core of the concept involved.

Folke Tersman observes that naming ethical concepts as “essentially contestable” is typically taken to mean that “although questions about their application (moral issues) *allow* for rational discussion, there is no way to *settle* these debates by rational discussion” (Tersman 2006, 113). This could be close to what Gray has in mind, and it naturally raises the question of what exactly in moral issues makes them irresolvable. However, I will leave such domain-specific questions to specialists in their fields. When Gallie presents DEMOCRACY, SOCIAL JUSTICE, ART, and CHRISTIANITY as examples of essentially contested concepts (ECC 168/PHU 157)—in addition to speculating about concepts including SCIENCE, LAW, LIBERTY, and GOVERNMENT (PHU 190)—I do not think we should look for how substantive issues are contestable *in toto* within specific fields. The relevant type of dispute involves substantive elements, and a domain-specific concept-application³²⁴ can be a big part of it, yet the dispute is also characterized by, for instance, reflexivity. The reflexivity, or that those applying the concept also judge what its proper, concept-determining criteria are, is arguably one hallmark of essential contestability that appears to transcend more specific domains, like morality. I will seek to account for essential contestability at that more general level.

While reflexivity can be viewed as a domain-transcending feature of making judgements in a dispute, concepts that are employed across domains may also share characteristics. At first glance, it makes good sense to try to locate essential contestability in broad terms within a concept’s intension, given that “a concept *is* its intension, for the intension encompasses all its characteristics or properties” (Sartori 1984, 40, see also 24). ‘Intension’ could also be defined as the meaning of an expression while extension consists of things signified by the expression (Audi 1999, 439), or it can be thought as the internal content of a concept³²⁵. The extension is most typically understood as the set of objects which the concept picks out or to which it applies³²⁶.

³²⁴ As a terminological matter, one can distinguish between a concept’s domain of application as “the set of objects of which it is meaningful to ask whether they fall under the given concept or not” and the extension as “the subset of domain consisting of precisely those objects that fall under the concept” (List and Valentini 2016, 531). Domains are usually concepts of a more general or inclusive nature— e.g., FINGER in relation to HAND—although the specific concepts are not necessarily related only to a single base domain but to several domains which are together called the *domain matrix* (see e.g., Cruse 2000, 140–1).

³²⁵ One can find this definition in some dictionaries. In David Kaplan’s terminology, content can be represented as a function from the circumstance of evaluation to an appropriate extension. Kaplan separately notes that Carnap called such functions ‘intensions.’ (Kaplan 1989, 502–3.)

³²⁶ Alternatively, it would also be possible to speak of the intension and the extension of a *term*. The intension of a term could now be called a *concept* (see Niiniluoto 1999, 119–21.)

There are reasons why the analysis in these terms might not be very useful. As a general matter, Hillary Putnam contends that equating the concept and the intension may only impart the vagueness [obscurity] to 'concept' (Putnam 1975, 134). More specifically, Ruth Zimmerling (2005) does not see anything extraordinary or noteworthy in the absence of the final word concerning that in which the intension or the extension of a concept consists. She claims that this sort of fluctuation is a very common characteristic shared by almost all our concepts. The perceived contestability is simply due to the conventionality of definitions, or of the vagueness and ambiguity of ordinary, non-formalized language. (Zimmerling 2005, 18.) On this basis it is hard to argue against, or for, what is contended. We would want to know why a certain concept seemingly fluctuates; is it perhaps because its subject matter can be conceptualized in different ways, rendering the concept variable? Does the ambiguity and/or vagueness involved in linguistic usage result in fluctuation at the level of conceptual content that is *de facto* attributed to the expression in question? By whom is this content attributed so that it is possible to speak of a concept?

Based on what has been said previously, I think it is natural to consider that the variability of a concept is, first and foremost, a result of disputants' attempts to describe a complex achievement, not of the subject matter or its complexity as such. When different (initially ambiguous, see 14.2) descriptions come together and clash, one either has an essentially contested concept at hand or not, and it makes sense to think that is a matter largely decided by the pragmatic context, or by the kind of dispute in which rival parties are engaged, instead of pure semantics. This is the view of essential contestability, or as I will say "essential contestation," that I personally prefer and argue for: the dispute should be understood more along the lines of concept-formation rather than being a matter of concept-users coming to the dispute with a concept they all already share. Essential contestability would now be conceived as a debate about which components should be included within a concept, and not merely as a matter of concept-application (see also e.g., Freedman 1994, 57; Besson 2005, 70).

By contrast, one might want to approach the matter more conventionally. Perhaps Gallie instead wants to describe, or should describe, disputes that combine concept-application and substantive disagreement concerning what makes the valued achievement what it is, a disagreement that does not impinge on the shared sense of that achievement. The shared sense enables parties to identify the same thing as the object of their dispute, and that much at least must be required, as one might interject. Notwithstanding the other merits of that view, I am going to argue that the latter approach fails in making sense of contestability

while the extension of a term can be considered as the set of things of which the term is true (Putnam 1975, 132) which, in turn, is sometimes referred as its semantic value. Following Putnam (1975), it is good to note that the very notion of extension is rather highly idealized as it implies that the set that is the extension consists of objects that either definitely belong to the set or definitely do not belong to the set. There are borderline cases, and "the line between the clear cases and the borderline cases is itself fuzzy." (Putnam 1975, 133; cf. 12.1.) A borderline case is not yet a case of essential contestability, though.

in a way that reaches far enough into the concept involved in the dispute; the proof is in the pudding, as we shall see.

The more conventional approach is not exempt from spelling out why contestation should be considered essential – assuming of course that it does not stand as a critical alternative to a stronger thesis of essential contestability in the first place. It has been proposed that a concept can properly be designated as ‘essentially contestable’ only “when all or any of its components are contestable” (Freeden 1994, 57) or that disputes about the meaning “go to the heart of the matter and can generate *rival paradigms and criteria of application*” and that it is “part of the *very meaning and essence* of the concept to be contested and to raise questions as to its nature”³²⁷ (Besson 2005, 72). Both views appear rather ambitious which is a good start. Moreover, these accounts capture the character of a thesis that at least accepts *Concept-Structure*—i.e., that the locus of contestation inheres in that concept/term owing to its special characteristics and/or how the concept is inherently structured or organized—even if actual disputes might be substantive disagreements about application rather than about the concept itself as *Concept-Object* would have it. Let us refer to that view as *Concept-Application*, i.e., the view that understands actual disputes generated by the right sort of conceptual structure as disputes of application. In fact, that conception corresponds with what John Gray terms as a somewhat weaker variant of essential contestability.

Now we are better positioned to see what a stronger variant of a concept-centered thesis could look like: it is assumed to generate irresolvable disputes over the concept itself, and not merely over how the concept is applied. In intension/extension terms, one might say that the contestation does not only concern what is judged as falling within the extension, but it reaches or threatens the intension as well. Since the extension is designated by the intension by which these terms are defined, and any change in the extension would thus require a change in the intension, this probably sounds odd or outright impossible to many³²⁸. Another way of approximating what I have in mind is that the essential contestation should threaten the concept’s shared core while allowing the sharing of the concept at the same time. I consider this the strongest possible variant of a concept-centered thesis of essential contestability, and I aim to use it as a standard against which different views on essential contestability are evaluated in the current part. A success or failure to meet it informs us of the appropriate scope of a viable contestability thesis. It should be also separately observed that

³²⁷ In this case, a term’s meaning could be conventionally tied to a controversy over it rather than to consensus, a possibility which is introduced in these terms by Waldron (Waldron 1994, 529–30). See also *Via Contestation* sense of ‘essentiality’ in 12.3.

³²⁸ For a clear argument of why *both* a concept’s intension and extension *cannot* be disputed, or why that results in a term expressing different concepts, see Rhodes 2000, esp. 11. As the intension must be identical between rival parties, and application-disputes are excluded, Rhodes concludes that it “seems that Gallie’s thesis is entirely dependent upon there being some special, or peculiar, feature of the contested concept itself” (Rhodes 2000, 14). By saying that contestation reaches or threatens the shared intension, I mean to include that option as well.

the current requirement is, in a sense, unproblematic from the perspective of the second challenge, in which the presence of multiple concepts is assumed, as different concepts can be conceived as contesting each other in its entirety or as a conceptual whole.

Gallie's own thinking regarding the depth of contestation along the conceptual/linguistic dimension is surprisingly unclear. In possibly the single most germane passage, Gallie introduces a potential objection, according to which there may be a conceptual confusion instead of genuine contestation:

To all appearances [the] concept of 'the champions' not only denotes consistently different sets of individuals (teams) according as it is used by different parties (supporters); it also connotes different achievements (in the way of different methods, strategies and styles favoured by the different teams) according as it is used by different groups of supporters. Is there, then, any real ground for maintaining that it has a *single* meaning, that *could* be contested? ECC 175/PHU 163-4

Gallie's insistence on couching his points in terms of *Artificial* clouds how exactly he sees the matter. A difference in connotation and denotation is typically taken to mean that the concepts differ in intension and extension (Rhodes 2000, 13). Gallie's phrasing thus suggests that a concept's intension is also somehow threatened or uncertain in addition to disagreement over its extension. There is not much doubt that Gallie views an essentially contested concept as having a single meaning in some sense, but it is a matter of interpretation whether that "meaning" is meant to incorporate variance and contestability within it rather than merely in its application (cf. 14.1). This is a watershed between those who understand Gallie's point to be about concept-application and those who attribute to him a much more ambitious, even a groundbreaking, philosophical thesis.

I think Gallie's emphasis on 'could,' in the quote above, already implies that the meaning he is referring to is not of the kind that is traditionally attributed to concepts, or that essential contestedness is solely about application. There are other similar clues in *ART* and *PHU* as well. Pritam Baruah observes that "the kind of disputes to which Gallie refers to are largely dependent on what he calls the 'description' that a user holds of the concept [citing ECC 172n1]." This means that the dispute does not originate in the different applications of the concept but, for Gallie, disagreements on essentially contested concepts "are rooted *in* the concepts." (Baruah 2014, 315). Still further support is found in "What Makes a Subject Scientific" (Gallie 1957). There, Gallie explicitly states that, although the criteria of 'science' are disjunctive, he is not satisfied to leave the matter at "showing that the application rules of the term or concept 'science' are of the untidy sprawling kind." Instead, he asserts that it is "incumbent on philosophy, in the case of any 'logically obscure' concept to explain why it is obscure, to explain why it has its characteristic structure or lack of structure." (Gallie 1957, 132.) Given the overall content of the article, and especially the uncanny similarities between what is said there and with regard to essential contestedness, it is *highly* likely that Gallie was not after mere application disagreements also in

the case of essential contestedness. However, given the framing of the matter in terms of arguably misleading *Artificial* (11.1) and the possibility that Gallie's achievement-terminology may end up mixing concrete factors that contribute to an achievement with the criteria that are constitutive of a concept (17.2), it cannot be ruled out conclusively that Gallie is not confusing concept's intension with its extension in some respects (cf. e.g., Freeden 1996, 55–60). It complicates finding a secure groundwork for a strong and ambitious concept-centered thesis in Gallie's original writings.

Essential contestability has been understood to mean at times that contestability is "part of the *very meaning and essence* of the concept" (Besson 2005, 72). But what does that mean? Glen Newey (2001) presents a noteworthy criticism to this effect³²⁹. Assuming that the possibility of disagreement is built into to the concept as part of its essence³³⁰, disputing parties "would have to *agree*, on pain of changing the subject, that the other interpretation was possible, and in this case the concept would no longer be contestable." They could fail to do this only "by making a mistake, or being in ignorance about the nature of the concept." (Newey 2001, 249.) Here, Newey appears to equate possibility of different interpretations, or their intelligibility, with non-contestability (cf. 13.2; 13.4), but his point becomes more convincing when it is applied to a variant Newey calls *the reasonable disagreement thesis*: the "concepts' interpretations may be (a) mutually inconsistent (b) individually reasonable, and (c) such that there is none which is justifiably regarded as superior to its rivals." (Newey 2001, 247 citing Mason 1993, 50). Newey claims that, on its most obvious interpretations, the reasonable disagreement thesis "imputes to the concepts the *de re* essential property of being contestable" (ibid., 250). *De re* property resides in the concept itself while *de dicto* concerns the way in which the object is referred to. But if such reasonability of interpretations is built into the concept itself, why would the rivals not accept conflicting practical judgments made by others on the basis of such interpretations? If one party to a dispute denies a judgment that conflicts with or rivals the other's, a judgment that springs from a different interpretation of the

³²⁹ Newey argues that the versions of essential contestability theses that he discusses in his paper fall victim to explanatory redundancy concerning the political, but he does not really engage with Gallie, whose ideas he calls an esoteric philosophical doctrine. The overall aim of Newey's paper is to defend the autonomy of the political sphere and phenomena from philosophical intrusions. His sights are especially set on the type of view professed by Andrew Mason, who thinks that the essential contestability thesis is "the best candidate for an account of why political concepts are inherently disputable" (Mason 1993, 13, see also 49). Newey himself concludes that "essential contestability provides no explanation as to *why* these disputes exist, nor why they are political" (Newey, 248). Here, it is worth noting that Mason (1990) argues explicitly that essential contestability theses "do not play a genuine role in *explaining* political disagreement" (Mason 1990, 81, see also 95–6). In the current study, I take no stance on this explanatory issue, and neither do I seek to establish any relation of priority or constitution between the political and the essential contestability.

³³⁰ According to Newey, something that essentially characterizes the thing referred to, e.g., justice, is needed "in order that the dispute be one about a single concept *justice*" (Newey 2001, 249). This may mean a property, or a set of properties together, which are perhaps most naturally understood to be located in the (common) core of a concept.

concept, it appears that either the concept in question is not contestable in the relevant sense or disputants are each working with a different concept.

Conceiving the matter in *de dicto* terms does not help either. Newey formulates what is at issue in terms of whether one can plausibly deny a sentence like “Necessarily, DEMOCRACY is contestable.” According to Newey it can be denied, unlike a sentence that wears its analyticity on its sleeve like “Necessarily, if A is a bachelor, then A is an unmarried male.” (Newey 2001, 251.) Although analyticity of particular terms and sentences might be more culturally bound than is commonly appreciated – consider the question whether a Catholic priest is a bachelor – we can take Newey’s point as it is meant and agree with it: there is no established linguistic convention that would decide the matter in favor of DEMOCRACY’S contestability so that the sentence “Necessarily, DEMOCRACY is contestable” would be obviously true. In addition, a *de dicto* modal property of contestability is coherently, i.e., sensibly, deniable of the concept under alternative description. It *makes sense* to say that a concept of x is contestable even when it is not, in fact, contestable, the same way it makes sense to say that someone is married even if he is, in fact, a bachelor (ibid.).

And finally, *de dicto* concerns the way to which the object is referred, and thus the property of contestability is attributed to *descriptions* of concepts instead of the concept itself. As was seen, different descriptions can be sensibly used about a concept like DEMOCRACY, and because of that “whether or not a given concept gives rise to disagreement will depend on the contingent fact of what descriptions are used about it.” But that would mean that the concept will not necessarily give rise to disagreement “since its contestability will depend only on how it is referred to.” (Newey 2001, 251.) One could argue that Gallie’s utilization of the idea that two or more (essentially contested) pure descriptions of a valued achievement are logically equipollent or equal in “logical force” (see 11.4) is also susceptible to this criticism. An example of logical equipollency, “some A” and “not no A,” illustrates well how Gallie’s conception could be taken as an affirmation that different descriptions present the same object merely in different sense. From this perspective, the challenge posed to any Galliean advocate of a concept-centered thesis is to find grounds for the claim that individual appraisive considerations that enable choosing between otherwise logical equipollent descriptions somehow transform the nature of the dispute. For example, perhaps a dispute involving different senses is transformed into a dispute that is both conceptual and substantive with the introduction of the right kind of appraisive considerations.

Newey’s own finding is that *de dicto* ascription of contestability to a concept(’s essence) shows “only that reference *can* be secured by means of the relevant descriptions [that bear the property of contestability], not that it *must* be” and rival parties may nonetheless disagree about the extension of the concept. Therefore, the claim that the concept is *essentially* contestable does no explanatory work in the case of *de dicto* contestability while *de re* attribution of contestability ends up going against the reasonable disagreement thesis of essential contestability. More generally, by licensing a plurality of interpretations, such a

thesis fails to explain why the parties think of themselves as disagreeing. (Newey 2001, 251–2.) It does make sense to presume that disputants think that the other party is wrong, not that they just happen to be offering another possible (reasonable) interpretation. Yet that attitude is also at least potentially subject to change depending on the level of awareness.

As another alternative, one could perhaps come to grasp a concept's present "contestability" only in reference to its actual contestedness, whether current and/or past. When that is the case, the necessity of contestation, or its essentiality, would be of *de re* type rather than *de dicto*³³¹: there is a possible world in which certain concepts are not subject to essential contestation but that world is not our world³³². Robert Grafstein makes that proposal rather explicitly by relinquishing the notion that essential contestability occurs in all possible worlds in which the relevant concepts occur in favor of a realist thesis that ties "the notion of essential contestability to the existence of politics and, just now, to the uncertainty of political outcomes" (Grafstein 1988, 24). Newey's criticism is nonetheless applicable if rival parties are assumed to treat other interpretations as epistemically reasonable alternatives. The objection thus hinges on how the reasonableness itself is understood: considering other interpretations as reasonable also requires viewing them to be just as good as one's own interpretation (see also 13.2).

What about weaker forms of justifiability? If we indeed assume that the disputants would view other's preferred uses merely as practically or historically intelligible (13.4), that judgment can certainly coexist with a further claim that one's own use is preferable, all things considered (see also 13.1). But that might already be too significant a weakening, especially if one is aiming for a reasonable disagreement thesis of essential contestability. What makes the issue of reasonable disagreement particularly philosophically interesting goes hand in hand with the assumption that everyone is justified in holding their beliefs – and maintaining their preferred uses of concepts – in the stronger sense.

To conclude, it must be said that I am not aware of anyone who attributes *de dicto* contestability to a concept as part of the concept's analytic in the sense required by Newey's example sentences above. If anything, there are some who think that the analytic-synthetic distinction breaks down in the case of essentially

³³¹ Baggini and Fosl note that "*De re* necessity is thus weaker than *de dicto* necessity, but it is necessity nonetheless, and so to assert it is still to make a strong claim (Baggini and Fosl 2010, §4.6); here and elsewhere, I refer to *de re/de dicto* only in connection to claiming something as necessary. Gallie might have wanted to make *de re* claim in the present sense but that is more or less conjectural. As Newey's criticism illustrates, if one were to argue for a thesis of essential contestability by explicitly making a modalized *de re* attribution of contestability to a concept, the status of those concepts as contested/contestable in relation to the beliefs, dispositions, or attitudes of the disputants would need to be clarified appropriately. For brief accounts of the *de re/de dicto* distinction, and its different conceptions, see Schwitzgebel 2015, §2.3; and McKay and Nelson 2014.

³³² One might continue that the "respective" concepts of that possible world would not be *our* concepts, and contestation (or its lack) in those possible worlds would not be over the concepts that *we*, in fact, share. I understand the conception of necessity that is operative in this particular case as similar to that professed by Saul Kripke in *Naming and Necessity* (1980).

contested concepts³³³. Be that as it may, I think Newey's *de dicto* criticism is a useful reminder that conceiving of essential contestability as part of a term's or concept's meaning cannot plausibly mean that anyone denying the contestability of the term/concept while favoring their own use would be without a doubt acting unreasonably. That would amount to a view in which those arguing for their preferred uses would simply be in error or ignorant rather than being justified to go on steadfastly as Gallie's original thesis presumes.

The attribution of *de re* contestability appears more promising, although focusing solely on single concepts could be too narrow a point of view as it invites the kind of criticism that Newey presents. Widening the scope does not come without a cost. For instance, locating the origin of necessary contestability to the ways our social world and life is structured appears problematic in at least two different ways. First, it might open the thesis to one horn of the criticism already presented by Barry Clarke (1978; 13.5), according to which such concept-use would become completely determined by external social structures, which eliminates freedom and innovation that we associate with language-use. Second, it becomes suspect why we should still be talking about contestable concepts rather than contestable judgments, in the latter of which we of course employ concepts but they themselves need not be particularly contestable.

³³³ William Connolly rejects the descriptive-normative dichotomy partly on the basis that he does not consider the open question argument as applicable in the case of essentially contested concepts. The open question argument rests on the validity of the analytic-synthetic dichotomy which, per Connolly, does not apply "to the more complex of these concepts that enter into our theories about social and political life" (Connolly 1993, 30, see also 17–22). John Gray views the criteria of concepts such as POLITICS as having "neither a purely analytic nor a purely synthetic relationship to that concept." Moreover, we are not often "in a position to specify definitely in advance the generic features of such a concept." For Gray, the findings of Quine and Putnam suggest that "the analytic-synthetic distinction breaks down when we confront concepts with multiple and variable criteria," i.e., cluster concepts. The cluster concepts are especially characteristic of political thought and practice. (Gray 1978, 390; see also 17.5.) Jeremy Waldron warns against associating essential contestability with a comprehensive skepticism about the analytic/synthetic distinction. The distinction still has its uses, even if, say, DEMOCRACY is essentially contested. There are still "propositions about it which are analytically false: for example, that democracy is a living animal, or that a private event in the life of a single individual can be democratic." In addition, to claim DEMOCRACY as essentially contested is itself an analytic thesis. (Waldron 2002, 152, n38.) With the latter, Waldron has in mind what I call the structural or inherent characteristics of a concept, i.e., its complexity, evaluativeness etc.

CHAPTER 16: PRELIMINARIES TO DISCUSSING A CONCEPT-CENTERED THESIS

The disagreements about the nature of concepts often reflect deeply opposing approaches (Margolis and Laurence 2014). The relevant philosophical issues in the theory of thought, metaphysics, and epistemology are so fundamental that “almost every philosophical claim about concepts is controversial” – the possible costs of errors are high but so are the potential rewards of getting it right (Peacocke 2009, 427). In the last fifty years or so the claims about the nature of concepts have proliferated, a fact which reflects not only a disagreement about a commonly identified phenomenon but that those employing ‘concept’ have been concerned with different cultural and cognitive phenomena (Adcock 2005). Gallie’s bold claim concerning the existence of a previously unheard-of group of concepts should be viewed in this light: it was bound to be controversial; its implied theoretical costs and rewards have attracted thinkers to either embrace or reject it; and there is a considerable ambiguity concerning the sort of phenomenon to which he refers.

In the current chapter, I will present a rough idea of the kind of concepts that might possibly be considered as essentially contested concepts in the relevant sense. Ideally speaking, it should be possible to first state what concepts are, after which that knowledge is applied in the case of essentially contested concepts. Unfortunately, that is not feasible as there is no consensus on which theory of concepts is the correct one; each primary candidate fares better or worse in different areas (see e.g., Laurence and Margolis 1999). In this study, I will try to avoid taking a stance concerning what concepts *ultimately* are, i.e., what the ontology of concepts is or what kind of entities we should be speaking of when we speak of concepts. The irony is not lost on me: for all the talk of concepts, I do somewhat keep the subject at arm’s length.

In any case, I will start this chapter by giving an account of what kind of entities concepts are typically thought to be and by identifying the level of analysis at which our views on concepts become especially pertinent in respect of essential contestability (16.1). Next, I will outline how I understand the key differences between words, terms, and concepts in addition to offering some

remarks concerning how Gallie makes the distinction (16.2). That explication is followed by a section in which I introduce to the discussion two different theoretical frameworks for dealing with concepts, the scientific-ideal and the language-focused (16.3). I will also present considerations that warrant conducting the later discussion in structural and organizational terms. Finally, I will describe two very different ways to understand the character of concepts, as criterially governed or as interpretive (16.4), in order to establish certain conceptual characteristics to which I refer in the later assessment.

16.1 Of concepts, in general

Some identify concepts with mental representations, others with abilities, and still others with abstract (e.g., Fregean) senses (Scharp 2013, 35; Margolis and Laurence 2014, §1). The advocates of the abstract sense view – also called the Fregean view – typically think that concepts mediate between thought and language, on the one side, and referents, on the other side (ibid., §1.3). Concepts are non-spatio-temporal entities that are constituents of propositions. In contrast, mental representations are ordinarily conceived as mental particulars or as concepts that some particular person entertains. They can thus be constituents of beliefs and other propositional attitudes, and as internal symbols they have representational properties. Finally, as abilities, concepts are considered as cognitive abilities or capacities. Examples include an ability to draw some inferences rather than others, and to classify objects based on perceptions. Psychologists and philosophers appear to talk about quite different things when they speak of concepts³³⁴ (Machery 2009, ch. 1–2). Within philosophical theories that are concerned with propositional attitudes, one may distinguish between the psychological view of concepts that is concerned with mental representations and the semantic view that takes concepts to be abstract objects (Margolis and Laurence 2007). The mixed view between the two could be possible as well (Laurence and Margolis 1999; but see Margolis and Laurence 2007).

In the current study, I will not assess the fit between different theoretical approaches and a thesis of essential contestability at this fundamental level. Neither do I take any position concerning the correctness of various theories; at most, I tacitly assume that the mixed view is not totally unreasonable. I think that there is one problem which besets all views at the current level of abstraction: it is somewhat difficult to conceive how a concept can be reliably accessed in order

³³⁴ Machery explicitly argues this to be the case. According to him, the most relevant contemporary meaning of ‘concept’ in philosophy is “concepts as capacities for having propositional attitudes,” at least as far as one seeks to compare, in the first place, the theories of concepts developed by philosophers and by psychologists. More specifically: “Having a concept of x is being able to have propositional attitudes about x as x .” (Machery 2009, 31–2.) Beliefs, desires, opinions, and wishes are instances of propositional attitudes.

to *contest* it³³⁵. Moreover, I do not wish to deny that some views might preclude the mutual sharing or accessing of a concept, not to mention their essential contestability, but I leave it for the reader to decide which, if any, do so³³⁶.

Many conceptual analyses aim to account for the features of *lexical concepts*, i.e., the word-sized concepts that are generally thought to be composed of even more basic concepts (Margolis and Laurence 2014, §2). Here one may distinguish, for instance, between the classical theory, the prototype theory, the exemplar theory, and the theory theory (see e.g., Murphy 2002, ch. 2–3; Machery 2009, ch. 4). Contestability of a concept is often understood in terms of how the concept is internally organized, and it is from hereafter that a thesis of essential contestability starts to gain relevancy. Depending on one's perspective, contestability either unsettles a concept's structure or organization or the contestability requires a certain kind of conceptual structure. A special form or structure that is attributable to essentially contested concepts could make them suitable objects to be shared and disagreed about, even if the real nature of the concept would continue eluding our best efforts to determine it³³⁷.

But surely something should be said about concepts in general. Concepts are often understood as component constituents or basic units of thoughts/thinking. As such they are crucial to many psychological and cognitive processes and "absolutely vital to the efficient functioning of complex organisms like human beings" (Cruse 2000, 127). Concepts hold our mental world together "in that they tie our past experiences to our present interactions with the world" (Murphy 2002, 1) and they are indispensable tools for navigating the world (Olsthoorn 2017, 156). Concepts basically tell us what things there are in the world and what properties those things have; without stable categories to which

³³⁵ For example, Christopher Peacocke notes that "[i]t is possible for one and the same concept to receive different mental representations in different individuals," which may make mental representations too fine-grained for philosophical purposes. When concepts are understood as senses to be grasped, it is also possible that there are concepts that human beings may never acquire (ibid., Peacocke 1992, 3, 169). However, Margolis and Laurence point out that they do not see any reason why different unique mental representation tokens could not be of the same type (Margolis and Laurence 2007, 567; see also 2014, §1.3). Rather, it is a Fregean inspired view that may fail to make sense of how senses are *grasped* since, as abstract particulars, they are supposed to fall outside the physical causes and effects (Margolis and Laurence 2007, 580–1). Margolis and Laurence discuss Frege's similar argument against what they call the Psychological View," i.e., the view that understands concepts as mental representations, and as the constituents of propositional attitudes such as beliefs and desires, yet they deem that objection misconceived (Margolis and Laurence 2007, 563, 566–9). According to Hilary Putnam, "Frege's argument against psychologism is only an argument against identifying concepts with mental particulars, not with mental entities in general" (Putnam 1975, 139).

³³⁶ Mario Ricciardi, for instance, appeals to the view presented by Frege in *Grundgesetze der Arithmetik* that the definition of a concept must be complete, and it must unambiguously determine whether an object falls under the concept or not. A concept that is not sharply defined should not be termed a concept and cannot be recognized one by logic owing to the impossibility of laying down precise laws for it. For Ricciardi's complete objection to essential contestability, see Ricciardi 2000, 52ff.

³³⁷ Here and there, I make odd remarks concerning how Gallie's views relate to the aforementioned conceptions, but I will not engage in a further comparative analysis of them.

we can assign aspects of our experience, it would remain disorganized chaos (Cruse 2000, 127). Edouard Machery observes that psychologists often use ‘concept’ and ‘category’ interchangeably, which may be confusing sometimes. That said, they “often characterize concepts as those bodies of knowledge that are stored in long-term memory and that are used in the processes underlying higher cognitive competences” (Machery 2009, 7–8, 10, see 12). Thus, one way to distinguish concepts from categories is to consider a category as a collection of instances which are treated as if they were the same while a concept refers to all the knowledge that one has about a category (cf. *ibid.*, 14). In this function, concepts may be viewed as representations of the world that become the building blocks of our knowledge of the world, or as “organized bundles of stored knowledge representing an articulation of events, entities, situations, and so on in our experience”³³⁸ (Cruse 2000, 127). Having their basis in experience, the different concepts we possess stand in relation to each other as well as standing in relation to the world (see e.g., Kalish 2016, 521), even if that relation can be highly complex. All in all, what is to be included under the heading of concept is controversial; key or default inferences that are drawn by employing a concept is one good candidate. In regard to concepts that are typically conceived of as essentially contested, it is important to note that they are not merely descriptive records of frequency distribution, but they are accompanied by normative and evaluative elements as well – if only in the function in which they are employed in disputes manifesting essential contestability.

Focusing on concepts as elements of cognition may result in downplaying their connections to language and communication. In attempting to elucidate the nature of concepts, we often describe how relevant words are used, yet “the description of the use of a word is different from a description of a postulated cognitive structure,” which is not to say the two could not be tightly intertwined (Adcock 2005, 15). Concepts and conceptual contents may thus be understood as capable of being shared through the common repository of meanings by virtue of using language – or perhaps even as mental equivalents of words (Plunkett and Sundell 2013b, 10), although such equivalency can be misleading. Giovanni Sartori glosses ‘meaning’ as “what is predicated or conveyed by a word or term” or “[v]ulgarly: any mental content” (Sartori 1984, 79), yet meaning itself is a controversial notion³³⁹. In any case, concepts and propositions can be considered as non-linguistic entities in contrast to terms and sentences which are linguistic; concepts can also be understood as rules that link various entities, attributes, and relations to their respective terms (Niiniluoto 121–2).

³³⁸ As a stored and later recalled description of associations concepts can be identified as “representations of feature co-occurrence” – as most psychological theories do (Kalish 2016, 520; see Murphy 2002) – but a concept can also be viewed as “a set of stored exemplars” or “a distributed pattern of activation in a network, dynamically changing with context” (Kalish 2016, 520).

³³⁹ For a basic overview of different theories of (sentence) meaning, see Lycan 2019. Tyler Burge observes aptly that “the term “meaning” has always been vague, multi-purposed, and to some extent adaptive to the viewpoint of different theories” (Burge 1979, 398).

The communicated meaning, or *the full communicative upshot of what is expressed*, can be understood to divide into the domain of semantics, i.e., “information that is part of the linguistically encoded content of the words we use,” and into the domain of pragmatics, i.e., “information that is communicated in virtue of other features of our use of those words” (Plunkett and Sundell 2013b, 8). Gallie’s Conditions may also be divided into two clusters that correspond to semantics and pragmatics to some extent (see van der Burg 2017; ch. 10). As the previous discussion of persuasive definitions and metalinguistic negotiation illustrated (15.2), the discussion of how exactly conceptual elements become contested in various disputes should not be limited to only one domain. I should stress that this is not the way many of Gallie’s commentators appear to see the matter, and most often the focus is, explicitly or implicitly, on the side of semantics.

In talking about essential contestability, some ambiguity concerning what is meant by ‘concept’ seems almost unavoidable: possibly several different theses of essential contestability have found their way to various fields of inquiry, and not all who apply the general idea engage in deep reflection upon their own concept of a concept and how it may differ from Gallie’s. Discussion and debate regarding that which is commonly referred to either as essential contestability or essential contestedness has no strict boundaries. It seems reason enough not to straitjacket my study of essential contestability by pairing it with any particular theory of concepts. A certain looseness might also work in my favor by opening up room for thought. At the very least it hopefully disallows construction of an argument for or against essential contestability that is decided solely upon what concepts have been stipulated to be. Following Aristotle’s counsel that the degree of precision needed is relative to the nature of the subject³⁴⁰, I have elected to offer my contribution within an already existing body of work and its characteristic theoretical framings instead of opening completely new avenues. That being said, I do not think there is much need to stray far from the basic sense of concepts as classes, categories, or representations of a wide variety of objects and entities. One could say that categories are something in the world while concepts are “in the mind” (or perhaps they are abstract entities altogether!), which means that concepts hold information that exceeds that which determines category membership alone; for instance, concerning relations to other concepts or that which makes conceptual (or semantic) promiscuity possible across different domains and cognitive competences. This means that a concept is not *simply* a class or category; it differentiates a thing from other things and assigns meaning to it.

Joseph Raz states that concepts are “a philosophical creation” as objects of philosophical study; a common core to the philosophical and non-philosophical uses is that concepts relate to how people conceive of certain objects or

³⁴⁰ "For a well-schooled man is one who searches for that degree of precision in each kind of study which the nature of the subject at hand admits: it is obviously just as foolish to accept arguments of probability from a mathematician as to demand strict demonstrations from an orator" (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1.3 1094b23-28, Martin Ostwald ed. & trans., 1962).

phenomena. It is as if concepts “are placed between the world, aspects of which they are concepts of, and words or phrases, which express them (the concepts) and are used to talk about those aspects of the world.” (Raz 2005, 324–5.) Some of Gallie’s readers might have had not much more than this kind of metaphorical idea as their guide. There is a saying that is commonly attributed to Camus: to call things by incorrect names is to add to the world’s misery. More mundanely, “different things should have different names” to avoid equivocations (Sartori 1984, 50), and I am afraid the literature on essential contestability is rife with equivocations when viewed as a whole. In this study, I do not define my use of ‘concept’ as precisely as it *could* be done to keep all options open, but hopefully that does not obfuscate and obscure too much what is at issue.

16.2 Words, terms, or concepts?

Given the abstruseness of the thesis of essential contestedness, it is conceivable that Gallie might be confusing a *term* and/or *word* with a *concept*. Words have a function or meaning in language use, and therefore random strings of letters (e.g., ‘sgjeöl’) are not really words. Terms are words that express or denote concepts. Thus, not all words are terms, for instance those words that serve merely syntactical function (e.g., ‘and’ or ‘neither’). Some suitable words might perhaps be viewed as “carriers of concepts” but it is more precise to distinguish between words and terms (Sartori 1984, 17; see also 22, 24). Terms make it possible to convey ideas to other people, and concepts “are the basic ideas that give sense to a term or expression” (Olsthoorn 2017, 155). Terms can be understood as labels for concepts—they are forms that signify concepts, i.e., designating words that are allocated to concepts (Sartori 1984, 51, 84)—but there is not a necessarily straightforward one-to-one relation between the terms and the concepts. (Olsthoorn 2017, 155.) It could also be said that the meaning of a word is the concept it expresses in a context (e.g., Plunkett and Sundell 2013b, 3), and the same word—as in consisting of the same string of letters or being a homophone—can express different concepts in different contexts.

Our decisions concerning language can sometimes be negligible, but often that is not the case. Giovanni Sartori identifies two aspects of the semantic import of words, i.e., a slicing aspect, and the interpretative aspect. According to Sartori, “All words provide some kind of cutting up or slicing of the real world” but “some words (especially the ones amenable to conceptual rank) also shape the perception and/or the interpretation of whatever we take cognizance of” (Sartori 1984, 18). More generally, Sartori emphasizes that the language is “the moulder of thought” which makes allocating the term to a concept “a most central decision.” Terms are certainly not only labels; they are also “the carriers of the stability of language and of the cumulability of knowledge.” (Sartori 1984, 51.)

It is often the case that concepts are grasped and discussed only *vis-à-vis* their linguistic manifestations, and in the contexts that are related to language-use. This makes it easier to confuse (contestedness of) a word with (contestedness

of) a concept, especially when one focuses on “word-sized” concepts, or lexical concepts. And although terms should always point towards their respective concepts, one might confuse a term with a word because a term is nominally a word. While it is somewhat tough to fathom how a concept could be contested in a genuine disagreement (14.1; 14.2; cf. 15.1), it is relatively straightforward to conceive of the disputes that would originate either in the differing usage of the term/word or in an underlying disagreement regarding what conceptual content, or meaning, should be attributed to the term (cf. 15.2). Both cases can either be or lead to conceptual confusions. Since concepts are not immediately accessible or testable and the evidence which we have of them is mostly linguistically mediated, people are somewhat liable to misapprehend conceptual confusions as genuine conceptual disputes.

As to Gallie’s usage of ‘word,’ ‘term,’ and ‘concept,’ John Gunnell notes that a central problem with Gallie is that he tended to use them interchangeably, “but on the whole, he actually seemed to be talking about words” (Gunnell 2014, 486; cf. e.g., ART 109, n10, 113–4 disc. in 13.2). Mario Ricciardi explicitly argues that both Gallie and William Connolly “are wrong because they are *not aware of the difference between words and concepts*”; the meaning of some words is essentially contestable, but “a concept cannot be essentially contestable as a matter of logic” (Ricciardi 2000, 52³⁴¹). These are grave accusations. For what it is worth, Gallie does indicate, at times, that he knows the difference (see e.g., ART 100, 109, 111/PHU 174). The problem is that the way in which Gallie neglects words in ECC by referring solely to terms and concepts can be taken to suggest that by ‘term’ he actually means ‘word.’ Gallie appears very aware that the dispute is

³⁴¹ For Ricciardi (2000), essential contestability is a property of certain words: “When a word is essentially contestable it is a kind of cluster-word used in ordinary language to allude to different activities (in space and time) that go under the same name because they have some relation of similitude, analogy, genetic derivation or rhetorical connection.” Interestingly, Ricciardi thinks that the notion of essential contestability appears to capture nicely the semantic properties of some of the words that are used in talking about social groups and human affairs with no material continuity as the principle of identification over time. The crux of the issue becomes more than evident at the very end of Ricciardi’s article: “In order to say if something is ‘the same thing’ one needs the concept of that thing. Only a definition (i.e., the set of necessary and jointly sufficient conditions of application of a concept) can specify a concept. A definition is necessary not for the use of a word, but for that of a concept.” (Ricciardi 2000, 53–4.) One could respond that it does look rather evident that Gallie (or Connolly, for that matter) is not subscribing to the classical view of concepts—for perhaps the clearest argument by Gallie against the definability of a concept, especially by necessary and jointly sufficient conditions, see Gallie 1957. In addition, doing so is no longer something that can be self-evidently required after the recent track record of psychological studies on concepts, which have established empirically that many conceptual categories that are part of our everyday life are a lot more complex, indeterminate, and unstable than we used to think in classical terms. We can define those findings away by stipulating that the only usage of ‘concept’ that is allowed conforms to the classical view, but it does not seem to me a very fruitful or charitable approach. Furthermore, if Gallie’s intention was to talk about a specific type of concept that is employed in various philosophical fields in contrast to natural sciences—similarly to R.G. Collingwood as argued by Weimin Shi (2014, see esp. 293–7)—abstraction from the content of concepts to focus on their abstract-logical form may defeat the purpose.

linguistically mediated, and that different uses of a term can stand for or denote a concept, but he also seems to assume too quickly the one-to-one link between a word ('term' in his terminology) contested by rival parties and the sameness or continuity of conceptual content expressed by the word's occurrences. But that is not quite right.

I think one should start by noting that Gallie moves from an uncontroversial assumption that a term has a certain conceptual content to a much more controversial conception according to which debates revolving around some word and its related judgments are understood in terms of using that word as a general term. In *ECC*, Gallie openly admits that there is a variety of functions of different uses of a *term* (note the above), but the awareness of this fact does not end the disputes. In the same breath, Gallie insists that a certain kind of *concept* figures in those disputes (*ECC* 168), which suggests ambiguity or some other sort of confusion. Gallie evidently thinks that by using a word/term in a contestable manner (see 12.2) one expresses an essentially contested concept when other conditions are met³⁴². The problem is that he skips the stage in which a general term, and not the particular use of the word, is what stands for an essentially contested concept in the final analysis. In two newly-added inserts to the *PHU*-version, Gallie emphasizes that he has such a general term in mind (*PHU* 168, 171, 178; see also 169–70, 177).

The question now becomes: what falls under the notion of a general term? To illustrate what is problematic here, let us assume that it is possible to distinguish between a non-evaluative or purely descriptive concept of 'x' and an evaluative concept of 'x.' Let us also assume that there are no two separate terms that conventionally stand for those two different concepts; the statement "That is art" which can be meant by the speaker either descriptively or evaluatively is a fine example. Next, recall Gallie's assertion that "when we press or resist the claim of a particular work or genre or style to be regarded as 'art', we will inevitably be using the term in a contestable (...) way," as far as the matter is seen from a point of view that understands art in a one-sided way (*ART* 113–4; see 12.2). With the previous discussion in mind, one could now argue that Gallie conflates a purely descriptive concept with an evaluative concept, or a descriptive use of a concept with an evaluative use, under the general term 'art' – analogously to how he is accused of conflating altogether different conceptual contents (whether descriptive or evaluative). The point I want to raise is that there is nothing wrong with claiming that someone might construe my descriptive use of 'art' with an appreciation of an object as art, and contest it. If that is sensible, Gallie could thus be after something quite different than some are willing to grant.

To allay worries, Gallie could have tried to convince his readers that the variety of "functions" evidenced by the different uses of such terms gives rise to essential contestability only in a very specific context. He leaves obscure clues, such as that the history of philosophical aesthetics "discloses a growing

³⁴² This is probably the underlying reason why Pritam Baruah states that Gallie uses 'concept' and 'term' synonymously (Baruah 2014, 346n83).

recognition of the fact that the word 'art' is most usefully employed, not as a descriptive term standing for certain indicatable properties, but as an appraisive term accrediting a certain kind of achievement" (ART 112). But since Gallie does not produce an *explicit enough* argument to that effect, it is possible to read him as assuming that contesting a use of a word/term means contesting an associated concept *simpliciter*; that there is one essentially contested concept and that is the end of it. His talk of appraisiveness and complexity is not enough to dispel criticism, while the reference to the standard general use can easily remain cryptic (11.3). What is needed is the explanation of how the disagreements concerning the correct use of a word/term come together as, or transform into, disagreements that involve what Gallie refers to as an essentially contested concept.

Some have captured Gallie's intention better than others. Jeremy Waldron characterizes Gallie's undertaking (in *ECC*) as an exploration of the possibility that, "for certain terms, meaning may be tied (conventionally) to the existence of a controversy (or a range of controversies) rather than to the existence of a consensus" (Waldron 1994, 530). Waldron's reading emphasizes the (linguistic) meaning side of Gallie's thesis in contrast to what might be called its concept formation side – unless, a term with a meaning that is tied to a controversy also denotes a concept that is at the same time formed as part of contestation. I am personally disposed to think that Gallie's choice of terminology is mostly deliberate, which also means that Gallie either tried to avoid being too specific and/or failed to be specific enough. Other changes made in the *PHU*-version of the thesis suggest that Gallie was not completely satisfied with his first endeavor. In *ECC*, Gallie speaks of DEMOCRACY and of the need "to recognize its essentially contested character" (ECC 184), whereas in *PHU* the phrase reads: "to recognise that in this, its basic and most popular use, the term Democracy stands for an essentially contested concept" (PHU 178; compare with ART 109).

The majority of commentators seem to at least implicitly agree that there is no there there in respect of word/concept confusion. John Gray is more explicit than others in stating that Gallie's evident motive for proposing Conditions (VI) and (VII) was both "the desire to distinguish [essentially contested concepts] from concepts that are just radically confused and incoherent, and to distinguish between general words that denote a single 'essentially contested' concept and general words whose use conceals a diversity of concept" (Gray 1978, 391; cf. Gray 1983, 94–6). It should be noted that Gray does not accept (VI) and (VII), yet he has no doubt that Gallie is aware of the need to make the proper distinctions (see also Besson 2005, 83). In the absence of a clearly indicatable mistake or confusion, Gallie should be given the benefit of the doubt in this matter. In the current study, I will continue speaking of concepts and of their usage, although I will draw attention to the distinction at several points by employing either 'word/term' or 'term/concept.' I am certain that the context will tell the attentive reader what I am after in each such case.

One other point of possible confusion still needs to be addressed. One key difference between much of the secondary literature and Gallie's original

writings is that the latter asserts very little in terms of meanings (see ECC 175/PHU 164, PHU 191). Much of what I am about to say on essential contestability, especially in my own name, is based on a reading, according to which Gallie's interest lies in the act and grounds of categorization rather than with how concepts function as intermediaries between words and the world. Sometimes the two are practically one and the same thing, sometimes the difference is more evident, and there are probably times when I transition oddly from one to the other. In the same vein, although I will employ terminology that is commonly used to discuss matters within semantics, I do not mean to imply that essential contestability is a phenomenon that is strictly confined to semantics alone. It is not; as we have already seen (cf. esp. ch. 10).

16.3 The structure, organization, and character of concepts

By the 'inherent structure of a concept' I mean the set of characteristics that endow the concept with what we may call its formal nature and organization, not a specific content³⁴³. Several of Gallie's Conditions are characteristics in this sense; complexity and openness are clear examples, and some might want to include appraisiveness as well while others might prefer to view it as one function in which a concept can be used. I do not see a reason to think that concepts would always be used for a single purpose, but it might be possible to refer to a 'character of a concept,' which would also include how the concept/term is commonly understood and employed in normal contexts. For example, a concept that is characteristically appraisive is normally employed to appraise things, although it might conceivably be used for other purposes as well; for instance, to describe without an accompanying evaluation. Were the *inherent* characteristics of a concept to change, and therefore also its formal nature of organization, the concept would clearly be a different one, but deviating from a concept's characteristic usage would not necessarily have the same implication.

Robert Adcock (2005) distinguishes between a cognitive structure that is a property of an individual and a linguistic structure that is a property of a language that is shared by many individuals. A cognitive view of concepts, according to which "the attribution of the concept to a group entails *similarities* between individual's cognitive structures," cannot "deal with the attribution of a concept to a group of individuals who understand that concept in diverse and conflicting ways." Instead, diverse uses of concepts can be understood "as claims about the patterns of use that emerge across an aggregation of differing individuals." Adcock further points out that such linguistic structures could be

³⁴³ 'Characteristic' is often used as interchangeable with 'property' (Sartori 1984, 73), and the inherent structure of a concept could be considered comparable with the intension of a concept. For the most part, I employ 'characteristic' when I speak of the features of *concepts*, and 'property' when I speak of the features of *objects/referents*. I do not intend to imply any specific metaphysical view by doing so.

understood as rules and regularities that govern the use of the word/employment of the concept among a group of people, and “[w]hen such patterns do emerge the aggregation of group use can be considered to constitute a structure of sorts, and hence the attribution of a “concept” to the group is meaningful.” (Adcock 2005, 8–9, 15, 17, 25, see also n8.) From this perspective, judging some concepts as contestable is about such patterns of both individual and group usage, rather than about a uniquely definable concept that is equally shared by all individuals and group members and subsequently contested³⁴⁴.

It may be possible to frame essential contestability in psychological-cognitive terms³⁴⁵, but I think it is more straightforward to understand many of Gallie’s original concerns as related to historical patterns of word/term-usage rather than to individual cognitive structures. Especially when essential contestability is looked at from a political or conceptual-historical perspective that emphasizes large scale or collective ways of conceptualizing things and how such conceptualizations might change in the course of time, it is sensible to treat contestable concepts as linguistic structures. That perspective comes with its own pitfalls, however. John Gunnell (1998) criticizes conceptual historians (like Skinner and Koselleck) of confusing histories of words with actual conceptual *development*; it is most often best to say that a concept has *changed* while a word has stayed the same. In juxtaposition, the above view, that understands concepts explicitly as something attributed to the patterns of word-usage that constitute identifiable structures, gravitates towards an externalist explanation (see 18.4). Whether those patterns are still merely “histories of words” depends now on the plausibility of conceiving the identifiable structures as expressing concepts³⁴⁶. The obvious advantage of the word-patterns-view is that it presents us with an access to a potentially underlying concept, as tenuous as that access might be. This alone does not insulate this view from the challenges that bedevil every other way of conceiving essential contestation over concepts. One could object, for example, that the identifiable structures do not indicate the presence of the same *concept* but rather the sameness of *topic*³⁴⁷. Therefore, word-

³⁴⁴ In any case, the judgments concerning the identified patterns of diverse concept-use are of a second-order nature, and essentially contested concept is a second-order concept, or a concept that applies to other concepts or categorizes other categories (see also 18.5). In the kind of conceptual dispute that Gallie’s *Artificial* also roughly models, the disputants are not employing an essentially contested concept as a theoretical concept – while I am doing so, of course, all the time in the present study.

³⁴⁵ For instance, Mark Criley observes that linguist George Lakoff has reintroduced “Gallie’s account into his own work on political discourse (...) without revision or critical scrutiny” (Criley 2007, 19).

³⁴⁶ One might argue against the current view that the kind of identifiable structures referred to here are ultimately cognitive by their nature, notwithstanding their social or cultural prevalence. As mentioned previously (16.1), I do not take any final stance concerning the ontology of concepts; if anything, I think that the different theoretical perspectives can complement each other, and no strict demarcation is warranted.

³⁴⁷ Herman Cappelen’s (2018) argument against the notion of conceptual engineering that understands the matter in terms of better or worse concepts is also relevant in the case of

concept confusions are still more than possible, and a lot still depends on what kind of entity one considers a concept to be. Yet tracing the patterns of word-use is not an outright wrong-headed approach, but the notion rides on the case-by-case plausibility of the structural unity behind a given usage.

If we moreover share Gallie's aim of elucidating the present contestation over a concept by looking into the concept's history (ECC 196–8), we should be able to say something about how a concept can admit internal change without changing immediately to another concept altogether. In fact, Sami Syrjämäki reads Gallie as suggesting that a concept's "structural features can be used to build up a framework which is of practical use when tracking down conceptual continuities and discontinuities" (Syrjämäki 2011, 138). As a theoretical issue, the present-tense contestability of a concept appears to be cut from the same cloth as its historical continuity: while conceptual continuity with its inherent changes requires tolerance of diachronic differences, in the case of present contestability the differences are viewed synchronically. Despite their temporal distance, differences are differences just the same. Gunnell (1999) describes conceptual change as a change from one concept to another while he considers it best to understand conceptual development or evolution "as related to internal changes in the uses of a particular concept." According to him, there are no *a priori* criteria for deciding the matter in the latter case (Gunnell 1999, 652). Jouni-Matti Kuukkanen (2008) understands conceptual stability as the case "in which there is no conceptual change of any kind," or, alternatively, that concepts across different times or contexts are identical. Kuukkanen himself attempts to rescue the notion of a shared historical concept as a general concept by asserting that it comes into being conventionally by being postulated by a historian. For there to be something conceptual that persists through perceived changes, Kuukkanen assumes that the concept has a common core while the change takes place at the margin of the concept. (Kuukkanen 2008, esp. 369.)

Change and difference present an advocate of essential contestability with a sort of paradox. On the one hand, the more flexibility and/or mutual conflict demonstrated by the variety of a concept's uses, the more it starts to seem that there is no structure capable of encompassing the aggregation of those uses; and hence no single concept (Adcock 2005, 27). On the other hand, it could also be said that contestability is possible because of "the total structure of the concept" (Ingram 1985, 44), or even that it is the disagreement on the concept's "internal architecture" (Freeden 2004, 4) that enables a concept to be essentially contestable. A structure can be viewed as that which holds different elements together in a certain configuration or organization. When a conceptual structure is stable, different elements can be held together within a concept, and possibly for an extended period, despite possible tensions that stem from how those elements are particularly organized. Assuming the common core of a concept and relegating contestability to the margins of the concept is one possible way to provide stability to a conceptual structure. Although the latter conception fits

essential contestability. However, engaging with his view is not possible within the limits of the current study.

uneasily with essential contestability (see 17.3), it has undeniable merit in giving a clear answer to how a concept can retain its identity across different uses, both locally and temporally. This poses a challenge for any advocate of a strong concept-centered thesis of essential contestability that understands even the concept's core as subject to contestation (cf. 15.3).

The notion of an unstable structure of *a* concept is more problematic, but it may be sensible enough to think that any multifaceted concept that is unstable has the potential for turning out to be something else sooner or later (e.g., a confused concept; see 12.1; 14.2). Interestingly, in the interpretation of essential contestability that understands the conceptual boundaries as being determined in an intersubjective process in which agreement on relevant concerns is reached, the structure of the shared concept appears inherently unstable. What is agreed one way could, in principle, be agreed differently, and thus the very integrity and unity of such a concept constantly hangs in the balance. Furthermore, the openness of a concept and its stability appear to be inverse (cf. 6.2). The most stable concepts are those that are theoretically or axiomatically fixed, like mathematical concepts, while essentially contested concepts are considerably less so, even when the essentially contested concepts are understood anthropocentrically, or as tied to our relatively stable and shared human purposes (see 18.3).

I have proposed that a strong concept-centered thesis of essential contestability understands contestation to cover both a concept's intension and extension (15.3). There are many ways to organize the intension of the concept. For instance, Freedon (2004) thinks that essential contestability is most interestingly about conceptual structure. We need to ask: "Does a concept include, in its very structure, many conceptions surrounding an ineliminable core, or can there be concepts based on a single criterion?"³⁴⁸ Freedon thinks that the first option permits "effective contestability," even essential contestability, as people can still understand each other "and yet disagree on the intension, on the range, of the concept." The second option, however, seems to foreclose essential contestability owing to "the remarkable thinness and abstraction of the concept." (Freedon 2004, 8) If one is dealing with only one criterion, it means that the concept cannot be essentially contested in Gallie's original sense (Mason 1993). For instance, RED applies to all red things and there is nothing more to that; disagreement concerning *how red* some object is does not seem to be what one is after by invoking essential contestability. Still, dispute over *how just* some act is might fit the bill, and if so, one should explain why³⁴⁹. Gallie did not refer to

³⁴⁸ The notion 'core' apparently entails different things for different authors. For instance, according to Freedon, political concepts "do not have fixed and determinate cores," but that "concrete instances of concepts may display a core as a structural rather than substantial feature" (Freedon 1994, 53–4).

³⁴⁹ For instance, Ronald Dworkin characterizes interpretive concepts in terms by which no decisive test or decision procedure is available in their case (Dworkin 2011, 160, 173). For Dworkin, a concept like RED is "criterial" in that people agree about the correct criteria of application while also accepting some decisive test for finally deciding when to apply the

criteria this explicitly but he certainly thought that essentially contested concepts must be complex (5.1; esp. ART 107).

The disagreement concerning what criteria to include within a concept's structure or organization, and not merely their weighting, can already be considered an extension of Gallie's theoretical framework (17.2). Some of Gallie's examples suggest, however, that the criteria are viewed by him rather fluidly. In discussing DEMOCRACY, Gallie doubts that any of its criteria would state an absolute requirement, a sufficient condition, or perhaps even a necessary condition of a democratic society since that matter depends on one's historical and social circumstances, or how one has arrived at them (ECC 185, n3). Regarding ART, Gallie presents five main types of aesthetic theories that view and define art differently, but he also remarks that "a single compendious definition of art" could be given in a "hundred-and-twenty possible arrangements" (ART 112-3). This is not the case with SOCIAL JUSTICE that "seems to admit of only two" possible descriptions "as popularly used to-day" (ECC 187). In general, Gallie is equipping the live examples with those criteria which conceivably belong to them contemporaneously while also acknowledging that the situation could be different if things had turned out differently. That is a truism, yet it may be taken to imply that the boundaries of essentially contested concepts are not only open in the future but also porous in the present.

In conclusion, can one get around the first challenge, i.e., the possession objection, by conceiving the organization of concepts in present terms? There is some reason to believe that we are never able to employ *exactly* the same concepts, since the concepts we actually possess have been affected by our personal histories in addition to broader historical, political, and social considerations. Consequently, practically any given concept-user differs in their linguistic and other dispositions, if ever so slightly³⁵⁰. What is considered "a concept" may just be a chimera that serves only to prolong illusions concerning what really takes place when we dispute with others. Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent, eh? Perhaps not quite. The domains of judgments in which essentially contested concepts characteristically figure (e.g., political and moral judgments) are not insulated from concerns that relate to concepts (or cognitive and linguistic thinking). In fact, some such matters have a huge practical significance for how we orient ourselves in the world and share our concerns with others and we need *some* tools for formulating what we are after, even if the overall theoretical framework were different.

Robert Adcock (2005) does just that by also distinguishing between two frameworks for dealing with concepts: the scientific-ideal and the language-focused. A key part of *the scientific-ideal framework* is the classical way of

concept (apart from few marginal cases). This should not be confused with what I call 'criterially governed (descriptive) concept' in 16.4.

³⁵⁰ Consider, for instance, the quite reasonable view that individuals' language use varies because language depends on "the experiences, usage, and psychological structures of individuals," whereas "[v]ariation in individuals' word meaning, for example, is the natural result of the close relation between meaning and belief," and hence "some variation in meaning with individual belief is inevitable" (Burge 1989, 176).

distinguishing between the meaning of a concept and the meaning of a word. More to the point, a rigid application of “the classical logic of the scientific-ideal framework suggests that any two scholars whose application of words employ slightly different sets of characteristics must be seen as employing different ‘concepts’.” In *the language-focused framework* the concepts have been treated as “multi-faceted social phenomena that have existence independent of any particular individual” instead of focusing on “atomized units of cognition that satisfy the criteria of classical categories.” Adcock also identifies the views according to which “concepts are capacities [e.g., rule-following] that are prominently displayed in the use of language,” with this framework³⁵¹. These views stand in sharp contrast with how the scientific-ideal framework distinguishes concepts (e.g., “A from not-A”). (Adcock 2005, 11, 21, 23–4.)

The change of framework may not directly resolve the first challenge itself, but it offers new ways of doing so. Maybe the fine-graininess of concepts as they are understood within the scientific-ideal framework, or as being distinguished by their unique possession conditions, is simply not what one is after in the case of essential contestability. Setting razor sharp distinctions between different categories might thus be a non-starter if essentially contested concepts have some function other than being categories of objects that are as distinct as possible. In addition, if they are comparable to multi-faceted social phenomena that are variously described, as a sum of those descriptions they are likely more rough-grained than their scientific-ideal counterparts. Gallie himself supports and argues for some kind of framework change as far as concepts are concerned when he rejects the applicability of the idea, that “clarification or improved understanding of a concept would naturally be taken to mean improvement in one's skill and confidence in using it—thanks to, e.g., a full and clear statement of the rules governing its use,” in the case of appraisive concepts (ECC 197; see also Gallie 1957, 132 or 15.3). One of Gallie's points is that essentially contested concepts that figure in discussions of political, moral, and aesthetic problems are different from the well-established concepts of the physical sciences, and we should not model one after another.

As far as the presently identified two broad frameworks for treating concepts are concerned, adopting one over the other depends on what one hopes to achieve with one's inquiry. Michael Rhodes, who argues that essential contestability is a matter related to terms rather than concepts (due to what kind of theoretical entities concepts are), proposes that the disambiguation of ambiguous terms should be favored to (i) facilitate better communication in ordinary contexts and (ii) remove impediments of progress in philosophical analysis (Rhodes 2000, 15–18). I think the point Rhodes is making is quite acceptable, but I also think that focusing on ambiguous terms misses the deeper point behind essential contestability and disputes characteristic to it. In the same manner, the classical take on concepts (or some neo-classical variant) that emphasizes definitions could prove to be the most useful regulative perspective on concepts as far as certain scientific or philosophical purposes are concerned,

³⁵¹ Here, Adcock cites works by Peter Geach, Hilary Putnam, Morris Weitz, and Grant Gillett.

yet it might be a mistake to cast Gallie's appraisive concepts that are understood as popular conceptions (11.3) in the same mold³⁵². But why exactly that would be the case still requires considerably more elucidation than my previous close reading of Gallie's thesis has offered.

16.4 From criterially governed concepts to interpretive concepts

In the current treatise, I have noted several times that I will steer clear of subscribing to any theory of concepts so as to avoid deciding upon the viability of essential contestability views on that account alone. The other reason is that Gallie does not seem to have a particular grand theory of concepts in mind (and nor do many of his commentators). If anything, the thesis of essential contestedness can be construed as an immanent criticism of the classical view (cf. 2.3) while no clear, not to mention comprehensive, alternative is proposed. In this section, I will start by offering brief remarks concerning how one may generally approach the "what is X?" type of questions from the standpoint of concepts and their criteria. The main point, though, is to present an account of concepts as descriptive and criterially governed, and to contrast that account with the very different idea of an interpretive concept. For reasons that become clear later, an essentially contested concept cannot be a purely descriptive concept that is criterially governed. And although there is reason to believe that essentially contested concepts have an interpretive function (see esp. 18.3), it is doubtful that they strictly align with the interpretive concepts. Rather, both conceptions serve as baselines for further modification and as theoretical contrasts that can be utilized in the subsequent discussions.

According to Georg von Wright (1963), one is urged to undertake conceptual investigations because of one's bewilderment concerning the meaning of some, usually familiar, words. Yet we often hesitate because we do not know the features that form the *grounds* for, or against, calling something 'x.' These grounds can be called "*criteria* or *standards* for deciding, whether a thing is x or not." (von Wright 1993, I: §3). In his discussion of moral notions, Julius Kovesi acknowledges this as the customary philosophical usage of 'criteria' but he elects to speak of 'recognitors' as "the defining characteristics of the material elements of a thing or act or situation or any phenomenon" while the criteria for the proper use of the word require the grasp of 'the formal element' in connection to activities³⁵³ (Kovesi 1967, 40-1). Gallie speaks of 'criteria' very sparingly;

³⁵² One can reasonably argue that the language-use of scientists should be different from ordinary instances (see Adcock 2005, 18ff), and cases that hold our practical interest could require different tools, even a different representation device, whether or not it is still called 'concept.' In fact, it is perfectly within the realm of possibilities that the project of developing a single theory of concepts is misguided in the first place – as Edouard Machery (2009) argues with respect to mostly psychological theories.

³⁵³ The formal element corresponds roughly with a concept's sense while the material element is akin to factual circumstances in which the concept applies. This way the same

instead, he refers to different descriptions via which a valued achievement is evaluated and in which the component parts of the valued achievement are ranked (cf. 5.1). The only relevant mentions of 'criteria' are either in the context of *Artificial* (i.e., what are, supposedly, the proper criteria of championship [sic: cf. 11.1]) and Condition (V) (i.e., the criteria need to be mutually appreciated by rival parties; see 7.1). In the current study, I have referred to and continue referring to 'criteria' in the sense used above by von Wright. It nicely illustrates why the "what is x?" type of definitional questions and the ensuing definitional disputes appear especially relevant with respect to essential contestability, even if most essential contestability accounts are probably hostile towards the classical view of concepts that represents concepts in the form of clear-cut and completely unambiguous definitions (see 2.3). That is because the answers to such questions are given based on what the proper features of 'x' are taken to be. From a different point of view, we seek grounds for calling something 'x' that can be presented in the form of criteria or recognitors.

Diverse describability of a valued achievement (that an essentially contested concept signifies) requires complexity (5.1), a complexity which reflects conditions in the world somehow, yet mutual differences in proposed descriptions originate in how each concept-user evaluates the matter in their particular appraisive situation (11.4). Since an essentially contested concept consists of mutually contesting uses that are conflicting (though not altogether incommensurable) descriptions (11.3; see also 18.1), essentially contested concepts are perhaps best viewed as descriptive (rather than as, for example, empirical). By this I mean that what is denoted by a descriptive concept shifts depending on how the thing denoted is described by the disputants (rather than being grounded on something else, for example, nature). It is indisputable that Gallie frames the disputes as involving different uses of a concept, the uses that he characterizes in terms of descriptions, which for him means that the concept in question is variously describable (5.1). Does that also mean that Gallie adopts the *descriptivist* view of concepts? Not really, since one of Gallie's points is that each disputing party fails in its attempt to capture all the complexity of an essentially contested concept with a particular exclusive definition³⁵⁴. Moreover, the kind of descriptions that Gallie has in mind include such varied things as

formal element can be captured by different variations of the material element. Relatedly, Michael Rhodes (2000) has pointed out that in the kind of case in which rival parties want their clashing conceptions of 'justice' actualized in society, what takes place could also be framed as "what many contemporary normative theorists, in accordance with Aristotle, refer to as arriving at conflicting material principles which are derived from a single formal principle." Hence, the contestability-related difficulties "may well be regarded as applicable to the formal-material distinction." (Rhodes 2000, 5.)

³⁵⁴According to Laurence and Margolis, "roughly, a descriptivist view is one according to which, in order to be linguistically competent with a term, one must know a description that counts as the meaning of the term and picks out its referent" (Laurence and Margolis 1999, 21). It may be of interest to note that Gallie is not susceptible to an objection often levelled against descriptivism, i.e., that we can possess a concept in spite of being mistaken or ignorant about the properties that we take its instances to have (see also Laurence and Margolis 1999, 21-2), because the status properties themselves are subject to contestation.

descriptions that rank one valuable aspect of the valued achievement over others, definitions of concept, and theories about what the concept signifies (see ART; cf. 17.1). When these things are considered to belong within a concept, that concept becomes not only complex but extraordinarily so.

It may thus be informative to simplify things a bit, even if only temporarily, and I will now do so by presenting essentially contested concepts as *criterially governed*. What I mean by a criterially governed concept can be captured by distinguishing it from a natural kind³⁵⁵. The natural kinds (or, natural kind concepts) refer rigidly to things in the world; the real determinant of the extension is a natural property, and the indicators of the concept are contingent in that they only point toward an underlying natural essence. “Is wet” is an indicator of the natural kind ‘water’ in its liquid form. However, water’s underlying essence is H₂O, and “is wet” merely indicates that one might be dealing with water, in which case it would be proper to use ‘water’/WATER. The indicators of natural kinds are therefore not to be understood as essential to the concept as there is an underlying material reality that “provides” one with the final criteria, norms, or rules that constitute the concept or the intension of the term. In contrast, the indicators of criterially governed concepts determine the extension of the concept intrinsically, after the fashion of a cluster of criteria, and the indicators are essential as regards a concept. No additional underlying reality is assumed nor necessarily denied; the point rather is that there is no need for it owing to the self-sufficient nature of such concept.

In the case of essentially contested concepts as criterially governed, the type of criteria in which we are interested pick out what we take to be the indicators or recognitors of the property that is denoted by the concept. That property is the valued achievement and/or the normative ideal that is held in value by the concept-users. Essential contestation around, say, DEMOCRACY does not really concern what actual governments are democracies, or could be called such, but rather what range of things determines, or contributes to, the status of being democratic³⁵⁶. Regarding moral notions, Kovesi asserts that their formation is a public process, and that the recognitors of the moral notions “are to be found in

³⁵⁵ The distinction between the two is from Crispin Wright (2003, 359–60), and my current presentation borrows heavily from him. Distinguishing criterially governed concepts in this way can be viewed as particularly apposite in the present context given that Gallie contrasted essentially contested concepts with the concepts employed in the natural sciences.

³⁵⁶ Gallie asserts that he is not interested in “questions of actual practice, vindicating or belying certain particular uses of the term ‘democracy’” (ECC 183), instead, he is after “the elementary use” of ‘democracy’ (see also 11.3). Many seem to disagree about this. For instance, consider the following critical point by John Gray: “when there is a dispute about whether a given form of government is democratic, or about what a just society would look like, it is far from obvious that the disputants must (or typically do) share a common concept of democracy and social justice while endorsing divergent criteria for its correct application” (Gray 1978, 391). I take that as a partial misinterpretation, even if the point Gray makes about assuming a single shared concept can be granted by itself. Gallie explicitly states that he is not interested in arguments in which “actual political conditions or actions are referred to and then the question is put: “Can you call that democratic?” or “Is this an example of your democracy?” (ECC 183). Only the latter of Gray’s cases, i.e., what a just society would look like, coheres somewhat adequately with what Gallie appears to have in mind.

our life.” Only those recognitors that are shared and recognizable by everyone can form the basis of a shared moral notion, and hence constitute the use of a term that corresponds with the notion. (Kovesi 1967, 55.) Adopting Kovesi’s view would amount to a slight, yet important, modification to Gallie’s requirement of the mutual appreciation of the criteria of application (7.1).

The fundamental problem with understanding essentially contested concepts as criterially governed is that the criterial governability entails that indicators/recognitors are essential with respect to the criterially governed concept. A disagreement over what those indicators or recognitors should be undermines the dispute’s genuineness by suggesting that parties are referring to different normative ideals or valued achievements. Any concept can be understood in terms of norms and rules that govern its meaning and application, and by virtue of which it has the meaning or content it does and is employed in a characteristic way. These norms and rules are now taken as constitutive rather than regulative³⁵⁷; they cannot be broken because doing so would amount to changing the concept, and not just using it differently. In terms of the first challenge (15.1), rival parties disagreeing over these rules and norms would not be possessing the same concept, or at least not an identical one. Both Kovesi and Gallie require that a concept’s/notion’s criteria need to be mutually accepted. That is because the identity of the concept/notion in question changes when a change occurs in the set of criteria that picks out the relevant recognitors or indicators, the criteria which correspond with the rules and norms that are constitutive of the concept.

Following Ronald Dworkin (but cf. below), Samantha Besson (2005) argues that normative concepts cannot be understood the same way descriptive concepts are. As the traditional understanding would have it, the minimal agreement required to share a (descriptive) concept comes down to sharing fixed rules or criteria for the correct use of the concept (i.e., its application). Genuine criterial disagreement is made possible only by a mistake by one of the parties who otherwise agree on how the concept is to be commonly employed. An essential contestability thesis requires more latitude in terms of both sharing and contesting a concept than strict criterial governability admits if the thesis hopes to avoid being reduced to an error theory. Besson herself characterizes conceptual disagreement as revolving around “the broad meaning or delimitation of a concept” (Besson 2005, 47, 71, 86), and I will get back to her view later (see 17.4).

Some of Gallie’s remarks, especially in *ART*, suggest that Gallie would not be happy with the idea of modelling essentially contested concepts after

³⁵⁷ The distinction is often attributed to John Searle, but it originates in Rawls 1955. Of the distinction, and whether it is merely a linguistic one, see esp. Hindricks 2009. Even the rules that regulate how some nominal linguistic expression is commonly used, and which can thus be broken by using the expression differently, can be reformulated as constitutive of the practice of using that expression. In addition, as a terminological note, Kevin Scharp calls these norms and rules a concept’s “constitutive principles” (Scharp 2013, 36), but I will not adopt such usage as I want to avoid confusions with normative principles that can be taken to constitute the type of normative ideals to which I refer.

criterially governed concepts. First, the lesson he draws from the history of what is taken as art is that it “discloses a growing recognition of the fact that the word 'art' is most usefully employed, not as a descriptive term standing for certain indicatable properties, but as an appraisive term accrediting a certain kind of achievement” (ART 111). Second, Gallie states that “the grounds of any fruitful comparison between *all* the arts can be only of a very abstract kind: there can be no question of comparison, in respect of observable or indicatable properties, between them all” (ART 110). The key term in both quotes is ‘indicatable properties’ which is comparable to the indicators of the criterially governed concepts. To me it seems that Gallie’s starting point is to consider concepts like ART as criterially governed descriptive concepts, but given the nature of the case he ends up adopting a very different conception of what a concept is.

An interesting, and ultimately highly relevant (see esp. 18.3; 18.5), alternative that appears to provide ample latitude for mutual differences is Ronald Dworkin’s idea of *interpretive concept* (see Dworkin 2011, chs. 6–8). The interpretive concepts are defined by Dworkin as concepts whose “correct use is a matter of interpretation, and people who use them disagree about what the best interpretation is” (ibid., 120). By itself, the definition is too thin to be of much use. The more substantive idea behind interpretive concepts is that, in addition to categorizing the world, they are employed by people to understand themselves and what they are doing. According to Dworkin, interpretive concepts figure within social practices (ibid., 160, 180) while people who use them also interpret practices in which they figure (ibid., 164). People treat interpretive concepts as identifying a value or disvalue, but they disagree about how to characterize or identify that value (ibid., 160); these concepts can be said to “house values” (ibid., 165). Moral concepts, for instance, are interpretive concepts (ibid., 166), and “because any definition of a moral concept is a piece of moral interpretation, any helpful definition will inevitably be controversial” (ibid., 170). Whether disputants share an interpretive concept or not depends on whether they sufficiently agree on what they take to be paradigm instances of the concept. However, it cannot be said in advance “just how much or what detail of agreement about paradigms is required in a particular community to justify treating a concept as interpretive for that community.” (ibid., 160–1.) For Dworkin, it is an open interpretive question whether one should identify disputants as sharing an interpretive concept rather than drawing some other conclusion (e.g., that there is a conceptual confusion).

As I see it, Dworkin’s idea of interpretive concept is directly and clearly influenced by Gallie’s thesis of essential contestedness even if Dworkin himself does not mention Gallie at all in what was to be his last major work, *Justice for Hedgehogs* (2011) (Stokes 2007, e.g., 690; Baruah 2017, 131, 152–3; see also 18.3). Besson ends up rejecting Dworkin’s account of interpretive concepts while siding with essentially contestable concepts because “the notion of contestability encompasses all the features of the Dworkinian ‘interpretive’ concepts, but without necessarily sharing their implications regarding the need for constructive interpretation” (Besson 2005, 71). By contrast, Wibren van der Burg

states that essentially contestable concepts constitute only a subclass of interpretive concepts, while Dworkin's suggestion that 'interpretive' and 'essentially contested' are synonyms is a mistake (van der Burg 2017, 249). In any case, the mere fact that a concept is interpretive does not make it essentially contested (van der Burg 2017, 249). My future discussion (17.1) of normative principles in relation to a concept suggests, among other things, that the need for constructive interpretation may indeed already be present in Gallie's thesis. At the very least, an essential contestability thesis can rather easily be coupled with the idea that they are employed in *interpretive function*³⁵⁸ (see 18.3).

Assuming that one is dealing with interpretive concepts opens new theoretical avenues for an essential contestability thesis. For instance, when essentially contested concepts are viewed as having an interpretive function, there is an alternative for how the liberal self-understanding could figure in essential contestability (cf. 13.3). One's self-understanding can now directly affect, or indeed be an integral part of, how one deems a concept to be properly used. That is perhaps trivial by itself, but it makes perfect sense to think that the liberal self-understanding could increase one's readiness to acknowledge that there are different reasonable ways of using interpretive concepts that stand for various achievements that are typically under contestation in liberal societies. The possibility that the combinatorial (and interpretive) tolerance (see 5.2) of the interpretive concept is determined through the extent of agreement in a community is implicit in the way Dworkin characterizes interpretive concepts (see above). Nevertheless, it seems that we could just as well assert that one's self-understanding is determined based on how one understands the interpretive concepts. In other words: one would be liberal because one understands certain concepts as admitting a range of reasonable uses, and not merely the other way around. The order of priority between the two is difficult, and I dare say needless, to establish.

To conclude, the concept of an interpretive concept stands in stark contrast to the concept of a criterially governed concept. The latter views recognitors or indicators of a concept as essential to the identity of the concept while the former accepts considerable variability between users as a matter that depends on interpretation that, in turn, can take myriad different considerations into account. The contestation over criterially governed concepts cannot really threaten the core of the concept while everything that has at least some ground in shared, though possibly partial, agreement on paradigms is potentially open to question or, I should say, to interpretation. The criterial governability does not offer enough latitude for essential contestability over a concept while the present rough approximation of the idea of an interpretive concept appears to guarantee maximal contestability by making the assessment of what falls within the concept

³⁵⁸ When I speak of an interpretive function of concepts, the basic idea is similar with what Dworkin substantively aims at, yet I do not appeal to Dworkin's specific theoretical views (e.g., on the structure of interpretive concepts as capable of housing values etc.) unless otherwise noted nor do I commit to his broader conclusions (e.g., on the unity of value, in general).

a matter of interpretation. However, it is not very clear based on Dworkin's account – even on the basis of his much more extensive presentation in Dworkin (2011) – what the real import of the interpretive concepts *as concepts* is in disputes between different conceptions and theories that Dworkin describes (see esp. Baruah 2017). It can also be doubted whether it is reasonable to postulate a specific theoretical entity to explain how certain intractable disagreements could be genuine (*contra* Dworkin, see Plunkett and Sundell 2013a). As it was already suggested in relation to the Shared Meaning Task, the stability of the subject matter of disagreement may not require a shared semantic meaning of a linguistic item (11.1). Furthermore, it is not clear how much of the possibility of genuine disagreement between rival parties simply rests on faith that they are talking about, and contesting, the same thing or topic rather than that they are, in fact, possessing and sharing a special kind of concept. Or from a slightly different perspective: it may be the case that Dworkin describes the beliefs that the disputants hold *about* the correct use of some concepts rather than it being the case that the disputants *have* the concepts corresponding to those beliefs (see Baruah 2017, 151).

CHAPTER 17: DELVING DEEPER INTO THE STRUCTURE AND ORGANIZATION OF THE CONCEPT

The concept of an essentially contested concept, i.e., *ESSENTIALLY CONTESTED CONCEPT*, is a philosophical creation that is utilized in connection to a phenomenon of essential contestability, i.e., there are irresolvable and endless disputes which are about such concepts, or in which such concepts are centrally involved. *ESSENTIALLY CONTESTED CONCEPT* is also a theoretical concept, the most obvious function of which is to designate a class of concepts on the basis of certain characteristics. In this chapter, I will analyze several ways of conceiving the inherent structure of first-order essentially contested concepts. I will continue making copious references to Gallie's views, but the following aims to be a critical examination of what kind of a thing, if any, could meet the requirements of the concept-centered thesis.

First, I will investigate the nature and character of essentially contested concepts in relation to their own criteria, norms and normative principles, and theories (17.1). Then I will analyze disputes over essentially contested concepts as weighting disagreements in which a concept's applicability to a given case is contested on the grounds that some feature(s) should be appraised more than others (17.2). I claim that essential contestability should not be understood as a simple weighting disagreement, which motivates looking for other alternatives. The first of those is the concept/conception distinction, but it turns out that the assumption of a mutually shared core of an essentially contested concept is problematic as it precludes contestation that is extensive enough (17.3). Another way of conceiving essential contestability as arising from a concept's structure is to view it as an upshot of how the concept's descriptive and evaluative content are organized (17.4). Although a thesis of essential contestability that relies on the interplay of the descriptive and evaluative elements may be possible at some level, there is reason to believe that essentially contested concepts are not semantically evaluative in any special sense.

Gallie deems complexity as the chief reason why a given concept is essentially contested. In the fifth section, I will examine that from different points of view, and mostly vis-à-vis the notion of a cluster concept (17.5). The key distinction in that regard concerns whether essentially contested concepts are understood either as internally complex, as embedded in more expansive conceptual constellations, or perhaps even as both. Unfortunately, it turns out that this position also comes up short in guaranteeing essential contestability, which motivates my final push in attempting to locate contestability within the concept's inherent structure (17.6). I make a case for the claim that the right kind of application dispute could threaten a concept's intension as well. However, it is ultimately capable of establishing, at most, a sense of uncertainty, not essential contestability.

17.1 Normative principles and theories in relation to concepts

Concepts can serve as the building blocks of principles, and principles can serve as the building blocks of theories; only the latter two are capable of being true or false (List and Valentini 2016, 534). This basic guideline has its foundation in the view that a concept does not by itself have a propositional form, unlike a principle (as a kind of statement) or a theory (as a collection of statements). Concepts are rather understood as basic units that are given their sense in how they figure in different propositions (see also Margolis and Laurence 2007, 565–6). Most of the secondary literature on essential contestability fails to explicitly account for concepts' relation to principles and theories, and that often reflects on what is assumed to be under contestation. In this section, I will discuss how the scope of a thesis of essential contestability, or any thesis of conceptual contestability for that matter, is affected greatly depending on how one views these relations. I will do so by trying to make sense of how normative principles or theories could be conceived as either forming an integral part of a concept or being otherwise intimately connected to the kind of disputes in which essentially contested concepts are involved.

As an example of how concepts, principles, and values are sometimes considered together, Jakob Norberg asserts in his "Concepts, political" entry to *The Encyclopedia of Political Thought* that political concepts "represent fundamental political values and principles" and that, as an essentially contested concept, "[a] concept such as democracy (...) *names an achievement or principle* held in high esteem by a great number of people" (Norberg 2015, 1–4; italics added). If a concept "names" or otherwise has come to represent certain value commitments or normative principles, we may ask why we cannot just say that those values or principles are contested instead of the concept. A conflict in principles can be indicative of differences in values rather than in conceptualizations. Nevertheless, there is no avoiding examining the accompanying norms and how disputants relate to them, if at least "part of what distinguishes different types of concepts are the normative commitments and

evaluations they entail" (Kalish 2016, 534). Gallie's appraisive concepts are meant to signify valued achievements, and so one is in any case required to judge what satisfies the relevant norm(s)/standard(s) (cf. Kovesi 1967, 23–6, 154–6). Essentially contested concepts therefore always invoke *some* accompanying standards and norms that are characteristically connected to the concept-users' normative commitments and expectations (18.3; 18.2). In the secondary literature, the norm-dependency is often implicitly assumed but only rarely have the authors made an explicit case for how that translates to the level of *conceptual* contestability.

Wibren van der Burg (2017) proposes a reconstruction of Gallie's thesis, according to which "essentially contestable concepts are concepts that refer to ideals or to concepts and phenomena that can only be fully understood in the light of ideals, and that are, as a consequence, open to pervasive contestation." In rough terms, Gallie's original references to a valued achievement are replaced with references to an ideal. Ideals themselves are now considered as complex values that are usually not completely realizable, and regarding which there is always a surplus of meaning. They are distinct from mere (personal) goals, and ideals "partly transcend contingent, historical formulations and implementations." (van der Burg 2017, 244–5.) As our present focus is on how a concept-centered thesis can make a case for a concept's special structure or organization as the key to its essential contestability, one especially relevant aspect of van der Burg's proposal is that he views ideals as open to different interpretations that he further equates with different competing conceptions. Every such conception is "necessarily only a partial one," though capable of providing additional valuable insight as an alternative conception³⁵⁹ (ibid., 245–7). It does not seem totally unreasonable to assume that we come to grasp such ideals by first becoming familiar with, and then accepting, related normative principles, norms, and standards (in short: normative principles). Or as van der Burg maintains, "we must refer to other complex ideals and constitutive values, as well as to intermediate principles and rules" (van der Burg 2017, 246). An interesting prospect emerges: contestedness of a normative principle or several normative principles might amount to contestedness of a (intimately) connected concept. That would go a long way in explaining why disputes over normative principles and values are often understood as conceptual disputes. I will next present two options for what is going on more exactly.

Regarding the first option, let us start by simplistically stipulating that the normative ideal of democracy (indicated now by DEMOCRACY*) comes down to the following two principles:

N₁: every citizen should be able to partake in setting a political agenda

³⁵⁹ The concept/conception thesis (17.3) and the incompleteness thesis that is characterized by the lack of conceptual wholeness (17.5; see also 6.2) are introduced and discussed later.

N₂: every citizen should be able to partake in free elections as a voter and/or as a candidate for office³⁶⁰

These principles could next be transformed to the descriptive criteria of DEMOCRACY* by replacing 'should be' with 'is'³⁶¹. We could also further suppose that all concept-users are acknowledging that the valued achievement of democracy can be realized to different degrees as circumstances are often less than ideal. In that case, the concept that signifies such achievement becomes gradable³⁶², which is enough for DEMOCRACY* to be complex and variously describable. When DEMOCRACY* is applied according to the criteria that reflect N₁ and N₂, one can thus have a conceptual dispute over how to rank the component parts of the valued achievement of democracy that the principles N₁ and N₂ reflect³⁶³ (see also van der Burg 2017, 247). There is a clear sense that the concept is normative: it denotes an ideal-like achievement that is valued positively by those who employ the concept.

However, contesting N₁ and N₂ would not automatically entail that one means to contest DEMOCRACY*. Rather, given the possibility to transform the normative principles to the descriptive criteria means that people could contest certain normative principles *as if* they were the criteria of DEMOCRACY (or, DEMOCRACY*). I mean to say that disputes over normative principles need not be conceptual disputes, even if they could be construed as such. The disputes over normative principles could be, for instance, (a) disputes concerning how the principles are to be applied in particular circumstances or (b) substantive value disagreements concerning which principles one should adopt and which to dismiss. It remains unclear whether the concept is, in fact, contested at all in either case. Claiming that the concept is contested could thus be tantamount to a confusion, even if both cases could be construed as kinds of conceptual disputes.

In the case of (a), a dispute over whether a principle applies in given circumstances may sometimes be construed as a dispute over whether that principle is important enough to merit active consideration as an integral part of

³⁶⁰ N₁ and N₂ are meant to capture one possible sense of what Gallie calls "aspirations" (11.3) that are connected to the elementary use of 'democracy' as a normative ideal. I presuppose that aspirations in the presently relevant sense are based on personal or collective values, they are normatively guided, and they can be represented by normative principles.

³⁶¹ Thus formed descriptive criteria should not be confused with the kind of conflicting descriptions, in which component parts are put in different ranking orders, that Gallie's disputants put forward in contesting what is most valuable in a valued achievement (cf. esp. ECC 184–5). At this point, the descriptive criteria are not (yet) further ranked or ordered.

³⁶² Issues related to gradability, or weighting, in the context of Gallie's original formulation are discussed in 17.2. See also ECC 184/PHU 179, PHU 162.

³⁶³ Here we also see clearly how the criteria themselves, and not only their mutual weighting, may require interpretation: (a) it is not evident how one should understand 'agenda' or 'freedom' in N₁ and N₂, (b) or how they are to be applied in particular cases, (c) not to mention that they would be the only correct or the most salient criteria. However, of these, (b) is not the kind of disagreement that we are after; (a) is not either, *if* the overall definition is otherwise mutually accepted, in which case we are back to application-dispute, and the dispute over component terms does not spill to question shared understanding; while only (c) has the potential to clearly threaten the shared core understanding.

the normative ideal that the concept signifies. Such considerations connect with what are taken as paradigm instances, and contesting or re-evaluating what others claims as paradigm is one form a conceptual dispute may take. In the case of (b), we are dealing with already discussed possibility to construe disagreement over a normative principle as disagreement over a criterion of concept that represents the principle in the form of descriptive norm or rule that determines the application of the concept. Furthermore, in this picture, it is conceivable that disputes that commence as being about a normative principle could easily become, or verge on being, about some closely related concept *if* the connection between the principle and the concept is close enough. That would nevertheless be frustratingly difficult to establish with any certainty; how each actual dispute ebbs and flows is one thing, how what takes place is reconstructed by theoretical means is quite another.

If the concept, and not only the normative ideal that is represented by the concept, were to consist of normative principles, the situation changes. If we are to further assume that the relevant type of normative ideal consists of normative principles—in my simplistic model of DEMOCRACY*, N_1 and N_2 —the principles not only represent or reflect the criteria according to which the concept is applied, but they *are* part of the inherent structure of the concept. Here it is probably sensible to still suppose that such concept is applied by comparing the descriptive form of normative principles (cf. before) to the facts of the matter in order to see whether a categorization threshold is met. This makes sense of Gallie's idea of why ranking the component parts, i.e., its indicators/recognitors, of a valued achievement differently can result in disputes over the concept itself since the valued achievement is understood to consist of normative principles, principles of which the concept consists as well. It may still be suspected, though, that all this results in a ranking dispute that is still not a clear enough case of essential contestability (cf. 17.2). Moreover, the current conceptual ontology may lead to drawing conclusions that defy theoretical sensibility. For example, every time a person is contesting a principle that (allegedly) belongs to one or multiple concepts that person is also contesting the respective concept(s) even if she were not aiming to do so or were otherwise unaware of what is taking place. Why would we not simply say that the person is not in agreement with those normative ideals of which the principle in question is a part and leave concepts out altogether?

Johan Olsthoorn (2017) offers an interesting perspective on the matter by distinguishing between *essentially evaluative* concepts, i.e., concepts the use of which "*necessarily* involves evaluation," and *non-essentially evaluative* concepts, i.e., concepts that are "frequently used normatively, but have sufficient descriptive content to not necessarily involve commendation or disparagement" like the former. Olsthoorn lists GOOD, JUSTICE, REASONABLENESS, and FAIRNESS as essentially evaluative—"anyone who sincerely declares 'this just arrangement is wrong' does not know what justice means." An essentially evaluative concept "could either consist of everything in the world that meets the standards of [x]," or "of all these standards, principles and norms themselves." In the case of

essentially evaluative concepts: any attempt to determine their extension is controversial; studying them will inevitably be a normative endeavor; and when such a concept evaluates an object positively, it is especially easy to conflate the set of evaluative objects with the set of evaluative standards that fall under the concept. (Olsthoorn 2017, 172–5; see also 17.4.)

Olsthoorn's notion of essential evaluativeness would appear to solve the present problem (in a technical fashion): such *thin* concepts consist altogether, or at least mostly, of a variety of norms, standards, and principles. However, on the one hand, Gallie's essentially contested concepts do not intuitively appear to be essentially evaluative in that sense, which is also attested by Gallie's live examples resembling those concepts that Olsthoorn lists as non-essentially evaluative: FREEDOM, DEMOCRACY, CHARITY, LAW, PUBLIC INTEREST, and EQUALITY (ibid., 172). The difference is that non-essentially evaluative concepts are connected to the normative commitments of those who are using them, and although it would be uncommon to call acts of charity morally wrong, it is not a tell-tale sign of one being conceptually confused (ibid., 173). On the other hand, Gallie *does* require of essentially contested concepts that they signify a positively evaluated achievement (4.1), and thus they might share some key characteristics with essentially evaluative concepts, including normative principles as their essential content.

If we divide strictly between the intension and the extension of a concept, the extension denotes only the objects to which the concept applies while everything else belongs to the intension, including all the attributes that determine to which objects the concept (or property, or predicate) applies. In this sense, the disagreement involving which normative principles are the criteria of a concept is conceptual, and over the concept's intension, while the specific interpretation of those principles or criteria is context-sensitive and, thus, more clearly a matter of application. Alternatively, one could consider the combination of all such principles as a complex ideal type that has, as a concept/term, a null-extension or an empty extension. Such an ideal type is far from useless; it can still set a standard or be a point of comparison, and disputes over essentially contested concepts would be primarily about what that standard should be *ceteris paribus*. The combination of the normative principles is regulative to the extent that it is something to be satisfied extensionally while all principles are constitutive of the concept that has an inherent character of an ideal type. In addition, conceiving the original exemplar's achievement as an ideal type would help in explaining why that which is taken as a valued achievement requires constant re-evaluation in the changing circumstances.

It is a completely different matter, though, whether the above musings represent the best theoretical account of what is going on: many would probably balk at the way I have conjured a very specific kind of concept *ad hoc* without any case study, or similar, that would entice one to accept it. Olsthoorn's distinction can nonetheless be utilized in drawing another important contrast: conceiving of essentially contested concepts as non-essentially evaluative concepts would not necessarily preclude their exclusive positive evaluation, but only those concepts

that are *employed* in the function of evaluating an achievement positively are deemed to be candidates for being essentially contested. In this picture, the fact that an essentially contested concept is employed *as if* it would consist of normative principles in the mold of N_1 and N_2 (as mentioned previously) is the essential element of the conceptual practice of using that concept. By invoking the concept in its *appraisive* function, one would also be expressing (one's) more specific normative commitments and expectations that cohere with the way one ranks the accompanying normative principles—in addition to its being the case that the normative commitments of all those who employ the concept in this function evaluate the matter at hand positively. If concepts like SOCIAL JUSTICE, DEMOCRACY, or ART are “appraisive” in the present technical sense, or can at least have such a function in addition to other functions, it offers us a way of conceiving how *a concept* might be understood as naming or standing for a principle (see Norberg before) while keeping relatively close to Gallie's original views.

I now move on to discuss the relation of essentially contested concepts to theories with the following bridge: the gradability of essentially contested concepts could be due to the fact that the normative principles, of which the normative ideal consists, can themselves be *both* realized to a different degree *and* ranked differently as contributions to the overall normative ideal. An essentially contested concept can now be understood as *a concept of* thus-composed achievement, but there is also another designation for a complex collection of principles: a theory. Gallie himself speaks of the contestability of concepts, definitions, and theories as if they were interchangeable (see esp. ART), but that is not advisable. In continuation to the previous theme, one might say instead that contesting a theory involves the assessment of its component parts, and since norms, standards, and principles may be key components of moral, political, and aesthetic theories³⁶⁴, contesting certain concepts could involve contesting normative principles *via* contesting related theories.

It has become commonplace to invoke essential contestability when affirming the endless contestation of political *views*, and some views that are of a more systematic variety are sometimes called theories. The term ‘concept’ also appears to have “a double use” in partly signifying “a way of classifying

³⁶⁴ Van der Burg states that, in understanding ideals, the reference to other complex ideals, constitutive values, intermediate principles, and rules, are “also related to further ideals with which they are associated, and thus may often be only understood in the light of encompassing theories” (van der Burg 2017, 246). According to him, Ronald Dworkin (2011, 162) espouses a similar view of how ideals or values must be understood and justified. However, it appears both accounts may be susceptible to the objection that semantic meaning is not provided by a theory one has concerning the thing to which the concept/term/expression refers. This is partly a matter of what theory of meaning is adopted, yet later remarks by Shapiro are instructive in this regard as well. There is certain theoretical leeway when one understands the concepts in question as *interpretive* (16.4; 18.3), as it could then be argued that theorizing is the mode by which one gains greater insight into one's culture and commitments, the very things one has to have a knowledge of in order to form this type of concept. Not being aware of this particular framing easily leads theorists to talk past each other at this juncture.

something” and partly signifying “a view or theory about something” (Alan R. White quoted in Rhodes 2000, 11). Both cases are instances of a sort of confusion or ambiguity. Instead, it should be shown that having a grasp of an essentially contested concept requires either an implicit or explicit construction of a theory, or otherwise more or less ordered judgments and facts (that would amount to a “view”), of the features that contribute to the valued achievement signified by the concept. That said, the general effects of theorizing or theory-relatedness to conceptual contestability is too big an issue to be handled comprehensively in the current study. The matters addressed emerge directly from the secondary literature.

Michael Rhodes (2000) rejects essential contestability of concepts *qua* concepts, but he brings up interesting points concerning the kind of dispute one might be having instead. He adopts a view that justice is a value concept, i.e., “lexically normative” (i.e., it is normative by definition) or “normatively loaded,” and “[c]onstitutive of its intension is a corollary of an ethical theory.” In other words, saying ‘that act is just’ or ‘that act is an instance of justice’ is saying ‘that act accommodates and instantiates at least part of my ethical theory,’ and these disputes can be waged at the ethical or metaethical level. Given the nature of the intension of JUSTICE, the term ‘justice’ thus cannot be used without indicating that one adopts the moral theory required by the use of the concept. (Rhodes 2000, 18–20.) If the intension of essentially contested concepts is constituted by the corollary of the (ethical) theory, even if one were not ready to consider a concept like DEMOCRACY normative by definition, the disputes over which specific understanding should be adopted could actually result from not wanting to either relinquish one’s preferred theory or reformulate it. On his part, Rhodes finds here a reason for why it may not be the case that theorists are simply belligerent in not accepting or seriously striving towards a purely descriptive standard use common to all parties. Terms appear in a variety of contexts, and they may do considerable work in those contexts; for instance, by figuring in critical statements that entail a normative judgment³⁶⁵.

Unsurprisingly, bringing theories regarding the nature of particulars into (alleged) conceptual contestation exposes the disputes that follow to confusion, a matter that is well articulated by Ian Shapiro (1989). He maintains that Gallie’s framework is too limited for facilitating progressive conceptual clarification. Instead, one needs to broaden the perspective from political philosophy and political theory to include a wider array of interdisciplinary (social) sciences.

³⁶⁵ A lot may ride on this in legal analysis or theorizing, for example. Consider the assertion “The fact that a person was coerced entails that the person’s rights were violated,” in which the term of interest is ‘coercion.’ (Rhodes 2000, 21.) Rhodes’s perspective on the issue appears to be dead-centered on theoretical and scholarly disputes. I will later present (18.1) that essentially contested concepts *as popular conceptions* may relate intimately to *endoxa*, opinions accepted by the many or the wise, and a folk theory or theories about the nature of the valued achievement signified by the essentially contested concept. The mechanism that I introduce bears some similarity to the present one with a major difference in that I posit a concept as its product. It should also be stressed that the connection to theory is what is important, not who does the theorizing, whether scholars or laymen.

Political theory is about concrete particulars, or “the changing relations of scarcity, power, and finitude that set the terms of human social interaction,” which makes it irreducibly descriptive. Many concepts typical to political discourse make sense only in certain circumstances, which renders them relational in this respect. For example, SOCIAL JUSTICE interpreted as ‘fair redistribution of goods’ pertains only in the circumstances where resources are at least somewhat scarce. It is thus rather reasonable to think that one cannot adequately describe such relational concepts without explicit or implicit reference to certain set of social particulars.

Substantive disagreements about the terms used in a relational argument are often reduced to “disagreements about the meanings of the terms themselves, making a self-fulfilling prophecy out of the ‘essential contestability’ thesis.” This is because social science concepts that deal with substantive empirical issues become *gross concepts* when those substantive issues are bracketed when theorized about. The gross concepts “reduce complex relational ideas to one or another of the terms in the relation over which they range, dealing with the other terms implicitly while seeming not to deal with them at all.” This introduces obscurity as well as “generates debates that can never be resolved because the alternatives that are opposed to one another are vulnerable within their own terms.”³⁶⁶ Those debates are based on “surface oppositions” that systematically misdescribe what is really going on, which in turn leads defenders of the essential contestability thesis to leap much too rapidly to their conclusion. (Shapiro 1989, 51, 65, 67–8.) So, the gross concepts are the concepts we are dealing with when substantive disagreements about one or another of the terms in a relational argument are reduced to disagreements about the meanings of the terms themselves. This is problematic, in short, because the kind of knowledge we seek concerning (semantic) meanings is found in dictionaries rather than in encyclopedias³⁶⁷, the latter being a reservoir of substantive matters.

Shapiro considers it highly likely that there are at least *some* essentially contestable concepts, yet not all normative concepts are contested when protagonists appear to disagree (Shapiro 1989, 68). One of his main points is that the focus should be on ‘substantive interdisciplinary knowledge’ regarding the domains to which the concepts apply, because, for instance, many politically charged questions about freedom are substantive and empirical and cannot be resolved without such knowledge (Collier et al. 2006, 221). Mere concept analysis is not enough to resolve these issues, with or without essential contestability; here one needs both theorizing and careful empirical research. If disputes manifesting

³⁶⁶ Shapiro bases his findings on the notion put forward by Gerald C. MacCallum, Jr. in the article “Negative and Positive Freedom” (1972): “As MacCallum showed long ago, any assertion about freedom or autonomy minimally involves reference to agents, restraining (or enabling) conditions, and action (...) His aim was to shift discussion away from conceptual debates about the meaning of the term “freedom,” by showing that most debates that seem to be about it are really about the substantive variables in his triad. The triad itself is empty” (Shapiro 1989, 52).

³⁶⁷ I have borrowed this excellent phrase from Jesper Kallestrup who invokes the idea from time to time in his *Semantic Externalism* (2011).

essential contestability/contestedness are indeed both conceptual and substantive (14.1), getting somewhere with them also requires advances on the substantive front—although certain conceptual elements might ultimately preclude reaching agreement. However, there is a marked difference *between* a perspective of a concept as a (semantic) meaning of a word that is conveyed successfully or unsuccessfully in a linguistic exchange, *and* asking “what is your concept of ‘x’?” as an exhortation for the other to present what she understands to be central to or required by justice, either casually or more theoretically. In the latter “exhortation-case,” the question thus stands as a lead-in for further explication of one’s more specific views concerning justice or justice-related matters³⁶⁸. As for Gallie, it is quite evident that his primary interest as far as concept application goes lies roughly in this sort of case, although he also puts forward a question about what grounds, or based on which criterion, some rather than other elements are considered apposite, or “relevantly similar” (see 11.2; 12.1). I claim that it is *that* question that is at the heart of what is conceptually contestable with respect to essentially contested concepts.

According to Shapiro, it is possible to extract purely conceptual components for analytical discussion, “but that (...) will never get anywhere, because it is discussion of parts of complex concepts as if they were whole simple ones” (Shapiro 1989, 67). Gallie himself considered complexity as the chief reason behind concepts’ essential contestability (ART 107), and it is quite natural to read his rebukes against exclusive definitions as a criticism of reducing a complexly relational phenomenon to one of its component parts. However, to say that Shapiro and Gallie are in agreement is a stretch, as Shapiro’s stance towards essential contestability claims is disobliging at best. Neither are social particulars (as something that needs to be addressed) directly comparable to normative principles as the content of a theory that aims to capture a normative ideal. But it is plausible that in disputes over how to best realize the normative ideal, the evaluation of the current circumstances and their relevant social particulars may be mixed in what would otherwise be purely normative evaluation.

John Gunnell (1999) argues that “the claim that some or all concepts are by their very nature contested cannot be sustained.” He conceives essentially contested concepts as context-variant “modal concepts” that have transtheoretical force, i.e., as concepts that are “involved in making various descriptive, appraisive, qualitative and prescriptive judgments and claims within a particular domain of discourse,” but which are not necessarily confined to a particular realm of discourse. They are “primarily concepts used in talking about other concepts” such as GOOD, BEAUTIFUL, RIGHT, RATIONAL, HARD, PROBABLE *et cetera*. He further claims that “what is usually at issue is their criteria and range of application, which is a function of the discursive context in which they are used,” and that a concept’s contestability is a situational matter. (Gunnell 1999, 648.) However, I think that by distinguishing modal concepts from analytical

³⁶⁸ Similarly, when we ask, “what is the meaning of life?” we appear to seek our fundamental human purpose in the cosmos, a purpose which is obscure and keeps eluding us, but that is certainly not equal to being somehow perplexed by the meaning of the word ‘life.’

concepts – i.e., the concepts that “are used to discriminate and classify things that have often already been theoretically constituted” and are particularly prevalent, and troublesome, in second-order practices such as social science and history” (ibid., 648–9) – Gunnell fails to appreciate the special nature of essentially contested concepts as Gallie meant them. Essentially contested concepts need not be purely evaluative, and Gallie’s own examples are both descriptive and evaluative (van der Burg 2017, 233; see also 17.4).

As I see it, essentially contested concepts are closer to analytical concepts than modal concepts (consider, e.g., ART), but perhaps they are best viewed as a kind of a hybrid between modal and analytical concepts as Gunnell makes the distinction above. In other words, essentially contested concepts would now be analytical second-order concepts, the contours of which are formed and tracked by various norms and values in different contexts. Why that is so? For one thing, essentially contested concepts are employed in a more theory-laden, descriptive, or thick fashion than Gunnell’s examples of modal concepts are. Some essentially contested concepts may seem trans-theoretical – or, applicable in very different theoretical contexts – partly due to the substantive interdisciplinary knowledge that is required for their application. Even those concepts that are moored less in social particulars and more in interpretation or judgment could still draw heavily from a shared reservoir of academic tradition and discussion which would make them inter-theoretical rather than transtheoretical – or, they would be applicable between theories within the particular realm of discourse rather than between different realms as a concept like GOOD could be applied. It may even be that what little transtheoreticality they appear to have is mostly a matter of metaphorical term or word usage which is a common prospect of almost all language-use. They are especially good candidates for it given the positive connotations that essentially contested concepts carry for many due to the fact that they signify valued achievements.

17.2 What results from weighting the features of the valued achievement differently?

For Gallie, the complexity of a concept and/or achievement is the chief reason for a concept’s essential contestedness, yet it does not come about without the fact that rival parties weight the component parts of the achievement differently. Gallie’s overall thesis, in which a specific conceptual structure is considered in conjunction with a particular type of appraisiveness, has been called “an esoteric doctrine” (Newey 2001, 252). In this section, I will analyze what Gallie says in that respect very literally, which results in a model that I call the simplistic conception of essential contestedness (hereafter EC*). The key feature of EC* is that it seeks to understand concept-application disputes in line with Gallie’s ideas concerning the different weighting of component parts of a valued achievement. The model is dubbed ‘simplistic’ because I think that Gallie saw more in essential

contestedness than can be expressed within the model. The shortcomings and limitations of the model also indicate what modifications are in order when essentially contested concepts are understood as criterially governed (16.4).

In Gallie's framework, those employing an essentially contested concept profess different descriptions in which they rank or weight the component parts of the valued achievement. The descriptions also represent how concept-users prefer to use the term/concept in question. This way the rival parties' differences in weighting the salient features of the valued achievement come to be reflected in their mutually conflicting uses of concepts³⁶⁹. To speak of 'component parts' suggests a collection of features or properties that constitute the valued achievement, and Gallie does not address the possibility that they could be in dispute as well. (ch. 5; 11.1.) For the purposes of the current study, I will call the component parts of a valued achievement 'C-making features'³⁷⁰. Furthermore, as Mark Criley points out, the employment of an essentially contested concept "must be responsive to a number of different "component parts or features" of *the targets to which it is applied*" (Criley 2007, 23; italics added). For instance, in a disagreement concerning what is just, we could be disagreeing about the features that make something just, or its just-making features. It should be pointed out, explicitly, that the component parts of the valued achievement appear to be the same general C-making features that can be identified in objects to which an essentially contested concept applies. The concept-users derive their preferred uses of the concept from how they describe and evaluate a given valued achievement; the criteria they have for applying the concept seem to reflect the achievement's component parts one-to-one. This feature is a part of the inherent structure of essentially contested concepts in EC*.

EC* has an exceedingly streamlined character: the component parts of the achievement are pre-given, so they are "already there" for disputants to appraise and put in ranking orders. According to Criley (2007), Gallie appears to be subscribing to a view that separates the descriptive concepts that are "responsive to the co-presence of a number of distinct descriptive or naturalistic features of the world, each of which must be of equal weight" from the evaluative concepts that are not "flatly conjunctive" but "can be responsive to these descriptive or naturalistic features in a way that reflects different weight or influence among the descriptive features." Disputes over descriptive claims, or over the content of descriptive contents are, in principle, objectively resolvable, while disagreements over evaluative claims, or over the content of evaluative concepts, are not. From this perspective it is sensible to assume that the contestedness originates in a

³⁶⁹ For Gallie, the criteria for applying a word/term/concept X in a dispute, and the conditions that need to be met for X to be what it is, seem to go hand in hand (16.4). In the current study, I do not assume any final position concerning the metaphysics of properties. The same goes for adopting a position on the ontology of properties, or how different types of properties could be distinguished from each other.

³⁷⁰ 'C' is mostly a placeholder for what is signified by a concept (e.g., a property, even if complex due to having "an achievement nature") but it can also be read as the reference to 'concept.' This is meant to reflect the idea that the would-be users come to have a concept of a valued achievement by identifying the salient features of that achievement (cf. below).

concept's "appraisiveness." (Criley 2007, 36.) The only room for particularly intractable contestation is now on the evaluative side, and this fact has been taken to suggest that the concepts are evaluatively, rather than essentially, contested (Ingram 1985; see 17.4). Be that as it may, it offers us one explanation why Gallie ignores the possibility of contest over which component parts should be included in one's ranking order in the first place. Another explanation could be that essentially contested concepts are indeed meant to be criterially governed concepts, the indicators of which stand in an essential relation to such concepts, but that is problematic in other ways (cf. 16.4).

In the rest of the section, I discuss the kind of application-disputes to which the mutual differences in weighting lead. Different concepts can have a different type of *categorization criterion*, i.e., the criterion that is to be met if the item is judged to be in the category determined by the concept (see Murphy 2002, 44). I have previously introduced the view according to which essentially contested concepts are criterially governed (16.4). The criteria in the constitutive sense are norms and rules that cannot be *transgressed* for the concept to apply to an object while maintaining its identity. This is clear enough in the case of RED, the application of which is governed by the criterion that the concept applies only to red things, or by the rule or norm 'x is red' that must be in effect for meeting the categorization criterion of RED. There certainly can be criterially governed concepts that have several criteria which all need to be met for a concept to apply, but there might also be similar concepts, not all conceivable criteria of which are applicable at the same time, or not all relevant indicators of which need to be clearly and unambiguously present in the object. This is not the same thing as the sharing of the concept; in the following it is assumed that the disputants share the concept in question completely.

In the case of essentially contested concepts, there is no one-to-one identity between objects and these concepts—for example, when SOCIAL JUSTICE applies to an institutional arrangement, that arrangement is not social justice; rather, it is socially just. In order for there to be a dispute over whether an object belongs to the extension of the concept between individuals who disagree on how to weight the different criteria, only some of the features that correspond with the concept's criteria are identified in an object, or those features are present to a different degree. Below, I will show why that is the case, but in the meantime, this type of a concept that allows a variety concerning which criteria are to be considered pertinent in applying the concept in specific instances could be called a *range concept*³⁷¹.

³⁷¹ There is nothing mysterious in the existence of range concepts or categories. For example, the prototype theory of concepts suggests that a perfectly usable category, like 'household item,' can consist, in practice, of several features that determine which objects fall within that category but not all features that are on the conceivable feature list, or even not any particular feature, need to be present in a single case (Murphy 2002, 44). In fact, even if an item were to have all of the necessary features of a category, it is possible that it would not be considered as a member of that category, which suggests that not only core features but also non-defining features are important in deciding category membership in the case of actual categories (see *ibid.*, 25–6).

Another conclusion that needs to be drawn is that the concepts of our interest that admit weighting disagreement are *non-binary* in that they “classify objects on one or several dimensions that may each admit degrees” (List and Valentini 2016, 532). Consider DEMOCRACY; things can be more or less democratic, and thus a non-binary category is invoked when one is employing the predicate ‘is democratic,’ but that is true also with regard to how well one component part of democracy, free participation in setting the political agenda, is realized in practice. Differential weighting of the criteria of such concepts can generate application-disputes of the sort EC* presents us with³⁷². However, it should be noted that the scientific-ideal framework of dealing with concepts throws a wrench in the works of essential contestability here. The one-place predicate ‘is democratic’ is arguably a different concept than the two-place predicate ‘is more democratic than’; they satisfy different sets of criteria. This means that Gallie’s weighting conception challenges the applicability of the stricter way of dividing and individuating between concepts as it seeks to combine them under the umbrella of one concept, even if only implicitly.

Next, I will illustrate what type of weighting dispute is concerned with whether a shared concept applies to an object or not. Let us say that the concept C signifies a valued achievement that has the features F₁, F₂, F₃, and F₄ which the parties to a dispute, P₁ and P₂, agree as contributing to the valued achievement (fig. 1, option 1). However, P₁ attributes to F₁ the value score of 5 while he values the rest of the features as 3 each. P₂ attributes to F₂ the value score of 7 while she values the rest of the features as 2 each. Different value scores reflect how rival parties weight the component parts of the valued achievement differently. Faced with an object O₁ that has all the features F₁₋₄, neither party would dispute that the concept applies to it – O₁ automatically gets the best possible score from both parties – *unless* it is possible that the features may be present in O₁ to a different degree.

To demonstrate, let us assume that the degree to which F₂ is present is only one-tenth that of other features (fig. 1, option 2). Now we get the following total scores: for P₁, 11.3, and for P₂, 6.7. This will not lead us anywhere unless we further assume that there is some *critical threshold value*, i.e., a categorization criterion that is concerned with the features that need to be present in the object for the concept to apply to it. If there is to be an evaluative dispute between P₁ and P₂ concerning C’s applicability to O₁, it must be the case that O₁ meets, or fails to meet, the critical threshold value of one party while the other party disagrees with that assessment. We may now set the critical threshold value for

³⁷² Freeden (2004) observes that his own morphological argument for essential contestability (see Freeden 1996) “concerns not only the question of the unavoidable absence as well as presence of conceptual components, but also that of relative weighting assigned to the components that *are* present in a given instance of the concept.” By contrast, Freeden portrays Gallie as presenting a thesis of essential contestability in “its weak philosophical form (...) as an issue pertaining to the impossibility of choosing decisively between values, between modes of appraisal” (Freeden 2004, 3–4). That is misleading at best; what Freeden claims there in his own name follows directly from Gallie’s original thesis and is also suggested by Gallie (ECC 185/PHU179).

P₁ at 8 and for P₂ at 7, which results in P₁ considering C as applicable to O₁ while P₂ rejects the applicability in this case. For P₂, C's applicability to O₁ may be considered close enough to be a borderline case but that is not modelled here. Instead, I repeat that even by assuming that the specific valuations of features are user-specific, the presence of all features in an object cannot bring about the kind of evaluative disagreement that EC* suggests unless the features can be present to a lesser or greater degree. Otherwise, one of the parties would not consider *any* existing object as meeting with the (proper) categorization criterion, or critical threshold value, which empties the extension completely³⁷³.

	F ₁	F ₂	F ₃	F ₄	total score	critical threshold
1. option						
P ₁	5	3	3	3	14	n/a
P ₂	2	7	2	2	13	n/a
2. option						
P ₁	5	0,3	3	3	11,3	8
P ₂	2	0,7	2	2	6,7	7

FIGURE 1: The weighting options 1 and 2

The alternative is that not all features are present in an object (fig. 2, option 3). Let us say this time that P₁ and P₂ face the choice between the objects O₂, O₃, O₄ (O₂ has features F₁, F₃, and F₄ present; O₃ has features F₂, F₃, and F₄; and O₄ has only features F₁ and F₂). P₁ gives them total value scores of 11, 9, and 8, respectively, while the scores given by P₂ are 6, 11, and 9. In other words: P₁'s ranking order is 2-3-4 while P₂ prefers 3-4-2. The disagreement concerning whether the concept is applicable to one of these objects or not is enabled when the value score meets with the critical threshold of one party while failing to do so in the case of another party. Another type of evaluative disagreement can be introduced by assuming that both parties set the critical threshold value to 5, which means that the concept applies to each object³⁷⁴. In that case, if P₁ and P₂ continue disagreeing concerning the applicability of the concept C, their disagreement could be about to which one of O₂, O₃, O₄ the concept C applies best, or meets best with its properly weighted criteria. The more distance there is

³⁷³ That could be illustrated by setting P₁'s critical threshold value at 15 while P₂ considers 13 to be just what is needed (in the latter case, the presence of all features would be necessary and jointly sufficient, or that O₁ meets with the [strict] definition of C). That being said, one could certainly state, for instance, that "There is no justice in the world" because of the high threshold value placed on the applicability of JUSTICE to real-world objects. This could be a conceptual dispute in which one argues that others should have higher standards than they do, but it is no longer a case of application-dispute in which disputants evaluate these rather than those disputes as just or non-just.

³⁷⁴ The value scores are only analytical representations of what takes place. There is hardly a real-world dispute in which the disputants would actually compare such scores.

between disputants' views concerning how central or paradigmatic the case is at hand, the more likely the dispute is to become heated.

3. option	P ₁	P ₂
O ₂ with F ₁ , F ₃ , and F ₄	5+3+3 = 11 (1 st)	2+2+2 = 6 (3 rd)
O ₃ with F ₂ , F ₃ , and F ₄	3+3+3 = 9 (2 nd)	7+2+2 = 11 (1 st)
O ₄ with F ₁ and F ₂	5+3 = 8 (3 rd)	2+7 = 9 (2 nd)

FIGURE 2: The weighting option 3

Other variants can easily be generated based on what is presented above. Yet by now it should be clear why a weighting dispute that follows the setup of EC* can take place only when some, but not all, of the features that correspond with the concept's criteria are identified in an object or those features are present in an object to a different degree. Moreover, when a disagreement arises over non-binary (range) concepts, it appears that they are used as if they were *threshold concepts*, i.e., they involve a critical threshold that needs to be met. In *Artificial*, Gallie suggests as much by noting that "no doubt (...) a certain minimum number of successes is necessary" (ECC 170) for a team's level of style or caliber to be manifested. The critical threshold value may also vary as is implied by Gallie's observations that "democratic targets will be raised and lowered as circumstances alter" (ECC 186, see also 174; 6.1), and Gallie also includes "features of democracy which clearly can exist in greater or less degree and are therefore liable to be differently placed for relative importance" (ECC 185/PHU179). When it is further considered that the worth of the achievement is explained by referencing "the respective contributions of its various parts or features" (ECC 172), then taking all of that together one can reasonably conclude that the notion of an evaluative threshold is built into the backbone of Gallie's thesis, and that essentially contested concepts as Gallie understands them are non-binary.

The EC* model in its current form is arguably too simple. It is based on the notion of a *feature list* that is inspired by the prototype theory of concepts (see Murphy 2002, 42ff), and previous psychological studies suggest that the absence of relevant features counts against deeming an object as belonging to a category (as its typical member)³⁷⁵. Now a negative value score can be attributed to an object when a feature is missing. For example, P₁, who attributes to F₁ the value score of 5 and values the rest of the features as 3 each, would give the object that has F₂, F₃ and F₄ but lacks F₁ the overall score of 4 (i.e., 3+3+3-5=4). P₁ could still hold that the object is the instance of the concept C if the overall score meets with

³⁷⁵ Are these considerations too psychological to be of interest? I think not. The disputes as they are carried out by disputants who judge differently how to employ the concept is a big part of Gallie's original thesis. The way people actually make categorization judgments becomes relevant the more one moves away from epistemic considerations based on ideal conditions.

the critical threshold value, even if the criterion that is not met in this case is the most valued by P_1 .

Furthermore, we can introduce *C-ruining features*, the presence of which *either* outright defeats the concept's applicability in a given case—these features are most likely tied to how the concept's domain is determined in the first place—*or* which contribute with their negative weight to the judgment that the concept does not apply to the object. How C-making and C-ruining features are apprehended can change over time. For example, think how the family-sphere is no longer considered a self-evident haven from political considerations in connection to the slogan “the personal is political.” The fact that something would occur in a family was long considered a political-ruining feature when applied to various actions, for instance, domestic violence or marital rape. In other words, the feature ‘takes place within family’ was widely considered a C-ruining feature when applying the predicate ‘is political.’ In general, the evaluation of how different features affect the applicability of a concept is somehow context-sensitive from this perspective, or that depends on one's conceptual and normative frameworks of interpretation. Given the starting premises of EC*, the concept's criteria are similarly a matter of interpretation since the criteria correspond to thus identified and evaluated features. To deny this possibility would lead to fixing the conceptual boundaries so rigidly that essentially contested concepts would become immutable, eternal entities, concerning which no variation would be permitted in order to preserve the identity of that concept as what it is³⁷⁶. This is not yet, of course, an explication of how the concept's identity can be preserved through such change (see 18.2).

Some features may be emphasized by the disputants exclusively as well as relatively (Collier et al. 2006, 216–7; cf. Criley 2007, 24; see 5.2). However, were the disputants to accord an exclusive importance to only one feature, it is not perfectly clear, why one would not be dealing with a single-criterial concept. That could reasonably be ruled out as a too thin or abstract notion about which to have a conceptual *contest* (cf. 16.3) that is not merely over application (cf. 15.3). Lexical ordering as exclusive emphasis of one aspect over another could also be a case of straightforward incommensurability, if each party would simply stick to one's guns. Rejecting this type of single-criteriality is in the original spirit of Gallie's thesis as long as there are other alternatives for taking a side in a clear-cut fashion (cf. 5.2).

Of course, none of this precludes the possibility that a certain way of meeting with the categorization criterion of an essentially contested concept would be the correct one, objectively speaking. Yet Gallie's basic assumption is that there is no general principle available for fixing how these concepts should

³⁷⁶ This reintroduces my earlier accusation against Gallie of him being committed to a problematic form of conceptual essentialism (see 12.3): if all the relevant criteria of the concept are derived from the original exemplar, and the list of the respective C-making and C-ruining features remains untouched by any evaluation by the concept-users, the constituting features of the valued achievement are also assumed to stay forever the same without any input from anyone.

be used. *If* there were an objective or incontestable standard and/or test for determining both how the features are to be weighted (and the degree to which those features are present in an object that is appraised), the matter could be settled without input from the users. The current discussion is premised on the idea that even if such a standard or test would be proposed it would not be *uncontestable*. If it could be shown that some such standard or test incontrovertibly settled the dispute over the concept, the concept would not be essentially contested or contestable. But the burden of proof cannot be on Gallie in this regard, since I do not think there is a way to demonstrate the non-existence of a decisive standard or test. All Gallie or any advocate of an essential contestability thesis can say, or needs to say, is that such a thing is absent as far as anyone can tell.

Threshold concepts are highly suitable for conceiving valued *achievements*. The C-making features or component parts of the valued achievement can be identified in the objects to which the concept applies. The class of such objects is the class in which the valued achievement (re)manifests. This makes it possible to think that the properties of the objects that correspond with the C-making features not only contribute to the applicability of the concept but they also contribute to the valued achievement in the world. From another perspective, judging the applicability of the predicate 'is democratic' to concrete objects that are conceived in achievement-terms is clearly not as easy a matter as consulting the list of democracy-making features which can then be checked one by one.

If one were to, say, set up a democratic local government, one could aim for the governing practices to exhibit *either* as many democracy-making features as possible *or* those features that contribute to making it optimally democratic given the prevailing practical constraints. Both options require consideration of social particulars so that those arrangements that match with the salient features of democracy can be identified (see also Shapiro in 17.1). The sensibility of the latter option nevertheless implies that the democracy-making features have *contributive rather than constitutive relations* to objects, or that the features of the ideally conceived valued achievement are reproduced in various objects to a different degree. If the criteria for applying a concept pick out something that is considered as an achievement, the objects to which the concept is applied are also achievements, though possibly lesser or grasped at a different level of abstraction (e.g., an ideal-type vs. a practical achievement). They may now become exemplars in their own right forming part of a chain of different elements that make up the overall tradition that is centered around the valuable achievement (cf. Evinne in 8.2).

We can now distinguish between the application disagreement that requires the assessment of whether the categorization criterion is met for something to be judged as an achievement, and a deeper disagreement about a concept that signifies the achievement. Although the C-making features may contribute to achievements to a different degree, the criteria of the concept are often understood to be in constitutive relation to the concept (see 16.4). This spells a recipe for confusion between the intensional side of the concept and the

extensional side of the objects in the world. Whether there is a confusion ultimately depends on what one thinks about concepts in general. A theory theory view of concepts could perhaps make this into the starting point for the way concepts come to be contested in the first place (cf. 17.1), while a view focusing on linguistic meaning probably wants to separate the features that make things what they are from the semantic content of concepts (see Väyrynen in 17.4). Gallie himself can also be taken to suggest that the origin of essential contestedness traces back to how similarity judgments in comparison to a prototypical original exemplar are made (12.4). Herein lies the reason why the weighting/application dimension of Gallie's thesis appears esoteric: without a presentation of exactly what type of concepts are involved, the fundamental reasoning behind essential contestedness can only be speculated upon³⁷⁷.

The application disagreement that requires the assessment of whether the categorization criterion is met for something to be judged as an achievement is not yet a case of essential contestability in the strong sense (cf. 15.3). By requiring the mutual appreciation of the criteria in the light of which others are using an essentially contested concept (7.1), it seems Gallie means to say that the disputants subscribe to the same set of that concept's criteria even if they emphasize different features over others. This way all the relevant (considerations or) criteria of a concept are potentially pertinent all the time, even if there could also be cases in which certain features (or considerations) or combinations of features should be valued over others³⁷⁸. Now it is not clear how essential contestability could reach or threaten the core of the concept. In fact, one would be hard-pressed to tell what conceptual elements are even in dispute: when the understanding of facts is ruled out as the origin of disagreement (see

³⁷⁷ Gallie's broader theory of concepts could be viewed, speculatively, as a hybrid between the prototype theory and the theory theory – or, alternatively, the prototype theory alone – the proper domains of which are various fields of philosophy. By "hybrid" I mean a conception according to which theoretical knowledge of categories or classes of objects referred to by essentially contested concepts is encoded in concepts that have a prototype structure. That structure is dimensional rather than featural which allows knowledge about properties that objects possess to some degree (see also Machery 2009, 84). In this picture, definitions and theories proposed in disputing the matter reflect and refer to various dimensions of the concept; in fact, the concept itself consists of such definitions and theories as far as we can tell. Interestingly, psychologists have repeatedly highlighted the issue that prototype theories entail what Edouard Machery calls "the selection problem": "theorists need to explain why our concepts represent only some of the numerous typical (or cue-valid) properties of the members of a category" (ibid., 85.) Gallie's insistence on tying essentially contested concepts to their presumed historical development is clearly an attempt to solve a similar selection problem, albeit almost 20 years before the prototype theory paradigm got off the ground. The many affinities between essential contestedness and the prototype theory paradigm are the clearest indication that Gallie's primary focus may have been on categorization rather than on that to which words and terms refer.

³⁷⁸ For instance, consider a person who takes all relevant aspects of justice into account, but in an insufficient, indifferent way. We would not call him 'just.' Or perhaps a government cannot be called democratic because it fails to rise to the task in given circumstances that require attention to some rather than other aspects. Someone else might disagree and sometimes we might be right to deem the case as borderline, and in others one of the parties could be simply wrong, yet that is to be decided on a case-by-case basis.

14.1), what remains looks like value disagreement for which there is no originating reason in sight apart from Gallie's reference to one's particular appraisive situation (cf. 11.4). In addition, Norman Care (1973) notes that weighting disputes are anything but rare. In the case of social particulars that are of interest to social scientists like a system of fair wages, the point of controversy "among participants" is not typically about what criteria are involved, but "rather what weights are to be assigned to such different factors as those of skill, experience, need, and so forth." From the standpoint of the social scientist, the contestability of such concepts does not pose a severe difficulty. It is not the case, after all, that the scientist cannot tell whether, for instance, an institution counts as an educational institution or political party. (Care 1973, 12.) Care directs his points against MacIntyre (1973), specifically, and he overlooks the connection to normative ideals. That said, the point about the ordinary quality of the weighting disputes stands.

Perhaps the concept is rendered essentially contestable by the fact that such disputes are now endless and irresolvable because of a factor *in addition* to weighting? For instance, the irresolvability could be brought about by the fact the whole process of evaluation is governed by conflicting values that, like Isaiah Berlin states, cannot be "structured hierarchically" and that therefore entail "the permanent possibility of inescapable conflict between values" (Berlin 2013, 83). Michael Stokes (2007) adopts the position by stating that the essential inconsistency of our values guarantees that "there can be no right answer to any question about which is the best conception of a contested concept where the answer depends upon reconciling those values." Prioritizing one value over another is possible but we would not be able to offer a completely rational explanation for our ranking, which comes down to one not being able to claim that one's answer is the best as the best argument, only that it is one good answer among others. Here Gallie's "language of conversion" describes what is taking place better than the "language of argument." (Stokes 2007, 701.)

I do not wish to deny a possibility of cashing out *an* essential contestability thesis in the above terms. Still, a couple of observations are in order. First, as Andrew Mason (1990) points out, essential contestability theorists go a step further than value pluralists who find the source of many moral and political disputes "in the way in which value conflicts admit of different resolutions that are reasonable." If the proponents of essential contestability are correct, "people will also disagree over how to *describe* values such as freedom, social justice, and democracy properly (and therefore over what counts as freedom, social justice, and democracy) ..." (Mason 1990, 83). Essential contestability is characterized by the reflexivity of evaluation and description (see 17.4). Second, radical value pluralism is an external factor that moves the source of essential contestability outside the inherent characteristics of concepts. While it may give us an account of irremediable value disagreement, it does little in terms of elucidating the possibility of the kind of irresolvable and endless conceptual disagreement that the concept-centered thesis of essential contestability is after. Both concepts and their inherent structure becomes almost an after-thought, which violates both

Concept-Object and *Concept-Structure* (cf. ch. 15 intro). For these reasons, we must keep on searching.

17.3 Concept/conception and the common core

Contested concepts have different uses, which, today, are sometimes called ‘conceptions’³⁷⁹. The key idea of concept/conception distinction is that some concepts can be conceived to have a common core that is mutually accepted by the disputing parties, yet all disputants have their own, more specific conceptions of it. The distinction is often considered to have originated in the writings of H.L.A Hart, John Rawls, and/or Ronald Dworkin³⁸⁰, and some trace it to Gallie directly³⁸¹. The explicit distinction, or one similar enough to it (e.g., between concept and its instantiations) has been utilized by Rawls, Dworkin, Steven Lukes, and Christine Swanton to discuss justice, fairness, power, and freedom (Ruben 2010, 260). Of the four, only Rawls has failed to either reference Gallie or to analyze his ideas in depth³⁸².

The concept/conception distinction has only rarely been subjected to sustained philosophical inquiry (Criley 2007, iv, 18). Pekka Väyrynen identifies two different versions: “One treats a conception as something like a proposed real definition of the property ascribed by the concept” while “[t]he other treats

³⁷⁹ For the etymology of the word ‘conception’ in relation to ‘concept,’ see Adcock 2005, 4ff. For the comparison of some dictionary definitions, see Adcock 2005, 10–11.

³⁸⁰ Esp. Rawls 1971, 5–6; esp. Dworkin 1977a, 134–36. Rawls himself credited H.L.A. Hart for his use of the distinction (Rawls 1971/1999, §1). Interestingly, John Gray (1978) surmises that Rawls likely owes a debt to R.M. Hare as to the concept/conception distinction, particularly in regard to Hare’s distinction between a term’s meaning and the criteria of its correct application (Hare 1963/1952), which “Hare was largely responsible for bringing into moral philosophy.” Gray also notes Hare’s influence on Stuart Hampshire’s notion of “essentially questionable and corrigible concepts” (Gray 1978, 388; see 2.2.)

³⁸¹ Stephen Guest remarks that Gallie conducts a seminal analysis of the distinction in ECC, “and his idea was taken up by many political philosophers, notably Rawls in *A Theory of Justice*” (Guest 2013, 74; cf. Gray 1978, 388). Mark Criley observes that “Gallie’s work is often cited as an influence on H.L.A. Hart’s treatment of justice in Chapter VIII of *Hart* (1998)” (Criley 2007, 19). For Pritam Baruah, the roots of the idea of a concept supporting various conceptions “are unequivocally traced to W.B. Gallie’s notion of essentially contested concepts” (Baruah 2014, 330).

³⁸² To give a sample of relevant texts: in *Taking Rights Seriously* Dworkin connects Gallie’s ECC to the concept/conception distinction explicitly (Dworkin 1977a, 103; see also Criley 2007, 2n2); Swanton’s “On the Essential Contestedness of Political Concepts” (Swanton 1985; see also Swanton 1992) is the analysis of different “essential contestedness views” and their faults; Steven Lukes combines concept/conception distinction in the Rawlsian sense with Gallie’s notion of essentially contested concepts in arguing that POWER is an essentially contested concept (Lukes 1974/2005; 1977, 418). Lukes also charges Rawls with missing that justice is an essentially contested concept (Lukes 1974, 182–184). Mark Criley discusses the distinction in relation to contested concepts, and in connection to Gallie’s thesis, in his dissertation (Criley 2007). His work surpasses what is currently presented in several ways, but I cannot hope to do justice to his specific views here.

a conception as an account of the features which 'give rise' to this property (the 'right-making' features in the case of right, and so on)." Both ways of making the distinction allow substantive disagreements between competing conceptions, but it is difficult to make them precise since that would require taking a stance on the nature of concepts. One should be able to say something concerning "what information is conceptually encoded and what information is left over to conceptions." (Väyrynen 2014, 480.) Kenneth Ehrenberg (2011) understands the basic idea to be "that the concept contains either the essential properties of the practice or idea, or those that are common to all or most of the conceptions of it, or that belong to a paradigmatic exemplar." The conceptions can be viewed as "more complete understandings or theories of the practice or idea," and because they are more complete, they are likely to contain controversial elements. Alternatively, some apprehend a concept as a complete correct understanding of a practice or idea although not much could be said about it with certainty, in which case conceptions are simply different takes or interpretations on the concept. (Ehrenberg 2011, 210.) In the simplest, and possibly quite misleading, form: "Concepts are general categories, while conceptions are specifications of concepts" (Galston 2014). Another rough way of understanding the distinction is to conceive of a conception as an elaborate interpretation (van der Burg 2017, 236).

The general idea behind the distinction therefore is premised on a notion that information, or substantive content, increases by moving towards conceptions while a concept remains that which generally, and perhaps obscurely or vaguely, unifies the more specified conceptions. Andrew Halpin (2001) observes that both Dworkin and Rawls—though the latter only obliquely—acknowledge the notion that the "concept" *poses* a question to which answers are provided in the form of conceptions, but Halpin finds this notion problematic because "it suggests the process of reaching the answer is essentially a process of intellectual reflection upon the question (...) There is a danger that using the device of conceptions of a concept will cause us to confuse our answer with our understanding of the question." This risks confusing all sorts of attempts to provide ideas of justice that are only slightly varying or utterly contradictory, or transparently coherent or muddled and inconsistent, as conceptions of the same concept "as though that concept or some aspect of it were present in each of these attempts." (Halpin 2001, 163–5.) In the same vein, Johan Olsthoorn deems "confusing" the employment of the distinction that suggests "that conceptions of normative notions like justice and fairness are some kind of concepts." Instead, "[r]ival conceptions of justice are created through the addition of at least some normative principles" while the concept/conception distinction "is profitably used to explain a kind of linguistic disagreement." (Olsthoorn 2017, 160–1.)

There does seem to be a general tendency to identify conceptions as concepts. For example, consider the following: "I sketched a series of claims about the true meaning of a variety of political concepts. How can I show that one conception of equality or liberty or democracy is right and rival conceptions wrong?" (Dworkin 2011, 6). The excerpt illustrates an argumentative shift from

the (true) meaning of a concept to the correctness of a conception, which implies their equation. In this picture, conceptions both correct and false are all meanings, or sorts of concepts. As an inoculation against this type of practice, Olsthoorn advocates for distinguishing between normative principles, or norms and standards, and criteria of application. The former accompany the normative concepts intimately, and normative concepts “often require many different principles, each appropriate for particular situations, actions or agents,” while the latter are conceived as non-semantic standards between a concept and the world. According to Olsthoorn, the distinction makes it possible for different parties to “agree on the general meaning of a normative concept while defending mutually incompatible principles of it.” (Olsthoorn 2017, 159–60.) Although Olsthoorn is not clear about this, it could be that the accompanying normative principles are meant to function as meaning-giving statements concerning a general meaning of normative term/concept. Despite a potential conflict between the principles, it is enough for disputants to understand the principles/sentences without necessarily accepting them all to grasp the concept’s meaning.

As I see it, Olsthoorn’s distinction serves as a good reminder that not all disputes in which concepts are centrally involved are conceptual disputes per se, and even mutual agreement on a set of principles that accompany a concept would not automatically entail that the parties would not be disagreeing concerning how to apply them. Taken together, however, the present points complement my earlier discussion (17.1) regarding the possible connection (and confusion) between theories and essentially contested concepts. If the disputes involving essentially contested concepts are both conceptual and substantive, mere concept analysis is not enough to resolve the issue. But the object of *the dispute* to be clarified is not solely the concept in question, but rather what our best understanding requires when we consider or apply the concept (in a particular context or theory). The answer one provides as to what justice requires in a given situation (e.g., in Finland in the 2020s) is not, at least not without further argument, a part of JUSTICE as one of its conceptions that the concept of justice unifies within its inherent structure. The foundation of the concept-centered thesis that affirms *Concept-Structure* as the key explanation of essential contestability in the concept/conception distinction cannot be located in this type of dispute.

The concept/conception has been stated as having become “a standard way” for explicating the idea of the essential contestedness of certain concepts (Ruben 2010, 260). Christine Swanton appears to view their mutual relation as one of entailment: essential contestedness views require “a distinction between the concept of an item x (such as justice) and a conception of x ” (Swanton 1985, 811–2; but see Ruben 2010, 260; Syrjämäki 2011, 159n401). It has even been claimed that “the concept-conception distinction was developed as part of a general theory of essentially contested concepts” (Stokes 2007, 689). The existence of any general theory is, however, doubtful. A person who subscribes to a thesis of essentially contested concepts might have some other conceptual logic in mind

as well—for instance, family resemblance (see 17.5). Gallie’s original idea also predates the popularity of concept/conception distinction by a wide margin. (Syrjämäki 2011, 159n401.) It might be best to merely say that the concept/conception distinction is often invoked in discussing essential contestability/contestedness.

‘Conceptions’ are mentioned only in passing in *ECC*, and the origin of the term ‘conception’ in its presently established general sense can be tracked to one specific passage:

...because of the internally complex and variously describable character of the exemplar's play, it is natural that different features in it should be differently weighted by different appraisers, and hence that our different teams should have come to hold their very different conceptions of how the game should be played. *ECC* 176/PHU 165³⁸³

In addition, Gallie’s references to ‘rival descriptions’ or ‘uses’ can be interpreted as referencing what are today called ‘conceptions’ (Swanton 1992, 1). In *PHU*, Gallie explicitly speaks of “two conflicting conceptions of social justice” while discussing the live example *SOCIAL JUSTICE* (PHU 182). These are a liberal or individualist conception and a socialist or collectivist conception, and the related discussion suggests that he makes no real distinction between a use and a conception. Gallie’s scarce usage of conception-terminology does not mean, however, that a viable thesis of essentially contestability could not be best presented in terms of the concept/conception distinction.

Steven Lukes’s specific interpretation of essential contestability has had a significant effect on how essential contestability is nowadays understood. Pertinent to present concerns, Lukes contends that there are *standard cases* of the possession and exercise of essentially contested power that constitute the concept’s common core (8.2). He claims to be following Gallie precisely in suggesting that

disputes about the proper interpretation and application of certain concepts are disputes between contending moral and political perspectives—that different interpretations (which I call ‘views’ and Rawls calls ‘conceptions’) of such concepts arise out of and operate within different perspectives. Lukes 1977, 418; see also Gray 1978, 392

The area of dispute concerns “where and how far the boundaries of the concept are to be extended” (Lukes 1977, 418). The wider the recognized boundaries, the more variety there is in respect of conceptions that are considered as proper interpretations and applications of the concept. Although disputes are brought about by contending moral and political perspectives, the dispute is still conceived as revolving around a single concept: “contests [over the social facts] are, after all, contests over something: essentially contested concepts must have some common core; otherwise, how could we justifiably claim that the contests

³⁸³ Other instances of Gallie referring to ‘conceptions’ are *ECC* 186/180; *ART* 108; and *PHU* 182.

were about the same concept?" (Lukes 1974, 187; see also Swanton 1992, 5–6). Lukes's view is liable to be criticized on the grounds presented by Halpin before.

Collier, Hidalgo and Maciuceanu point out that the idea of the common core in the form of multiple paradigmatic examples is helpful in anchoring the concept and the contest (Collier et al 2006, 220, 239). Sami Syrjämäki observes, though, that "Gallie does not refer to any general grammar, core, principle, or structure that would be common to all concepts contesting with each other" (Syrjämäki 2011, 164), which is fairly accurate; more so if one does not take Gallie's reference to standard general use (11.3) as implying either of those things. The distinction is attractive for an advocate of an essential contestability thesis because it appears to solve the unity problem (14.2). If controversial normative implications can be put to the side of more specific, rivalling conceptions (see e.g., Syrjämäki 2011, 90; see also 17.4), it might keep the core concept free of contestation, which enables its outright sharing. Nevertheless, insulating a core concept from contestation might render the contestation over the concept non-essential as contestation would take place between conceptions and not over the concept³⁸⁴, in which case the thesis of essential contestability would fail to be strong enough (cf. 15.3)

According to Ruben (2010, 2013), the common core that is mutually accepted can be vague and, as such, open to interpretation, which brings about different conceptions of that concept. In other words: the concept's intension has in its specification a vague term like 'rational,' 'reasonable,' 'arbitrary,' or 'proper balance' while the concept's extension includes "a core extension" that is agreed upon by all disputing parties. In addition, there are contested or penumbral cases that are considered as proper cases of X by some while others disagree, which gives rise to different conceptions. (Ruben 2010, 259–61; 2013, 34.) Let us call it *the vague core account* (fig. 3), the basic idea of which is to guarantee the unambiguity and univocality of the core concept. There is only one concept of X with a core meaning, albeit vague, and disputes take place between varying conceptions of X.

³⁸⁴ Syrjämäki observes that "Dworkin's, Rawls's and Hart's assertions have been regarded as a denial of the essentially contested concepts thesis in the sense that they are claiming that people are not disagreeing about a given concept but about their conceptions of that concept." However, this may not be the case, as they apply the distinction in different types of cases than Gallie. (Syrjämäki 2011, 164.)

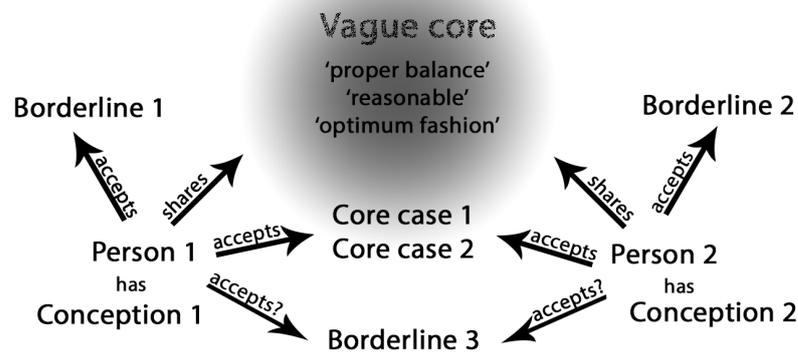


FIGURE 3: The vague core account

However, Ruben (2010) rejects the vague core account for approaching the kind of phenomenon that held Gallie’s primary interest³⁸⁵. Gallie’s disputes are not only undecidable, in fact, but they involve something “conceptually or logically undecidable.” The expression employed by disputants is supposedly not ambiguous, and the dispute is not easily resolvable by distinguishing between distinct concepts. When a concept has a common core, however, one expects everyone to agree that certain cases are proper cases of X while the contestation is about penumbral cases – i.e., the overall area of a concept’s extension is only partly shared. Yet the fact that there are cases “which do not clearly fall under or fail to fall under the concept” means that the concept in question must be a vague concept. The natural way to cope with vagueness that “besets a concept” and to settle the dispute about it is to “precisify” the concept and thus eliminate the disputed cases by allowing that there are, in truth, several different concepts of X, i.e., X₁, X₂, X₃ and so on, “each precisified in the way demanded by one of the parties.” But that would mean yielding to the ambiguity after all; Gallie would not have accepted the multiplication/disambiguation of concepts/meanings as a mechanism of dispute resolution (Ruben 2010, 259–61; see also Norberg 2014, 5; 12.4.) and neither will rival parties in the right sort of disputes (Waldron 1994, 531).

I find Ruben’s reading of Gallie’s intentions accurate and further add – also as an answer to Ruben (2010, 259) – that Gallie attempts to show, originally, how initial ambiguity is transformed into conceptual unity, and not that there is alleged (though ultimately mistaken) unity which is then dissected by making more specific distinctions³⁸⁶ (ECC 172; 12.1; 14.2). At this juncture, it is also good

³⁸⁵ For Ruben, essential contestability is about true succession and faithfulness (to the original exemplar) in the context of the membership in social groups, movements, traditions etc. (see both Ruben 2010 and 2013; see also 12.4 for the discussion of similarity judgments).

³⁸⁶ Furthermore, the multiplication of concepts in order to precisify a concept is not the only way to eliminate vagueness. There are a lot of vague concepts whose meaning is clear enough, but their vagueness gives rise to issues in relation to the extension rather than the intension. When that is so, one could also put forward better denotative and/or precisifying definitions that are meant to circumscribe the application of the concept increasing “within-concept

to note the difference between the two broad theoretical approaches to essential contestability that I have earlier named *the concept/conception approach* and *the unifying process approach* (14.1). The former approach begins with a shared concept that admits different conceptions, the unity of which is not questioned as long as they are conceptions of the one and the same concept. In the latter approach, essential contestability is understood as having to do exactly with the question of whether or not to unify different meanings or conceptual contents under the rubric of one essentially contested concept, or how to do so properly. For example, in his critical remarks, Ruben problematizes disambiguation as a patent method of resolving the disputes manifesting essential contestability. Yet he still operates within a theoretical framework that assumes conceptual cores and their further specifications, a feature that is characteristic to the concept/conception approach, instead of focusing on the process in which a contested concept is formed.

Moving on, it may also be that Ruben discards the vague core account a bit too soon. Vagueness can sometimes be a conceptual asset (Viola 2019, 237 in 12.1) and some forms of vagueness may not be in need of elimination even in the most ideal of circumstances³⁸⁷. Rather than besetting a concept, its function could be to invite different value judgments, for instance, in order to facilitate communal discussion and debate concerning what is deemed reasonable by the concept-users. SOCIAL JUSTICE is at least conceivably such a concept. Terms like ‘fairness’ or ‘reasonableness’ could not perhaps be made more precise as appeals to moral concepts by being more detailed; when they figure in explication, they are not simply incomplete or schematic attempts to lay down particular conceptions (see Besson 2005, 76 quoting Dworkin). In other words, they could function just the way they are supposed to. In this they might not be that different from what Michael Freeden describes as taking place in a pronouncedly political context: indeterminacy, ambiguity, or vagueness may generate consent by allowing a greater number of people to subscribe to a single political message, thus making them a recipe for political co-existence in favorable circumstances (Freeden 2005, esp. 117–8, 129–30). There is thus enough conceptual flexibility to allow a kind of consensus on what is being argued about without dispersing the conflict altogether.

Many concept/conception accounts, like Lukes’s, presume a common core or a shared nucleus of mutually accepted core cases, which relegates contestability to a concept’s periphery. But there could also be further disagreement concerning the relative *importance* of such standard cases of the

discriminating capability” (see Sartori 1984, 25–6, 29, 34, 42.) rather than taking it to imply a sort of ambiguity. Solving vagueness with better denotative or precisifying definitions presumes that the core meaning, or “declarative definition” in Sartori’s terms, is clear enough, even if “undenotative” in its vagueness (cf. 12.1).

³⁸⁷ To be fair, Ruben’s own, main insight—i.e., that the disputes manifesting essential contestability can be further explained in terms of true succession and faithfulness, the notions in which the assessment of qualitative similarity plays a significant role—is a kind of validation of the vagueness at the heart of what Gallie is talking about (see Ruben 2010, 269; see also 12.4).

possession and exercise of the concept that, presumably, constitute the concept's common core³⁸⁸ (compare ≠EXT with EXT* in 17.6; Ingram 1985, 43–4). These pivotal disagreements (14.1) challenge (pre)conceptions concerning what is centrally important in the concept's shared application, which introduces tension that *may* further induce or threaten conceptual change regarding not only the specific criteria, but the concept's point or function as well. The current train of thought may lead one to relinquish the idea that essentially contested concepts are criterially governed (16.4). Samantha Besson, for instance, thinks that, even if essential contestability means that certain concepts are contested in their core meaning, all we need to be able to share these concepts "are paradigms that can gradually be changed rather than fixed conceptual criteria"³⁸⁹ (Besson 2005, 16; see also 17.4). One way to fix a concept is to understand its criteria as constitutive of the concept, which, in effect, closes the concept. Another way to introduce stability is to establish agreement on the extension while the intension is understood more fluidly as consisting of criteria that need not be pertinent all the time and that may even undergo a change. The vague core account, for example, introduces disagreement at the intensional level that is primarily about how to respond to a standard that comes with the vague term present in its core definition. This is achieved by fixing the core extension.

Swanton (1985) identifies Gallie's thesis as one way to characterize the precise nature of the distinction between a concept and its conceptions³⁹⁰: the "concept of x is 'derived' from an 'exemplar' of x to which the concept of x paradigmatically applies." According to Swanton, "essential contestedness theorists," namely Gallie and Lukes, "agree that essentially contested concepts do possess a "common core" but that detailed specifications of this core are essentially contested." (Swanton 1985, 812–3; *contra* Syrjämäki 2011, 164.) In this picture, the common core possessed by an essentially contested concept is the 'concept' and the contested interpretations of that core 'conceptions.' Swanton shares my view that under essential contestation are ideals (11.3), and thus the relevant sort of concepts and conceptions are understood as concepts or conceptions of ideals. She nevertheless ends up rejecting the common core view in terms of the concept/conception distinction, although she appears to

³⁸⁸ This type of view would also be in tune with the notion that people may acquire what are basically the same concepts/meanings in slightly different ways because, for example, they have originally learnt the meanings in different settings (12.1). What might be considered mere differences in connotation, linguistically, could thus become a source for deeper contestability when the standard cases or exemplars are considered, and further judgments are made on that basis.

³⁸⁹ I am skeptical of Besson's claim that paradigms, loosely understood, get the job done (see also 17.4), but her view otherwise nicely exemplifies the current point.

³⁹⁰ By looking at the recent literature on moral and political ideals Swanton identifies two additional views: that (i) the "concept of x is provided by a schema or canonical form" (example: Gerald MacCallum, 1967, "Negative and Positive Freedom," *Philosophical Review* 76: 312–34); and that (ii) a "specification of the *concept* of x encapsulates a common content (as opposed to structure) of rival conceptions of x" (example: John Rawls, 1971, *A Theory of Justice*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, p. 5).

hesitantly accept at least the coherency of essential contestability more generally (ibid., 818–19).

The claim, that a concept has a *common core*, or that disputants share a *core concept*, has to mean something. The theoretical attractiveness of the distinction between a concept and its conceptions derives from the capacity of the common core to gather and unify competing conceptions under its umbrella. Yet the idea can be criticized in the context of essential contestability by presenting *the sophisticated inconsistency objection*³⁹¹. It may be alleged, says Swanton (1992), “that the ‘core concept’ is a fiction designed for the purposes of the essential contestedness view” because it can be supposed that the common core of a concept is essentially contested just like the conceptions. If that is not the case, then “What is the principle for settling the disputes about the core which is not available in the case of contested conceptions?” (Swanton 1992, 6.) That is a very good question. I do not go into the minutiae of Swanton’s overall argument³⁹², but based on her findings pose the following two alternatives:

(A) If (the specification of) the common core *is not* essentially contested, there is a way to correctly specify the core. But now the question is why would not that “way” be also available in the case of conceptions?

(B) If (the specification of) the common core *is* essentially contested, there is no common core that all can agree on. In this case, for the putative contests to be genuine, one *either* has to abandon the assumption that an essentially contestable concept “must possess a uniquely specifiable “core” that is common to the various contested interpretations of that concept” (Swanton 1985, 816), *or* abandon the assumption of contestability/contestedness, i.e., the concept admits a variety of interpretations or uses, which are disputable, and that these “conceptions” are deployable against rival “conceptions” (Swanton 1985, 813; 1992, 3–4).

Swanton further doubts that there is an uncontested conceptual core in the case of FREEDOM, JUSTICE, or various rights (*pro* Mason 1993, 82–3). For an essential contestedness thesis to be viable, (i) one needs to be able to speak of contested conceptions that refer to the same ideal without assuming that some core concept is common to those conceptions; and (ii) no such conception is the best conception, or one is not warranted in claiming to know that some such

³⁹¹ Zimmerling (2005, 24–6) identifies and names two inconsistency objections that can be directed against Gallie and Lukes: the simple inconsistency objection (13.1) and the sophisticated inconsistency objection described here. Both are presented originally by Swanton (1985) who defends Gallie and Lukes against the former, and criticizes them on the basis of the latter.

³⁹² See Swanton 1985, 816–8; see also Swanton 1992, 6ff. See also Michael Rhodes’s discussion of the same issue in terms of defining properties of concept that are, problematically [though Rhodes’s reading of Gallie is not the most accurate in this respect], derived from the original exemplar. Rhodes claims that if there is no core concept, or if the core concept is disputed, “then there is absolutely no ground for maintaining that the contestants are providing competing conceptions – there is nothing in common of which the contestants can be said to be formulating conceptions.” (Rhodes 2000, 8–9.)

conception is the best. In connection to DISTRIBUTIVE JUSTICE, she adds that “a “core concept” of justice is itself highly theory laden.” Interestingly, for Swanton, the concept’s *value-ladenness* is not at the crux of contestability as much as its *theory-ladenness* – and she is focused on the contestedness of individual concepts as part of “political theory.” (Swanton 1985, 814–7, 819.) Gallie himself is characteristically vague about both dimensions. As *explicit* assumptions, both value-ladenness and theory-ladenness seem to have their origin mostly in Lukesian ideas, from which they have found their way into the secondary literature on essentially contested concepts.

Eugene Garver (1990) joins Swanton in concluding that the dilemma posed above inflicts considerable damage to the essential contestedness positions (see also Kristjánsson 1995, 82 esp. n23), but he adds that it is the case “only if one presupposes that an adequate theory must be able to determine in any case whether or not two disputants share a concept over which they are arguing.” (Garver 1990, 265n4; *contra* Rhodes 2000, 9; cf. later.) Be that as it may, if the common core is not assumed, one might be better off by getting rid of the concept/conception apparatus in favor of some other option. That is what Swanton proposes as well.

Swanton’s (1985) alternative is based on a linguistic philosophical view, according to which it is possible to refer to the same thing by virtue of agreement on sufficiently many “samples,” in which case it would not be necessary to share the meaning of the term that is used to indicate which thing is talked about. One could thus refer to the same ideal, or to the same “thing” [Mason 1993, 83], without sharing the same meaning of the corresponding concept. Swanton admits the speculative nature of her position, but she complements it by invoking the Aristotelian idea of *endoxa*, i.e., common conceptions that are accepted by the many or the wise. The overarching idea is that although there might be a wide-ranging agreement on some *endoxos* – e.g., it is right to steal if one’s life depends on it – there could still remain further disagreement concerning how this is accommodated in a fully-fledged moral theory. There might be a high level of agreement concerning different *endoxa*, but when different theories attempt to resolve tensions *between* the *endoxa*, there is little reason to believe that there will be a core concept (of right) that is common to all theoretical conceptions (of what is right). (see Swanton 1985, 818–9; 1992, 7; *contra* Newey 2001, 254–5; but cf. Rhodes 2000, 13.)

Swanton’s position has its problems, and I will return to the matter of *endoxa* later in the study (see 18.1). It suffices to note, here, that the account can be understood as a combination of two previously presented views: (i) the dispute is grounded on paradigmatic cases (cf. Besson before and in 17.4); and (ii) the intractability of the dispute is largely traced to the inability of the proposed theories to solve the matter at hand (cf. Shapiro in 17.1). This is not necessarily at odds with Halpin’s previous criticism, since various conceptions as theoretizations or intellectual reflections are no longer gathered under the umbrella of a single core concept. But that is also the main reason why it fails as a concept-centered thesis of essential contestability – neither *Concept-Object* nor

Concept-Structure is met within the parameters presented. An optional avenue is implied by Andrew Mason (1993) who observes that Swanton might just as well suggest that a common core of different uses of a term is not required for sharing concepts; instead, the agreement on sufficiently many judgments justifies sharing concepts. The vagueness of that criterion might not be troubling since “the question of whether disputants share the same concept may be one that cannot be settled by any precise method and may in some cases not have a determinate answer.” (Mason 1993, 83n40.)

From the standpoint of the sophisticated inconsistency objection, the vague core account seems promising at first. The vagueness may enable agreement on the common core in abstract, while it is perfectly sensible that that agreement would be increasingly difficult to maintain in more precise conceptions from which the agreement-enabling vagueness is eliminated. Disputants might now go back and forth between the vague common core and the more specific conceptions in order to argue that their own conception meets with the shared core understanding of the concept best. By reversing the issue, it conceivably sidesteps, although not completely discharges, Swanton’s demand for elucidating what principle can settle the potential disputes about the core which is not available in the case of contested conceptions. However, I do not think that the account is worthy of being called essential contestability. The idea that there is a vague core formulation of an essentially contested concept that serves as a kind of mutually accepted general principle or criterion for deciding the matter goes against Gallie’s assumption that such a standard is not available. Admittedly, one needs at least *some* standards, but allowing the core concept to serve that function would have to mean that the intension of the concept is not really threatened as required by the strong thesis of essential contestability.

To conclude, we need to examine how Michael Stokes and Eugene Garver frame essential contestability in terms of the concept/conception distinction in a quite novel fashion. Stokes (2007) defines an essentially contested concept as “one which admits of different competing conceptions” and the debate is part of “an ongoing attempt to determine which of these conceptions is preferable or correct.” According to him, “it is impossible to comprehend fully the meaning of an essentially contested concept without an understanding of its competing conceptions.” Evaluative contested concepts should be further distinguished from (ambiguous) general terms that are merely descriptive and classificatory. (Stokes 2007, 689–91.) Stokes appears to be suggesting that ambiguous meanings of a general term might be confused with genuinely competing conceptions (of a concept). While ambiguity is resolved when it is known what is intended in a context, essentially contested concepts admit different conceptions “because of continuing disputes about the most justifiable understanding of the values which underlie the concept” (Stokes 2007, 693). In the latter case, further clarification of what is meant does nothing to resolve the disagreement. What seems to be decisive, then, is *how* conceptions come to conflict and compete.

Eugene Garver (1990) views conceptions as instances of an essentially contested concept *iff* they compete against each other; he therefore rejects the

notion that conceptions “compete against each other because they are opposed versions of a single concept.” Concepts are essentially contested only derivatively, i.e., because they are employed in “essentially contested arguments.” There is no demarcation criterion for distinguishing them from other concepts beforehand: “Partisans, not theorists, determine whether a conflict involves an essentially contested concept.” In fact, Garver considers “making competing conceptions simple instantiations or specifications of an independently accessible primary concept” an evasion strategy “employed to avoid confronting essentially contested concepts,” a tactic that makes the idea of essentially contested concepts incoherent. (Garver 1990, 258, 264.)

Both Stokes’s and Garver’s points of view cohere with the spirit of Gallie’s statement that “the philosophical concept of Art is an essentially contested one, and that so-called ‘theories of Art’ are intelligible only as contributions to a seemingly endless, although at its best a creative, conflict” (PHU 177) — ‘theories’ should now be substituted with ‘conceptions,’ of course. If a concept cannot be fully accounted for without assessment of its competing conceptions in a dispute, the contestability is an ineliminable partner to an essentially contested concept, notwithstanding the way it is reflected on the concept’s semantics. I will call this type of a concept/conception thesis of essential contestability *the competing conceptions account*.

The claim that actual circumstances of competition and contest determine a concept’s status as essentially contested is implicit in Stokes’s view while Garver ends up affirming it explicitly (see also Garver in 13.4). In general, there are two clear ways to continue towards a full-blown essential contestability thesis. One option is to go against Garver and emphasize the presence of competing conceptions as a structural feature of essentially contested concepts; in this *concept-centered thesis*, it is an essential characteristic of some concepts that they consist of such conceptions. Gallie’s statement that mutually contested, and contesting, uses of the essentially contested concepts together make up its standard general use (ECC 169; 11.3) supports it. The other option is to confront essentially contested concepts broadly in the way that Garver goes about it; this results in a *processual conflict thesis of essential contestability*, the key hallmark of which is to focus on the kind of argument and dispute the rivals are having as constitutive of essential contestability. Gallie appears to hint at this direction as well at various points. For instance, the playing styles of the artificial teams are viewed as “competitively connected athletic skills” (ECC 179). He could have just as easily said that the playing styles are connected by the fact of their being ways to play the same game, but he elects to characterize them as being connected by virtue of being part of the same competition. The competition is further specified as the continuous competition by Condition (VII) (9.1). I personally favor combining elements from both Stokes and Garver: to grasp the overall concept is to understand its competing conceptions as part of the debate about or centrally involving the concept, a debate which is itself an ongoing attempt to determine which one of the conceptions is to be preferred. In this picture, conceptual unity becomes something to be established in a continuous manner.

From a synchronic perspective, there does not have to be a pre-existing, shared concept before contestation. The conceptual boundaries of the presumed concept are formed only when conceptions are competing, as contestable as those boundaries could be from still other standpoints (fig. 4). From a diachronic perspective, each competing conception has been somehow affected, directly or indirectly, by “past proliferations and the unifications” to which their subject matter has been subjected by their users (PHU 190; 14.2). Not all disputes and conflicts are held together this way by some unified general concern, problem, or valued achievement that is at the fulcrum of a dispute. Still, in some cases that is *probable* or *plausible* (9.1), as Gallie would have it, in which case further determination of conceptual unity would be that more defensible.

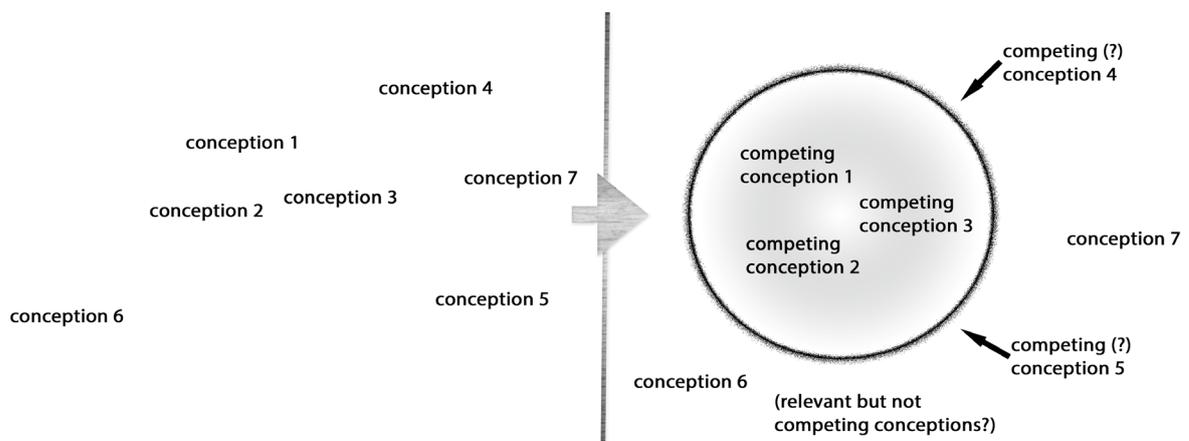


FIGURE 4: The competing conceptions account

If certain concepts become the concepts that they are only through being contested, it also appears that their specific content is determined by the very same dispute between competing conceptions. Given the present qualifications, no other possibility is sensible. This way the concept that can be conceived of as unifying competing conceptions is constantly in its state of becoming; it is continuously shaped by the competing conceptions which also means that it is shaped by individuals and groups who advocate those conceptions. In this sense, at least, partisans would determine whether a conflict involves an essentially contested concept, although the exact status of the “shared” concept is a different matter. Perhaps it is merely a second-order construction, an *assumption* of conceptual unity that a theorist as well as participants to a dispute may come to make in the light of *accepting* that the conceptions in question are, in fact, mutually contesting and contested, genuinely. An essential contestability thesis that follows competing conceptions account in this does not need to make claims about a common first-order concept that all parties to a dispute well and truly employ in the sense that they also possess that concept (see also 18.5.).

To better grasp what I am after, competing conceptions can be compared to a widespread usage of some term. Even if some term-uses appear to conflict, one may determine that the pattern of usage manifests a conceptual unity, i.e., there

is a fruitful conceptual link between considerations behind different occurrences of a term. One could also try to represent both the conflict and the conceptual unity that is made manifest in how the term is generally used by depicting the assumed unity as an essentially contested concept, which is a judgment concerning its “standard general use” (11.3). In this sense, it would not be as much the case that employing an essentially contested concept leads to irresolvable and endless disputes but that some irresolvable and endless disputes are properly characterized as involving an essentially contested concept. The corollary of the latter option is that what is depicted as an essentially contested concept is not necessarily a concept that is employed by any party to a dispute. It is, rather, a concept of the combined employment of the term (cf. 9.1; see 18.5), which positions Gallie to the side of the language-focused framework for treating concepts rather than the scientific-ideal framework (cf. 16.3).

Understood this way, the competing conceptions account runs the risk of becoming somewhat trivial due to the concept’s status as being dependent on judgments after the fact rather than being the kind of entity that concretely guides formation of views. This type of a concept-centered essential contestability thesis appears to be solely limited to scholarly contexts and/or theoretical reflection while ‘essentially contested concept’ becomes a term of art, more or less. However, it raises the possibility that essentially contested concepts are always *partly shared* by the disputants: instead of a common core, the concept itself would be somehow “split” between the rivals, and that which is shared by rival parties would not suffice for accurately representing the concept’s paradigmatic instances. In general, the competing conceptions account can be understood as an attempt to make sense of how the common “core” of a concept could be subject to essential contestation when the assumption that an essentially contested concept must possess a uniquely specifiable core that is common to the various contested interpretations of that concept is rejected. Competing conceptions point towards a kind of core, but as that core hangs in the balance as to its competing conceptions, it remains elusive and mercurial, and certainly not uniquely specifiable. That is to be expected if an essentially contested concept is properly characterized as “inchoate,” or “persistently vague” in Gallie’s specific sense (ECC 184/PHU 178; ECC 173/PHU 162; see also 12.1). But now the relevant type of vagueness is generated by contesting the matter, and not by virtue of certain characteristics of a concept that could exist without being contested or having been contested before (cf. 18.1). Alternatively, the concept is endowed with the special characteristics by virtue of being contested.

17.4 The relation between description and evaluation

In this section, I will discuss proposals that seek to resolve difficulties that come with a concept-centered thesis of essential contestability by separating between a concept’s descriptive and evaluative elements. The proposals may overlap with other ways of structuring an essentially contested concept. For example,

according to Sami Syrjämäki the concept/conception distinction “means to maintain that while various *conceptions* of, for example, liberty are likely to carry an evaluative or normative load within them, the *concept* of liberty might be purely descriptive and universal” (Syrjämäki 2011, 90). In general, essential contestability is often understood as a combination of evaluativeness/normativity and complexity (e.g., Waldron 2002, 149–150; van der Burg 2017, 245). Anyone advocating a specifically concept-centered variant based on a division between the evaluative and descriptive elements should further explicate how the distinction is encoded within a term/concept, and how it contributes to the irresolvability and endlessness of disputes over a unified concept, if at all. Notwithstanding the insights Gallie’s original thesis might contain, Gallie does not produce a satisfactory argument in this regard.

For Peter Ingram (1985), some concepts like RELIGION and HISTORY are *partially* contestable in that they can be *evaluatively*, but not essentially, *contested*. RELIGION is not essentially contested in the sense that adherents of one religion would claim that other religions are hardly religions or not religions at all, yet “there can be arguments over what is a better religion, over what best exemplifies the ideal of religion.” Evaluatively contested concepts may thus admit different conceptions of X, but the very admissibility of different conceptions is not in question. According to Ingram, this type of comparative arguments over the merits of rival conceptions and their ranking order do not appear to take place in the case of JUSTICE and DEMOCRACY which more clearly admit either-or disputes: a “bad religion is still a religion, but we believe that a bad (so-called) democracy is not a democracy at all or that a theory of justice that we cannot accept does not in fact constitute a concept of justice.” Evaluative contestation is made possible by the fact that certain concepts “necessarily possess certain, agreed common features” or properties while the essential contestability proper becomes more a matter of family resemblance type fluidness of criteria.³⁹³ (Ingram 1985, 44–45.)

Leaving the family resemblance aside for now (see 2.3; 17.5), Ingram’s observation questions Gallie’s rationale for choosing his live examples. The point can be rephrased by saying that disagreement concerning what is a good or bad example of a religion is not reflexively connected to disagreement over religion-making features, while the opposite appears to be true in the case of democracy and justice. One way to look at the matter is to state that, in the latter cases, the concept’s criteria of application are also in dispute. Another way is to explicitly

³⁹³ Ingram’s basic idea concerning evaluatively contested concepts seems quite clear, but his other chosen example, HISTORY, raises a particular worry. In short, Ingram presents us with a case of two individuals who hold differing views concerning how one arrives at a truthful and integrated account of the past, and HISTORY that they share is also assumed “to possess some binding force for holding together the many different ways of researching and writing history.” These individuals are not claiming “of each other that what they were doing was not history at all, but rather that it was not the best kind of history, that it was not the way in which history ought to be done.” (Ingram 1985, 45.) But now HISTORY is saddled with an exceedingly specific function, or it is evaluatively contested only within a very narrow conceptual practice. The talk of evaluatively contested concepts implies that what he talks about pertains to an evaluative domain overall, but now it rather seems that he is speaking of solution-concepts (14.2) and/or concepts that have a very precise animating point (18.2).

draw attention to the evaluativeness of the criteria. According to Gellner, “the criteria for an object falling under [an essentially contested concept] are multiple; they are evaluative (i.e., to satisfy them is to satisfy a norm of excellence, as well as a mere precondition of a classification)” (Gellner 1974, 95; see also Gray 1978, 389).

This type of criteria play a *dual role*: they are criteria according to which one evaluates the worth of the achievement itself (*the norm of excellence part*) but they can also be viewed as the criteria that need to be met for an object to be judged as falling under the concept (*the classification part*). Both description and evaluation are needed: essentially contested concepts are neither purely descriptive or purely evaluative (van der Burg 2017, 233–4). At first sight, it appears that evaluation and description are now fused in the sense that the concept’s evaluative point or function provides a rationale for grouping or classifying certain things together, hence resulting in the concept’s criteria³⁹⁴. I think this is what might *motivate* calling essentially contested concepts “evaluative ‘all the way down’” (Harcourt and Thomas 2013, 35), or as interpretive all the way down (see Ehrenberg 2011, 225 in reference to Dworkin). Whichever way one wants to get down with it, its counterpart in Gallie’s original terminology is the *appraisiveness* of concepts.

The dual role of the criteria is reflected in how essentially contested concepts can be used in (at least) two different ways: descriptively and/or evaluatively³⁹⁵. More to the point, the way the criteria figure in judging relevant matters endows the uses of first-order essentially contested concepts *their reflexive character in the function in which they are characteristically used*, i.e., appraisively. Such concepts are not exhausted altogether by their evaluative function. Normative concepts like JUSTICE certainly have a descriptive function; it is by virtue of their descriptive function that they can indicate features in arrangements that ought to be favorably evaluated (Miller 1983, 39–42; Besson 2005, 80–1³⁹⁶). This is a matter of reflexivity; “what counts as just always requires

³⁹⁴ The notion that evaluation and description are fused together, perhaps irreducibly, is a huge philosophical issue. Here, I cannot hope to discuss how this fusion would be actually encoded in concept’s/term’s semantic meaning, if at all, in order for it to elicit proper sort of judgments from other users in communicative situations. In general, I adopt a view which understands this and similar functions pragmatically, or as something that relates to how individuals intend to use the terms in a given context (see esp. 18.2).

³⁹⁵ Or, alternatively, in proposing a real definition or an honorific definition (see Weitz 1956, esp. 35). To illustrate, the claim that “justice is equity” can be taken as a real definition of justice, which is here captured by the one necessary and sufficient condition, namely its uniformity with equity, or as an honorific definition that mainly draws attention to one feature of justice, namely to how things (e.g., people) should be treated in an even, balanced, and fair way.

³⁹⁶ For Samantha Besson (2005), this further means that the meaning of the concept is also under disagreement, at least often. As I see it, her point translates to maintaining that the indicators of essentially contested concepts (in the earlier lingo of criterial governability; see 16.4) are also in dispute from time to time. However, rival parties might not be disagreeing linguistically per se. Whatever the standard is that determines how the predicate ‘is just’ should be specifically applied in a given situation, it is not self-evident that (semantic) meaning or linguistic practice (alone) should determine that standard (see Väyrynen 2013b,

a moral judgement as to what justice is" (Besson *ibid.*) Gallie is almost solely focused on the evaluative function, as he can be seen to frame essential contestation as a weighting dispute while taking component parts of a valued achievement for granted (17.2). That is why Ingram understands such contestation as "partial": it involves the norm of excellence part rather than the classification part.

Ingram does not appear to be fully cognizant of the possibility, however, that a concept's descriptive criteria may be chosen or interpreted reflexively based on one's evaluative (or other) concerns, or he otherwise chooses to disregard that as a valid option (cf. Ingram 1985, 44n8). He appears to understand the variability of a concept that comes with essential contestability solely as a matter of complex descriptive structure, like the family resemblance, in addition to assuming separately, in the case of evaluative contestation, that one needs other (evaluative) criteria for assessing which of the instances of the concept is better than others in addition to the shared descriptive criteria. I find it more fruitful to presume, initially at least, that essentially contested concepts are intimately connected to the points of view from which judgments concerning their proper employment spring (see also 18.2). It is also implied by Gallie's talk of the particular appraisive situations of rival parties (11.4), or in how the point of view from which one's appraisal is made, and the concept of the achievement, are equated as both are considered essentially contested (ART 114).

One might confuse disputes over theories with disputes over concepts (17.1) or theories might be mixed with the more specific conceptions of concepts (17.3). Morris Weitz (1956) describes another source of confusion that pertains to how an evaluative or honorific use of a concept may figure in treating an open concept like ART, or its "sub-concepts." On the one hand, one may ask "what is tragedy?" and choose a class of samples for which one is able to give an account of its common properties, like (extant) Greek tragedy, which are then construed as a true or the best definition or theory of the whole class of tragedy. What takes place is that one subtly transforms the "correct criteria for *recognizing* members of certain legitimately closed classes into recommended criteria for *evaluating* any putative member of the class" and thus mistakenly tries "to define what cannot be defined." An open concept cannot be squeezed into an honorific formula for a closed concept. On the other hand, one could praise an object by saying "This is a work of art," and what actually happens is that a particular criterion of evaluation for the employment of ART is "converted into a criterion of recognition," or that the utterance implies that "'This has P," where "P" is some chosen art-making property." (Weitz 1956, 32-34.) In both cases, a specific evaluation may nudge one to consider a coincidental criterion or property as a recognizer or indicator of a concept, although the relation may be inessential rather than integral. In the case of a concept that evaluates its object positively, it is especially easy to conflate the set of evaluative objects with the set of evaluative standards that falls under the concept (see also Olsthoorn in 17.3).

155). The possible mix-up, here, is analogous to the one we witnessed earlier in the case of normative principles and theories (17.1).

Weitz's own take on questions of concept application like "Is Gide's *The School for Wives* a novel or a diary?" is an interesting perspective that is highly applicable to essential contestability. In such cases, "what is at stake is no factual analysis concerning necessary and sufficient properties but a decision as to whether the work under examination is similar in certain respects to other works, already called "novels," and consequently warrants the extension of the concept to cover the new case" [cf. ART 101]. Weitz warns against confusing evaluative use with the other, more fundamental conditions of using a concept, but I find his crucial insight to be that the honorific definitions, or evaluative uses of concepts, are not important as "disguised linguistic recommendations." Instead, they bring with them "debates over the reasons for changing the criteria of the concept." The definitional form is used to turn attention towards recommended features, whereas extending the concept to cover new cases and properties is a matter of decision. (Weitz 1956, 31-32, 35; see also 6.2.) A decision implies a possibility to decide otherwise, and when one's decision turns on assessment of similarity (see 12.4), it creates plenty of room for uncertainty.

Given how Weitz discusses the class of Greek tragedy as a closed category in juxtaposition to the arguably broader class of tragedy as an open category, he appears to understand tragedy as an on-going and open-ended activity that can, by virtue of its nature, admit new types to be included within the category of tragedy. Weitz's conception of tragedy, although he considers it a sub-concept of ART, therefore shares features that Gallie (and Weitz himself) similarly ascribes to ART (see 11.2; 11.3; ART 114; PHU 190). For Gallie, the arts are "ever expanding, ever reviving and advancing values inherited from a long and complex tradition" (ART 114) while, for Weitz, "the very expansive, adventurous character of art, its ever-present changes and novel creations, makes it logically impossible to ensure any set of defining properties"³⁹⁷ (Weitz 1956, 32).

William Connolly's (1993) view of essentially contested concepts as widely but imperfectly shared appraisive concepts bears important resemblance to what is discussed here although he does not emphasize openness as much as Weitz. Connolly observes that politics is the mode in which the contest over such concepts is expressed in a clash "when mutual understanding and interpretation is possible but in a partial and limited way, when reasoned argument and coercive pressure commingle precariously in the endless process of defining and resolving issues" (Connolly 1993,40). The solution- or answer-seeking process in which essentially contested concepts are employed is thus understood as a continuous and quintessentially reflexive one (see also *ibid.*, 35-41). That is because essentially contested concepts describe from a moral point of view. However, we are now moving quickly away from a concept-centered thesis of essential contestability. Characterizations of this generality merely suggest that the current sort of essential contestability is a live option, rather than try to cash it out in terms of a concept's inherent structure and characteristics. I will later get

³⁹⁷ Interestingly, in his paper, Weitz also starts with the notion of family resemblance, from which he moves to discuss the issue in terms of openness.

back to the issue of how a concept's criteria, its recognitors or indicators, are organized from a certain point of view (18.2).

Samantha Besson's (2005) preferred version of essential contestability delivers us a multi-faceted account that better satisfies *Concept-Structure*. For Besson, an essentially contestable concept "clearly embodies and names a normative standard or value, the detailed content of which determines the correct application of the concept," and whose "correct use is for its correct use to be contestable." This implies that there is no absolutely correct conception of a contestable concept, and never will be, and that "a contestable concept always contains more potential components than can be included in any actual definition or conception of the concept." The contestable concept can thus give rise to manifold conceptions. (Besson 2005, 72.) To this extent, Besson's account can be understood as a concept/conception thesis (see 17.3).

Besson further asserts that those disputing the use of a normative contestable concept share a *minimal understanding* of it. For example, even if they were to "disagree about whether social justice consists in a distribution according to desert or a distribution according to need, they still appear to concur in thinking that 'justice' refers to a manner of distributing goods among persons." In addition, essentially contestable concepts usually have a *clear minimal meaning* in the sense that they are used correctly when they elicit "specific value judgement from anyone applying or implementing the proposition in which they appear." These concepts have specific evaluative meanings, which do not preclude disagreement over the criteria of application but which presumably restrict the scope of those criteria, and thus the contestable concepts push "in the direction of a particular dimension of evaluative significance and away from other dimensions." They may also have elements of "relatively fixed descriptive meaning," and, by the virtue of their descriptive function, "the concept can indicate that it is a certain feature of an arrangement that ought to be favourably evaluated." Both evaluative and descriptive meanings are "the dimensions of the minimal understanding of normative concepts." There is also variability, at least when the specific evaluative meaning is retained in order to "alter the descriptive meaning," and in some circumstances this may even induce the change in the global constitution of the concept³⁹⁸. (Besson 2005, 82-3)

For example, in the case of CRUELTY, we are aware of the concept's negative and condemnatory connotations in addition to it telling us something about the gravity of the suffering experienced. As an illustration of the kind of contestability that is involved, Besson observes that a utilitarian employing JUSTICE "is referring to justice for he shares the minimal consensual

³⁹⁸ In the context of changing a descriptive meaning, Besson cites Hare (1952, 119). On that specific page, Hare speaks of how the evaluative force of the word 'good' can be used "to *change* the descriptive meaning for any class of objects. This is what the moral reformer often does in morals; but the same process occurs outside morals" (ibid.). The implied comparison to Hare's example of 'a good motor car' is unfortunate, I think, for Besson's purposes. Since 'good' is a general word for commending something, it does not really limit the scope of the descriptive criteria the way Besson appears to understand the *specific* evaluative meanings to do in the case of contestable concepts with *thicker* senses (e.g., 'cruel'; cf. Besson 2005, 71).

understanding that concern for a distribution is an element of justice, but it is not possible to make the conceptual and absolute claim that he is right or wrong in doing so [in a specifically utilitarian fashion]." Essential contestability thus seems to boil down to a dispute over C-making features, or "whether cruelty is simply a matter of the intensity of suffering, or whether it also refers to the malice, inhumanity or disrespect with which the suffering was inflicted." For Besson, this is an instance of substantive or normative disagreement over the application of a normative concept, but the parties are also applying different criteria to the case at hand, or at least they are weighing them differently. The reflexivity of normative concepts appears to do the most work in making sense of why the dispute in question is not only substantive but also conceptual: "when people disagree about the features of an arrangement in virtue of which it is to be called just, they are also often disagreeing about the meaning of the concept 'justice.'" (Besson 2005, 80–3, 88.)

Besson puts forward a complex and enticing account, the different facets of which deserve a more thorough examination. Alas, here I can but identify a couple of snags, as simplistic as my findings are. First, it is not perfectly clear what is, in fact, contested or contestable in Besson's account. The contestation appears to be about the "recognitors" (see 16.4) of concepts, in addition to the concepts' central applications perhaps. The disagreement over what I have previously called 'the C-making features' translates to the disagreement over the concept when such C-making features are decided by virtue of the concept's criteria, and thus judgment concerning the proper C-making features is, reflexively, also over the criteria for applying the concept correctly. However, since Besson rejects the view that an essentially contestable concept is "criterial" (Besson 2005, 89, see 79, 73) or criterially governed in the first place, she cannot appeal to such identity-forming relation between the concept and its criteria. As a result, it can be argued that the disagreement is merely substantive.

Besson further states that "agreement on the terms of a concept is a prerequisite for further conceptual or normative agreement or disagreement" (Besson 2005, 47–8), so rival parties have no problems of *understanding* concerning what they all *mean* when they use the concept. She nevertheless goes on to argue that "the shared minimal element of meaning does not exhaust the word's core meaning for either party." This statement is accompanied with a reference to R.M. Hare (1952, 94ff) with the remark that questions "how evaluative concepts like 'good' can be used and shared without sharing criteria for their correct application as we do need to for the use of terms like 'red'" (Besson 2005, 84n103). Besson thus appears to consider essentially contestable concepts similar to either transtheoretical modal concepts (see Gunnell 1998 in 17.1) or essentially evaluative concepts (see Olsthoorn in 17.1), but the matter is left rather obscure, especially since it would be at odds with the view that the dispute is about something that is comparable to C-making features (as the criteria of the concept). Moreover, according to Besson, disputes over essentially contestable concepts are, however, both conceptual and normative/substantive (Besson 2005, 71), but what really separates disagreement over "features of an

arrangement" from the quite ordinary substantive disputes if agreement on terms is already required? We have Besson's assurance that there is more to the core meaning than is presumably required to carry out the disagreement, but what is that "more" other than disagreement over proper features of an arrangement³⁹⁹? The danger is that she simply ends up reproducing some of the confusions that can arise when essential contestability is cashed out in terms of the concept/conception distinction (17.3) or viewed as a clash between different theories (17.1).

Second, Besson's account appears to combine elements from both *Contested Core* and *Via Contestation* senses of 'essentiality' (see 12.3): the relevant type of disputes can generate rival paradigms and criteria of application, but it is also "part of the *very meaning and essence* of the concept to be contested and to raise questions as to its nature." However, disagreements surrounding the meaning of the concept are not irresolvable as parties are assumed to share a minimal though decidedly not complete understanding concerning the concept's scope of applicability (Besson 2005, esp. 72, 89.) It is somewhat counterintuitive to speak of *a single concept* as being involved in disputes that generate rivalling paradigms concerning how to apply *it*. On the one hand, *Via Contestation* accounts tend to treat a concept as a kind of artefact that can be accessed, shared or contested by several people without a hitch; "the concept" is treated as a stable fixture around which disputes revolve. At worst, this evidences a kind of uncritical intellectual mannerism in which one habitually assumes that the discourse-specific meanings attributed to some word show that the discourse in question is oriented towards and around a single "concept" – it is, of course, perfectly possible to talk past one another even in one continuing discourse. On the other hand, *a* paradigm, as the notion is more commonly understood, can order various concerns the disputants might have, thereby providing unity to contestation that takes place within it, while plural paradigms imply incommensurability. Unfortunately, while the theoretical role the notion of paradigm plays in Besson's thesis is relatively clear, the exact sense Besson attaches to 'paradigm' is anything but⁴⁰⁰.

³⁹⁹ We commonly presume that we can know what the terms that we use mean without knowing what the features that would satisfy those meanings are. This is true in more theoretical contexts as well; we do not assume that either Rawls or Nozick do not know what is meant by 'just distribution' even if they disagree concerning what makes actual social distributions just (see also Väyrynen 2013b, 142, 139). We should not take lightly the intuition, or let us say the presumption, that a dispute like the one between a deontologist and utilitarian over what makes an action morally right is substantive, and that the participants share the meaning of 'moral rightness' even though they espouse a different moral theory. The burden rests on someone claiming that there is something conceptual in those and similar disputes to pinpoint what exactly is conceptually in dispute.

⁴⁰⁰ See esp. Besson 2005, ch. 3. Besson conceives paradigms as "instances in which the requirements of the practice seem obvious and uncontroversial; they are 'clear cases used as an object of comparison.'" (Besson 2005, 84; see also 76; the quote is from Endicott 2000, ch. 7.3) yet at the same time paradigms should not be confused with "(historical) foundations, criteria or central exemplars that make the argument possible in the first place" (ibid., 86). Paradigms "are tentative and temporary cases of clear and correct application of a concept" (85, 89), they can be shared (52) and gradually changed (17), but they cannot all be revised or abandoned at the same time (85). Paradigms can be disputed; in fact, no paradigm remains

In any case, both Ingram and Besson understand contestability – in Ingram, evaluative; in Besson, essential—as a matter of disputing parties agreeing on descriptive content that is further qualified based on their individual evaluations. The clear difference is that Besson views the shared content as incomplete, while for Ingram it is enough for classification if not for comparative evaluation. In all fairness, my presentation of Besson’s complex position and its possible problems is much too simple, though necessarily curtailed. She addresses some of the issues I have raised⁴⁰¹, and although I remain unconvinced, it is best to read my current criticism as an illustration of more general points. In comparison to Ingram’s account, for instance, Besson’s overall conception is more refined and attractive. Ingram views *essential* contestability in terms of incommensurability of the criteria, but as Besson implicitly subscribes to the premises of the Shared Meaning Task (see 14.1), she is confronted with a problem that she tries to solve by showing how a *meaning* of a term is both shared (or conveyed) and contested at the same time. That is why she posits an incomplete descriptive meaning (e.g., ‘justice’ refers to a manner of distributing goods among persons) as the shared part while its further specification is guided by evaluation. But even if rival parties mutually accepted that descriptive content as the (possibly incomplete) definition of the term, that would still not incontrovertibly establish that they are sharing the same meaning, since the disputants could interpret it differently⁴⁰². In fact, I think that is to be expected since they go on to specify it differently. By contrast, a thinker like C. L. Stevenson draws attention to fact that the evaluative

undisputed (ibid., 77, 82, 85). At one point, Besson seems to liken paradigms to a concept’s referents (83n98), another time to normative principles (85), and also to rules (52, 78). Paradigms admit degrees in terms of minimality and fullness (82). The worry is that this variety evidences that ‘paradigm’ functions as an all-purpose-tool for solving theoretical problems at every step of the way.

⁴⁰¹ For example, Besson distinguishes between the minimal understanding of the concept that is required to start disagreeing from the full (normative) understanding that leads to essential contestability. She supports this notion with another distinction, this time between “the requirement of understanding meaning-giving statements of the concept” that is needed in order to share the concept and the requirement of belief in the truth or indubitability of those statements. A person can share an understanding without believing “in the truth of the central applications of a concept she understood.” This is meant as an answer to the criticism that “if all central applications of a concept are contestable and this without making a mistake, then this concept cannot be shared and understood properly.” (Besson 2005, 16, 19, 89.)

⁴⁰² For this point, albeit slightly differently formed originally, I am indebted to Andrew Mason (1993, 82). See also his discussion of C. B. Macpherson’s notion that the different variants of democracy, viz. “liberal,” “communist,” and “Third World,” have in common the same ultimate goal: “to provide the conditions for the full and free development of the essential characteristics of all members of the society” (Macpherson quoted in Mason 1993, 86). The disputants succeed in communicating with each other despite employing different concepts by ‘democracy’ “because they are disagreeing over what conditions are required for the full and free development of all members of society, even if they do not describe their disagreement in these terms” (Mason 1993, 86). With the exception of assuming a single concept, this view is close to the idea of solution-concept (see 14.2; see also 18.3). One could conceive specifications of, for instance, ‘justice as something that refers to a manner of distributing goods among persons’ (Besson’s characterization) in similar terms.

meaning of a word – more precisely, emotive meaning – can stay the same while the descriptive meaning can be altered (Stevenson 1938 in 15.2; cf. Hare 1963/1952, 119–121). The descriptive content to which the word refers to has now changed, and the new standard of what is either valuable or to be rejected has thus been introduced⁴⁰³. That is relatively unproblematic since only the word and its emotive meaning, and not the concept, is assumed to stay the same.

If Besson's primary point is more simply that it is easier to identify an issue at hand as an issue of *x* (e.g., of justice) than it is to resolve an ensuing dispute about what arrangements qualify as just (see also Olsthoorn 2017, 174–5), I definitely agree with her with an accompanying disclaimer: what is identified *may* be a *topic* of *x* (e.g., 'justice') rather than a *common concept* (e.g., JUSTICE). Besson's insistence on couching her points in meaning-terminology may do them a partial disservice as she does, indeed, observe that disagreement over justice "is not restricted to uncertainties about *norms* for the use of *language* but [it] expands into uncertainties about *moral and political norms* more generally"⁴⁰⁴ (Besson 2005, 76). I assume Besson has in mind an idea highly similar to Jeremy Waldron's, i.e., that normative terms can have a clear meaning, and the fact that they do not determine our value judgments does not detract from their univocality. Some terms are more specific than others, and each term "pushes us in the direction of a particular dimension of evaluative significance and away from other dimensions." (Waldron 1994, 527–8). Yet, here, "evaluative significance" does not necessarily entail that the dispute extends along the meaning dimension: the dispute may indeed *involve* a normative term with a shared meaning while the dispute is not *about* that meaning. The different types of agreement and disagreement are not easy to discern or tell apart. Nevertheless, even by assuming that I read too much into Besson's thesis, and the dispute she describes is merely about a concept's application without threatening the concept's core (cf. Besson 2005, 84), it fails to be sufficiently strong for what I am after (15.3).

⁴⁰³ This could be quite close to what is commonly understood as the conceptual change of normative or evaluative concepts, although arguably the change in descriptive meaning results in a different concept. Whether the identity of the concept stays the same or not is decided based on the theory of concepts to which one subscribes, of course, but perhaps also on how strongly a given emotive or evaluative meaning is able to bridge different uses. These considerations relate closely to a later discussion of a concept's point (see 18.2).

⁴⁰⁴ Quentin Skinner presents a case of a dispute that may arise over "whether a given set of circumstances can be claimed to yield the criteria in virtue of which the term is normally employed." In this case, the disagreement does not have to be merely a linguistic one, since the crux of contention may, for example, be "that a refusal to apply the term in a certain situation may constitute an act of social insensitivity or a failure of social awareness." (Skinner 1989, 13.) Skinner presents an example of "wives in ordinary middle-class families" who suffer from exploitation, and he sketches "the social argument" that may underlie a particular "linguistic move": "It ought to be evident to all persons of goodwill that the circumstances of contemporary family life are such that this strongly condemnatory term does indeed (if you think about it) fit the facts of the case. Conversely, if we fail to acknowledge the application of the term *exploitation*—in virtue of its agreed criteria—is indeed appropriate in the circumstances, then we are willfully refusing to perceive the institution of the family in its true and baleful light" (Skinner 1989, 14).

Andrew Halpin (2001) gives another spin to the notion of evaluating incompleteness by suggesting that DEMOCRACY could be seen “as incomplete because it contains an evaluative element that requires completing by drawing on a standard external to the concept itself.” In talking of democracy, one is not so much describing “a state of affairs that has already been expressed in the idea itself” but raising the question of what idea of democracy identified by the word is required. This way “the contestable concept also displays the characteristic of requiring a reflective participatory response in order to ascertain what is appropriately regarded as falling under the concept.” Halpin further suggests that the kinds of contestable concepts that summon the reflective participatory response from others manifest in “a pluralist moral environment from which different standards might be selected in order to fill out the evaluative element that the concept contains.” (Halpin 2001, 161–2.) It should be noted that this last segment of Halpin’s discussion coheres well with John Gray’s understanding of the phenomenon of essential contestability (13.3; see also Waldron 1994, 527), and the general idea of a reflective participatory response is also close to what Besson thinks about how certain concepts—or, words, as Waldron would have it (ibid.)—are used correctly when they elicit specific value judgement from those using them⁴⁰⁵ (see Besson before). I will later present my own reading or redevelopment of Gallie’s original thesis (ch. 18) that is similar especially to Halpin’s view. Unlike Halpin, of course, I will also claim that my version manages to address the first and the second challenge to essential contestability in addition to being a strong variant of an essential contestability thesis (see 15.1; 15.2; 15.3).

Besson’s and Ingram’s respective arguments start from a mutually accepted, minimal descriptive content which is then complemented to more specific description as each participant sees, or evaluates, fit. In this sense, any given specific conception of an essentially contested concept is guided by evaluation, which is the primary factor behind the ensuing dispute. We thus appear to be dealing with a situation in which the minimal content of the concept that is shared by rival parties underdetermines the referent to the extent that it allows disputants to fill the content further as they see fit.

A case of underdetermination is often a quite unremarkable affair. If the sign says that “no vehicles are allowed in the park” does ‘vehicle’ also include

⁴⁰⁵ John Gray states relatedly that the contestability of a concept “derives primarily from the norm-dependency of its uses” in the sense that “rational argument cannot show any set of norms to be uniquely appropriate.” However, by assuming ethical naturalism as established instead there would not be much room to dispute a concept’s criteria after the rational debate had specified the appropriate norms, which means that “the validity of essential contestability theses rests largely on the acceptability of theories of ethical nonnaturalism.” Thus, the point of view of such a thesis is not philosophically neutral about the logical status of a concept. Rather, in its strongest form, the attribution of the status as essentially contested “is to proffer a philosophically partisan understanding of the character of the dispute itself.” (Gray 1977, 336–40, 342.) Robert Grafstein considers Gray’s objection unnecessarily strong. The realist advocate of the thesis “need not (...) make any claims about what, if anything, might justify values, only that we are caused to believe in a variety of them and in a variety of conceptual schemes.” (Grafstein 1988, 18n12.)

bronze statues that are shaped like a car? How about electronic toy cars that go 35km/h? What if toy cars can hold people inside and have engines for maintaining a speed of 5km/h? Pekka Väyrynen (2013b) asserts that “meaning often fails to determine definite semantic value without some help from context, and similar phenomena arise in the case of concepts.” For instance, indexicals have different referents in different contexts; we may say they have a constant meaning, or character, but their extensions vary relative to context. In general, Väyrynen is wary of drawing too far-reaching conclusions concerning the concepts themselves based on disputes on the extension⁴⁰⁶: “Which way our concepts should go might be up for debate, not something determined by the concepts themselves.” (Väyrynen 2013b, 141, 144–5.) In the present context I think we should especially ask: what makes our concepts susceptible to going the way towards becoming essentially contested, *assuming for now* that they underdetermine their referents in the manner suggested above? It is not enough to merely state that quite pedestrian underdetermination somehow turns into genuine contestability when important values are at stake. Yet adding a theoretical frame that aims to make sense of related historical changes could perhaps make all the difference (see Waldron and Ingram in 12.2).

Even if many commentators disagree with him, Gallie originally fixed the evaluative point of essentially contested concepts at the level of *pro* or *contra* attitudes: valued achievements signified by certain concepts are always positively appraised (ch. 4). But would that also make it impossible to say that “This painting is art but it is not good at all” or that “That government is democratic which is why I do not like it one bit”? We are now fast approaching a theoretical issue of how to properly distinguish between *thick* and *thin* evaluative concepts/terms⁴⁰⁷. According to Pekka Väyrynen, at stake is the issue “whether thick terms and concepts represent some kind of irreducible fusions of evaluation and description or whether their evaluative and non-evaluative aspects are somehow separable” (Väyrynen 2013b, 137). Much of the discussion has revolved around whether one necessarily adopts a certain evaluative stance, or whether it is adopted by default, when using a thick term with a strong evaluative connotation that is connected to a relatively specific description, like

⁴⁰⁶ A single concept can admit many referents, i.e., it can be applied in different cases and/or there are several things in its extension. The extension cannot be reliably used to guide views as to determining the identity, or the intension, of the concept (Väyrynen 2013b, 141; Niiniluoto 1999, 121, 168; see also Kovesi 1967, 155). On the one hand, disputants may have the same concept although they disagree on its extension. On the other hand, agreement on extension does not guarantee that the sense or the meaning of the concept is also shared. From a slightly different perspective, “terms with the same reference or denotation may present their references differently and so differ in sense or connotation” (Audi 1999, 547). This gives rise to the mode of presentation problem that often manifests as a difficulty to substitute co-referential terms in sentences without the change of meaning.

⁴⁰⁷ Instead of referring to ‘concepts,’ it might be better to speak of ‘expressions’ or ‘terms,’ especially in the context of the current discussion. Although I do not mean to abandon ‘term’ altogether, I will mostly employ ‘concept.’ The reader is advised to mentally substitute ‘concept’ with, for example, ‘term that (allegedly/presumably) designates a certain concept’ or with some other satisfying linguistic detour when needed.

'cruel' or 'courageous.' Väyrynen identifies two broad camps. The more common, "standard view," is that "evaluation is built into the meaning (sense, semantic content) of utterances involving thick terms and concepts as much as the non-evaluative descriptions that they entail are so built." The alternative views, which are currently in the minority, view evaluations as "some weaker, perhaps broadly pragmatic implication of utterances involving thick terms and concepts." The fact that thick terms and concepts can be used to convey both non-evaluative description and evaluation is not in dispute. (Väyrynen 2013b, 136–7.)

None of Gallie's live examples is a paradigmatically thick concept. In the case of ART, Gallie does speak of how "the word 'art' is most usefully employed, not as a descriptive term standing for certain indicatable properties, but as an appraisive term accrediting a certain kind of achievement" (ART 111). He also notes that the elementary use of essentially contested DEMOCRACY is to express approval of "certain political aspirations which have been embodied in" different actions and intellectual artifacts (ECC 183–4). There is some immediate plausibility to the idea that one who does not value the political aspirations that are linked to democracy does not really grasp DEMOCRACY, at least not as a normative ideal. That might be taken as an evidence of a "thick link" between description and evaluation. Then again, in the above passage from ART, Gallie indicates that the usage of the word 'art' does not necessarily entail appraisiveness, even if he considers the appraisive usage more *useful* than the descriptive usage. The formulation illustrates that there is no *irreducible fusion* between description and evaluation in the case of a word like 'art.' If anything, Gallie is distinguishing between a descriptive ART and an evaluative ART (see Criley in 17.2) that can both be referred to by using the same word although the context determines which term/concept is meant. And that suggests, in turn, that evaluation is not meant to be built into the semantics of 'art' but rather that the evaluation/appraisiveness is pragmatically conveyed. A quite different tack is in order if one wishes to locate essential contestability in the thick nature of essentially contested concepts as the standard view would have it (cf. above). After one first shows how evaluation is built into the semantics of the relevant expressions, one would need to demonstrate how that necessarily results in endless and irresolvable disputes between competent language-users.

Gallie's thesis has recently been discussed from related perspectives⁴⁰⁸, but I cannot hope to cover the broader questions to which those contributions are

⁴⁰⁸ See e.g., Roberts 2013, Väyrynen 2014, and Eklund 2017 who comments on both Roberts and Väyrynen. Other authors and works that are commonly referred to in this line of debate are Wiggins 1987 (esp. "A Sensible Subjectivism" in *Needs, Values, and Truth*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, pp. 185–214) and Dancy 1996 ("In Defense of Thick Concepts" in *Moral Concepts* (eds. French et al.), Midwest Studies in Philosophy, Volume XX, Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, pp. 122–45). Both Wiggins and Dancy are understood to connect essential contestability ineliminably with normativity, an assumption that both Väyrynen and Eklund criticize. Väyrynen has written about the presumed relation that holds between descriptive content of concepts/terms and (global) evaluation, or whether thick concepts/terms are imbued with *pro* or *contra* evaluation, a relation the necessity of which he denies (Väyrynen 2013a; 2013b). The connection to essential contestability is partly associative: he utilizes similar arguments in objecting to the semantical evaluativeness of

ted here. I will nevertheless end the present section by discussing some of Pekka Väyrynen's key findings concerning what a thesis of essential contestability can tell us about the normativity of concepts—assuming that the normativity, or appraisiveness, that is operative is understood as semantical evaluativeness. Given that Väyrynen's final answer is roughly “not much at all,” it holds considerable promise in terms of informing us of what to rule out in the case of essential contestability.

Väyrynen (2014) states that, by appraisiveness, Gallie must mean “something like ‘semantically evaluative’,” yet he denies that there is a special kind of connection between essential contestability and semantical evaluativeness. Almost any word is capable of being used for evaluative purposes; therefore, that function cannot as a basis for the special connection. Väyrynen further argues that terms or concepts that satisfy Conditions (II), (III) and (IV) need not be semantically evaluative even if Gallie takes them to secure Condition (I), or appraisiveness. In consequence, essential contestability is not “sufficient for a term or concept to be evaluative in meaning,” and it “needn't be analytic of such terms or concepts that they ascribe some kind of valued achievement, or their extension is determined by standards whose satisfaction entails positive (or negative) appraisal, or the like.” In any case, the notion of evaluation that is operative in Gallie's thesis is of primary interest to moral, political, and legal philosophy and it should be distinguished from “a weaker notion that is found in linguistics, according to which any term whose extension is set by a standard (of whatever sort) is evaluative.” (Väyrynen 2014, 472–475, n16.). What Väyrynen is after is that vague predicates like ‘tall’ or ‘heavy’ do not generate essential contestability as it is most often understood. The evaluativeness that is relevant to essential contestability is intimately connected to the values and practical judgments of rival parties, or to what they hold near and dear; it is not about any given “judgment-call” that a person may need to make.

Väyrynen makes his case against essential contestability by introducing various terms/concepts as examples that can satisfy what he takes to be the central characteristics of essential contestability, i.e., Conditions (II) to (IV). The point of course is that they are not evaluative or appraisive in the relevant sense. The recipe is simple:

Take a *gradable expression* (one that measures a quality which can be had more or less of) which is *multidimensional* and whose dimensions admit of different relative weightings in the interpretation of the expression; this will secure [Conditions (II) and (III)], respectively. When such a term is *context-sensitive*, it will be particularly clear that the relative weightings may be modified in ways that cannot be predicted or prescribed in advance; this will secure [Condition (IV)]. My claim will then be that

essentially contested concepts (Väyrynen 2014). Some of those who argue for the special nature of thick terms support or sympathize essential contestability as well (e.g., Harcourt and Thomas 2013; Roberts 2013).

such a term needn't be (although of course it can be) semantically evaluative.⁴⁰⁹
Väyrynen 2014, 475

The examples listed by Väyrynen include terms like 'painful'⁴¹⁰; terms related to species-membership; and those otherwise structurally similar terms that list different functions as a part of definition like 'money.' That being said, Väyrynen acknowledges that not all of his examples meet with the required criteria above: 'money' is not context-sensitive (i.e., open) and species concepts are not obviously gradable (i.e., variously describable) even if their dimensions could be. (Väyrynen 2014, 475.)

For the present purposes, it is the specific way Väyrynen argues against the semantical evaluativeness of 'painful' that merits interest. He observes that

it is one thing to propose an evaluative theory of pain, quite another to say that the theory also provides the correct semantics of the term pain. Someone who denies that a painful experience is thereby at all bad may well be mistaken but needn't be conceptually confused or semantically incompetent. Väyrynen 2014, 477

The distinction seems reasonable. What I previously referred as "C-making features" (17.2) can be understood to be captured by non-semantic criteria of application, and thus there might be no pressing reason to presuppose that dispute over those features would impinge on the shared semantic meaning of a term. For example, what properly counts as painful is not necessarily part of the semantics of 'painful' – one can know what painful means without knowing all the features that contribute to being in pain, or having a theory concerning pain as a state, and so on (Väyrynen 2014, 476–7).

However, Väyrynen appears to imply, the following, more generally: claiming a term/concept as appraisive is to claim that unless others agree that the thing described is good, they are confused and/or semantically incompetent. Someone who argued that democracy is not a valued achievement would not therefore engage in a substantive disagreement over the value of democracy, but that person would instead be deemed either confused or an incompetent language-user. If this is the sense that Väyrynen is after, it appears that Gallie himself is confirming that essentially contested concepts are not semantically evaluative in the relevant sense: as concerns DEMOCRACY, Gallie observes that its elementary use (11.3) "can be said to express (...) certain political aspirations," and that today it *usually expresses approval* of such aspirations (ECC 183–4).

⁴⁰⁹ Väyrynen (2013b, 137–8) asserts that not even such terms and concepts as 'cruel,' 'selfish,' and 'courageous,' which are paradigmatic thick terms, are semantically evaluative in the relevant, essential sense (i.e., inherently evaluative in meaning). It is reasonable to presume that Väyrynen's opposition to essential contestability stems from how he more broadly considers semantical evaluativeness of different terms and expressions. Of course, there is no need to reconstruct a case he *could* make against essential contestability as we already have at hand the case he *actually* makes. I leave it for the reader to decide how representative Väyrynen's argument is for the camp that views evaluations as having a weaker status in relation to thick concepts as opposed to those who consider thick terms as evidencing an inseparable fusion between description and evaluation.

⁴¹⁰ 'Painful' is discussed by Väyrynen in length, see Väyrynen 2014, 475–7.

'Usually' does not 'necessarily' make, and so it seems that Gallie must be after something else by positing appraisiveness as one of the Conditions⁴¹¹.

Väyrynen observes that Gallie's own main concerns might not be about evaluative language and concepts in the same way that those notions pose questions to "contemporary metaethicists or philosophers of language." In fact, Gallie "seems at least equally, if not more, concerned with the notions of tradition and true succession in a tradition" (Väyrynen 2014, 474n13). Väyrynen himself is forthright about not really considering (VI), and he acknowledges that the reader might object that his examples are not cut "from the same formal cloth as Gallie's," examples which are not obviously context-sensitive and gradable. But it still turns out that "The crucial feature is multidimensionality" (Väyrynen 2014, 478). As I see it, the multidimensionality of an expression relates to (II), (III), and (IV): there is complexity in the form of many dimensions; the dimensions can be weighted differently; and how exactly that is to be done "seems open-ended and disputable irrespective of semantic context-sensitivity" (Väyrynen 2014, 478). Indeed, essentially contested concepts do not seem to be very different from multidimensional expressions as far their internal complexity goes, and "their dimensions allow disaggregation in the way multidimensional expressions do in general." (Väyrynen 2014, 478.)

We can say that someone is intelligent *in* mathematics though not with social relationships, healthy *except for* high cholesterol, or healthy *with respect to* sexually transmitted diseases [Sassoon 2013: 337-8]. This way of representing dimensions of predicates as predicates in their own right is equally possible with [essentially contested concepts]. Väyrynen 2014, 478

The main argument that now emerges is that there is nothing of specifically evaluative or normative interest in essential contestability because "[t]he central features of essential contestability can be explained in more general terms that have nothing in particular to do with whether [essentially contested concepts] are semantically evaluative" (Väyrynen 2014, 487). Given how I understand appraisiveness in Gallie's thesis, I tend to agree, but only to a point. Väyrynen further asserts that his explanation of (II), (III) and (IV) does not collapse essential contestability into vagueness and that multidimensional gradable terms can involve even an original exemplar. In the case of 'painful,' Väyrynen notes, "the likely exemplars would rate high on both the intensity and the duration of the pain." (Väyrynen 2014, 479.)

⁴¹¹ At one point, Gallie is referring to "appraisive attitudes" (ART 112), by which he means the pull that different (aesthetic) viewpoints have on our sympathies. Does this indicate the above sort of semantical evaluativeness? I argue it does not. A bit later Gallie states that "In general, the special form of the concept of art that we favour will widen the range of our aesthetic sympathies in certain directions, and curtail it in others" (ART 113). Gallie did not therefore mean to claim that the expression 'art' can *only* be used to express positive approval, semantically, but rather that one's conception of what art is determines how one demarcates the border between the things that are art and the things that are not art. Gallie's interest is in categorization judgments instead of how words or terms refer to their objects.

There is no use in reiterating the whole argument here. It suffices to say that the argument is premised on the similarity between the multidimensional expressions and essentially contested concepts as they are defined by Conditions (II) to (IV), and on how the disputes over essentially contested concepts resemble metasemantic disputes over multidimensional expressions (see esp. Väyrynen 2014, 480–5). Väyrynen’s argument is an effective antidote to what ails some advocates of essential contestability: many appear to already have in mind the term(s)/concept(s) which they need to claim as essentially contested or contestable, but only scant attention is paid to what would grant their chosen term(s)/concept(s) that special status among other, structurally similar alternatives. The problem with that is that even if one happened to be right about the status of a concept as essentially contested, it would become more a matter of intuition than a reasoned conclusion based on certain specific conceptual characteristics.

Nevertheless, two things seem clear now: (1) the reach of Gallie’s thesis is much more restricted than all evaluative concepts or all multidimensional expressions; (2) to distinguish essentially contested concepts from other concepts, more demarcating features should be added. And that is exactly why, for better or worse, Gallie felt the need to complement Conditions (I) to (V) with (VI) and (VII) which introduce a historical dimension in the form of backward- and forward-looking perspectives (8.1; 8.2).

Väyrynen’s criticism suggests, more generally, that one should be suspicious of explanations that understand the right sort of contestability, first and foremost, as the product of the evaluativeness and the complexity. A wide variety of expressions and terms can be used for evaluative purposes, but that, by itself, is no reason for distinguishing those terms as evaluative in some special sense. Neither does the existence of numerous multidimensional expressions preclude essential contestability; one just has to look for it elsewhere. The sense of evaluativeness that is important and properly attributed to essential contestability does not have to be normativity *sui generis*. To illustrate, one could say that, when a term is used for an evaluative purpose in a political context, the contestability attached to the term is political contestability, and *mutatis mutandis* in other contexts (see Waldron 1994, 528–9.) Think of how ‘humiliating’ can be used to describe the character of a draconian social policy initiative. The term is evaluatively thick, but it is not an instance of a politically contested term strictly because of its evaluative meaning. Rather, its possible contestedness is derived from how it is applied in alternative accounts of what is taking place in a society, or how ‘humiliating’ is respectively applied to the case at hand. It is reasonably clear that different normative standards can be embodied in judgments in this sort of a case. Perhaps we should ask what the proper *context* is in which evaluation figures in combination with other factors that together constitute essential contestability.

To sum up, it is difficult to distinguish terms that stand for essentially contested concepts from other structurally similar expressions. If we are to accept Väyrynen’s criticism, a thesis of essential contestability does not tell us anything

interesting about the normativity, or semantical evaluativeness, of the concepts that are alleged to be essentially contested. That is mostly because their allegedly distinguishing characteristics are common to other, quite mundane, multidimensional expressions that no one would consider contestable in the sought-after sense. The facts that a similar conclusion can be drawn in connection to a concept's openness as a distinguishing feature (6.2), and that Väyrynen confines his critical discussion about semantical evaluativeness of essentially contested concepts to the first four Conditions, both jointly indicate that the key to what *could* make an essential contestability thesis special is found in the last three of Gallie's Conditions instead. The problem is that those Conditions do not appear to describe the inherent characteristics of concepts/terms; and if they relate to concepts/terms at all, they appear to move us firmly towards the terrain of pragmatics.

17.5 Complex concepts and clusters of criteria

Key to getting at the heart of the inherent structure of essentially contested concepts is to spell out precisely which conceptual elements are shared, and which are not. For instance, in Ingram's view of evaluative contestation (17.4), descriptive criteria are shared completely while further evaluative criteria are contested. The simplistic conception of essential contestedness (i.e., EC* in 17.2) frames the matter correspondingly as the comparative evaluation of the shared descriptive criteria. Here, I will examine further alternatives for the way in which a concept's complex criteria may be viewed as contributing to its essential contestability.

To begin with, a few words about abstract concepts. Sometimes conceptual levels are ordered by their abstractness or specificity, which implies a hierarchy in which specific conceptions are included in an abstract category. Those conceptions can now consist of numerous precisifying characteristics or features in contrast to the abstract concept, the meaning of which can often be presented simply, declaratively, and relatively uncontroversially (see Sartori 1984). At times, Gallie appears to suggest that the abstractness of concepts is a major feature in their essential contestedness:

[t]he grounds of any fruitful comparison between *all* the arts can be only of a very abstract kind: there can be no question of comparison, in respect of observable or indicatable properties, between them all (...) Hence the most characteristic difficulty of every classic aesthetic theory: to specify some sense of one of these categories so that it applies to all works of art and to nothing else. And the results are familiarly disappointing: failure to specify sufficiently narrowly gives us a hopelessly vague theory: stricter specification means the exclusion of something essential to at least *some* works of art. ART 110; see also 106-7; 11.2

In addition, one could perhaps read Gallie's reference to the persistent vagueness of concepts as an affirmation that the abstractness of an essentially contested

concepts makes it decisively unclear which referents are to be included in the concept's extension (ECC 172n1; or 6.1; see also ECC 173). And given that adding specificity means increasing a concept's characteristics, which render what is potentially captured by the abstract concept more complex, the concept's contestability could now be understood as the function of the failure of any such specific cluster of properties to capture the wide abstract meaning of the concept without contestation. The idea is at first quite appealing in the present context: as a concept's discriminatory capacity increases with added characteristics, it attains "handles" about which people may have different opinions. And since Gallie seems to be hostile to the possibility of precisifying or specifying concepts according to the needs of the experts, it makes one wonder whether the kind of essential contestability that he particularly has in mind is due to their nature as very wide popular conceptions. These broader, less technical conceptions are simpler than the more precise expert conceptualizations that are sure to leave something out of the picture in comparison.

But that is not quite right as to Gallie's original thesis or more generally. The restricted scope of essential contestedness tells us that Gallie is not talking about this quite ordinary feature of how we think and categorize, even if it may be a part of a thought-process that contributes to mutually contesting and contested uses of a concept. In fact, the passages in *ART* that support the current reading directly precede the introduction of historical considerations that Gallie explicitly views as contributing to concept's essential contestedness (*ART* 110–4). It could moreover be argued that *the abstract-specific structure*⁴¹², as it is here described, does not add much to the concept/conception thesis that more clearly articulates how specific conceptions of a shared core concept can become contested. The two approaches have similar weaknesses: the idea that an abstract concept consists of one characteristic that may be expressed and defined unequivocally seems antithetical to Gallie's idea of the complexity of essentially contested concepts (cf. Mason 1993, 79; Freedman 2004, 8) while the need to share the core concept makes it impervious to contestability. Yet *something* needs to be shared so that the dispute can take place within or in reference to it. Besson's solution, in the previous section, was to anchor conflicting evaluations to a rough description to which those evaluations bear relevance, and one could perhaps understand the most abstract content of the concept to play a similar role⁴¹³. However, it can be doubted whether this strategy is enough to answer the two challenges that relate to the distinctness of concepts in a dispute (15.1; 15.2), and whether it results in a sufficiently strong thesis of essential contestability (15.3).

⁴¹² Why not 'abstract-concrete' instead of 'abstract-specific'? To call a concept with an accruing number of characteristics 'more specific' is more immediately understandable than to call it 'more concrete,' I think. The actual instantiations of the concepts can be concrete in a way that concepts cannot, yet some concepts or their uses can certainly be more specific than others.

⁴¹³ Rooting the dispute to a one-criterial statement is also what John Kekes can be seen to be doing with his idea of essentially contested concepts as solutions to a shared problem (see 12.4).

The next option seems to hover constantly in the background of essential contestability: family resemblance. Unlike previously (2.3; 11.2), I will now concentrate on its capacity to serve as the model for how essentially contested concepts are structured or their criteria organized. Unlike the abstract-specific structure, there is no obvious hierarchy between the characteristics that make up the family resemblance concept; they are understood as a set, any number of which, in principle, could together make the concept applicable to the objects that have matching properties. As a result, family resemblance concepts do not settle easily into conceptual hierarchies that admit transitivity, they cannot be defined in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions, and their boundaries remain fluid in that new members can be introduced to the “family” that is the concept as a category. The notion of family resemblance thus challenges the classical view of concepts, especially if the classical view is understood as demanding that *all* concepts are determined by their necessary and jointly sufficient conditions⁴¹⁴. Subscribers to the family resemblance view do not have to hold that all concepts meet with this structure.

The family resemblance structure appears capable of making sense of key elements of an essential contestability thesis. The openness of concepts is comparable to the possibility of introducing new family members that may have additional properties that are to be picked out by a concept’s criteria (cf. 6.1). A family concept is also complexly organized as well as variously describable (cf. 5.1) as the concept can be applied with reference to different features in different cases. The scene is thus set for disagreement the pertinence of features, especially given that none of them are necessary. This introduces vagueness or uncertainty concerning the proper boundaries within which the concept is applicable⁴¹⁵ yet grasping that a concept has a family structure can be illuminating. Getting to know different ways of using such a concept may give one a clearer

⁴¹⁴ The family resemblance is thus also at odds with the scientific-ideal framework (16.3). One advocate of the latter approach, Giovanni Sartori, asserts that “the crux of defining consists of separating the *defining* properties (or necessary characteristics) from the *accompanying* properties (contingent or accidental characteristics)” and that “a concept without defining properties, or necessary characteristics, cannot be applied with any certainty and consistency” (Sartori 1984, 55). Wittgensteinians could point toward existing (conceptual) practices in rejecting the objection of inconsistency while perchance holding as well that formerly accompanying properties could be included in the family of defining [sic] properties at a later date.

⁴¹⁵ Waldron (1994) identifies a type of vagueness that “attends complex predicates whose meaning is understood in terms of the application of other predicates,” and he illustrates it through Wittgensteinian family resemblance. Let us imagine a set of five objects each with four properties from A to F so that there is no property that all five objects have in common. Let us further suppose that there is a sixth object that has properties B, F, G, and I. Waldron now asks whether the same predicate also applies to the sixth object. He concludes: “if users of *P* characteristically hesitate, and if they do not call for further information about [the sixth object], then *P* is vague in the Wittgensteinian sense.” (Waldron 1994, 517-9.) For example, I do not need to know anything more about the properties of a landline phone, but I would hesitate a bit when asked to categorize it as a piece of furniture which stands in contrast to my readiness to label it quite clearly as a household item. This type of vagueness looks to be about conceptual fuzziness, i.e., blurry transitions between different categories or concepts.

understanding of the range of objects to which the concept can be applied, and hence imparting a better grasp of the shared concept despite its contestability (cf. 9.1). These are among reasons for why it is tempting to conclude that Gallie appropriates the family resemblance structure while merely adding a few elements to bring it to a new terrain (cf. Vincent 2004, 98). One might consider this structure particularly suitable for essentially contested concepts (see e.g., Syrjämäki 2011, 159n401).

I have already discussed some differences between Gallie's view and the family resemblance structure (2.3; 11.2), and the following adds to that. Ernest Gellner thinks that Gallie's thesis is superior to the notion of family resemblance in that it provides us with "a suggestive and realistic way of looking at intellectual change" rather than offering a "static picture" that gives "no hint of the fact that the disparate criteria and elements in one concept often form an organic yet conflicting and interacting unity, that the conflict is of the essence of the concept, and that the life and history of a concept is best seen in this way." (Gellner 1974, 103.) Collier, Hidalgo, and Maciuceanu understand Gallie as holding that the idea of family resemblance and its framing does not adequately clarify conceptual meaning. Instead, Gallie seeks to provide a more precise structure of concepts such as WORK OF ART, and Collier et. al. reference Gallie's observation that the family resemblance account offers no explanation on the subject of why one particular line or set of resemblances among all the conceivable "has been picked out and valued under the rubric 'work of art'"⁴¹⁶ (Collier et al. 2006, 234; cf. ART 101). Both observations draw attention to the fact that essential contestedness aims to be a historically sensitive approach to how complex concepts are formed and held together⁴¹⁷. Understanding essential contestability solely through a Wittgensteinian lens tends to overemphasize the synchronic elements of the phenomenon (see also 2.5).

Another notable difference between Gallie's essential contestedness and the notion of family resemblance is that essentially contested concepts always involve a positive appraisal of value (4.1). However, coupling this requirement with a stronger interpretation of the family resemblance conception produces a closely applicable sense of contestability: not only is there nothing in common to all Xs (e.g., a game), but there is nothing shared by all good examples of Xs. Peter Ingram (1985) states that this position is in fact also confirmed by the doctrine of family resemblances which suggests that "no *one* member of the family exemplifies typical family features more plentifully or more correctly than all the others: there are many diverse *kinds* of game, not just many diverse games."⁴¹⁸ It

⁴¹⁶ Some may feel that the question of *why* has no bearing on the structure of any concept. Gallie's interest in that type of question is nonetheless undeniable.

⁴¹⁷ The complex, organic unity of a historically appreciable achievement is most clearly present in how Gallie (1957) describes the development of particular sciences as something that "can be advanced in a number of different ways, and for this reason prized or valued on a number of different grounds." And since "our history of scientific ideas is carried up to the present it must include an understanding of the relations of the correct, currently accepted uses of the term 'scientific'." (Gallie 1957, 132-3.)

⁴¹⁸ Here, Ingram refers to §66-67 of *Philosophical Investigations*.

would be impossible to have a single exemplar that is referred to by this type of concept of game without radically changing the concept. (Ingram 1985, 46.) This aptly illustrates why the marriage between Galliean and Wittgensteinian conceptions is somewhat inconvenient after all: in Gallie, the original exemplar enables the grounding of differing evaluations to a standard which naturally leads to extending the applicability of the thesis to the cases in which (family) features can be present in an object under dispute to a different degree (17.2).

But what about the capability of the family resemblance structure to explain the pervasiveness of disputes? Resemblance or similarity is a contentious basis upon which to determine an identity (cf. 12.4), which paves the way for contestability but only at a cost. Nelson Goodman points out that “Two performances are of the same symphony if and only if, however unlike they may be, they comply with the same score (...) In the case of performances of a Beethoven symphony, the score determines what those requisite characteristics are...” (Goodman 1970, 22). For Gallie, the original exemplar, conceptual practice, or tradition with its attendant values is the closest equivalent to “the score.” In discussing the Wittgensteinian notion of family resemblance, Julius Kovesi (1967) points out that “we do not need to look for empirical similarities between various instances of the same thing or same act in order to explain why they are instances of the same.” By looking solely at (superficial) similarities “we could connect everything to everything else. We could turn off at a tangent at any similarity and what we would get in the end would not be a rope but a mesh.” Instead, one needs “a formal element” that enables us to follow a rule. The very act of following a rule is a rational activity. (Kovesi 1967, 22–3.) The metaphor of mesh—instead of the more common “threads in a rope”—is certainly something that an advocate of a thesis of essential contestability *might* accept; I guess it is particularly attractive to those with postmodern or poststructuralist sentiments. Having said that, Gallie’s inclusion of the original exemplar appears to be the designated cure for what he perceives as ailing the family resemblance notion (see esp. ART 101, quoted in part above). Wittgenstein can be interpreted as grounding the usage of family terms/concepts in practices, which is also a live option for an advocate of essential contestability, yet it does seem that Gallie grounds the employment of essentially contested concepts in their histories.

From the family structure, it is natural to move towards what may be taken as its generalized structural alternative, or a *cluster concept*. It exhibits a specific organization for tackling the following sort of situation: suppose that there is a list of the attributes P_1 , P_2 , P_3 , and so forth, that go to make up a normal human being⁴¹⁹. Now it is possible to ask whether there could be a human being without P_1 , or if P_1 and (most) other attributes are present, perhaps without P_2 , or P_3 , and so on. We could be perfectly comfortable in replying “Yes” in each case, and it would strike us as absurd to claim that the term or expression ‘human being’

⁴¹⁹ The example is from Hilary Putnam with minor changes (1962, 378). In fact, Gallie also presents the notion of a concept that consists of disjunctive criteria, only some of which may be necessary but none of which are sufficient, in his “What Makes a Subject Scientific?” (1957, see esp. 131–2).

would have no meaning at all in the absence of any one attribute. We have now arrived at the notion of a cluster concept:

That is, we say that the meaning in such a case is given by a cluster of properties. To abandon a large number of these properties, or what is tantamount to the same thing, to radically change the extension of the term 'man,' would be felt as an arbitrary change in its meaning. On the other hand, if most of the properties in the cluster are present in any single case, then under suitable circumstances we should be inclined to say that what we had to deal with was a man. Putnam 1962, 378

A cluster concept/term – for Putnam, cluster terms have corresponding cluster concepts (Niiniluoto 1999, 169) – often has a broad and variable set of criteria which admit instances to the extension of the concept, instances which do not necessarily meet with all the relevant criteria of the concept. The cluster concept is a natural and conscious extension to the notion of family resemblance (Putnam 1962, 378; cf. Wittgenstein 1958, §67).

There can be different kinds of cluster concepts. For instance, Putnam speaks of *law-cluster concepts*, the extensions of which are determined by a cluster of (scientific/natural) laws. ENERGY can be considered as a typical example as it has many different functions in different natural laws – the general idea here is that a change in our understanding of one particular law does not change our understanding of the term's extensional meaning. Ilkka Niiniluoto distinguishes *rule-cluster concepts* (orig. 'säätöryväskäsitteet' in Finnish) as well, i.e., the concepts that can be identified with the help of the relevant rules. He offers ICE HOCKEY as an instance in which changes and additions to particular rules – e.g., concerning the icing – are not enough to change the game into something else; that would require much more substantial changes. (Niiniluoto 1999, 170.) The structure of a rule-cluster concept could possibly contain normative principles as part of a single concept (cf. 17.1), in which case contestation over the concept would come down to contestation over the principles. Relatively minor changes to some of the principles might not thus be enough to change the concept's reference – i.e., "the game" stays the same⁴²⁰.

Some of the conceptual relations or links could plausibly be necessary though not sufficient. If POLITICS were not connected in any way with INTEREST, that concept of politics, or POLITICS*, would be a very different concept to the concept we commonly employ. The links to other concepts are innumerable when one is dealing with an open concept, a fact which is clearly not enough for generating a special sort of contestability by itself – lexical meanings, for instance, are hermeneutically interconnected and there is no need to make a fuss about it. However, concepts often have domains within which they become

⁴²⁰ For Julius Kovesi, seeking an appropriate moral principle, or principles, is more or less the same process as forming a moral notion (Kovesi 1967). For Gallie, contestation appears to be a process in which contestants seek, or the process itself is otherwise directed towards, the optimum conception. If Gallie's account is viewed through a Kovesian lens, it makes sense to understand contestation as the process by which the concept is formed. Minor differences between views would not threaten the common reference since the common reference is produced through, and as a consequence of, those differences. (see also 18.1; 18.2.)

understandable, and a nuanced understanding of complex concepts may require taking into account the domain matrix with several related concepts, not just a single domain. How exactly this takes place in the case of complex normative concepts is obscure. I nevertheless assume that it is reasonably uncontested to claim that to understand the notion of democracy, DEMOCRACY needs to be linked to a number of concepts, like GOVERNMENT, SOVEREIGNTY, EQUALITY, PEOPLE, and so on. The same goes for conceptual domains: while HAND is a conceptual domain of FINGER, GOVERNMENT is a conceptual domain of DEMOCRACY.

A concept may also be complex

in the sense that its philosophical elucidation requires the establishing of its connections with other concepts, and yet at the same time irreducible, in the sense that it cannot be defined away, without circularity, in terms of those other concepts to which it is necessarily related.⁴²¹ Strawson 1992, 22–3

Dismantling or reducing the concepts to other and simpler concepts or elements is not the only way to go. P. F. Strawson favors “the connective model” which seeks to trace connections in a system or network of connected concepts. The circularity is not necessarily a problem as one can move about “in a wide, revealing, and illuminating circle.” (Strawson 1992, 19–23.) This notion of complexity is rather *holistic*, and it thus differs from the view that understands a single concept as complex due to its *individual* characteristics.

Hilary Putnam (1962) observes that some concepts and linguistic expressions are more or less stipulative conventions, others have more or less systematic import; in effect, our conceptual systems have centralities and priorities. The conceptual system itself has a monolithic character as “a massive alliance of beliefs which face the tribunal of experience collectively and not independently.” Putnam also stresses that “the meaning of an individual word is a function of its place in the network.” The use of words reflects deeply embedded collateral information that cannot be separated from the “meaning” of the word. (Putnam 1962, 366.) Nowadays, psychologists distinguish between the knowledge that is stored in concepts and the background knowledge that is not. It amounts to a distinction between semantic or conceptual knowledge and encyclopedic knowledge; however, for some elements of knowledge, it might be indeterminate to what category they belong (Machery 2009, 11–12). In general, the recent shift in conceptual studies towards more complex structures makes the notion of a concept as a distinct unit of thought “increasingly untenable” as it is not easy to say “just where one concept ends and another begins as what were previously seen as distinct concepts become linked via shared elements of the same conceptual web” (Adcock 2005, 13). I will next discuss views on essential contestability that emphasize such interconnectedness in slightly different ways.

⁴²¹ The traditional theory of definitions, or more generally a theory of explicit definitions, is not well equipped to handle cluster terms (Niiniluoto 1999, 169) or circularity, the latter of which is regarded as a defect. Essential contestability views that assume a cluster organization of criteria or characteristics of a concept are thus indirectly hostile to all views that seek explicit definitions in the case of concepts that fall within their purview.

William Connolly (1993) views essentially contested concepts as having a cluster-like structure⁴²². Connolly proceeds to list a variety of things one might mean while calling something political or part of politics. Among those are: policies backed up by legally binding authority; actions that involve a decision or choice among viable options; considerations or motives invoked in selecting one option over another; how the decision outcomes affect the interests, wishes, or values of population segments; the number of people affected and for what duration; and the extent to which a policy or act becomes an issue due to it being deliberated. Importantly, Connolly's point goes beyond observing that there are different applications of POLITICS; at issue is whether any single dimension suffices to establish an act or practice as political. Still, some dimensions may be more significant than others and a limited number of them could, in conjunction, suffice to make an act or practice a viable candidate. This suggests that "we cannot specify an invariant set of necessary and sufficient conditions" for the proper application of POLITICS. (Connolly 1993, 10-14.)

Despite the obvious similarities, cluster concepts must not be confused with family resemblance. The criteria on Connolly's list are not necessarily based on perceivable or conceivable similarities as such, as the family metaphor suggests. Rather, Connolly's conception incorporates the idea (by Julius Kovesi, 1967) that a thing denoted by a concept is always described from a certain (moral) point of view or for some purpose that decides which facts are relevant for determining something as political even if all listed sorts of facts might not be equally relevant in a given case⁴²³. Moreover, the clarification of the cluster concept "involves the elaboration of the broader conceptual system within which it is implicated" as "each criterion itself is relatively complex and open." The disagreements proliferate as the additional concepts – such as DECISION, VALUE, INTEREST, MOTIVE, INSTITUTION *et cetera* in the case of politics – which are referenced by the criteria need to be elucidated as well. Therefore, it is not enough to analyze a single concept as it refers to "a host of other concepts to which it is related." (Connolly 1993, 14.)

John Gray (1977) is on the same page with Connolly in stating that each use of a concept "typically rests upon, presupposes, or endorses a definite use of a whole constellation of satellite concepts." Definitional disputes manifesting essential contestedness/contestability are typically about not only the criteria of *one concept* but of *a whole range of contextually related concepts* which "lock together so as to compose a single, identifiable conceptual framework." When that is so, it is "indicative of conflicts between divergent patterns of thought," and these disputes are partly constitutive of ways of life. (Gray 1977, 322, 344-345.) Michael Freeden states straightforwardly that political "concepts always appear in clusters that are mutually defining, sustaining and, for that matter, constraining"

⁴²² This view is shared by s Gray (1978) and Freeden (2005), whose views are discussed later, but also van der Burg 2017 who explicitly turns to it in place of family resemblance.

⁴²³ I will discuss the notion of the moral point of view further in 18.2. The matter can also be cashed out with the help of Kovesi's distinction between a "formal element" and a "material element" (Kovesi 1967; see also Ewin 2012).

(Freeden 2005, 117). Ideologies are “complex combinations and clusters of political concepts in sustainable patterns” and wide-ranging structural arrangements that attribute decontested meanings to a range of mutually defining concepts (Freeden 2009, 51, 54). Essentially contested concepts are building blocks of ideologies rather than ideologies in their own right.

Adopting an ideology means adopting an order, or *logos*, of ideas. The ideas now function as signposts in ordering and carving out the reality we inhabit, and as such they are readily understood as concepts based on which various judgments are made, beliefs are arrived at, and claims are put forward. Andrew Mason (1993) reminds us that the ways a person uses terms such as ‘democracy,’ ‘freedom,’ and ‘social justice’ “in itself provides an account of what she thinks constitutes, or would constitute, a desirable social order,” and that their use is related and presupposes a range of uses of other expressions “in such a way that together they constitute an ideology.” Disputes do not involve isolated concepts. (Mason 1993, 49, 72.) That is what Gray thinks as well: since the use of an essentially contested concept and its contextually related concepts “typically cohere to form a single recognizable worldview that is intelligibly connected with specific forms of life (...) essentially contested concepts occur characteristically in social contexts which are recognizably those of an ideological dispute”⁴²⁴ (Gray 1977, 322–3). The function of ideologies, or orders of ideas, in our belief-systems make it easier to conceive of Freedен’s further assertion that political (and essentially contested) concepts are “permeated at their perimeters by ‘real-world’ externalities that impact on their cores,” and that they are always located in one context rather than another, that likewise becomes malleable (Freedен 2004, 9). The present type of concept is very different from the one presumed by the scientific-ideal framework (16.3).

In a new chapter added to the third edition of *The Terms of Political Discourse*, Connolly is perhaps even more explicit in emphasizing the significance of a broader conceptual system:

To say that a particular network of concepts is contestable is to say that standards and criteria of judgment it expresses are open to contestation. To say that such a network is *essentially* contestable is to contend that the universal criteria of reason, as we can now understand them, do not *suffice* to settle these contests definitively. Connolly 1993, 225

On his part, Gallie conceives the sub-ordinate concepts like COLORATION and PARLIAMENTARY IMMUNITY as essentially contested under more general, or superordinate, concepts like ART and DEMOCRACY (PHU 190; or see 11.3). Gallie and Connolly thus appear to understand (essentially) contestable concepts as nodes around which other concepts that are invoked in related judgments and

⁴²⁴ When one’s worldview, political or moral outlook, and/or personal identity is at stake, while concepts serve as proxies for effecting changes in them, the language of conversion (11.4) rather than rational conviction is particularly apt. Given the monolithic interrelatedness of concepts, it is not a meager achievement to bring about changes in someone else’s conceptual frameworks. Any change threatens, potentially, to snowball into several others, which further contributes to overall resistance.

statements revolve. This is even more so in Freeden's case: interrelated concepts become a sort of placeholders for different "decontested" specifications that together determine what particular form and content one's order of ideas, or ideology, comes to have (Freeden 1996). We may even add Gray's views concerning the ranges of contextually related concepts to the mix: as orders of ideas they do not only indicate but *are* patterns of thought as concepts guide thought-processes and categorization, and the contextually related concepts do so in a patterned fashion. Essential contestation may not start and end within a single concept, not to mention any one part of the concept, and the process of contesting the matter can sensibly be affected by "real-world externalities" (see above). I would hesitate, though, to extend that influence on the structure of *a concept*, technically speaking. In addition, it is good to be mindful of the possibility that some concepts that are not essentially contested may include or otherwise depend upon other concepts that are perhaps best considered essentially contested. For example, GOVERNMENT involves POWER but "[t]o characterise the concept of government itself as essentially contested does not respect the kinds of disputes that actually arise around it, and it does not appear to clarify the disputes that do take place" (Ehrenberg 2011, 215; see also PHU 190).

Connolly (1993) traces the makings of a conceptual dispute to situations in which people who jointly employ this type of a concept (1) weight the importance of shared criteria differently; (2) interpret the jointly accepted criteria in subtly different ways; or (3) when the new criteria are added, or the old criteria are dropped, and some party objects to that. Together, these points amount to saying that the "contests persist over the proper interpretation of the partly shared idea of [x⁴²⁵], and we might say that its very characteristics as a cluster concept provide the space within which such contests emerge." (Connolly 1993, 14-5.) The cluster concept can therefore be viewed as a structural solution to the unity problem, the problem which vexes the theses of essential contestability persistently, when the presumption that the concept is mutually shared is modified accordingly.

What does it mean to *partly* share a concept or an idea? Connolly speaks of "Gallie's qualified celebration of the diverse use of partly shared concepts" by which he basically means that in some situations, people committed to "partly discrepant assumptions and ideas" agree upon calling a particular set of practices 'x,' but in other situations applicability of the concept is either denied by some while affirmed by others or parties disagree about the extent to which the concept applies (Connolly, 1993, 10-11). Kenneth Ehrenberg (2011) views incompleteness as "a hallmark of any exploration of a concept that is understood as essentially contested or has elements that are usefully considered as such." That is because to call a concept essentially contested is, "in a sense, to offer an explanation (or justification) for the incompleteness of one's theory." To wish that kind of incompleteness away is "to wish for a grand unified theory of all social concepts," since related theories either advocate for a specific conception or do not plumb the depths of every related concept. (Ehrenberg 2011, 216-7.) Ehrenberg thus understands essentially contested concepts as the kind of entities that can

⁴²⁵ In the original quote: politics.

supposedly be captured by (necessarily incomplete) theories (see also 17.1), while Connolly views incompleteness as manifesting in application differences.

Connolly's thesis also incorporates the distinction between complete and incomplete (moral) notions that comes from Julius Kovesi originally (Kovesi 1967, e.g., 146–8; see also Kristjánsson 1995, 73, 78ff; 18.2). The difference between the two boils down to how many conceivable acts fall within the criteria of application without there being other features present that would make one alter one's judgment. Connolly states that 'murder' is a more complete notion than 'lying,' because 'murder' allows fewer features in a situation to override the moral judgment that an act is somehow reprehensible. By contrast, one may sometimes lie for admirable reasons. 'Lying' could be precisified and made more complete by adding qualifications, but that is a different matter from how we actually utilize the notion in the manner that allows a variety of applications, some of which go against the predominant evaluative standard that is implicit in the moral point of view. The basic idea is that the rules for applying the moral notion "are not specified finely enough to ensure that every conceivable act falling within the rules specified embodies (for the community that shares these ideas) the moral judgment that most such acts do" (Connolly 1993, 27). The problem I perceive in Connolly's argument is that the identified sort of dispute is over judgments that come with the implicit *pro* or *contra* attitude. If one is interested solely in political or honorific uses of concepts/terms, that may be enough to capture the dimension of interest. Yet when the analogy is drawn with concepts like DEMOCRACY and CHRISTIANITY, two of Gallie's live examples, it is not clear how that should help in grasping how they are contestable. The primary disagreement is not about whether a particular event or action is right or wrong *et cetera*, but about what exactly one is referring to in the first place and how accurate that reference is. I will further discuss aspects of Connolly's thesis in section 18.2.

In general, a thesis that locates essential contestability in the incompleteness of concepts and/or in the incompletely shared concept(s) can be called *the incompleteness thesis* of essential contestability. It goes directly against the premise of the first challenge: the concept as an object of contestation cannot be individuated by its possession conditions, since partly shared concepts are allowed. When a claim of incompleteness presumes the existence of a more complete concept while the incomplete versions of it do not fully capture all of the concept's possible criteria or aspects, the view corresponds with one of the ways of conceiving the distinction between a concept and its conceptions (see 17.3). Yet incompleteness itself can be considered essential, a matter which has already been discussed in relation to Condition (IV), i.e., openness (see 6.2). Views like the competing conceptions thesis (see 17.3), in which the "concept" in question consists of its competing conceptions, could now be combined with the affirmation of essential incompleteness: no amount of contestation or conflict is enough, as a matter of principle, to resolve the question of how their totality is to

be properly conceived since the totality itself is individuated by the conflict⁴²⁶. Notwithstanding their inherent composition or structure, it makes sense to think that all contested or contestable concepts must be *somehow* incompletely shared or applied. If they were employed in a uniform fashion, what would there be to contest? Appealing to incompleteness without additional elucidation does not, thus, suffice as grounds for the claim that some concepts are essentially contested.

Many theorists have already discussed views that incorporate incompleteness as a central part of their explanation⁴²⁷. Other theorists have not. For instance, one might be tempted to argue that Ian Shapiro's (1989) previously discussed notion of a gross concept is a variant of an incompleteness thesis. Shapiro's idea is (here briefly; see also 17.1) that social and political concepts are relational with respect to social particulars, the interpretation of which needs to figure in the adequate description of these concepts. However, many ensuing disputes over "meanings" fail to address substantive issues that need to be resolved so that one can move on with the overall disagreement, which makes those debates over presumed meanings irresolvable when rival parties persist in their claims. One might now conclude that the thus-reduced gross concepts lack the substantive content that is required to possibly end the debate and are therefore incomplete in that sense which, with the irresolvability of the disputes in which they are involved, is just the thing that is needed for the incompleteness thesis of essential contestability. One would be mistaken as that is not the case. First, Shapiro presents parties to such dispute as being in error, and essential contestability cannot be grounded by a straightforward error theory when parties are understood to be justified in holding to their views steadfastly (cf. 13.2). In addition, there is no epistemological limitation in sight that would make such an error necessary and unavoidable. Second, there is only so much that can be incorporated within the structure or semantics of a concept, especially as part of its analytic. Many social and political concepts describe exceedingly complex phenomena; it defies a good theoretical sensibility to include all possible substantive issues and accompanying disagreements within a concept that denotes an object that is extensionally connected to those other issues⁴²⁸.

One way of grounding the contestability of cluster concepts, is to affirm that some already operative cluster of criteria is mutually conflicting. The concept

⁴²⁶ Ernesto Laclau has a similar logic in mind (albeit in connection to identities): "The universal emerges out of the particular not as some principle underlying and explaining the particular," rather "the universal is the symbol of missing fullness and the particular exists only in the contradictory movement of asserting at the same time a differential identity and cancelling it through its subsumption in a nondifferential medium" (Laclau 1992, 89). This could be one way of interpreting (anew) Gallie's somewhat obscure remark, according to which "the unity of an essentially contested concept may be said to reside" in the "conception of a possible optimum (never finally achieved and approachable by a variety of routes and through a variety of results as between different competing claims)" (PHU 167).

⁴²⁷ Consider, for example, Besson's and Halpin's suggestions in 17.4 or van der Burg's view on the surplus of meaning in 17.1.

⁴²⁸ N.B: this is very different from a view that understands the so-called meaning-giving statements of a concept as a complex cluster in which similarly contestable concepts in those statements need to be adequately clarified.

could be contested, in fact, when the stakes (e.g., moral or political) were high enough for disagreeing parties (see Ingram and Waldron in 12.2). In his “morphological” thesis, Freedon (2004) picks this avenue: any conceptual definition is an arbitrary excluder of some of the meanings the concept logically entails despite the cultural significance of the selection that is made. The concept is essentially contestable “not because we cannot agree on how to appraise it but because we cannot agree on its intension, its range, its internal architecture.” In this type of case, conceptual structure forms meaning, and no structure can hold all the configurations of the concept: there is no rule that can determine the correct proportion that each component can claim *vis-à-vis* the others. (Freedon 2004, 3–4.) Freedon considers this a significant improvement on Gallie’s original thesis, but I find it perhaps more of a clarification in this respect than a unique interpretation. The view can be criticized on account that it jumps too quickly from the established usage of a word that signifies a variance of meanings to the conclusion that those meanings are logically entailed under the same concept.

Another way of justifying contestability is to start by emphasizing the fact that properties picked out by the concept may be present in objects to a different degree (17.2). Contestability could now enter the discussion manifest as the uncertainty over which aspects of a valued achievement are to be preferred, not only particularly but more generally, when the achievement denoted by the concept is complex and appraisable in different ways. If each disputant can conceive of considerations on the basis of which other disputants apply the cluster concept as sufficiently relevant to the case at hand, there is no self-evident conceptual confusion in a dispute that centrally involves that concept. Leslie Green (1987) maintains that Gallie’s essentially contested concepts are “evaluative cluster-concepts which find different aspects of their value promoted by different conceptions of the concept,” and that “[d]ebate among these different conceptions promotes or sustains the totality.” Elements of the cluster of values that the disputants describe and evaluate are, in this picture, “assets precisely because there is a kind of conceptual division of labour in which partisans of each conception contribute to the value of the complex whole.” (Green 1987, 18.) This is a neat way of introducing a key structural feature of essentially contested concepts: they are concepts that consist of their contested uses (11.3; ECC 169, 186/PHU 180). Yet, it appears that the feat is performed by saddling essentially contested concepts with a very specific function that is reflected in the conceptual practice that is characterized by such conceptual division of labor (see also 18.2). One may also wonder to what exactly are the partisan conceptions contributions; and if it is supposedly an abstract sense, how does one *contribute* to it rather than find or adopt it?

Glen Newey (2001) claims that “the neo-Wittgensteinian position” that has influenced several advocates of essential contestability, including the cluster concept views, may be hostile to a type of thesis that has a linguistic starting point⁴²⁹. He contends that Gallie’s own account of “essentially contested terms”

⁴²⁹ More precisely, Newey is referring to the view in which the meanings of terms are understood “as being based on multiple criteria, whose individual content, and whose

is a clear counterpart to the *polycriterial* view of language that attributes contestability to the indeterminate standing between the criteria, and not to “the fact that certain normative properties are given different valuations” (Newey 2001, 252). Newey’s observation does not seem completely inaccurate (cf. 17.2), although another interpretation is also possible. Gallie’s focus is not on linguistic issues at the level of terms, words, and expressions but rather on how the dispute over what to include under the rubric of a word, term, or expression manifests conceptual contestability (see also Ruben 2010, 258). That being said, an essentially contested concept could still have a cluster structure; not primarily because perfectly competent language users happen to master the semantic content of certain words/terms correspondingly but because features or properties that are ordered into a category denoted by the term together form a cluster. In a sense, these are two sides of the same coin, but I consider it advisable to treat them separately.

Another opening for criticism originates in the idea that disagreements over the criteria of correct application may not be “pivotal” enough (see 14.1). With reference to Joseph Raz, Samantha Besson (2005) observes that those who share the concept assume “that some minimal rules regarding its proper use, such as paradigm or analogies, ought to be shared and agreed upon, unless people are mistaken.” Related disagreements are “restricted to cases in which some people suffer from epistemological barriers and are making claims which others are entitled to regard as wrong.” According to Besson, truly pivotal disagreements can put into question any preconception of a correct and shared application of the concept. (Besson 2005, 52.) The “pivotal” sort of essential contestability thesis would meet the tall order I have previously set concerning the strength of essential contestability proper (cf. 15.3). However, I have my reservations concerning Besson’s own proposal (17.4), while I also think that the disagreement over the application of incompletely shared concepts that Connolly describes does not really fit the bill. If one is willing to weaken the thesis and understand essential contestability solely as a matter of application, the problem of course dissolves. However, if the nature of disputes is not understood merely linguistically, or solely as a conceptual contest, it would be possible to *add* to the contestability of disputes by understanding the disagreement as substantive also (cf. Gray 1978, esp. 391). That could mean bringing considerations that relate to normative principles and theories into the mix after all (cf. 17.1), but how exactly that is to be done is a different matter.

The present examination of complex conceptual structures in terms of their inherent characteristics has not revealed a sufficiently strong thesis of essential contestability. While the more holistic standpoint appears to fare better than those focusing on single concepts, it tends to be imprecise concerning the nature of the contested concept in question or lose it from sight completely. By

weightings with respect to one another, may be indeterminate. There may be a definite or indefinite set of such criteria, but if we examine the linguistic dispositions of native speakers, only a proper subset of them may figure in any individual’s semantic mastery. Moreover, the criteria themselves may be indeterminate” (Newey 2001, 252).

discarding the scientific-ideal framework in favor of the language-focused framework, one option could be to consider the “concepts” in question as produced simply by normative discourses that posit categories that seek universal or near-universal validity. Ideologies or similar conceptual frameworks arguably operate in that manner, and any such claim of universal validity could be contestable within other discourses or ideologies. However, it does only little to guarantee that there is a single concept involved or that the bearer of contestability is a concept rather than a discourse or something else. This illustrates a general problematic with which we have been confronted in the current chapter: what constantly eludes us is how to frame a contestation of required strength as something that is inextricably linked to a special kind of structure possessed by certain concepts rather than others. What we really want to know is why rival parties insist on claiming that they are using the same concept, or on what grounds they can be reasonably conceived of as doing so when the shared concept is thoroughly contested.

17.6 One last attempt in concept-centered terms

Peter Ingram (1985) offers two interesting organizational solutions to “the question of what exactly is shared by essentially contested applications of a concept such that we are still entitled to talk about them as applications of one concept.” Before presenting them, let us take a brief look at how Ingram distinguishes between three conceptual “patterns” or “structures” with respect to criteria of application and how a word [sic] is used. First, there might not be something in common “between any applications of a concept X, nevertheless there are some uses of X having something or other in common with all other uses.” The idea is that some peripheral uses of words may have nothing in common among themselves but that they refer to central uses of the word, which themselves relate all uses to a common core. For instance, in the previous example of one instance of underdetermination, i.e., “no vehicles in the park” (17.4), referring to a toy car as ‘vehicle’ is comparable to a metaphorical/analogous use while the central use refers to a conveyance that is actually functional (e.g., a bicycle, car etc.). Secondly, there is still something in common with every use of the word Y, “but there are alternative further criteria for examples of a good Y, and therefore there are distinct paradigms of a good Y which may possibly be contested as examples.” Ingram stresses that, here, “what is contestable is not whether they are examples of a Y, and not, significantly, whether they are good examples of a Y merely, but whether they are examples of a good Y.” (Ingram 1985, 43–4, 56.) The first option is a kind of crossover between a cluster concept view and a common core view while the second option matches with the evaluative contestation with its additional evaluative criteria (for the latter, see 17.4).

According to Ingram, neither of the above conceptual structures match with that of an essentially contested concept. For that one needs a concept, in the case

of which there is nothing in common to all uses of a word X. Now, “Contestability is possible because the total structure of the concept, embracing unconnected criteria, allows over its many applications some criteria to be in mutual opposition” (Ingram 1985, 44). Ingram thus attaches the cluster structure for essentially contested concepts, and we may now move to his proposed solutions for what is ultimately the unity problem (14.2).

In the first solution, rival parties agree on non-fundamental uses or non-central cases rather than what they take to be most significant. This is based on the premise that not all uses may be considered fundamental by all users. This can happen in two ways: (1) the disputants agree that such-and-such a use of a word is a correct one, but one party considers it fundamental while the other party does not share that view or thinks that is merely borderline; (2) the disputants agree that a given use of a word is a non-fundamental one and thus does not conform to either’s ideal one-to-one, yet both believe it as constituting an approach to *their* ideal, albeit grounded in different criteria. (Ingram 1985, 56.)

(2) appears to imply that the disputants have different ideals and thus different concepts in mind, which goes against the *Concept-Object* requirement of a concept-centered thesis. The unity problem can be resolved, however, along these lines, but the sense in which it is achieved is a very specific one, and I will get back to the matter later (18.1). Without further elucidation this option merely paves the way for the kind of metalinguistic dispute that Plunkett and Sundell, or Stevenson, describe (15.2) concerning what conceptual content should be accepted in connection to the word or term employed.

(1) is more interesting in that it presents us with an alternative perspective on the way that complex concepts can be organized in addition to the standard core-periphery model that many accounts presume. The issues under dispute are not merely borderline but concern what falls within the core extension and what is relegated to the periphery of the concept. At first, it looks that there are only two possibilities when the extension is under dispute:

≠EXT: the disputing parties disagree on whether the object under scrutiny belongs to the extension of the concept (at all).

≈EXT: the disputing parties disagree on which of the objects that belong to the concept’s extension satisfies the concept best.

≠EXT-disputes can originate in several ways. A disagreement in which one party claims that the concept applies to an object, while another party denies it, is typically about a borderline case rather than about the core or paradigmatic cases—assuming that the concept is shared to begin with. By contrast, ≈EXT disputes involve the comparative evaluation of the range of things within concept’s extension. Disagreement on this front may further signal that disputing parties divide the extension of a concept differently: some things that are core or paradigmatic cases for one party may be merely borderline cases for another, although each is acknowledged as a case to which the concept applies. In the ≈EXT sense, the specific views of the disputing parties can be understood as a function of how the parties divide the concept’s extension into paradigmatic and

borderline cases. The disputes about weighting features of an object with respect to categorization can be of either sort, generally speaking, while most disputes concerning the weighting of the component parts of a shared valued achievement should lead to the latter type of disagreement⁴³⁰ (cf. 17.2). Ingram's option (1) corresponds roughly with \approx EXT.

However, there is still another type of extensional disagreement: disputing parties (appear to) share the concept while having a difference of opinion in line with \approx EXT, but they disagree concerning whether a suggested instance should be included in the concept's extension at all (hereafter EXT*). With EXT* the disputants are therefore disagreeing over (i) how central the proposed new instance of a concept is while they agree that it is a proper instance of the concept; and/or (ii) whether the new instance is an instance of the concept at all while at least one party thinks that it is perhaps even a (near) paradigmatic instance of a concept. The difference of EXT* to \neq EXT is that, in the latter, parties who share the concept can be thought to be in agreement that the suggested new instance of the concept is borderline, which is ruled out in EXT*. EXT* disputes are traceable, at least in principle, to how rivals divide the extension of the concept into paradigmatic and borderline cases. As a result, the concept under dispute is rendered particularly fuzzy as its boundaries are drawn differently by its users.

Another consequence of postulating EXT* is that \neq EXT, \approx EXT, and EXT* can be hard to tell apart by simply examining what takes place at the surface level of a dispute. Even making an enlightened guess requires having a clear sense of how disputing parties are dividing the extension, or what importance they attach to different features that the concept is meant to pick out. That is highly important because rival parties stand to each other exactly in this relation as well; if their apparent \neq EXT dispute is not merely about borderline issues, they are most probably talking past each other concept-wise if the dispute is not traceable to the \approx EXT element, which would render the dispute having an EXT* character in the final analysis. In other words, the present account aims to take seriously Waldron's criticism against understanding vagueness by three exact categories "clearly x," "clearly not-x," and "borderline x," the trichotomy that does not capture a true and troubling form of vagueness (Waldron 1994, 520–1; see 12.1). This connects with Gallie's technical sense of vagueness as uncertainty (see 12.1; 18.1). A disagreement over whether or not a given object is judged to be within the extension of the concept can be about how a shared concept is applied (extensionally) or how that concept's aspects should be understood (intensionally) in the first place. Uncertainty does not guarantee that disputants are contesting *the same* concept, but when they are contesting *some* concept, they remain uncertain of what is going on, nonetheless.

One feature of essential contestability can be said to be that disagreement that is over both the extension and the intension of the concept amounts to a

⁴³⁰ This clarifies why Ingram thinks that Gallie is actually talking about evaluative contestation: since the extension is determined by the descriptive criteria, one needs extra evaluative criteria for any further contestation within the (mutually acknowledged) extension (cf. Ingram in 17.4).

disagreement over what the concept applies to, and by virtue of what properties (Glock 2008, 207; see also Miller 1983, 39–42; cf. 14.1). This is a matter of reflexivity (17.4), but the above discussion tries to make it plain how a dispute over proper categorization can also threaten the disputants' sense that they share a concept. 'Threatening' does not mean 'undermining' in the present context. Although I am currently discussing how essentially contested concepts could be structured or organized, the threat that I am referring to seems to be a feature of a specific kind of dispute in which parties have a plenty of reason to be unsure what is really going on, rather than any structural feature of a concept. For Gallie, one appears to follow from the other (see 11.4; 12.1) but a distinction needs to be made at this point. The characteristics of a concept become involved when a new debated instance has, or is considered to have, properties that would change or otherwise significantly affect how the concept should be applied thereafter. What Gallie appears to drive at is that there is no general standard or principle available for disputants by which to decide without contestability whether their current disagreement reflects the fact that they employ different concepts, or whether their disagreement is traceable to the degree to which they evaluate/appraise the significance of those properties as component parts of a valued achievement. What I want to say here, in addition to Ingram and others, is that such a situation can arise within, or be implied by, quite ordinary application disagreement as well, if other conditions are met.

As to Ingram's second general solution to the unity problem, he points out that various "contested uses of the same concept are integrated into larger conceptual systems in directly corresponding ways. Their unity consists in the nature of the reasoned argument used to justify each interpretation of the concept."⁴³¹ The concept may even be applied to different examples, but applying the same concept requires structurally similar arguments. For instance, in the case of DEMOCRACY, one needs to speak "in terms of the relationship of government to people, the importance of representation, the responsibilities of the state to society, and the ways in which democratic requirements are properly realized." This further shows that essential contestability has a substantive foundation in addition to being a matter of conceptual structure: the argument for one's preferred use of a concept "through the content that fills out the structure" is "as essentially contested as the concept itself." This is because the use of an essentially contested concept presupposes an understanding of other contextually related concepts as well, and as such they are partly constitutive of rival ways of life; it derives its rational justification from such interlocking with other concepts in systematic ways of life. Ultimately, the integration into rival ways of life renders contested uses incompatible "for they compete for the same ground." (Ingram 1985, 56–7.)

Ingram's argument for the substantiveness of the disputes manifesting essential contestability as a matter of conceptual content filling a proper kind of structure appears somewhat backwards when literally understood. What

⁴³¹ This resembles Ronald Dworkin's notion that essentially contested concepts can serve as plateau for further thought and argumentation (Waldron 1994).

structure is there to fill without content? Be that as it may, Ingram's account combines elements from previously discussed conceptions in an interesting way. It appears to owe a lot to John Gray's views on the matter (e.g., Gray 1977, 344; 1978, 394; see also 5.2), and thus it is not surprising that the essentiality of contestation that Ingram's account suggests has a similar origin: if contestability stems from differences between rival ways of life, it is really essential only when rivalry in ways of life is understood as a part of the human condition. The unity is brought to the contestation by conceiving conflicting uses as competing for the same ground (see also Kekes in 18.3).

In *ECC*, Gallie himself claims that he is after the elementary use of a concept, and he is therefore not that interested in disputes over whether some actual object is picked out by the concept or not (*ECC* 183–4; 11.3; 14.2). In *ART*, Gallie draws attention to the grounds for deciding upon the relevantly similar contexts from which one draws in assessing the value of a painting as an artwork (see *CRITICS* in 11.2). As I see it, Gallie's primary interest is in conducting an enquiry into *how and on what grounds we come to choose* certain criteria as more reasonable than others, and this is where essential contestability enters the picture. Thus, when Gallie is asking for the criterion for relevantly similar contexts, he is asking a theoretical question that is not necessarily connected with contestation over any single concept, but rather what more generally could explain how we come to form unified and shared concepts despite our differences.

The substantive issue of how the relevant features that are already picked out by a concept's widely acknowledged criteria should be weighted or applied can become a point of heated controversy. Many issues that demand one to make a balanced social, moral, or political judgment and/or choice have that potential. That is not yet a conceptual issue unlike why this, rather than that, set of features is proper. It makes a difference how one arrives to judge the issue. One may contest the appropriateness of the instances in the application of the concept, or the appropriateness of the concept's application in connection to certain types of instances. Making a judgment from the universal to the particular is comparable to judging how a concept applies to an object; making a judgment from the particular to the universal is comparable to judging how a concept is formed on the basis of samples or exemplars. When Gallie characterizes essentially contested concepts as "inchoate" (*ECC* 184) or "embryonic" (*ART* 102), it basically means that the structure of an essentially contested concept allows both processes to play out reflexively or in a recursive loop (cf. 17.4; 18.5). It is also why questions of conceptual categorization appear in different guises time and time again in my study⁴³².

As I understand it, a thesis of essential contestability is also about concept-formation on the conceptual side of a dispute that is both conceptual and

⁴³² I have copiously employed application-terminology in the psychological sense of judging whether an object falls under the concept. Concept-formation is a cognitive operation that takes place outside the realm of pure semantics. If the proper instances of essential contestability are somehow always connected to concept-formation, it would only be natural to favor expressions that point to what is going on in the heads of the disputants rather than those that refer to how a more abstract linguistic entity extends to the world.

substantive. Yet concepts are not formed from scratch or for arbitrary reasons as the disputing parties already have an operative grasp of the concept, even if that grasp is somewhat obscure (or vague in Gallie's technical sense; see 12.1). The dispute can be about the proper boundaries of a concept indirectly, when new instances are presented, or directly, when a change in criteria is proposed. The key point is that the concept-formation is an ongoing process in which a concept is not shaped solely by appealing to commonly acknowledged past exemplars, but in which each instance of concept-application potentially demands one to adjust the concept. However, since the intension is defined as designating the extension, any dispute over the extension may be taken to suggest a different concept, as a technical matter, similarly to how the first challenge is set (15.1). I have not given a comprehensive answer to such objection in the current chapter.

One possibility could be to get more creative with how the relation between the intension and the extension of an essentially contested concept is comprehended. For instance, let us say that the concepts of normative ideals share a characteristic with the concepts of non-actual or imaginary entities (e.g., Santa Claus, a unicorn) in terms of how their extension could be contested. There are no unicorns, which means that whatever we think them to be, we cannot really test our claims. We can still argue about the features unicorns have based on various cultural sources we have available, but there is no telling for sure. Now a change in extension does not mean a change in intension since nothing can change extensionally: it remains empty. This somewhat fits with the openness of essentially contested concepts and the uncertainty that comes with them: we are simply fundamentally unsure about those things to which certain complex normative ideals potentially apply, which translates to being unsure how to weight, organize, and fix their intensions. The problem with this anti-realist proposal is that we now appear to be dealing with a criterially governed or a descriptive concept that just happens to have a null-extension. As such, it is subject to previously presented criticism⁴³³.

I am unsure whether it is possible to satisfy those who accept the premises of the first challenge (15.1) with an account that understands essential contestability in terms of concept-formation, but what follows is nonetheless a valiant attempt to do so (see ch. 18). Whatever theorists decide to be theoretically reasonable in terms of concept individuation, or however fine- or coarse-grained they wish to digest their concepts, it might not matter much. The world goes on and people contest how that world should be ordered into categories that they

⁴³³ It is of course possible to present an anti-realist thesis of essential contestability in much more straightforward terms: the only access we have to the reality we are describing are our concepts, and that "reality" itself is constituted by how we conceptualize it, which ultimately leads to the impossibility of sorting out our conceptual disagreements concerning reality. However, I agree with Grafstein (1988, 11) that the metaphysical dispute over essential contestability between realists who take a *contra*-position and anti-realists who take a *pro*-position seems frozen. Choosing one side or another probably does not do much in terms of informing us about the more general viability of the essential contestability thesis, as one may just end up rehashing old lines of argumentation. See Grafstein (1988) for a related discussion and a proposal of a *realist* thesis of essential contestability.

consider useful for their purposes. Sometimes we adopt categories that give rise to philosophical ruckus by not being the most theoretically palatable. That cannot be defined away, and essentially contested concepts that are involved and employed in their characteristic context might be just that hard to swallow.

CHAPTER 18: PLACING THE SPECIFIC KIND OF USE IN ITS PROPER CONTEXT: REVISING THE CONCEPT-CENTERED THESIS

The present chapter starts from the finding that previous attempts to construct a concept-centered thesis of essential contestability that meets with the assumption of *Concept-Structure*, or the assumption that the locus of contestation inheres in that concept/term owing to its special characteristics and/or how the concept is inherently structured or organized, are not convincing enough. I do not see how any of the proposed accounts manage to be (i) strong enough in that they truly capture essential sort of contestation that reaches the core of the concept (15.3); (ii) about a single concept that the disputants all possess (15.1) rather than involving a number of opposing concepts (15.2). The basic problem with producing a structural account of the nature of concept that is capable of being essentially contested is that, although one might be able to give an account of what kind of concept *could* be contested, it alone does not suffice as an account of why ensuing disputes are essential to have.

In this chapter, I approach the matter differently by replacing *Concept-Structure* with *Concept-Function*, or the assumption that essential contestability arises due to a special way a concept is employed. *Concept-Object* still holds, or I still assume that the actual object of contestation is a concept/term. All in all, I will now move more clearly towards the terrain of pragmatics, the need for which I have been suggesting throughout the study. I am going to claim that essential contestability can be captured more plausibly by concentrating on how rival parties use and contest the concept(s) in question, but it is not enough to save a concept-centered thesis of essential contestability in the form that is most often assumed even if only implicitly.

I will start by introducing a new notion to the literature of essentially contested concepts: a decision-based reasonable disagreement (18.1). It is a natural extension of Gallie's original ideas, and it articulates a common presumption that many readers of Gallie actually have or could be persuaded to accept: whether there is a shared concept is, in a significant sense, up to disputing

parties instead of being a state of affairs to which they conform. Next, I will take a look at how essentially contested concepts are formed from a certain point of view or for a certain function (18.2). It is here that a thesis of essential contestability affirming *Concept-Function* starts to truly gain traction. The third section is reserved for discussion of how essentially contested concepts figure in disputes that have a role to play in relation to broad human activities (18.3). The connection to *Concept-Function* approach is evident, but the section aims to flesh out more concretely where the origin of the essentiality of contestation could truly lie. Together, these three sections form the foundation of the essential contestability thesis that I personally prefer, and my increasing personal contribution to the discussion reflects that. I will bring the different elements together in the final section when I argue for the combinatory account of essential contestability (18.5). Before that, however, I will examine different ways for historicist or historical considerations to figure as part of an essential contestability thesis (18.4).

18.1 Decision-based reasonable disagreement and endoxa

The current section further develops the idea that the zone of reasonable disagreement is determined as the function of those views that are mutually admitted to the dispute by the disputants (see esp. 11.4; 13.3). As a result, I will introduce an idea of *decision-based reasonable disagreement*. With the help of Aristotle's concept of *endoxa*, I will present how decision-based reasonable disagreement fits with, and makes sense of, Gallie's suggestion of essentially contested concepts as popular conceptions, the concepts that consist of their conflicting uses.

Debate is the life of an essentially contested concept, and not just a contingent attribute of it (Gellner 1974, 96) – a metaphorical expression that finds backing in my previous finding that essentially contested concepts, as Gallie describes them, consist of their mutually contested uses (cf. 14.2). At times, Gallie also comes close to saying that the *unity* of a concept is determined by agreement of rival parties concerning the boundaries of acceptable contestation. Essentially contested concepts are hardly sites of an anything-goes sort of contestation that one is simply forced to accept in the nature of the case (cf. 13.3). Quite on the contrary, rival parties “could express agreement as to where the real issue between them lies,” and thus “a given contest can at least be identified with the best elements that take part in it” (PHU 188). That points towards a zone of reasonable disagreement that is formed as the function of those views/uses that are admitted to the dispute by the disputants themselves (cf. 11.4; 13.3; 14.2). In practice, there are always lunatic or otherwise much too extreme elements that need to be excluded from contestation, and the nature of essentially contested concepts makes the matter more pressing: their integrity requires it. The unreasonable fringe views would otherwise be part of the debate and hence the life of the concept, which is manifestly intolerable in that yet again there would

be no way of distinguishing essentially contested concepts from confused ones. If anything can go under a concept under the guise of contestation, there is no reason to believe that the concept would still manage to do its primary job in picking out accurately what it signifies. Essentially contested concepts require at least some agreement in addition to disagreement.

To illustrate the idea that I am after, let us say that potential rivals in a dispute (that manifests essential contestability) start by judging which uses of the expression/predicate/term/concept in question are *not* the proper uses of it. It is relatively uncontestable, for example, that both merit- and status-based considerations can be relevant in assessing justice-related claims, but we would rightly consider the proposal that eye color should have a similar impact either lunatic or absurd. Clearly, eye-color has nothing to do with the issue, and thus we are ready to exclude the views of eye-color-justice proponents, however vocal or enthusiastic they might be. After this first stage of culling, the parties still disagree on which one of the acknowledged ways of using the concept is the best, the paradigmatic, or the core use of the concept while other still relevant uses are considered more or less penumbral, or perhaps even borderline, in that they do not capture what is most significant in the valued achievement. This does not mean that an essentially contested concept would consist of uses or applications that the users, individually, would deem borderline or hard-to-categorize. If anything, it is just the opposite: the rivals have a very strong sense of what they consider as the appropriate way of using the concept while they also acknowledge other, not so apposite, uses. So, one may find paradigmatic instances of justice in cases that relate to status considerations while holding that merit-based considerations are also relevant for assessing justice. *Mutatis mutandis* in the case of merit-based considerations, or any other relevant factor for judging what is just.

There are thus limits to how essentially contested concepts are used, but it is not necessarily clear *what exactly* those limits are even if we can presume *how* the limits are to be determined, i.e., in the process in which some uses rather than others are admitted as part of contestation. Ultimately this means that vagueness permeates the whole concept that is meant to cover that area, both its “core” and outer limits, as far as different uses are concerned (cf. 12.1). If there were a core to such a concept, it is bound to be temporal in the sense that the shift in balance of its combined employment would induce a shift in the location of the “core” as well. In this, the present view takes the route of the competing conceptions thesis rather than the standard concept/conception thesis (see 17.3).

However, if we were to be convinced that eye-color indeed has a significant role to play, we *could* factor it in in our justice-related judgments. Now, whatever we decide to do in any given instance, the decision is not arbitrary; it is founded on how we judge the matter based on arguments and evidence we have at hand. This type of a dispute can be called *decision-based reasonable disagreement* as it marks the boundaries of the area of committed choice and uncertainty by the

disputants⁴³⁴. The proper limits for using an essentially contested concept overlap with that area, or with *the zone of reasonable disagreement*, and this is how the concept-side and the dispute-side of essential contestability come together in practice.

The reasonableness of decision-based reasonable disagreement is thus contingent on a collective agreement and mutual appreciation of certain concerns over others. That agreement is not completely immune from outside criticism. However, even when there is a case to be made that disputants do not conceptualize the matter properly, they could continue contesting the same matter, together, improperly⁴³⁵. If a relevant value community or a linguistic community combines and handles different conceptual contents under one term while holding, perhaps tacitly, that they together form a conceptual unity instead of ambiguity, to not follow in suit and defer *could* mean excluding oneself from the sphere of concerns that the other members of that community have⁴³⁶ (cf. 13.2). Sometimes it is the community that ostracizes the dissident who violates norms that have been established communally. It is worth stressing that those norms are not solely, or even primarily, linguistic. All communal norms that could affect how certain rather than other things are mutually categorized are relevant as they may be the reasons for why those things are evaluated within the same continuum (cf. 12.2; 14.2). This way the phenomenon of essential contestability extends well beyond the semantics of a given concept to the pragmatic circumstances in the widest of senses (cf. ch. 10).

Gallie stresses that no particular claim made by the disputing parties is justified; only the combined employment of a concept is justified (ECC 178/PHU 167; 9.1). Since Condition (V) states that what it is to be an essentially contested concept requires one to maintain one's use of a concept against other uses, what is justified is contestation over how the concept should be properly employed. This supports the view that there appears to be no logical room for essentially contested concepts without them being constituted by contestation. This realization helps in setting other pieces at their proper places. Suspending one's judgment or withdrawing from contestation is not simply a decision one makes in the absence of convincing epistemic justification without any other

⁴³⁴ Originally, Gallie appeared to have in mind only those disputes in which rival parties are somehow committed or normatively strongly invested in their preferred uses. If one wanted to make room for a more speculative conceptual disagreement – e.g., of “as if” or “for the sake of argument” type – this requirement should be relinquished by saying instead that it is enough if parties appreciate or acknowledge the same set of concerns as relevant (cf. 7.1; 11.4).

⁴³⁵ In this instance, I intentionally disregard the distinction between the internal perspective and the external perspective to essential contestability (13.2).

⁴³⁶ Gallie does not actually say that all disputants who are engaged in essential contestation are required to apply the concept according to the same set of criteria, only that the disputants are required to at least minimally appreciate others' criteria (7.1). Given the value-ladenness of how an essentially contested concept is applied, such appreciation could perhaps come down to accepting the legitimacy of communal values, or a moral point of view from which the matter is described (18.2), although one would not necessarily share them.

ramifications. Being detached from the common enterprise, or “the game” (ECC 175, 191 / PHU 164, PHU 185), means disconnection from a process in which an essentially contested concept is determined by community members to be the contested concept that it is⁴³⁷ (see also 13.2). Regarding different ways to understand and appreciate the valued achievement signified by the thusly formed concept, the wheat is separated from the chaff by those who are willing to contest the issue and persuade others of the merits of their own views. Interpreting the matter this way makes sense of Gallie’s remarks concerning *both* the exigencies of living that demand one to take a stance *and*, more specifically, how one who fails to throw her support to one side rather than another “is lost (...) to the game and to the day” (ECC 190–1/PHU 185). In the current sense, the determination of the boundaries of essentially contested concepts that are understood to figure in decision-based reasonable disagreements is a collective and political operation.

The question of how much latitude we have concerning conceptual categories we employ is a difficult one, yet it makes sense to assume that there is at least *some* elbow room concerning how we choose to identify, describe, and order the social realm. A crucial step is taken the moment one decides to argue against other uses of the alleged concept, and the decision is not limited to instantaneous verdict or vote-like occurrences. It can span several generations, centuries, or even longer; or, as Gallie would say, the championship is decided in a continuous manner (see 3.3). At the end of *PHU*, Gallie takes up but comes to reject SCIENCE, LAW, LIBERTY, and GOVERNMENT as possible candidates for essentially contested concepts. However, he is

quite certain that an adequate understanding of each of these concepts calls for some appreciation of their growth, of their past proliferations and the unifications to which they have been subjected, both by social pressure and by logically tidy and dominating minds. PHU 190; see also ECC 198; PHU 171, 174

Gallie is basically saying that SCIENCE, LAW, LIBERTY, and GOVERNMENT are comparable to essentially contested concepts in the above manner (see also van der Burg 2017, 254, esp. n97). The passage indicates, on the one hand, that concept-users are assumed to have an active hand in unifying, extracting, or adding different conceptual contents under one concept. The talk of unification suggests, on the other hand, that Gallie is not simply confusing ambiguous words with unified concepts (see also 16.2). Initially diverging conceptual contents are unified by virtue of actively contesting them as better or worse descriptions of what is taken to be essentially one thing.

We have now arrived at a conception in which an essentially contested concept is a constantly evolving category that is subject to contestation in which its boundaries are both contested and reformed. That is why the debate over so called C-making features (17.2) is relevant in determining the proper boundary

⁴³⁷ As a corollary, rival parties do not have to share a common core concept before engaging in contesting the matter, since there is no common core to the concept before it is formed in the course of the dispute (see also 17.3).

of the concept, even though such debate does not need to concern the semantics of the respective term. Given the lack of agreement on a definition, general principle, or the like, it is the sole window to the concept that is formed intersubjectively. The specific kind of a concept-use that Gallie seeks (3.1) would thus be approximately the following: it is an argumentative move made by a participant to a dispute, a move which questions what is of primary importance in the case of a given concept, and which is, at the same time, an intellectual contribution to how the valued achievement signified by the concept is to be understood, sustained, and developed further (see also 18.5). To use an essentially contested concept is both to use the concept in an evaluative/normative dispute and to take part in the continuous formation of the concept. That which consists of the proposed uses of the concept is understood as the popular conception (see later).

The present discussion gives rise to two theoretical worries. First, it can be argued that the notion of the decision-based reasonable disagreement merely tracks disputants' subjective perceptions, or perhaps (un)certainly of their normative adherences, instead of being able to say anything meaningful about the reasonableness of their views. The worry is somewhat compounded if the mode of transitional rationality (13.4) is taken to be operative as it appears to have no purchase outside biographical transitions or other analogous processes. Any meaningful, objective sense of reasonableness looks to be foreclosed: one cannot derive objectivity from the intersubjective agreement just the same as "the simple fact of disagreement for a certain sort of belief cannot itself show that there is no *fact of the matter being argued about*" (Besson 2005, 41 quoting Moore 1982, 1089–90⁴³⁸). More specifically, agreement on within what boundaries of a conceptual dispute should be carried out does not mean that the parties could not be mistaken.

Second, one might object that I am now extracting the inherent characteristics of concepts from the expectation of a certain kind of disagreement (cf. 14.1). It is a reasonable worry to which I can only reply that it is not my intention to do so. That said, I *do* think that focusing on a specific kind of concept-use requires explicating its normal context. For example, with respect to the live examples, Gallie understands their conformity with the Conditions to help in explaining "the ways they function in characteristic aesthetic, political and religious arguments" (ECC 180). A part of the characteristic context in which essentially contested concepts are used is, I claim, the decision-based reasonable disagreement. The specific employment of these concepts is predicated on them figuring in the right type of disagreement, which means that explicating the nature of the disagreement is simply a way one can make sense of the idea that the status of a concept as essentially contested is determined in the dispute, or through contestation. My ultimate goal is still to articulate a concept-centered thesis of essential contestability although I replace *Concept-Structure* with *Concept-Function* (cf. ch. 15 intro). Essentially contested concepts do not admit all conceptual structures, but this change suggests that their most characteristic,

⁴³⁸ Moore, M (1982), 'Moral Reality' 1 *Wisconsin Law Review* 1061.

essential contestability inducing feature relates to their specific function instead⁴³⁹.

I will now turn to address the first worry by expanding on the notion of the decision-based reasonable disagreement. *The point is not to say* that uses accepted by disputants are considered appropriate or reasonable in a dispute-transcending sense *simply because* the disputants have decided so. For that we can appeal to criteria which can be of the run-of-the-mill variety. By assuming that the concept involved is determined in the course of a dispute without assuming a prior, past, or independently existing conceptualization as the object of dispute, one is not saying anything about how well it represents or refers, or how well it facilitates sound judgments. *The point is to say* that a thesis of essential contestability needs a notion of disagreement that *does* track adherences and subjective perceptions as they figure in intersubjective dispute. It is assumed from the start that rival parties evaluate the matter in their particular appraisive situations in the absence of a general principle for deciding the matter once and for all⁴⁴⁰. No dispute-transcending assessment of reasonableness is presumed, and the determination of the object of dispute does not depend on the independent correctness or reasonableness of disputants' views or uses as it is determined by a dispute-independent external standard.

The operative sense of rationality in a decision-based reasonable disagreement is transitional and of *ad hominem* character. One starts from what one can accept, and further changes in one's views are self-justifying when one considers them as improvements over one's previous views (13.4). As to the shared object of the dispute, any concept-use by a disputing party must be acknowledged as a competing use by other parties. Agreement on what is argued about is a phenomenological precondition of a genuine dispute in which the disputants consciously engage. If that dispute is also a contest, opposing views need to be identified and acknowledged as valid competitors to one's own. Considering someone's reasons for holding on to a particular use of a concept as completely invalid vis-à-vis the case at hand prevents one from partaking in a common enterprise that is quintessentially a contest or competition over which use best reflects that which is important in the mutually valued normative ideal. This is the plateau on which all further claims, arguments, and appeals are based. The disputants are (now) free to appeal to any standard (of rationality) they consider relevant, pertinent, and reasonable, but if they wish to persuade others

⁴³⁹ The turn from concepts, or concept-centeredness, to disagreement and dispute is by no means a remarkable feat, in general. For example, Quentin Skinner holds that "there is not analysis to be given of contests about concepts in themselves, but only of their uses in argument" (Skinner 1979, 224 quoted in Grafstein 1985, 24). For a brief critical engagement with this aspect of Skinner's thought, see Gunnell 1999, esp. 651-2.

⁴⁴⁰ Gallie's case looks to be at least partly motivated by concerns that are similar to problems that could conceivably arise when one tries to abstract or universalize from a particular situation, and from an individual's particular adherences, in order to judge what should generally be done in a similar situation (cf. PHU 190-1). Gallie raises this concern explicitly, which suggests that he considered the personal adherences of rival parties an important factor. See also ECC 168/PHU 157.

as well, they must take into account what those disagreeing with them are willing to accept in addition to what they themselves can accept. If no party revokes their decision that opposing concept-uses are indeed competing uses, what the parties together consider rational in the nature of the case, and while they disagree continuously and competitively, determines the zone of reasonable disagreement between them. Rationality, or what is taken to have normative force, is now understood in a constructivist fashion⁴⁴¹. There is no limit to the number of people who may partake in determining the zone of reasonable disagreement regarding this or that matter.

What if one is convinced that everyone else is wrong? However strongly one may feel that some of the opposing views are without any merit, the practical reality of the situation oftentimes dictates that, by continuing to contest the matter, one may facilitate the inclusion of even poorly grounded or irrelevant uses within the range that are, *in fact*, contestant positions in the matter. Disregarding all opposing views despite their putative unreasonableness or ridiculousness is not always a feasible option. As time goes on, some may be sedimented as commonly acknowledged ways of conceiving the matter, and thus to be included within the reasonable limits without much objection.

What I say above does not argue for including unreasonable or irrelevant views as somehow proper alternatives. Neither do reasons for deciding what views to include or exclude need be arbitrary, irrational, or even markedly personal (though one must of course affirm them). The standing assumption is that rival parties truly and honestly strive to sustain and develop the valued achievement to the optimum, and hence they have no reason to not take into consideration arguments and evidence they consider best or the most relevant⁴⁴². Moreover, Gallie clearly intended the disputants to draw from their history and culture in search of the best use of a concept. The world is what it is, culturally or otherwise, and thus it is not arbitrary how the relevant facts are grouped together or how they inform our conceptualizations (cf. Kristjánsson 1995, 86; see also 18.2). This is where the notion of the original exemplar (8.1) and what Gallie states in the case of *LOVERS* are germane (11.2), but here I will move things forward by considering Aristotle's notion of *endoxa*, which offers us a slightly less abstract, yet still a loose enough standpoint to the matter.

Endoxa may be referred as the common conceptions on a subject that are acceptable to the many or the wise (Swanton 1985, 818). Christopher Shields describes Aristotle's original use of the term as follows:

⁴⁴¹ Discussing how normativity is grounded goes beyond the scope of this study. In any case, I think what I say here could be compatible with understanding normativity as grounded in individuals' / disputants' practical identities.

⁴⁴² This is a bit of a double-edged sword: if the rivals truly and confidently believe that their way is the best in sustaining and developing the achievement, why not just shape the playing field to their advantage by leaving others outside the contestation if they are in a position to do so? Here Gallie's assurance that true believers bide their time in the hope of true conversion sounds quite weak (13.3).

endoxa are widely shared opinions, often ultimately issuing from those we esteem most: ‘*Endoxa* are those opinions accepted by everyone, or by the majority, or by the wise – and among the wise, by all or most of them, or by those who are the most notable and having the highest reputation’ (Top. 100b21–23) *Endoxa* play a special role in Aristotelian philosophy in part because they form a significant sub-class of *phainomena* (...): because they are the privileged opinions we find ourselves unreflectively endorsing and reaffirming after some reflection, they themselves come to qualify as appearances to be preserved where possible. Shields 2016, §3

Luis Renon notes the esteem sense of *endoxos* and adds that, “within the scope of argumentation, it is said of views or tenets, and has come to signify a certain weight or degree of approval of a belief, opinion, or dictum” (Renon 1998, 95). In this picture, *endoxa* inform the contestable or otherwise uncertain judgments that are made by the disputants:

the *endoxa* are primarily characteristic premises of dialectical syllogism (Top. 100a30, 104a8): propositions put forward or granted as premises which are, say, ‘occupying the ground’ in argumentation about a controversial issue, as opposed to the true, per se first and incontestable principles upon which demonstrative syllogism ultimately rests.⁴⁴³ Renon 1998, 96

From one perspective, essentially contested concepts as popular conceptions can be understood to involve *endoxa* as constituents or reasonings that are relatively unreflectively endorsed and reaffirmed in how the concept is used in different ways. It fits well with Gallie’s description of how different conceptions of art have been brought about by various aesthetic schools and traditions but also through “teachings and preachings” of “men of great insight” (ART 109; PHU 174; 11.2). At some point, the teachings of the “representatives” of different schools of thought become a conventional wisdom on which further judgments are based. A certain set of constituents can thus come to qualify as that which *appears* to be essential to an achievement denoted by a term. Here an essentially contested concept is a popular conception that is signified by “a supremely general or categorial term” (PHU 178), the conception to which different people may arrive in different ways guided by *endoxa*. (cf. ECC 186–7, PHU 178, 180; see also 11.3.) In general, the connection to *endoxa* helps in grasping how and why the reasonableness of the decision-based reasonable disagreement is to be understood in terms of plausibility or intelligibility rather than objectivity⁴⁴⁴.

⁴⁴³ Note, though, that the mode of reasoning that is characteristic to essential contestability is of an *ad hominem* character, and not dialectical argumentation capable of reaching universal truths (13.4).

⁴⁴⁴ Renon states that *endoxa* are “opinions that may be esteemed according to criteria of consensus or approval, as opposed more in general to assertions which are only judged in light of the truth, on the basis of what actually holds (APo. 81b21–22)” (Renon 1998, 96). It might thus be better to analyze the specific statements of the disputants in the context of their assertability rather than in terms of their truth. The rivals might view the matter very differently (see 13.2) and thus fail to grasp what they are actually doing, but that mistake would not be comparable to a conceptual confusion. Rather, they are in error concerning *endoxa*: instead of considering them as common opinions, conventional wisdom, or the like,

From the standpoint of effective argumentation based on *endoxa*, the argumentation that brings about conversion can be viewed as a rhetorical effect that may replace a rational conviction on a firmer ground in the right circumstances. *Endoxa* now become something that rival parties seek as a common ground to persuade their opponents, or *endoxa* form the common ground based on which they attempt to judge the issue as coherently as possible. It would now be possible to join Eugene Garver (1978) in affirming that essentially contested concepts are composed of rhetorical arguments (in Aristotelian sense), or that “the meaning of an essentially contested concept contains arguments about its meaning.”

For, if the meaning of a term is made of the opinions, values, and referents that people give to the term, those opinions, values, and referents are at the same time the material for arguments about the concepts, and are the products of these arguments. Garver 1978, 164; see also 13.4.

I previously claimed that the specific kind of concept-use that holds Gallie’s interest is an argumentative move made by a participant to a dispute (among other things, see before): given that essentially contested concepts are comprised of their mutually contested and contesting uses, one might want to take a step further and understand them as consisting of arguments that accompany different uses as their justification. These arguments serve as further material to which one may appeal in further contestation without establishing a once-and-for-all truth, which is an important part of the rhetorical nature of the argument (Garver 1978, 156–7 or see 13.4). The problem with this view is that it is not yet very clear how the argumentative plateau that is formed is specifically conceptual, and not just material for contesting issues, topics, or the like⁴⁴⁵.

A thesis of essential contestability could perhaps be premised on a sort of descriptivist outlook, or a view that the reference/meaning of normative terms/expressions/concepts is determined by an associated theory ⁴⁴⁶ .

they elevate them to the status of truths, on which further truth-claims can be uncontestably grounded.

⁴⁴⁵ This problem surfaces, for example, in Garver’s discussion of how a particular resolution to a problem that is the subject of a rhetorical argument does not become a resolution of the meaning of the essentially contested concept. That appears to be because, in addition to the above definition of the relevant type of rhetorical argument, Garver assumes that essentially contested concepts are *involved* in such rhetorical arguments that seek to solve problems (1978, 165). Garver wants to have his cake and eat it too: essentially contested concepts both consist of rhetorical arguments and are involved in them, which serves to cloud what kind of entity such a concept is now supposed to be, or what is its characteristic function.

⁴⁴⁶ The present point is inspired by Eklund 2017, 21. A connection can also be drawn more directly to descriptivism, or the descriptive theory, which is the view that “there are sets of descriptive properties associated by competent speakers with singular and general terms which both give those terms their meaning and determine their reference,” and such descriptive content “is what competent speakers know when they understand them” (Kallestrup 2011, 3–4; see also ch. 1 and/or Lycan 2019, chs. 2–3 for an overview). Gallie does not mention meanings practically at all, and, in an earlier paper, he more generally doubts the view according to which one needs to *know* the rules or conditions of the proper use of words in order to do things with words or apply them correctly (Gallie 1949, 40). Still, the

Alternatively, presenting and appealing to descriptions is merely the characteristic mode in which rival parties forward their claims, and not a theory of semantics to which one subscribes in its own right. In both cases, an essentially contested concept *as* a popular conception, and *as* a valued achievement that is referred by contestants, would be determined by a *folk theory* that consists of commonly held, general beliefs, or *endoxa*, which link a normative term and its valuation to certain descriptive contents. The loose assortment of *endoxa* could now pass from one generation of concept-users to another with modifications that any given era or culture has considered appropriate⁴⁴⁷. Any specific or more strictly limited attempt to define the concept behind the popular usage of the term would be considered insufficient or unreasonably exclusive (cf. *LOVERS* in 11.2). However, as different aspects of the *popular* conception, i.e., as parts of a culturally acknowledged way of seeing things, the specific definitions are historically intelligible despite their limitedness (cf. 13.4). The limits, within which different specifications clash, mark also the boundaries of a decision-based reasonable disagreement, albeit a very wide one.

The outside analyst may have reason to think that some of the conceptual contents thereby arrived at do not cohere, and disambiguation is therefore warranted. That usually has little or no effect at all on *how* the matter at hand is contested, or *what* is contested, by those who are many though not always the wisest. Unlike most actual disputants, analysts have explicit theoretical tools to resist a move from the first level or stage – i.e., there are various uses of concepts that come to conflict with each other, which appear to have different functions and thus could very well be applications of quite different concepts – to the second one where the combined employment of possibly different concepts is considered to form a totality in the form of a single concept (14.2). In everyday disputes that disagreement would most often proceed by rivals arguing for their own view as *better* or *more reasonable* than the alternatives, and thus they have already moved, implicitly, to the second stage.

Despite one's theoretical arsenal, the stance one takes can always be construed by others as taking part in a wider dispute. Or: "What we say can easily be recognised as appreciation or criticism from the (excessively one-sided) (...) point of view" (ART 114; 12.2). The analyst may thus become a party to the dispute in effect, willing or not⁴⁴⁸. This illustrates the instability and

obscurities in his presentation may have contributed to the situation, in which it is not perhaps clear for his readers whether the meanings are the proper loci of contestability after all. Given the dual role of descriptive content in descriptivism, it might either invite such perplexity or become quasi-operative framework as a (possibly unintended) result. Compare with the discussion related to semantic externalism in 18.4.

⁴⁴⁷ For Sami Syrjämäki, the exemplar that is common to contesting parties is often "a somewhat loose popular understanding of the concept" (Syrjämäki 2011, 165). Here, I say much the same thing, though I consider my present articulation an improvement. It is not perfectly clear how Gallie would respond to my account (see e.g., ECC 185, n3).

⁴⁴⁸ William Galston thinks that one sometimes becoming a contestant simply by using a certain word while nothing but a shared name unites the different views is part of a hypothesis, also advanced by Gallie, that all political concepts are essentially contested (Galston 2014). I disagree with Galston's broad characterization, but I agree with the finer

contestability that is inherent in a decision-based reasonable disagreement: its very existence in terms of participating persons or views can be denied or affirmed by any other participant. However, Gallie indicates (see *LOVERS* in 11.2) that having an external perspective to the issue that is grasped through an essentially contested concept is possible without necessarily internalizing the gravity of any given view or being sucked into the conflict as a partisan (see also Ehrenberg 2011, 217–8, n18, 229.) That has not stopped some from arguing that academic debates that manifest essential contestability have internalized political battles under study (Grafstein 1988, 20). If the distinctness of the external and internal perspective were denied, the analyst’s perspective would not amount to much more than confused pretense regarding certain concepts since all the uses would necessarily be aggressive and defensive⁴⁴⁹.

The analyst perspective need not be privileged in terms of being capable of determining how a given concept is to be appropriately employed, or how it is to be correctly defined, as there are other ways of analyzing concepts. Kenneth Ehrenberg (2011) observes that nothing stops one from giving a descriptive intellectual history of different *conceptions* of a concept, even if one has to repeatedly refer to the concept that is deemed essentially contested. In such a project, one’s reference to an essentially contested concept can be vague and contestability-admitting rather than one having to subscribe to a robust conception of it. Furthermore, an essentially contested concept can be left as an unexplored cluster of value when it is referred, and thus it does not automatically make other concepts in connection to it essentially contested. (Ehrenberg 2011, 216.) The current issue is also connected to how a term may be used at different levels of generality, which may be taken to suggest several distinct concepts instead of one unhelpfully broad one (*ibid.*, 230; see Ehrenberg in 18.3). It also implies that were there to be a useful notion of essential contestability, the concepts employed and contested would be distinguished by the particular usage to which they are put, rather than how a concept like *JUSTICE* has an inherent structure that renders each and every use of it essentially contested.

point. David Boromisza-Habashi states that when contestation functions as the locus of a concept’s meaning, “the act of defining an essentially contested concept like ‘democracy’ means, in effect, that the speaker producing the definition inevitably becomes a contestant.” In addition, essentially contested concepts function as discursive resources that are utilized “for positioning oneself and one’s group against a rival group of contestants.” (Boromisza-Habashi 2010, 278.) This rings true, even if the inevitability in question were not taken to mean that one cannot fight becoming one of the contestants.

⁴⁴⁹ The “determination” (i.e., identification) that a given first-order concept is essentially contested is possible, even if, in another sense, the concept’s second-order status as ‘essentially contested’ is “determined” (i.e., constituted) by the conflict between the partisan users. Furthermore, presuming that any sort of dealing with essentially contested concepts necessarily results in contestability would give the resulting thesis a two-tiered character that is highly problematic (13.5). A theoretically partisan second-order view adopted by a theoretician (e.g., Gallie) should not be needlessly confused with the partisan first-order views of the disputants who actively contest the matter (but cf. Gray 1977, 338–9). By saying this much, I do not mean to overrule one very commonsensical way of *conceiving* of the analyst as one of the contestants (see also 18.3), or that the analyst would not have a vested interest in how the contest plays out in certain circumstances.

It is not only the analysts that have their work cut out for them. A historically shaped collective understanding concerning the aspects of what is assumed to be one valued achievement, e.g., social justice or democracy, is resistant to redescriptions or clarifications by any party, however well-meaning. When the moral, political, or personal stakes are high, getting others to change, exclude or include a sense of how a key term is used is often a matter of prolonged social struggle. To change the concepts is to change how the world is perceived, and that is often conditioned on changing the world⁴⁵⁰. In this, a concept signifying a valued achievement is almost like an appearance to be preserved (cf. Shields before), or it becomes a sort of *endoxos* in itself. However, I would advise against stressing this last point too much since, by doing so, one risks losing the concept from the sight altogether in expense of widespread cultural conventions or other popularly held beliefs. Instead, *endoxa* may be viewed as something that provides one with information that complements and/or helps to identify exemplars based on which one arrives at a specific concept-use. *Endoxa* could thus stand between exemplars, i.e., instances that manifest a given valued achievement, and a popular conception of the valued achievement which constitutes the aspects of a multi-faceted concept. On one hand, *endoxa* as widely shared opinions are affected by everything that takes place on the exemplar-side as events and actions progress, and *endoxa* affect how the matter is conceptualized through the lens of an accompanying folk theory, on the concept-side. This account further explains why disagreement on what I call C-making features (see 17.2) is relevant in the case of essentially contested concepts: how C-making features are commonly perceived determines the contours of the corresponding folk theory that, in turn, determines the reference of the associated general term.

I have already discussed Christine Swanton's views with respect to *endoxa* and an essentially contested concept as a normative ideal (17.3; esp. Swanton 1985, 818–9, 825–6; 1992, 7). Here, I need to introduce two points of criticism that Glen Newey directs against her view in order to assess their applicability to my account. First, Newey (2001) states that Swanton merely puts off the problem. Either the incorporation of the *endoxa* in how disputants judge the matter at hand is essential to their judgments reflecting different conceptions or not. If it is, there appears to be a core concept after all in that it includes at least the *endoxa* in question; if not, general assent to a proposition, or the bare fact of assent to the *endoxa*, is not sufficient to demonstrate that there is a unitary referent. Second, Newey further argues that Swanton “mislocates the explanation of the disagreement”: for Swanton's argument to apply, the occurrences of the contested concepts (in sample propositions) must be purely referential⁴⁵¹ in

⁴⁵⁰ See Herman Cappelen (2018) for the view that understands conceptual-engineering, or a broad outlook according to which a number of concepts or other such representational devices can often be used in a better way than is the case currently, as a process that “operates directly on extensions or intensions (i.e., things in the world) without giving any key role to words, not to mention concepts.

⁴⁵¹ Michael Rhodes states, instead, that Swanton's claim appears “to amount to an assertion that if two or more terms express concepts that have different intensions, one cannot

which case it is irrelevant if the parties to a disagreement attach different meanings *qua* Fregean senses to the term(s) in question (see also Mason 1993, 85). It appears there is no real disagreement:

if all that is in play are different Fregean senses, the parties' claims can simply be conjoined. If on the other hand the fact that the parties may engage in different resolutions of the apparently conflicting *endoxa* is held to show that there is a real disagreement, it must be one over truth-conditions, in which case at most one party is right, and conceptual structure fails to explain the disagreement. Newey 2001, 254–5

In short, if there is no disagreement concerning the referent, the disagreement concerning the meaning appears linguistic in that one could use the different expressions that have the different senses interchangeably without the change in the truth of what is claimed. From another perspective, different senses of a co-referential expression are akin to different modes of presenting what is at stake, and thus the difference is conveyed by pragmatic implicature rather than pertaining to semantics. However, if the disagreement is instead about truth-conditions, it is not conceptual as the truth-conditions are distinct from meaning—relatedly, the disagreement over which C-making features present at a given time in an object make it “C” is not conceptual either in the analogous sense.

Swanton's original description of how *endoxa* could figure in the matter is so brief that I hesitate to say much about its viability⁴⁵². Swanton is not interested in meanings per se but in conceptions, and different conceptions may adjust *endoxa* to achieve coherence differently. As far as the account that I suggest goes, one might object that I fall victim to the first criticism as I push the problem even further away by positing agreement on a folk theory that is informed by *endoxa* as that which bring unity to different concept-uses instead of agreement on *endoxa*. I am not sure that is the case. On the one hand, assuming that “the descriptivist outlook” is sound, an essentially contested concept could be determined within a suitable theory from which the concept's peculiar characteristics follow, and that is all there is to it. On the other hand, if the descriptive outlook is not sound, people may still employ certain normative concepts with an intention to describe what they take to be the real, factual features of the world. They would thus be mistaken concerning what they are actually doing—for example, perhaps their judgments are merely expressive

conclude that the concepts' extensions do not have common members.” Yet, there is “nothing terribly profound” about the statement that a difference in intension is not a sufficient condition for a difference in extension, since many terms with different meanings (like ‘citizen,’ ‘mother’) might have common referents. (Rhodes 2000, 13.)

⁴⁵² See especially Swanton's discussion of a coherentist epistemology in connection to a distinction made between assertability conditions and truth conditions (Swanton 1985, 825–6). See also Andrew Mason's related discussion on a coherentist theory of justification (i.e., of beliefs), particularism, and intractable political and moral disagreement (Mason 1993, 42ff). Perhaps the lesson to be learnt, here and there, is that there are different kinds of coherentist theories that may form a part of the explanation of different types of disagreements, yet how they would amount to explaining the unity of conceptual disagreement is more difficult to see.

instead – but that would not amount to explaining essential contestability as an error committed by any one party at the level of first-order views. Be that as it may, one may further object to the presence of such a “theory” as a factor that affects how rival parties are employing the first-order concept, and it indeed may ultimately be a matter to be established by empirical means. I therefore grant that what I have presented concerning the folk theory’s role in essential contestability is conjectural (see also 18.5).

As to the second criticism, it has bite when it is assumed that the parties to a dispute argue over meanings while the referent is fixed with the help of *endoxa*. When it is further presumed that meanings in question are Fregean senses, options for a genuine and interesting conceptual dispute run out fast. What options are there in my account? The reference of a concept could be thought unified by virtue of being determined by the commonly acknowledged folk theory, and that reference can become a matter of controversy, in practice, when the theory underdetermines the referent while it is imperative to make up one’s mind. Yet here we are yet again where I left the discussion at the end of the previous section: a conceptual structure may admit a type of contestability but it does not really explain what makes it special or “essential” (17.6). That is why I would go a different way by holding that essential contestation does not concern picking the referent based on commonly agreed *endoxa*, but it is rather about what is attributed to objects under a given concept when informed by various *endoxa*. The essential contestation is about concept-formation, and thus a matter of pragmatics rather than semantics. This perspective makes it easier to incorporate various insights that relate to the characteristic pragmatic context of employing essentially contested concepts, like David Boromisza-Habashi’s observation that essentially contested concepts also function as discursive resources for positioning oneself or one’s group against rivals (Boromisza-Habashi 2010, 278; quoted in 12.3).

A decision-based reasonable disagreement characteristically involves a culturally bound topic. That disagreement has boundaries that form the zone of reasonable disagreement, and those boundaries are determined by views or uses of a concept that are admitted to the dispute. The zone of reasonable disagreement remains an area of both disagreement and agreement, or the area of uncertainty and the area of commitment, in which *endoxa* are appealed to because there is nothing firmer available. This also means that *endoxa* have a suggestive rather than determinative role to play in how the proper boundaries of essentially contested concepts are determined, objectively speaking, while individuals may reach personal conclusions of varying strength given their temperament, interests, aptitude, and other such factors. I seek to take the limited phenomenological and epistemological situation of disputants seriously, as I understand Gallie to have done as well. The thesis of essential contestedness aims to describe the elements that enable, rather than prevent, meaningful discussion and debate in certain areas of life (3.1). The idea of decision-based reasonable disagreement goes beyond Gallie’s original formulation while it still seeks to describe the context in which the kind of contestedness that Gallie describes

occurs. To be aware of the true nature of essential contestability is to acknowledge and understand the uncertainty of the situation in which the disputants find themselves.

18.2 Points (of view) to an essentially contested concept

This section is reserved for investigating the idea that one's point of view in employing a concept, or the concept's point or function, is essential for explaining the character of essentially contested concepts. I will discuss the issue rather selectively, and for two reasons. On the one hand, I try to avoid more general debates on concepts by focusing mostly on the secondary literature on Gallie; on the other hand, my specific aim is to introduce theoretical resources that I personally find useful in illuminating essential contestability. This serves to complement our knowledge of the issues that have been brought forward in connection to essential contestability, but it also leads towards a version of an essential contestability thesis that I personally prefer.

Let us start with two perspectives to conceptual inquiry by G. H. von Wright and Julius Kovesi. Von Wright (1993) tells us that we often end up hesitating in our conceptual investigations because we do not know the features that form the grounds, criteria, or standards for, or against, calling something 'x.' Nevertheless, as moral agents we need such grounds or standards for orienting ourselves in the world: when we shape our standards for judging things normatively differently – von Wright specifically refers to judgments of “good and bad and duty” – we shape our conceptual frame of moral judgments differently. Our particular judgments need not be different although they may be, yet our grounds basing the judgments would be different “and therewith their meaning.” In other words: “Our moral 'points of view' will be different.” (von Wright 1993, I: §3.) It appears that the criteria (or grounds, or standards) for calling something 'x' go hand in hand with a point of view, or even with a meaning; when the criteria change, so does the meaning. This bears close resemblance to the previous notion of a criterially governed concept (see 16.4). However, von Wright remarks that

The idea of the philosopher as a searcher of meanings should not be coupled with an idea or postulate that the searched entities actually *are there* – awaiting the vision of the philosopher (...) Philosophic reflexion on the grounds for calling a thing 'x' is challenged in situations when the grounds have not been fixed when there is no settled opinion as to what the grounds are. The concept still remains to be *moulded* and therewith its logical connexions with other concepts to be *established*. The words and expressions the use of which bewilder the philosopher are so to speak *in search of a meaning*. von Wright 1993, I: §3

Von Wright adds that “conceptual inquiries, which take the form of a moulding or shaping of concepts, are particularly suited for the treatment of problems in ethics and some related branches of philosophy (aesthetics, political philosophy)”

(ibid.). This has an unmistakable Galliean ring to it, and the perspective is especially apt when concepts under discussion are understood as solutions to a (philosophical) problem (see also 18.3; 18.5).

Another standpoint that I find particularly fruitful in the present connection is Julius Kovesi's (1967) view of moral reasoning as analogical rather than deductive. Yet, Kovesi corrects, we do not first have "certain paradigm cases that we know to be good or right, and then by analogy (...) work out what to do in similar cases." Rather, in elucidating the meaning of a moral notion we are looking for a common denominator or "that which brings a variety of things together as examples of the same thing," and Kovesi calls it a *formal element*. He is essentially arguing that "the process of finding the formal element is the process of finding what would or would not be instances of the same thing." It is reasonable to assume that the instances of any notion can be thought of only by the help of its formal element, and thus finding new instances is not something that takes place before discovering the formal element that one seeks. Instead, one can focus on the what the formal element should be *by virtue* of considering what would be regarded as instances of "the same something." (Kovesi 1967, 114–5; see also 16.4; cf. 17.6.) Kovesi later adds to the view by observing that

[t]he evaluation of particulars is possible not because we value something in so far as it falls under a description but because the description functions like a standard to which particulars approximate (...) The various particulars exemplify more or less what they are supposed to be under a certain description. It is by virtue of this fact that we can evaluate them. Kovesi 1967, 155

In Gallie's terms, when one describes a valued achievement, some particulars rather than others suggest themselves to him as proper instances of that achievement. Yet it is the description that determines how well each of the instances exemplify the achievement, i.e., which of the instances are greater or lesser achievements of that nature in comparison to others. This accords with how the criteria of essentially contested concepts that signify valued achievements pick out features that contribute to objects under evaluation that themselves are, or exemplify, the achievement in question (16.4; 17.2). It also makes sense of an apparent reflexivity of a normative concept, but without needing to assume that evaluation is something extra on the top of description (Kovesi 1967, 25), like Peter Ingram, for instance, does with his notion of evaluative contestation (Ingram 1985; or see 17.4). Evaluation does not manifest at the level of criteria; rather, it is embedded in one's moral point of view that seeks to find the formal element.

What I want to emphasize is that both Kovesi and von Wright understand the process in which one looks for criteria of 'x' to be an active one. Despite their differences, the conceptual boundaries are molded or shaped by one's judgment concerning which instances, and which features of those instances, the concept captures – either as a meaning of a word or as a formal element of a notion. One searches for that which unifies different proposed instances, but it is one's point of view that gathers things together for different purposes. Sometimes one merely seeks to describe, in which case one forms a concept from a descriptive

point of view, and sometimes one seeks to prescribe or evaluate, in which case one may form a concept from a moral point of view. There is no limit to the number of concepts thus conceived, but not all of them are conceptualized equal. Some can be better than others for some purpose or from some perspective: a concept can have a *point* or a *function*, and it may be possible to compare different uses by taking that as a standard.

I turn next to discuss another aspect of William Connolly's (1973/1993; see also 17.5) essential contestability thesis, or the notion that a description (always) characterizes a situation from some point of view by calling attention to features that are important for a certain purpose. The mere similarity between elements is not enough. Instead, there are concepts that "have the contours they do in part because of the point of view from which they are formed," and thus they cannot be adequately understood until the connection between the point of the concept and the conditions of its application is grasped. A concept's characteristics and the point are "dialectically related." For example, it is from a certain point of view that something is deemed as excusable, and from that point of view mistake (as in "It was just a mistake!") is formed. When an act meets the specifications of mistake, "we say we have a reason to excuse the agent when he makes a mistake." An adequate understanding of a concept comes down to having "rationale both for using the concept and for adjusting its criteria to meet those new and unforeseen circumstances that persistently arise in a changing society." Analogously, if one failed to understand that a kettle is for boiling water, one might fail to apply the concept to other receptacles for cooking that are of different size, shape, color *et cetera*. (Connolly 1993, 23, 26; cf. 27–8.) We could say that the concept's point or function is the role it plays for us – the point of MISTAKE is to excuse others – while the rationale is the justification for employing the concept in accordance with its point in various circumstances. Connolly's views are heavily influenced by Kovesi, whose approach it is to always ask what is the point of the concept that we are using, or for what reason(s) did we form that concept (Tapper 2012, 171).

With respect to a form of life, concepts can have functions that go beyond specific individual or group purposes as such. Many of them can be understood as solutions-concepts (14.2). FOOD is connected to our basic need to be nourished, it is its function or its purpose in our lives. This is true also in the case of babies and other mammals who suck nipple or teat without explicitly cognizing there to be a problem to be solved⁴⁵³. Kenneth Ehrenberg states that despite the heavy contestation among their different possible uses, essentially contested concepts "must be those concepts" that "are still of high value in ordering and explaining the world" (Ehrenberg 2011, 212). Food is one such concept, surely, but we do not typically consider it essentially contested. Instead, our focus is in those concepts that are formed more clearly from a moral, or more broadly, normative, point of view⁴⁵⁴.

⁴⁵³ The example is from Ewin 2012 in connection to Kovesi 1967; see esp. 47–9.

⁴⁵⁴ For an opposite perspective, see *Political Concepts: A Reconstruction* (Oppenheim 1981) in which Felix Oppenheim, who Mario Ricciardi calls "a staunch opponent of 'essential

That focus is shared by Connolly as well, and his discussion of DEMOCRACY helps in demarcating essentially contested concepts from other highly important concepts. By calling a society ‘undemocratic,’ we are characterizing a practice or society critically from a normative “angle of vision” or

...we are describing it from the vantage point of accepted standards of political participation, debate and accountability (...) The dialectical relation between the criteria of a concept and its point or purpose in our language is exactly what makes the notions ‘democracy’ and ‘politics’ the subject of intense disputes. Connolly 1993, 27–8

In the case of ‘food,’ there is no similar dialectical relation between the criteria of a concept and its point, at least not characteristically. Applying DEMOCRACY triggers a need for a normative judgment, which is then made with the help of related moral and political standards and principles⁴⁵⁵. This can be considered a part of a super-criterial agreement on how ‘democracy’ is correctly used (cf. Waldron 1994, 526–9). It resembles agreement in place regarding vague concepts or terms: although people may disagree on how tall a basketball player should be in order to be properly called ‘tall,’ it is understood by all competent language-users that ‘tall’ invites judgment.

In the current picture, ‘democracy’ invites a value-judgment, or assessment from a moral point of view. Connolly’s interest is in how political concepts/terms are characteristically employed: “to get others to accept my account of an appraisive concept is to implicate them in *judgments* to which I am committed and to encourage political activity congruent with those commitments” (Connolly, 1993, 30). This means that appraisive concepts, like DEMOCRACY, are used honorifically in their pragmatic context (e.g., as part of a political struggle), i.e., by aiming to turn attention to some features rather than others (Weitz 1956, 31–32; or see above). But could ‘democracy’ be used solely descriptively? I see no reason why not. A thesis of essential contestability does not need to commit to the position that certain terms cannot be used descriptively, or from a descriptive point of view. It is enough to state that any given use of a suitable expression can be interpreted from a moral or appraisive point of view. For the thesis that I personally advocate—the one that understands disputes involving essentially contested concepts as decision-based reasonable disagreements (18.1)—the potential of contestation is enough to set things in motion.

On his part, Connolly understands the concept’s capacity to be applied in new instances as the consequence of it having a moral point. New and unforeseen situations may require one to modify or revise the criteria of the concept, yet its point can stay the same. Thus understood criteria have a looser relation to the concept than the basic account of criterially governed concepts would allow: the

contestability” (Ricciardi 2001, 42), tries to explicate an unambiguous set of neutral and descriptive operational concepts for social sciences. For a brief criticism of Oppenheim’s method that is related to current concerns, see Kristjánsson (1995, 74–5; cf. MacIntyre 1973, 8).

⁴⁵⁵ A similar possibility is raised, with variations, by Waldron (1994, 527), Halpin (2001, 161–2), and Besson (2005, 82).

criteria are all there is to the concept's application (16.4). For Connolly, an appraisive concept like DEMOCRACY is "understood by exploring the connection between its criteria and its point," and it displays "over a normal range of cases a close connection between its criteria and its normative point." Both the point and the criteria are analytic to, or constitutive of, the concept. If the point were to be "exorcised" from the concept completely, it would become "idle" or purposeless. And if the close connection were denied by the beliefs and deeds of people in a sufficient number of cases over a relatively long period of time, "the concept itself would either fall into disuse or undergo fundamental change." (Connolly 1993, 29, 32.)

Both the criteria and functions of these concepts are conventional and also sanctioned as such; Connolly even states that the conventional judgments are "embodied in the concept" (ibid., 31). Especially, the notion of the point appears to reference to how terms/concepts are used in a society in a somewhat fixed and persistent way. In fact, without connection to common language use or shared moral notions that reflect various social and moral concerns that are (relatively) fixed between t_0 and t_1 it would be somewhat nonsensical to speak of the dialectical relation between the criteria of a concept and its point. The (moral) point of view *informs* us of how the concept is to be formed, and the same can perhaps be said about the point or purpose some term has in our language. But informing is not the same thing as *determining*, and here the previously discussed view of incompleteness of moral notions becomes relevant (see 17.5). Connolly now conceives of many, though not all, political concepts as if they were similarly incomplete. Although the normative point or the purpose of appraisive, political concepts is directly connected to their criteria, the connection is not so close that it would not allow considerable variation (see also Connolly in 17.5). One might say that Connolly makes room for contestability within a concept by stretching the concept so that it allows debate over specific application. We have encountered this general idea in many different forms. Importantly, though, Connolly anchors one "stretched" end of the concept, i.e., its point, to a communal sense of the concept's evaluative purpose.

Both the point and the criteria are contingent in addition to constituting the appraisive concept, which becomes clear with the following example. Let us assume that some people become convinced that active participation in group decision processes in circumstances of increasing scarcity leads to the division of political parties into uncompromising warring bands; and that the specific, modern way of organizing work that is necessary for the survival of mass societies develops a lower class that cannot intelligibly participate in political life. As our conceptions of democracy are predicated on a quite different (partly theoretical) understanding, this new historical situation might be enough to "sever the prevailing connection between the criteria and the normative import of 'democracy'." Connolly points out that it is not possible to predict whether the selected course of action would be to revise the criteria of the concept to preserve its point (e.g., by introducing civility/competence tests for citizens), to revise the point (e.g., "democracy" becomes a condition to be avoided), or leave the criteria,

the point, and the theory within which the concept is embedded⁴⁵⁶ intact (the whole complex becomes anachronistic or irrelevant to the present time). (Connolly 1993, 31.)

With the help of the example, we can better see why Connolly assumes that advocating for changes in the concept's criteria means implicating others in one's judgments. As Freedden observes, one function of characteristically political concepts is to "inject order and meaning into observed or anticipated sets of political phenomena." This way, "political concepts create, through their 'topography,' the reality to which we relate and attribute significance." (Freedden 1994, 52, 57.) From the standpoint of Connolly's example, opening the debate on the normative point or the criteria of DEMOCRACY is to shape the political topography to match one's (partly theoretical) judgments better.

A concept's point can be understood as an independent criterion by which competing answers can be judged (see also Kristjánsson 1995, 83⁴⁵⁷), which is especially convenient when seeking to clear room for contestability. If there is a point to the concept, one may disagree about its criteria while referencing that point and while arguing for one's preferred use. However, if the (moral) point of view were subtracted, one would lose sight of why certain things are combined under the rubric of one concept (Connolly 1993, 29–30) and likely also how that concept applies to new and unforeseen situations. Such a point, or categorization from a point of view, thus holds a complex concept together. It is the factor that determines whether a given combination of ingredients is over- or under-aggregated (with the world that sets limits for shared representations) (see also Collier et al. 2006, 217; cf. 5.2). Furthermore, what is taken as the rationale for using the concept in the changing circumstances becomes also the standard for evaluating its more specific uses which themselves are particular adaptations to the prevailing circumstances. If an essentially contested concept displays a close connection between its criteria and its normative point, like Connolly asserts, it is the relative closeness of the connection that makes it sensible to speak of a conceptual change of *a* concept instead of there simply being multiple concepts (e.g., with different sets of criteria at t_0 and t_1) under the same name. Conceptual change is thus understood as adaptation to perceived circumstances, and thus not all concept-users may undergo change at the same time, or ever, since that depends on how they conceive of the issue from their particular point of view, or particular (marginal) appraisive situation as Gallie would have it (cf. 11.4).

⁴⁵⁶ At times, Connolly refers to concepts as situated in theories, but I assume this admits a folk theory (18.1) or a very general understanding concerning a way of life in addition to more specific collections of statements. This adds a slight complication, but here I simply bracket that issue.

⁴⁵⁷ Kristjánsson himself reserves this sort of "objective control to the inquiry" to those concepts that have a clear common core which allows decidability between borderline cases, and he explicitly contrasts this with essential contestability, in the case of which "different interpretations share only a vague common core." This is because it is assumed that the parties to a dispute cannot change this formal element. An essential contestability thesis does not therefore afford the sense of objectivity or rational decidability. (Kristjánsson 1995, 82–83.) This is too hasty, I think.

Matthieu Queloz (2019) observes that point-based explanations have gained more ground in recent years, in analyzing internally diverse concepts that elude sharp definitions⁴⁵⁸. However, he states that the talk of ‘the point of a concept’ is “multiply ambiguous” between the four senses: practical, evaluative, animating, and inferential. (Queloz 2019, 1–2, 9–10.) I will now present these senses briefly along with some more specific observations concerning essential contestability, after which I take another look at Connolly’s thesis.

The first sense is *the practical point of a concept*, or “the salient practical consequence of using a concept at all, i.e., the *salient useful difference* which the concept actually makes to the lives of concept-users.” In this sense, the concept in question is bound up with one’s interests to make judgments in a certain way at all, and not solely because one would arrive to true judgments by employing the concept. Queloz cashes out ‘usefulness’ in terms of how well the concept serves the needs and interests of concept-users and ‘saliency’ in terms of the particular explanatory purposes of the theorists in any given case. A useful difference is salient when use of a concept produces a causal effect, in a conceptual community, that is worth singling out by a theorist. (Queloz 2019, 4–5.)

If essential contestability does enrich particular activities or practices (see e.g., 9.2; 11.2; 12.3), it is a salient practical consequence that may operate behind the backs of concept-users as it does not necessarily serve specific personal or group needs. The awareness of disputants is not required since saliency is grasped theoretically, or from an external perspective (13.2), with the help of an explanatory framework. From their own internal perspective, disputing parties may have other practical reasons for why they think that it is useful to employ the concept in a certain way, or why they contest others’ uses (cf. animating point later). These reasons can include more general concerns as well. Still, the practical point with the present notion of saliency directs attention towards sociological explanations (cf. Queloz 2019, 6). *If and when* Condition (VII) is understood as following directly from (I) (9.1), one may confuse an individual function of a concept with its function at a more general or collective level. Gallie arguably commits the latter sin, which appears to also be the source of many awareness-related problematics. Gallie’s thesis certainly lacks the proper sociological grounds for why contestedness would lead to any kind of optimum development or enrichment.

The second sense is *the evaluative point of a concept*, or “the needs, interests, and values that together form an evaluative viewpoint which *informs* and is *betrayed* in the application of the concept.” Thick terms like ‘cruel’ and ‘virtuous’ are often mentioned in this context. When one grasps the evaluative point of a concept, one grasps the sort of evaluation on the part of the concept’s user that goes into the correct application of the concept. However, to speak of an evaluative point of a concept is somewhat misleading because one is actually

⁴⁵⁸ Queloz provides the reader with a wealth of literature references that I will not repeat here. For the specifics, and for how the point-based explanation finds its place among other philosophical conceptions, see Queloz 2019.

dealing with a viewpoint as a set that consists of needs, interests, and values that informs the application of the concept or is betrayed in it. (Queloz 2019, 6–7.) Queloz’s conception squares nicely with my previous discussion of the complications regarding values and normative principles in connection to concepts (17.1).

The evaluative point of a concept corresponds seemingly well with Connolly’s moral point of view before. The crucial difference is that Connolly seems to understand it as the inseparable part of the concept while Queloz considers it—at most—an inseparable part of a concept’s overall application. Pertinently, even if there are values or normative principles involved, they do not have to form a part of the inherent structure of a concept. Queloz’s notion of evaluative point thus has the merit of being somewhat less controversial than Connolly’s view, and those content with a weakened essential contestability thesis (see 16.3), especially, might find it enough for their theoretical purposes. That being said, a dispute that is traceable only, or primarily, to the needs, values, and interests of which a normative point of view consists, is a practical or value-disagreement by default. Making a case for conceptual disagreement would require establishing a sufficiently intimate connection between the evaluative point and the concept-use, and that can be achieved in these terms only through the last two senses, strictly speaking. If the application of a certain conceptual content is intelligible solely by reference to the concept’s evaluative point, it may be better to view that as part of the salient inferential consequence of applying a concept (i.e., the dimension that is captured by the fourth sense).

The third sense is *the animating point of a concept*, or “the aim, goal, or ideal concept-users consciously pursue in applying the concept, and in terms of which concept-users make sense of the practice of using the concept.” Queloz observes that mastering games, like chess, “generally involves having a clear sense of what the game’s animating point is,” and that does not only mean the goal to win. Rather, one needs to realize that the victory is achieved, for example, by checkmating the king or scoring more goals than the opponent. For Queloz, this suggests “that for a concept to possess an animating point, it is a condition on counting as a competent participant in the practice that one [has] a fairly clear sense of what the animating point of the conceptual practice is.” As an example of a relevant theoretical view, Queloz presents Elizabeth Anderson’s conception that the point of equality is “to end oppression” and “to create a community in which people stand in relations of equality to others”⁴⁵⁹ (Anderson 1999, 288–89 cited in Queloz 2019, 8). With the present sense, it is sound to argue that “there are *some* concepts where the conscious aims, goals, or ideals of concept-users determine a task and thereby set a standard for the use of the concept to meet.” (Queloz 2019, 7–8.)

⁴⁵⁹ This appears similar to Gallie’s characterization of the elementary use of ‘democracy’ as an expression of “certain political aspirations (...) [that] are evidently centred in a demand for increased equality” (ECC 184; 11.3); not because of common reference to equality, but by understanding what goes on in terms of aims and ideals that form a part of what is understood to be at stake.

I dare say that the considerations related to a concept's animating point are just as important as, if not even more than, its evaluative point. Gallie's simple answer to the problem of conceptual confusion—rival parties are not confused because they believe that their team is playing better at the same game (ECC 175/PHU 164; 14.2)—attests to that. Given that the only provided criterion for appraising which concept-use is better than others is how the use sustains and develops the (original exemplar's) valued achievement (9.1), it is relatively straightforward to view essentially contested concepts as appraisable by a standard that is derived from the task determined by concept-users' aims, goals, or ideals. The animating part suggests that the participants are self-motivated, but I do not think that it needs to extend to the awareness of the true nature of dispute or to the supposed benefits of contestation (cf. 9.2). I will continue discussing the related matters after completing Queloz's typology of point-based explanations.

The fourth sense is *the inferential point of a concept*, or "the salient inferential consequence of applying a concept, that is, what properly and centrally follows from the fact that a concept's application conditions are satisfied." Applications have many inferential consequences, but here one should be mostly focused on a consequence "worth singling out for its explanatory value, a value it possesses because it ties in with the concerns of concept-users in a way in which other inferential consequences do not." That depends, in turn, on what explanatory interests and assumptions we bring to the concept. Grasping the inferential point is more straightforwardly constitutive of one's mastery of the concept than is the case with the other points. Queloz offers as an example that "if an exercise of public power was the result of a *democratic* decision, this means that it was to that extent *legitimate*." Another example is from Dummett: a pupil who tries to master VALIDITY has not managed to do so if he fails to grasp that an argument being valid is a reason to accept its conclusion if one accepts its premises. According to Dummett, it may be that the pupil has learned to classify arguments into valid and invalid ones akin to how one would classify poems into sonnets and non-sonnets; though in this particular case we should say that he has missed the point of how the distinction is made⁴⁶⁰.

Essentially contested concepts have inferential consequences, and complex (cluster) concepts presumably have quite varied consequences based on how the applicability of their criteria is determined in a given case. The explanatory interests and assumptions the concept-users bring into essentially contested concepts pertain to their character as valued achievements, and such interests and assumptions may depend at least partially on how the concepts' evaluative and animating points are understood⁴⁶¹. Perhaps this is the fashion in which

⁴⁶⁰ According to Queloz, Dummett discusses the matter in *Frege: Philosophy of Language*, New York: Harper and Row (1973, 454).

⁴⁶¹ The explanatory interests and assumptions that rival parties bring into the concept may certainly differ from how they are viewed by external parties, and this makes it possible for disputants to disagree over a concept, the inferential consequences of which might not be understood by the outside analyst who would not thus share the same concept, and neither could he offer an accurate analysis of what takes place between the disputants. For example,

positive valuation is meant to be baked into Gallie's live examples (e.g., ART, CHRISTIANITY) when they are used in the kind of way that Gallie is after. Furthermore, what Connolly says regarding the incomplete sharing of political and moral concepts (17.5) might be rephrasable in terms of the incomplete sharing of the salient inferential consequence of applying a concept. I do not think that Connolly would necessarily disagree assuming that the substance and points of emphasis would be retained.

In the same vein, although two persons may share the same descriptive criteria for categorizing things as 'socially just,' when one of them views social justice as detrimental to society and another disagrees, they do not appear to share the same concept. Here a point-based explanation in inferential terms naturally slides into an explanation in evaluative terms. The same goes for the possibility of describing what takes place in practical terms or by referencing what animates the concept-users, and the different explanations may utilize theoretical knowledge concerning social particulars or reference normative principles. This way it is relatively easy to make sense of how disputes involving "essentially contested concepts" could be both conceptual and substantive: although it is possible to make analytical distinctions between these dimensions, they tend to crisscross and slide into another as far as functions in which the concepts are employed are concerned. If that is the case, examining or organizing the criteria of a concept in their sense as recognitors or indicators (see 16.4) does little to reveal it.

The present examination of point-based explanations gives further guidance with respect to how essentially contested concepts are employed and formed from a certain point of view. Notwithstanding Connolly's report that the concepts that are formed from the moral point of view "describe while conveying the commitments of those who share them" (Connolly 1993, 6), the notion is left unspecified⁴⁶², and it is too indiscriminating to be useful in clarifying what is special in essential contestability. Although the moral point of view appears similar to the idea that there are concepts that are both world-guided and action-guiding because of how they combine descriptive and evaluative aspects (Williams 1985, ch. 7-8; Queloz 2019, 4; see also 17.4), Connolly lumps various sorts of normative considerations together, which results in too coarse a notion. His democracy-example further implies that a concept's point is merely about how one values some combination of criteria, yet his general talk of the rationale for grouping certain things together (that would be lost when the moral point of view is subtracted) suggests a more substantive guidance. Which is it, and on what grounds? As it stands, it is not clear what in the rationale for employing essentially contested concepts actually contributes to their essential contestability.

The possible argument that a point of view as the evaluative point in its present sense is necessary for the mastery of an appraisive concept is difficult to

the analyst may end up overlooking disputing parties' (effective) animating concern which may result in over- or undervaluing the saliency of certain inferential consequences in comparison to others.

⁴⁶² In fact, neither does Kovesi, originally (Kovesi 1967, 145; see also Ewin 2012, 44ff).

make convincingly⁴⁶³. I tend to agree with Queloz (2019, 10ff) who argues that neither grasping the practical point nor the evaluative point of the concept is strictly speaking necessary in order to master the concept as this would mean to “over-intellectualize” the concept or its use. ‘Over-intellectualization’ is not a pejorative expression; the aim is rather to simply say that the evaluative and practical point may demand (theoretical) reflective awareness at a different level than what it is to rudimentarily grasp and employ the concept. This is more easily seen in the case of the practical point, as it tends to explain a concept’s application “sociologically.” In any case, if grasping a concept’s evaluative point requires “inhabiting or imaginatively occupying the evaluative point of view from which the concept’s extension can be made out,” it too appears to suggest “something more cognitive and reflective than what is actually at stake.” (ibid., 11.) Ergo, disagreement over a concept’s practical or evaluative point is carried out at a different level of reflection than that involving a concept’s animating and/or inferential point. Concept-users may share a concept’s evaluative point, but they do so by sharing the concerns that give the concept its point rather than grasping something that inherently belongs to the concept’s inherent structure that supplies it with its point.

It is implausible to require grasping *all* possible inferences of a given concept for its mastery; only those that are the most important are required. Mastery is not an all-or-nothing matter *in this sense*; rather, it is context-sensitive while also admitting different levels of competence. Saying that much does not really undermine the premise of the first challenge (15.1) since a concept’s essential contestability would certainly be among the concept’s most important inferential consequences, in which case those mastering the same concept would have to agree that it is all right to employ that concept differently. But I am more interested in Queloz’s additional remark that

if it is a condition on counting as a competent participant in a conceptual practice that one have a fairly clear sense of the animating point of the conceptual practice, then someone who wanted to master the relevant concept would necessarily have to grasp its point in that sense. When application of a concept is guided and motivated by an aim in this way, someone who failed to grasp what that aim was would be as far from genuinely using the concept as someone who moved the pieces on a chess board without grasping the aim of the game would be from genuinely playing chess. Queloz 2019, 11-12

This offers us a new perspective on what brings unity to the ways essentially contested concepts are employed and mutually contested. While sharing the inferential point, i.e., the salient inferential consequence(s), of a concept to a sufficient degree appears to be necessary in the case of all concepts, sharing the

⁴⁶³ The mastery is a highly relevant element since there is often nothing special in disagreement between concept-users, concept-wise, if not all have mastered the concept under dispute. The situation would then be comparable to the previous example of the pupil who fails to master VALIDITY, but the pupil would now claim that others are wrong in applying the concept with the assumption that an argument being valid is a reason to accept its conclusion if one accepts its premises.

animating point of the concept—rather than its evaluative or practical point—is especially elementary in the type of essential contestation that Gallie describes.

A reasonable peer disagreement is understood to take place between persons of equal competence who also share the same evidence (11.4). In the light of the present discussion, a decision-based reasonable disagreement over an essentially contested concept can be seen to take place between competent participants in a conceptual practice. I now assume that a hallmark of the competence is grasping the animating point of the concept, and such competence is determined by those engaging in the conceptual practice and, indeed, the decision-based reasonable disagreement. Under the assumption that grasping a concept requires employing it competently in a conceptual practice, sharing or denoting the same concept in a genuine dispute (14.1; 14.2) now partly depends on acknowledging the animating point of that concept in connection to the conceptual practice. I do not mean to say that the disputants would not be concerned with the concept's evaluative point, or that the contestation could not extend over each of the four dimensions that Queloz identifies. It is rather the case that essential contestation "is animated by participant concern regarding the communal norms that enable and constrain the use of essentially contested concepts" (Boromisza-Habashi 2010, 278). The concern with appraisiveness (4.1) or optimum development (9.1) in the case of essentially contested concepts is not just about assessing what is good or what is bad by itself.

Evaluative stances or attitudes are numerous, and they can be relatively detached, but there are probably only a handful of things at the time that animate a person to strive towards as aims, goals, or ideals. When they become a quintessential part of a conceptual practice, they come to guide and regulate proper ways of applying the corresponding concept. Gallie's concept-users that engage in a common conceptual practice are animated by the same general concern. That is *not* the contestation of a concept; their goal *is* to sustain and develop the valued achievement to the optimum while contestation is an ineliminable consequence of their goal⁴⁶⁴.

Essential contestation is now specified as belonging to a certain kind of conceptual practice (or, of using the concept in a specific way) rather than as a necessary characteristic of a concept (or, as part of the concept's inherent structure). As to the desiderata of a concept-centered thesis, the current interpretation replaces *Concept-Structure* with *Concept-Function* while retaining *Concept-Object*: the concept is still object of essential contestation, but now within

⁴⁶⁴ Gallie's Condition (V) states that to use an essentially contested concept means to use it against other uses, and to recognize that one's own use of it has to be maintained against these other uses (ECC 172/PHU 161; or see 7.1). Interestingly, Mark Criley glosses Condition (V) as "[c]ommunity members must use C "aggressively and defensively" (Criley 2007, 23). In the present context, there is a practice of using the concept, and each competent participant to that practice, or in a relevant community, understands that contestation is the way to steer what is considered valuable and how the concept is used in the future, which can be done by contesting the matter. The corresponding sense of 'essentiality' is *Essential Contestation* (12.3). In addition, Michael Freeden frames contestability as effectively ineliminable in reference to "the thought-practice we are identifying" (Freeden 2004, 5). Freeden's 'thought-practice' looks to be very similar to what Queloz (2019) calls "conceptual practice."

a certain kind of conceptual practice without which it could not be essentially contested. It has the merit of not identifying contestability as a core or essential characteristic of a concept thus avoiding the previously discussed objection about ascribing contestability as *de dicto* or *de re* modal property to the concept (15.3; Newey 2001). Those disputes in which the contested concept has a clear interpretive function will emerge as a paradigmatic instance of a conceptual plateau that admits the right kind of contestation⁴⁶⁵ (see 18.3). This also means affirming that essential contestation is not a global phenomenon in the sense that each and every use of terms like 'democracy' or 'social justice' would always be similarly contested, though they may be 'contestable' in a one-way-street manner, and thus the danger of being sucked into a dispute that bears the hallmarks of essential contestability is constantly present.

When accepting or internalizing the goal(s) prescribed by a concept's animating point is needed for sharing and contesting the same concept in the fashion that is characteristic to essential contestability, only those who grasp the point can engage in genuine contestation over the concept. For example, think of the difference between what believers and non-believers may try to achieve through contesting CHRISTIANITY, or how to live a Christian life. The point is not to argue that RELIGION, or CHRISTIANITY, or the concept of "adherence to, or participation in, a particular religion" (ECC, 180) could not be employed descriptively or that all possible uses of terms 'Christianity' or 'religion' bring about endless and irresolvable disputes. Gallie's confusing terminology aside, the thesis of essential contestability can be understood to claim that *when* a contested issue is held in high regard by at least one of the disputants who has a vested interest in how the matter is conceptualized, and *when* a dispute involves significant practical adherences and commitments that are shaped and affected by the goal of the common conceptual practice, *then* an ensuing dispute has a potential to be irresolvable and endless as a quite practical matter⁴⁶⁶. In the next section I am going to elaborate on what particular forms that type of dispute could take in order for the contestation that is involved to count as essential.

In conclusion, essentially contested concepts are most often understood to be appraisive in the sense that they are evaluative, yet the way they are disputed cannot really be properly grasped without paying attention to rival parties' practical adherences. This can be a source of some theoretical confusion. I agree with Kenneth Ehrenberg according to whom "the point of characterizing a concept as essentially contested is to help explain its [first-order] use" (Ehrenberg 2011, 210). The current discussion of the different points behind using a concept in a particular way should be viewed in that light: when a concept is characterized as essentially contested, one draws attention to a specific way of

⁴⁶⁵ It would be completely wrong to say that Connolly overlooks this aspect (see e.g., Connolly 1993, 35–41), but I wish to argue that his notion of moral point of view is too coarse to capture it precisely enough.

⁴⁶⁶ The conditional "when... then" formulation coheres with Gallie's choice to speak of the possibility that there are essentially contested concepts rather than it being necessarily the case (9.1). For a variety of related perspectives and standpoints, see 12.2 and 12.3.

using the (first-order) concept, a usage that meets adequately enough with predetermined conditions. A consequence of distinguishing essentially contested concepts from other concepts based on their point/function rather than substance/topic is that there could be, for instance, SOCIAL JUSTICE₁ that meets with the use that is characteristic to essential contestability while also allowing the concepts SOCIAL JUSTICE_n that differ in their function. In this picture, 'essentially contested concept' refers to a certain way of evaluating and disputing rather than being an apt description of a certain fundamental type of concepts. Whether this makes 'essentially contested concept' a term of art or not is a matter of perspective (see also 18.5); it is a highly theoretical term nonetheless, and it should not be used lightly.

A point-based explanation that strives to portray how a concept is employed *as* an essentially contested concept is better able to incorporate the adherences within a concept-centered thesis by referencing a concept's animating point. This move avoids the need to suppose, controversially, that disputants' evaluations that reflect their often very deep normative commitments are somehow incorporated in the concept as part of its analytic. It might be difficult to get reliable information concerning the point(s) behind any given concept-use, but the alternative is not any better since all information we have concerning the character of concepts is based on how they are supposedly employed. A broadly functional explanation avoids making as many ontological assumptions about the nature of concepts as an explanation that focuses on their structure and organization would make. The functional account allows us to see the concepts as multiply usable context-dependent entities, and thus as similar to how they are often portrayed in contemporary studies on concepts.

18.3 Essential contestation in relation to activities and practices

In the previous section, I examined what follows from conceiving essentially contested concepts as ineliminably tied to the point of view from which they are formed. I settled for the functional framework in which the status of essentially contested concepts is described and explicated with the help of a point-based perspective to how they are employed. Now, I will examine and elucidate the nature of the conceptual practice within which essential contestation that is traceable to a specific kind of use takes place. In addition, I seek to describe what makes the contestation essential and, as such, of required strength (15.3). Both aims require a closer examination of the role broad human activities and practices play in essential contestability.

I start with Michael Freeden's newer proposal (Freeden 2004) that certain concepts are properly called "effectively" rather than "essentially" contested. The idea is to remove essential contestability "from the arena of inconclusive philosophical logic games" by anchoring contestability outside the essence of a concept. Instead, the concept's contestability is a property of political discourse, and the concept is effectively contestable as part of, or in relation to that discourse.

Such contestability is now considered “effectively ineliminable” in reference to the thought-practice one is identifying. If the contestability were to be somehow eliminated, the political discourse under scrutiny would be comprehensively changed; we would not recognize it as a political discourse. (Freeden 2004, 5, 7.) As I understand it, Freeden’s conception is built from three parts; a concept, a specific discourse in which the concept is employed, and a thought-practice within which the concept is employed as part of a specific discourse. The political discourse of which Freeden speaks is the thought-practice with temporal continuity that enables identifying its persisting salient characteristics as its constituents, among them contestability.

Sami Syrjämäki (2011) surmises that the distinction might make it clearer that “concepts have existence in their use and not as autonomous agents,” still, he does not consider the distinction either necessary or “very important, since the result is the same: there is no definitive, universal conclusion to be reached when arguing about essentially contested concepts” (Syrjämäki 2011, 140). This appears to be pretty much Freeden’s goal: the idea of essential contestability that is useful in political studies would now be saved from the clutches of philosophers without changing the conclusion that affirms a particularly deep-seated and intractable contestability. Freeden’s effective ineliminability matches, though, with one previously discussed sense of ‘essentially,’ i.e., *Essential Contestation* (12.3). What is the effective ineliminability of contestability other than the essentiality of contestability in relation to the discourse and the thought-practice in question? One should also be wary of how the contestability as the essential feature of the thought-practice translates to effective ineliminability of contestability at the level of concepts. Although Freeden does not necessarily confuse words and concepts, his notion does little to alleviate the worry that oftentimes one is simply dealing with different meanings that should be disambiguated to separate concepts⁴⁶⁷.

Kenneth Ehrenberg (2011) makes a related observation in his discussion of essential contestability and LAW: although “we might be prepared to say that to dispute what counts as law is to engage in (the practice of) law, we would generally not say that to dispute about the *nature* of law is to engage in law (*pace* Dworkin).” If there are no different levels of generality about what may be taken as LAW, it is more sensible to think of LAW as essentially contested. However, while some uses of LAW *might* be usefully considered as essentially contested, that is not the case with the most abstract LAW. To simply state that LAW is an (interpretive or) essentially contested concept is to paper over less value-laden uses of the concept, and it is not useful to pretend that all different uses are advocating value-laden conceptions. (Ehrenberg 2011, 225, 229–30.) Those

⁴⁶⁷ See e.g., Freeden 2003, 52–3 in which Freeden appears to equate essential contestability and the already established polysemy of language without actually paying any attention to possible conceptual confusions. Even Freeden’s structural argument for (essential) contestability is suspect to the same worry (see 17.5). John Gunnell (2014, 486) presents almost the exact same critical point, minus the reference to essential contestability, against Freeden very clearly in his book review of Freeden’s *The Political Theory of Political Thinking: The Anatomy of a Practice* (2013).

thought-practices that characteristically involve interpretive judgments appear to involve some sort of contestability as their essential feature. For instance, questions like “How should law be interpreted (in this particular case)?” invite one to consider what law is, and what it should be, and judging the matter this or that way in any given instance does not determine the nature of the general category, LAW, at all levels of abstraction.

It should be noted that Freeden’s view allows multiple concepts to be effectively contestable within a thought-practice (of politics). One’s judgment regarding a given concept does not necessarily affect how the overall thought-practice should be viewed, or the relation between the concept and the thought-practice is no longer one of direct pairing as is the case with LAW from a certain perspective (see above). One’s mode of judging within the thought-practice is broadly reflexive (17.4), but it is not necessary for a concept to signify the practice directly – unless the concept in question is POLITICAL/POLITICS in which case the above type of confusion is possible. This sense of the thought-practice is similar to the one I am after in the following discussion of how activities and practices relate to essential contestation. Unlike Freeden, I have no intention of losing the philosophical baggage; I rather try to work around it.

To show how essentially contested concepts are employed in connection to a practice or activity, I need to introduce their interpretive function. It is *a* function, albeit important, and I do not see a pressing need for defining any group of (lexical) concepts as interpretive by their nature (*contra*. Dworkin 2011, ch. 6–8). More specifically, by interpretiveness I refer to how certain contestable concepts which often describe various human activities, social practices, or perhaps institutions (e.g., LAW, ART) can be employed by people to understand themselves and what they do in addition to making sense of those activities and practices. They are *human* activities and *social* practices after all, and as such, reflexive. The interpretiveness of a practice, however, is not to be equated with the institutionalization of contestability. In practices like art, morality, and religion, “clashing views may be a fact of life, but the practices are not organised in order to provide an adequate response to these conflicts,” as Wibren van der Burg observes, and thus “understanding and dealing with these conflicts is not central to these practices” (van der Burg 2017, 242). That being said, it seems to me that dealing with the contestability that comes with drawing the boundaries of such practices, interpretively, is part of the human way of life as we know it. Such contestability is still essential, although not strictly localized to a relatively well-defined practice or activity.

Despite my misgivings about postulating interpretive concepts as a clearly delineated group with their own set of characteristics, like Ronald Dworkin does in *Justice for Hedgehogs* (2011), I find his account of interpretation process illuminating with respect to essential contestability. Dworkin introduces three stages of interpretation as follows:

We interpret social practices, first, when we individuate those practices: when we take ourselves to be engaged in legal rather than literary interpretation. We interpret, second, when we attribute some package of purposes to the genre or subgenre we

identify as pertinent, and, third, when we try to identify the best realization of that package of purposes on some particular occasion. Dworkin 2011, 131

In an interpretive community, the first stage generally requires most agreement and the second stage more than the third; but how much agreement is necessary, or how much divergence is possible, to (still) sustain the practice can be discovered only after the fact. The limits of toleration can be determined “only by judging whether some particular practice of agreement and disagreement remains fruitful or runs into argumentative sand.” Interpretation is importantly a social phenomenon, and we can interpret in our typical manner “only because there are practices or traditions of interpretation we can join.” The interpreters interpret a larger practice as they interpret a specific instance that falls within the practice, even if they are not aware it is what is taking place. Virtually echoing Gallie, Dworkin reminds the reader that a “judgment that a particular interpretation of a particular object or event best realizes a practice’s value is always (...) a very complex claim, which of course adds to its inherently controversial character.” This is because interpretations or judgments always draw from a set or package of inarticulate assumptions and background convictions and thus the point of interpretation in a genre cannot be reduced to “a single crisp maxim” without obliterating what it tries to capture. (Dworkin 2011, 130–2.) These points find their proper place in Dworkin’s general account of interpretation, but they certainly pertain to his interpretive concepts as well, the concepts whose “correct use is a matter of interpretation, and people who use them disagree about what the best interpretation is” (ibid., 120).

Gallie’s and Dworkin’s views are very similar. In *ART*, Gallie contends that one inevitably must speak of art in general terms that reflect one’s attitudes towards art as a whole, otherwise the field of the discussion cannot be understood (cf. 11.2). Gallie is especially interested in art-criticism which he seems to view either as an activity that falls within a general artistic activity or, perhaps more plausibly, as a practice that tries to make sense of, or interpret, artistic achievements that spring from various sub-practices and genres of art, or “the arts,” like painting, sculpture *et cetera*. The implication is that *ART* is needed so that specific judgments concerning the arts are intelligible or shareable as *ART* provides sense and point to what is discussed, criticized, or contested (in art-criticism regarding all matters art). Michael Stokes observes that

At a higher level of generality, Dworkin’s theory of interpretive practices in which the practice has a point or rationale which is used to determine the rules of the practice in contested cases can be seen as an application of Gallie’s ideas to social institutions (...) Interpretive practices could with equal accuracy be called essentially contested practices. Stokes 2007, 690n24

In fact, Gallie himself “applies his own ideas” to social institutions in much the same way, which is shown most clearly in Gallie’s response to one contemporary critic, David Harrah. Noting “the colossal diversity of the activities to be included under the term ‘scientific,’ Gallie clarifies that he earlier (Gallie 1957) wanted to claim that “a piece of work can be judged to be good or genuine science only by

(at least implicit) reference to the main scientific tradition which lies behind it and which it represents even as it advances – and in advancing no doubt in a way alters – that tradition.” The standards for judging which are the relevant scientific values in a given case “have been progressively revealed in and through a relevant part of our scientific tradition.” (Gallie 1959, 239–40.) The interpretative aspect is clearly present, here, and this is particularly noteworthy since, in *PHU*, Gallie entertains the thought that SCIENCE is essentially contested as well (compare *PHU* 156 with 190). Gallie also directly refers to genre here and there, and he appears to consider it interchangeable with (a particular playing) style (of an artificial team) (*ART* 113–4; Gallie 1957, 134).

More generally, for Gallie, it is historical understanding that enables perceiving the importance of features of an institution (*PHU* 130ff; see also Gallie 1957, 139), and how one may thereby arrive at a better position to defend the institutions not only against attacks by others but also to “defend and discuss and reaffirm them *to ourselves*, to our critical perplexed selves” (*ibid.*, 139). The interpretive aspect is thus strongly present especially as a form of historically oriented introspection. The notion of contestability and Dworkin’s idea of interpretive concepts mirror each other to some extent, although the contestability view may be even more encompassing (see Besson 2005, 71). Most prominently among the differences, Dworkin seeks to show that right answers to normative questions are more than possible, even if they could be exceedingly difficult to come by. I think that many proponents of an essential contestability thesis would also acknowledge the importance of striving towards what one judges the best (see also Dworkin 2011, 126), but they would probably either deny or be highly skeptical of Dworkin’s conjecture regarding the unity of value.

When essentially contested concepts are employed in connection to participatory social practices and activities, they become interpretive: they are employed by people to understand themselves and practices in which they engage. Norman Care (1973) examines the idea that we may, as participants in social life, establish particular conceptualizations through institutionalized argument, debate, and conflict. *Our* decisions ensuing from such social debate are time- and circumstance-bound, or “subject to the shifting sands of interests and expectations, ideology and custom,” and our conceptualizations cannot ever transcend the particular circumstances of *our* social life. (Care 1973, 15; 13.2.) Agreement on how to use a concept is possible, but such closure may be merely practical or temporal by its nature as contestation could break out anew at any time in the future (12.4). I now will examine how far the idea of a connection between social practices and the interpretive function of essentially contested concepts can be extended.

According to Care, one may contest the character or boundaries of the practice or institution in which one also partakes; depending on the circumstances, one might want to revise, change, or altogether abolish it. The arguments produced to that effect are logically posterior to our being able to identify the institution or practice in question for what it is, or at least for what we take it to be [see also Ricciardi 2000, 46–7]. That suggests relatively stable or

uncontested applicability of at least some of our basic social concepts, which, in turn, renders the assumption of a very deep and pervasive contestability at least questionable.⁴⁶⁸ (cf. Care 1973, 16–8.) According to Care, the needed stability for the application of basic social concepts is provided by “a group of minimal, noncontroversial truisms about persons and their environment” although he does not elaborate on the matter much. Based on his brief discussion of H.L.A. Hart’s views on the matter, it is clear that Care considers our central social practices and institutions, like the legal system and the economic system, to be fixed by some basic general facts that both identify the problem or the set of problems and posit the practice/institution as a way to solve the issue. In this manner, the “institutionalized debates and arguments about the character of our institutions and practices take place within a framework of [such] social concepts.” (ibid., 18.)

If Care’s view is accepted as it stands, there appears to be little room, if any, for the most profound kind of contestability that could unsettle the basic concepts which we use to frame and order our social life. Care himself is mostly interested in social scientific concepts, and thus his standpoint does not cover all the ways in which essential contestability could manifest in relation to concepts, practices, and problems that thus conceptualized practices aim to solve. In any case, the absence of contestability in the case of some basic concepts need not be a problem: disagreement does not have to be taken to mean the absence of any kind of consensus (Besson 2005, 19), in general, and neither does essential contestation have to imply disagreement over everything conceivable. It has also been argued that a realist conception of the substratum underlying various categorizations – by particular cultures, for instance – is what makes those conceptual differences meaningful, and thus supports the idea of conceptual diversity (Grafstein 1988, 16, 18). One might then want to argue that one needs basic concepts to identify, even if crudely, elements that belong to the substratum even if further conceptual differences come on top of them (cf. later).

The above discussion can be complemented by considering the views of one of Gallie’s earlier commentators, John Kekes (1977), who distinguishes between “problems-to-cope-with” and “problems-to-remove.” Since the latter admit a final answer (unlike the former) they are of no interest to us. By contrast, problems-to-cope-with deal with three general problem areas that have to do with one’s relation to the physical environment, society and other people, and with one’s attitude to oneself⁴⁶⁹. On these problem areas, one cannot really “avoid

⁴⁶⁸ I have slightly modified Care’s argument (presented against and in juxtaposition to MacIntyre 1973) to better fit my current purposes. I urge the reader to consult the original article for the specifics.

⁴⁶⁹ Kekes provides the following examples: “The first type of problem produces such goals as the satisfaction of various physiological needs, health, shelter and protection, generally speaking, physical security and well-being. The second problem area yields goals having to do with politics, morality, the law, manners, and mores. The third type concerns the pursuit of a rich and interesting internal life; it is in this connection that understanding and shaping oneself in accordance with ideals and the imaginative extension of one’s horizons acquire their importance.” (Kekes 1977, 77)

having some policy in pursuit of these goals,” and the solution consists in “finding a way to cope with the situation, to develop a workable, consistent attitude; the solution is always a *modus vivendi*.” Essentially contested concepts themselves signify “a type of activity whose performance is believed to lead to a possible solution” and the examples frequently appealed to by Kekes are morality and rationality. The reason why disputes over these occur, in the first place, is that “the solution implicit in the [essentially contested concept] is too imprecise; there are many ways of implementing it and opposing participants favour different ways.” (Kekes 1977, 77, 87–88.) Kekes therefore adopts a now quite familiar view of essential contestation as taking place between specifications of more general or abstract concepts, but the twist is in conceiving the specifications as solutions to the problem. In Dworkin (2011), the sense in which some concepts could be viewed as having a solution-function in connection to a general problem area is derivable from his conception of moral responsibility. One is fully morally responsible when one’s moral convictions are fully coherent, but that is not practically possible. Rather, “Moral responsibility is never complete: we are reinterpreting our concepts as we use them. We must put them to work day by day even though we have not yet refined them fully *to achieve the integration we seek*” (Dworkin 2011, 119; italics added).

The notion of a general problem area connects fruitfully with Charles Taylor’s conception of the pre-understanding needed for evaluating the justifiability of transitions when there are no decisive considerations that must be accepted from the standpoint of either the older or the newer conception (13.4). Taylor speaks of the recognition of “human constants,” or “a mode of understanding of a given domain, D, which consists in our ability to make our way about and effect our purposes in D,” or a “mediating element” that is “deeply embedded in the human life form” (Taylor 1993, 209, 220–1). This type of pre-understanding can be compared to an already entrenched awareness of practical human purposes within the general problem areas of the human life form. The next step is to form concepts that enable a cognitive grasp of the world and help one to effect one’s purposes. But if the basic concepts that we have at our disposal for ordering the social world are understood to rest on such pre-understanding rather than on other, even more basic, concepts, it is at least conceivable that those basic concepts can not only be contested through their relation to other concepts but also in relation to an even more vaguely shared pre-understanding. One could consider the pre-understanding as “a group of minimal, noncontroversial truisms about persons and their environment” to borrow Care’s phrasing, but with a qualification that even the most basic *concepts* need not be as stable as Care perhaps supposes.

To illustrate, it intuitively appears that people recognize questions of justice more readily than they share JUSTICE – at least when the boundaries of concepts are determined sharply in accordance with the scientific-ideal framework (16.3). The identification of questions of justice could perhaps be grounded in minimal, noncontroversial truisms about persons and their environment or to some other human constant or pre-understanding. Such truisms might be too vague for

everyone to arrive at the same, further conceptualizations, not to mention value judgments, but they may be enough for establishing a preliminary common ground or argumentative plateau on which to build with roughly the same estimation of the stakes. As has been noted before, vagueness is not necessarily only a hindrance as it may help in directing inquiry towards a unitary intellectual content, which could get further specified over time (Viola 2019, 237; 12.1). Conceived in these terms, the pre-understanding and the truisms become the bedrock or the final boundary beyond which it is impossible to reach, and the further determination of which is bound to remain speculative. Establishing the boundary is nevertheless theoretically useful as it helps in making sense of how essential contestability may be rooted in certain basic facts of our form of life. Thus we arrive at an unequivocally metaphysical view of essential contestability: essentially contested concepts (consist of specific conceptualizations that) are likened to solutions to problems that stem from the shared form of life; it is presumed that the problems confronted are part and parcel of the human condition, and that they therefore require fresh answers one individual or generation after another in constantly evolving social and cultural circumstances.

It is not clear, though, why the solution is somehow implicit in the concept. Kekes asks us to consider MORALITY as an essentially contested concept: "To say that one should treat one's fellow men in a moral way represents a solution to the problem of what attitude one should have to others" but he deems this "hopelessly vague and general." He continues by observing that there are many options for interpreting "the ideal represented by morality," options that are presented by different moral theoretical accounts of "what morality really is." Yet the "limits of morality (...) are virtually defined" by fundamental questions concerning how one should act morally, to which several different answers are given. There are no final answers, however, since they vary with the situation in which the question is posed. (Kekes 1977, 88.) Kekes appears to argue that MORALITY sets boundaries for certain kind of questions, or the other way around, and those questions are answered within the same boundaries. Thus, it seems we are once again dealing with a kind of reflexivity; determining what is moral, or a morally right course of action, requires a moral judgment. But I do not view that as much of a solution in a sense that it would provide us with a viable answer, or a range of possible answers, to our problems, even implicitly. To assert that the solution to how to act morally is provided by MORALITY or what falls within boundaries of morality begs the question.

The issue is compounded by the fact that Kekes explicitly claims that, since essentially contested concepts are solutions-concepts, their rational resolution is possible because the "arguments are about the means for reaching the ideals" (Kekes 1977, 86). The previous point-based perspective on essentially contested concepts is compatible with understanding them as solution-concepts (see also Waldron 2002, 158; 14.2), but I am not satisfied with Kekes's argument (see 12.4), even less so given the obscurity involved in the notion of a solution that is implicit in the concept. If Kekes's account is about those concepts that denote only very broad activities, it is too restrictive; if he means all kinds of conceivable human

undertakings, it appears much too wide and possibly disconnected from the basic problems to which they are meant to provide “implicit” solutions. For instance, it is not clear which broad activity is signified by DEMOCRACY. Is it morality or politics or some other broad activity (which one)? Or is it specifically an activity of democracy? In the latter case, the solution would be provided explicitly in terms of a particular definition of democracy—perhaps in the form of a principle—that is then either shared or rejected; in the case of even more specific activities, such definitions become increasingly narrower. Is SPENDING QUALITY TIME an essentially contested concept as a multiple realizable human activity, a concept which holds a solution to the problem of how to stay connected with one’s loved ones, or something similar? I do not see why it would not be, in the present framework, but I argue that there is a better way to view the matter.

We should retain the solution-concept *function* of essentially contested concepts yet understand them to be applicable in connection to certain basic human activities or practices, though not necessarily directly signifying them as Care and Kekes appear to think. It fits better with Gallie’s original idea that subordinate concepts (see 11.3)—or, here, concepts that do not denote or stand for an activity by themselves, but which are thematically connected to an activity in a given pragmatic context of use—can also become “essentially contested” in the right circumstances. It also helps in *avoiding the temptation to consider concepts as direct solutions to practical problems*. As categories or classes, concepts are not true or false—there are no misconcepts although there may be misapplications or misconceptions (Rhodes 2000, 11)—but a solution to a problem can certainly be wrong or right. With respect to problems-to-cope-with that arise in connection to human activities, one can conceivably offer principles, theories, or sets of statements as solutions, all of which are truth-apt in the right context but which should not be needlessly confused with concepts (see also 17.1). Rather, concepts are employed in posing questions, and when they represent their object accurately or describe it meaningfully, the concepts can be of great help in answering those questions as well. Yet a concept does not really set or answer any question by its own. To think otherwise is to commit a category-error of including in the inherent structure of a concept those context-dependent features that *accompany* the concept rather than make up part of the concept. Gallie’s original thesis can certainly be subjected to that criticism as well.

The current reframing of what is going on, in functional terms, could be applied to some other suitable essential contestability theses as well. For instance, in van der Burg (2017), essentially contested concepts refer either directly or indirectly to ideals, and thus they are claimed to have an *aspirational character*, the strength of which renders a concept more or less strongly contestable. It means that “In some concepts, like ‘democracy’, the ideal dimension is clearly visible. In other concepts, like ‘secrecy of elections’, it is only very indirect” (ibid., 252; see also 17.1 for a fuller theoretical context). Van der Burg’s idea is that the secrecy of elections can be viewed as an element of the complex ideal of democracy, but it only refers to that ideal indirectly and may sometimes be scarcely contested. Gallie arguably has something similar in mind with his notion of the subordinate

status of some concepts, like COLORATION, in relation to others that are more clearly essentially contested, like ART (11.1). It is not clear, however, why one would need to posit such a conceptual architecture in either case: rather than trying to identify a dimension of a concept, one could say instead that a person employing the concept aspires to do something particular with it as part of the conceptual practice of using that concept in that specific way. In point-based explanatory terms: the concept in question may have a specific animating point of hoping to further some related valued achievement or ideal, and SECRECY OF ELECTIONS is not as often used in that function. The reason why it is intelligible to deem it indirectly referential to the ideal of democracy is that we know, as a matter of pragmatics, that it is sometimes employed in such a function as part of discussions and debates of how to best realize the valued achievement or ideal of democracy. This move also eliminates a need for argument between theoreticians who disagree on whether such an ideal dimensional or aspirational character is *really* present in a (universal) concept of 'x'⁴⁷⁰.

Tim Sundell and David Plunkett (2013b) propose that the disagreement that is characterized by metalinguistic negotiation (15.2) may take place because people care about which concept is expressed by the word in use. It is important to observe that this does not need to be merely about "labelling" (see Ruben 2013, 33). Certain words can "fill specific and important functional roles in our practices," and thus "participants might care a great deal (and genuinely substantive results could hang on) which concept/word pairings we employ in a given context." Plunkett and Sundell give an example of a disagreement in which Bob and Chris use the term 'morally right' to express different concepts. The details of that example are not important here⁴⁷¹, rather, Plunkett and Sundell propose that they differ in terms of "which concept is best suited to play a certain functional role in thought and practice, a role that includes matters of how to treat others, what to hold each other responsible for doing, and how to live more generally." It is possible that their disagreement has nothing to do with what is analytic about the term. It might be the case, instead, that it has to do with "social, historical, and psychological facts about what is standardly associated with the use of that term." (Plunkett and Sundell 2013b, 20-1.)

Plunkett and Sundell assume that multiple concepts are involved, which is fair enough. I nevertheless propose instead that essentially contested concepts play similarly a certain functional role in thought and practice—or in thought-practice, in conceptual practice, or the like—and that role is to interpretatively facilitate the best possible solutions in basic human problem areas and/or in connection to broad human activities, which also means that essentially

⁴⁷⁰ Van der Burg also makes a distinction between the first-order essential contestability and contestedness of concepts and the second-order essential contestability and contestedness of concepts, the latter of which are meant to track theoretical disagreements concerning whether either essential contestability or essential contestedness-inducing elements are present or not. I find a distinction between the first-order level and the second-order level useful, even if I utilize it very differently (cf. 18.5).

⁴⁷¹ For an illustrative example, see the discussion on Secretariat in 15.2.

contested concepts have endorsement functions for their users⁴⁷². These concepts can be understood to have a quintessentially philosophical character quite simply because philosophy is the institutionalized form of inquiry that tackles with such matters.

In the rest of the section, I will examine how some of Gallie's live examples fit with my preferred perspective on essential contestability that I have presented in the current chapter. To start with, art as a basic human activity may be understood to be centered around the basic human need to express oneself and portray the world according to one's aesthetic sensibilities, or something along those lines – the details are not that important as my focus is not on the empirical facts of our human condition. Neither is this a definition of ART. Instead, essential contestation over what is properly categorized as 'art' in both theoretical/conceptual and substantive/normative terms would come down to conflicting judgments by people who draw from their inarticulate assumptions and background convictions (Dworkin) as well as from some non-controversial truisms (Care) that are qualified by their pre-understanding concerning the importance and significance of the artistic activity in connection to basic practical human purposes in social life (Kekes, Taylor)⁴⁷³. There are no obvious or non-contestable standards that enable one to decide once and for all between conflicting views, not in terms of how one should delineate the boundaries of the artistic activity or in terms of what is most important within those boundaries. Both are up for negotiation in a community, which may always lead to contestation. When the term 'art' and its derivatives are used aggressively and defensively to contest these matters, 'art' is used to stand for the respective human activity with at least a rough understanding of its sub-practices or related genres⁴⁷⁴. Given the centrality of art as a human activity that finds itself realized in a wide variety of spheres of life, claims regarding how to draw the boundaries of thus understood ART deeply touch the character of the shared life form, and not just a particular way of life.

⁴⁷² Sami Syrjämäki has, in fact, come quite close to my position, although his emphasis is on historical understanding. Consider the following: "I would like to suggest that there are other questions which are commonly answered by some kind of definition (or perhaps by a theory) of a concept, and which allow rational judgments regarding better understandings of the concept in question. If we ask, for example, what kind of liberty is important for us now at this historical situation or context, we might quite rationally argue on behalf of some concept of liberty as better or more important, regarding human conditions, than others. We can do this and still acknowledge that there are other rational concepts of liberty, and that, very likely, subsequently some other concept of liberty will be more important and provide a better answer to the challenges of the time" (Syrjämäki 2011, 173).

⁴⁷³ I do not mean to say that these rudimentary elements are everything that is present in a given dispute. Instead, I do mean to say that the more sophisticated views, conceptions, theories etc. can still be contested by appealing to what lies beneath them, even if that something is not necessarily effable or expressible in terms of more basic, single concepts that are uncontestably shared.

⁴⁷⁴ I have already extensively discussed Gallie's views on how ART stands in relation to a tradition of keeping the values associated to it alive (11.2) and how that contributes to what Gallie calls its standard general use (11.3). That discussion is still highly relevant, especially in figuring out Gallie's original, complex view, but I will not repeat it here.

ART can be considered an unusually favorable example, so next I want to turn attention to what is arguably the hardest of the ones presented by Gallie: CHRISTIANITY (esp. PHU 168–70; ECC 181). In addition to ‘Christianity,’ Gallie uses several different terms and phrasings more or less interchangeably: i.e., ‘religion’ (ECC 187/PHU 168), ‘the adherence to, or participation in, a particular religion,’ ‘a Christian life’ (ECC 180; cf. PHU 168–9), ‘the Christian tradition,’ and ‘Christian doctrine’ (ECC 168/PHU 157). In *PHU*, Gallie clarifies what he is after by saying that he wants “to consider the concept of Christianity in its practical, not its purely doctrinal, manifestations, e.g., as exemplified by what would generally be meant by such a phrase as ‘a Christian life’” (PHU 169). Ruth Abbey identifies “a religious way of life” as one of Gallie’s examples (Abbey 2005, 464), and very perceptively, I think. To see why that is the case I will next compare two types of disputes over what it means to be a true Christian: those that are carried out between believers of the Christian faith, and those between the believers and non-believers.

Non-believers may understand the historical and cultural nuances that relate to different aspects of Christianity equally well, or even better, than those within the faith. The key differentiation is that the non-believers are not animated by the same concerns as the believers are: the non-believers do not try to be the best Christians as they can be, they may not consider a religious way of life important at all, and surely they do not think that their eternal salvation depends on how well they adhere to a Christian religious code and dogma⁴⁷⁵. From a communal perspective, non-believers do not have a stake in establishing God’s Kingdom on Earth. In Gallie’s original terms, having a different stake, the non-believers do not aim to sustain and develop the same valued achievement to the optimum.

Understanding essentially contested concepts as having an animating point helps in conceiving how such concepts are connected to their characteristic

⁴⁷⁵ It almost goes without saying that my overall argument does not depend on providing the most accurate information concerning a Christian way of life or Christian theology. It does depend, though, on these things being a source of adherences for concept-users so that their conceptual practice of using ‘Christianity’ and its derivatives comes with an animating point. The animating point supplies one with a goal, aim, or ideal to realize, and that is finally the reason for why one could consider essentially contested concepts as signifying solely positively appraised valued achievements. Commentators have rightly observed that some normative concepts signify negatively valued things (4.2), and certainly an achievement like Christianity is not endorsed by all, or even that “a false religion is no less a religion than the one we believe to be true” (Ingram 1985, 45; or see 17.4). Relatedly, Ehrenberg’s point about different levels of generality in employing law is directed against Dworkin’s view of ‘law’ as a necessarily interpretive concept or practice that leads to using the concept in a self-consciously aggressive or defensive way. These objections are cut from the same cloth as far as their adequate resolution is concerned: one should simply relinquish the (implicit) assumption that all possible disputes, in which a word/term apparently denoting an essentially contested concept is involved, need to be explained by a thesis of essential contestability. Rather, essential contestability requires a specific kind of use, and thus a certain pragmatic context rather than semantic structure (although not all structures admit internal contestation).

conceptual practices. Without such an animating point, one is not engaging in the proper sort of conceptual practice. In the sense that we are after, CHRISTIANITY or CHRISTIAN LIFE has an interpretive *function* for the believers who seek to solve one of their problems-to-cope-with: the problem of how to live a religious or spiritual life properly or according to its requirements. They are keen to do so in the best possible fashion. The non-believers can certainly be knowledgeable enough to join the debate over the intellectual matter of how to live one's life as a Christian. However, as they do not have the same practical stake as the believers have in resolving the matter correctly, right, or in the best possible way, they are not contestants in the same way believers are, who end up advocating different ways of living a Christian life.

John Gray states that "essentially contested concepts find their characteristic uses within conceptual frameworks which have endorsement functions in respect of definite forms of social life" (Gray 1977, 332). This is also accepted by Peter Ingram who adds that our purely academic interest (in the pejorative sense) in a concept itself does not bring us to contest the concept, "but because of our understanding of the way in which that concept relates to our way of life, the way in which it is part of the expression of a comprehensive outlook" (Ingram 1985, 53). Together with my previous discussion of ART and CHRISTIANITY, these remarks emphasize the social and practical sides of essential contestability, which are often overshadowed by intellectual considerations. It seems to me that Gallie's original thesis has attracted such a wide variety of interpretations because its core ideas find a theoretically fruitful terrain in the intersection of conceptual and linguistic issues, in relation to both evaluative attitudes and moral and political commitments, and in intimate connection to human practices and activities⁴⁷⁶. Gallie's essentially contested concepts are not clearly demarcated logical entities that many philosophers generally take concepts to be. Rather, they are always concepts in use in a somewhat specific, human context.

I claim that essential contestation is a localized rather than universal phenomenon. It presumes a shared stake or animating concern if rival parties are to engage in essential contestation over an interpretive solution-concept that takes place according to conventional rules dictated by a related conceptual practice. Additionally, Gallie's original thesis easily leads one to conclude that contestation takes place within a group, movement, community, or tradition with its own commitments, adherences, and values that coincide with what the disputing parties are trying to sustain and develop further. It requires a step to a more concrete level, and I think it is fair to hesitate a bit at this point. I have discussed the matter in abstract terms by relying on theoretical notions like a concept's animating point or a decision-based reasonable disagreement, but these things cannot be perfectly reliably pinpointed in the actual disputes of the

⁴⁷⁶ William Connolly, who applies Gallie's basic idea to the terms of political discourse, speaks of both the "conceptual dimension of political inquiry and political life" (Connolly 1993, 4). The inquiry stands for the cognitive part of the phenomenon, but Connolly rightly emphasizes the life aspect as an elementary ingredient as well.

empirical world; they are bound to remain guiding idealizations. Yet it cannot be denied that essential contestability in its most characteristic and theoretically defensible form occurs intra-traditionally rather than inter-traditionally when one moves to consider actual spaces of agreement and disagreement in the world⁴⁷⁷. This makes it easier to extend the thesis towards issues of community-membership (see e.g., Ruben 2010; 2013; Boromisza-Habashi 2010), but its downside is that many intractable disputes, in which clearly more incommensurable claims – conceptually and/or valuationally – are involved, fall under the radar.

The absence of incommensurability does not mean that the personal, cultural, or political stakes would necessarily be lower. Given the combination of the above kind of endorsement function and intractability of disputes, one may just as easily be tempted to make a ruthless decision to silence those who disagree, to damn them as heretics or exterminate them as unwanted (ECC 193–4). Of course, one should not altogether dismiss the possibility that some people may indeed be “willing to die over mere labels and the value they attach to them” (Ruben 2013, 33). However, if someone does not subscribe to my terminological choice, I might become perplexed, frustrated, or decidedly annoyed, yet the danger of annihilating the other as an enemy, pathological cases aside, is surely present only in the circumstances in which a lot of practical significance rides on how the matter is conceived. As David-Hillel Ruben so aptly points out, the disputes that have the kind of character that Gallie describes can literally tear societies apart—one example being the dispute regarding whether the true followers of Mohammed today are the Shia or the Sunni Muslims⁴⁷⁸ (Ruben 2013, 32–33). The present interpretation of Gallie’s thesis enables one to see how practical considerations of varying seriousness become factors in essential contestation over the correct use of concepts that have an interpretive function in attempts to provide solutions to human problems we have to cope with.

It is fair to ask who or what the analogous “community of believers” would be in the case of concepts like ART. Can the community of potential contestants be as wide as humanity with all the variety in views it involves? With the notion of decision-based reasonable disagreement I have tried to emphasize that determining what to include and what to exclude is always a matter of some interpretation. That means that the believers (in the Christian faith) could also include as well as exclude the views of the non-believers. Complicating matters more, the social and cultural circumstances might be such that believers have no real say in the matter of how to conduct the actual debates effectively, even if they think non-believers confused or unreasonable in the matter. In addition, I

⁴⁷⁷ There is reason to believe that Gallie would not object to this although he would have understood traditions very broadly. See esp. ART 114 and Gallie 1957, 132ff.

⁴⁷⁸ The disputes of true succession involve problematics that come with assessing similarity or faithfulness to the original exemplar (Ruben 2010; 2013; 12.4). They may be particularly intractable and socially demanding despite, and partly because of, the shared background and value-commitments. Not only are they about individual attempts that come to conflict while trying to cope with the exigencies of living, but they also necessitate a diachronic evaluation of cultural and/or membership commitments.

find it plausible to think that there are many decision-based reasonable disagreements with their specific boundaries going on all the time, and not just one hegemonic battle over how certain things are conceived of. On the one hand, a group of art-connoisseurs could try to exclude laypersons from joining the debate of what 'art' means, or how art as a valued achievement should be advanced further in different artworks. Appealing to proficiency or profession can also be a marker not only of *argumentum ab auctoritate* but also of a community- or adherence-based exclusion from a decision-based reasonable disagreement⁴⁷⁹. On the other hand, assuming that people share a pre-understanding concerning the most basic social particulars, they may share a general problem that demands some solution as well. When ART functions as a key concept in resolving the issue, cognitively, that animating point may also be operative in how the concept is used by pretty much everyone. But this is not the only function to which the concept can be put, even if it is always possible to interpret another concept-user as employing it in this particular fashion.

Disputes involving essentially contested concepts appear to be endless as essentially contested concepts are employed interpretatively as part of answers to problems that arise in connection to important human activities (12.3; 18.3). The answers may satisfy temporally, but new and unforeseen problems and circumstantial practical requirements require new answers which demand flexibility from the concepts used. The concepts that are required and employed both to make sense of our way of life (descriptively) and to cope with the issues that arise within it (normatively) are *anthropocentric*. In turn, essential contestability can be understood as a metaphysical thesis that is about the human condition or form of life and the related anthropocentric concepts: our condition is such that we come to endlessly and irresolvably disagree about the correct use of concepts with that function. If we are to view humanity at large, it indeed appears there is no end to disputes concerning how to live, or how to best relate to practical issues, unless something changes drastically. Yet, even if one age were to bring answers that satisfy people at that time, with the new age and new people there would be need to think things through, again. Individually speaking, finding a way to cope with one's situation within social life is a life-long process in the course of which one adopts new ways to describe and order the aspects of

⁴⁷⁹ As an anecdotal example, I remember arguing with my friend, a journalist, about what good journalism is or should be. The exclusion-move was expressed indignantly, and pretty much exactly in the form "you do not even participate in/contribute to journalist practice, so what should it matter what you think about what journalism is?" An evaluative and substantive question that aimed to producing a workable definition on which we could both agree, or so I thought, suddenly became a question of contributing to a valued achievement as a member of a community that is presumably authorized to make the judgment. Rather than thinking that as a case of fallacious argumentation, I think the more correct interpretation is that the professional in question employed the concept interpretively, and with an animating point that was related to his personal (life) project or goal *via* professional life. In simpler terms: one may feel that one's self-worth and self-judgment is threatened which may induce a knee-jerk reaction. But as to why it is threatened in a dispute that someone might consider, mistakenly, purely definitional, what I have described here offers a different perspective.

one's experience, the ways which replace the older, inferior ones. The account of transitional rationality understands these instances as self-justifying biographical moves (13.4), which Gallie describes as conversions (11.4), and those concepts that have an interpretive function both enable the process of change and are changed in the process.

18.4 Between historicism and semantic externalism

In the current section, I return to interpret Gallie's ideas more broadly, once more. Gallie stands at the crossroads of several philosophical approaches and influences, and some of his interests are clearly historical-philosophical, or historiographical (2.5). Since I have been focusing on a concept-centered thesis, and to how it has been perceived in the secondary literature, I have not paid as much attention to this as could have been warranted with a different focus. Yet concepts or terms do not *have to* be the main vehicle of essential contestation: one could focus instead on contested judgments, theories, views, beliefs *et cetera* while the right type of contestability would be brought about by one's historical, sociological, or political situatedness, or the like. It is also conceivable that some concepts are inherently historical, or otherwise the kind of entities that cannot be adequately grasped without paying attention to their histories.

In what follows, I will present my suggestions for the basics of the two versions of a *historicist thesis of essential contestability*: the historical development thesis, and the historical understanding thesis. They are introduced, partly, as potential candidates for being the most viable account of essential contestability, but mostly for illustrative reasons that pertain to how historical considerations may figure in essential contestability. Afterwards, I will examine Simon Evnine's (2014) account of how essentially contested concepts can be viewed as one species of a single semantic genus that also contains natural kind terms, yet the actual contestation is over the ownership of traditions. The general point of the present section is this: although it is a safe bet that Gallie would have been sympathetic to either of the historicist theses, the way he appears to present essential contestedness as an immanent critique of descriptivism—his argument is arguably premised on a kind of descriptive outlook, but the thesis ends up pulling the rug from under it (see also 5.1; 16.4; 18.1; Gallie 1949, 40)—implies that he might have had something like semantic externalism in mind⁴⁸⁰.

Despite the prominence of historical considerations in Gallie's thinking (cf. 2.5), the possibility of the historicist interpretation is often overlooked. Andrew Vincent (2004) groups the notion of essential contestability together with logical positivism and ordinary language philosophy and claims that they "all saw the philosophical method, implicit in conceptual and analytical political theory, as both foundational and universal." These perspectives also gave political theory

⁴⁸⁰ Despite semantic externalism being contrasted with descriptivism here, it is not my intention to favor one or the other in the current study.

of the latter half of the 20th century “a predominantly ‘conceptualist focus’” while the historical situation of what were thought of as key concepts was of little interest (Vincent 2004, 104, 108; see also 133, 142.) It is especially in political studies, broadly defined, that Gallie’s thesis has found most traction (2.6). Jan Ifversen holds along the same line that “the difference between a universally grounded, philosophical approach and a historical approach to concepts is well demonstrated in the difference between Gallie’s essentially contested concepts and Koselleck’s basic concepts” (Ifversen 2011, 75n31). One may also wonder why Gallie insists on concentrating on the use of concepts while he devotes much more analytic attention to their structure and limits his observations of use to hypothetical situations (Boromisza-Habashi 2010, 277n1). Gallie’s overall approach is arguably empirically thin, and the same can be said about most subsequent academic treatments of the topic, which is why some consider it a significant improvement to introduce historical considerations to an essential contestability framework (e.g., Gautier 2019).

The above characterizations would probably make Gallie squirm⁴⁸¹. If anything, he was mindful of others accusing him of confusing a concept’s “logical” sense with its “historical” sense (the quotation marks are Gallie’s). In the former sense, to understand a concept means to conform to, and to be able to state, the rules governing its proper use; in the latter sense, to understand a concept “means to know (something about) the whole gamut of conditions that have led to, and that now sustain the way we use it.” Gallie’s aim was to “see aright” the connection between the two sides, and he certainly opposed anti-genetic attitude towards concepts, or tearing them from their changing social contexts and seeing them in a timeless and static way. (ECC 196–7; see also PHU 127–30; see also Gellner 1974, 97.) At the end of *ECC*, Gallie tries to set things straight by emphasizing that one should pay attention to instances that display a concept’s growth and development (ECC 197–8), but perhaps it is too little, too late. All in all, there is no denying that Gallie was keenly interested in how concepts’ history would affect their contestability, but neither can it be denied that Gallie’s approach is distinctively philosophical—as are the salient questions and problematics that essential contestability is understood to raise.

As I see it, one advocating for historicist understanding of essential contestability in concept-centered terms views it as a quintessentially diachronic affair: not only do certain concepts manifest as part of historical processes but they also cannot be separated from their historical context, and/or their content cannot be understood without the context⁴⁸². The historicist thesis of essential contestability divides into two elements or claims, one metaphysical and the other epistemological: (a) a concept’s essential contestedness or contestability results from a historical development; (b) in order to adequately understand an

⁴⁸¹ And quite likely several others as well. For instance, Elías Palti finds himself in agreement with Terence Ball by noting that such a thesis of essential contestability “would become specially attractive to historians, since it permits them not only to account for conceptual change, but also in a normatively neutral fashion” (Palti 2005a, 113).

⁴⁸² Historicism is briefly discussed in 2.5, and I will not expand on the matter further here.

essentially contested or contestable concept, one needs understanding that is distinctively historical, or historiographic⁴⁸³. In my framing, (a) corresponds with the historical development thesis, and (b) corresponds with the historical understanding thesis. It may be that no robust historicist position would bifurcate into two distinct theses in this manner, but that complication can be brushed aside since the two theses are introduced only to illustrate a broader point.

According to the historical development thesis, a concept's essential contestability results from a unique historical development. The proper historicist thesis is not content to argue that the particular form that contestation takes is merely affected by its historical context; instead, the contestability itself needs to be understood as the product of a unique development process or trajectory. That means that concepts of the same type – for instance, as far as they pertain to moral, political, or aesthetic domains – are not necessarily contestable in the same fashion. By contrast, making a categorical claim regarding the concepts of a certain type would amount to failing to consider particular conceptual trajectories as unique, and the origin of contestability would no longer be traceable to concepts' histories. The present framing entails a theoretical dilemma of how contestation through different times can be intrinsic or inherent to concepts instead of being an external factor.

Gallie sees the historical development of essentially contested concepts as starting with the original exemplar (ECC 180), based on which subsequent concept-users interpret its valued achievement in the light of later, changing circumstances (8.1). The original exemplar itself has been interpreted in various ways, narrowly or more broadly (8.2). Gallie also suggests that the development trajectory from the original exemplar onwards is one of progressive development. Understanding how we apply an appraisive concept may be learned “by asking from what vaguer or more confused or more restricted version (or ancestor) our currently accepted version of the concept in question has been derived” (ECC 198; see also 8.1). Still, previous uses or instances of the concept can “display its growth or development” (ibid.). Together with Gallie's discussion of how ART has come to be the concept it is today, even if possibly still “embryonic, as yet unarticulated” (ART 102; 11.2).

It is evident that Gallie conceives of essentially contested concepts diachronically; they are also entities that may develop in different stages or one (improved) version after another. Ernest Gellner remarks that Gallie's account

⁴⁸³ Following the usage by Aviezer Tucker (2009), ‘history’ refers to ‘all the past’ while ‘historiography’ refers to ‘all that can be known about it.’ The philosophy of history is the direct philosophical examination of history while the philosophy of historiography is the philosophical examination of all the aspects of our descriptions, beliefs, and knowledge of the past. There can be many ‘histories’ (i.e., as different narratives, or descriptions) as well as many ‘philosophies of history’ (i.e., as different type of philosophical examinations of history conducted by, often, different authors). Also, ‘historical’ is used in a sense of ‘of history,’ or ‘pertaining to history’ and ‘historiographic’ as respectively. I will often use ‘historical’ as more inclusive general term. For more specific canvassing of various usages, see Tucker 2009.

“endeavours to offer a picture *in movement* both of the life of concepts and of history, and that it relates the two (even though the picture differs from that of the dialectic)” (Gellner 1974, 109). The process is dialectical but without Hegelian sublation. Instead, the concept becomes “essentially complex” – the complex structure of such concepts is their now-inherent part – and, “chiefly for this reason, *essentially contested*” (ART 107). The basic idea thus is that we either learn an essentially complex term or concept from various cultural sources or “inherit” it from past generations of concept-users. Whichever way it is done, the implicit assumption is that we also learn or inherit the potential for contesting the matter as it has been contested before in addition to possibly finding new ways of doing so ourselves. Otherwise, considering how a concept “came to be” (ECC 198) would not provide us with particularly significant information concerning our concept-application or how we contest the concept in question. Succession in employing a concept requires a link between concept-users. Based on how Gallie touches upon through ordinary examples (see both *CRITICS* and *LOVERS* in 11.2), that link has to be causal-historical, but not much more can be confidently said of Gallie’s position. In general, the notion of *path-dependency* goes well with a historical development thesis: what is properly open at t_0 is going to be determined this or that way between t_0 and t_1 thus affecting how the boundaries of the concept are to be further shaped from t_1 onwards.

There are other philosophical accounts that closely resemble a historical development thesis. Alasdair MacIntyre (1967) holds that individualism has corroded our moral structures over centuries to the effect that we currently live with several well-integrated moralities that each have a proposed end or ends, a set of rules, and a list of virtues. The traditional moral vocabulary can still be used but “we cannot expect to find in our society a single set of moral concepts, a shared interpretation of the vocabulary. Conceptual conflict is endemic in our situation, because of the depth of our moral conflicts.” (MacIntyre 1967, 266–8.) This corresponds with MacIntyre’s later view in *After Virtue* (1984/1981), in which apparently available alternatives are narrowed to just two: the Enlightenment moral individualism or emotivism that comes with a vocabulary incapable of expressing our moral concerns coherently, and the Nietzschean critique that reveals the emptiness of the former but fails to replace it with anything but individualist fictions of its own. (MacIntyre 1984.) The point is not so much that there is a clash between the two broad alternatives, but that the terms of which modern moral discourses consist (e.g., ‘right,’ ‘utility’) are empty, and the older ones (e.g., the notion of desert) are torn away from their proper context⁴⁸⁴ (Mason 1993, 7).

⁴⁸⁴ According to Andrew Mason, MacIntyre appears to endorse a variant of the contestability conception (see 12.4), as he seems to believe that concepts like JUSTICE admit reasonable interpretations, and they “can be used to express incommensurable ways of thinking; the political disagreement need not imply that someone has made a mistake” (Mason 1993, 7). MacIntyre ends up advocating a return to a revised Aristotelianism that is in MacIntyre (1988) specified as philosophical Thomism. This is found in the latter work, in which MacIntyre tries to find grounds for rational resolvability of some disputes that take place between

Another example could be found in the writings of Hans Blumenberg, whose views on the theory of secularization are summarized by Elías Palti as follows:

For Blumenberg, what modernity inherited from the old eschatologies is not any given series of ideal contents which were then merely translated into a secular key, but, essentially, a void. Christian world views would no longer provide answers to a question – the one on the ultimate sense of the world – before which modernity could not remain indifferent. Palti 2005a, 117

In this picture, the role played by the diverse modern political languages is attempting to make sense of a world without transcendental. What would need to be confronted is unthinkable: “the radical contingency (“irrationality”) of the foundations of every secular order; in sum, the “essential contestability” of the core categories of all modern ethical and political discourse.” (ibid.)

To be a strong historical development thesis of essential contestability, Gallie’s account would need an argument that can be found in or at least easily added to the two macro level stories above: the appeal to historical irreversibility (cf. Gray 1978, 401). As Palti points out, the explanation of contestability (for him, “indefinability”) of concepts by factors that are of an empirical nature indicates “a factual condition, a circumstantial happening.” Historicity can be both inevitable and contingent without there being nothing intrinsic to concepts. What Palti claims is needed is a Blumenbergian view in which “semantic content is never self-integrated, rationally and logically articulated.” More generally, “to comprehend why every meaning fixation is constitutively precarious, we must recreate an entire semantic field; that is, we must move beyond a history of concepts in the direction of a history of political languages.” (Palti 2005a, 116.) This latter statement has some affinity with the view that cluster concepts are to be understood only as part of broader conceptual constellations (17.5).

The historical development thesis faces a couple of hurdles. On the one hand, without clear articulation of how exactly one understands concepts as mutually shareable and/or accessible entities, the present type of macro level explanation raises the worry already encountered in the case of complex concepts that need to be understood in connection to broader discourses, ideologies, or languages (17.5): an allegedly contestable concept as an individual object of inquiry starts to disappear from sight in favor of large-scale theorizing that establishes some type of contestability, but does not necessarily involve a concept. That might be perfectly fine for several theoretical purposes, but it does not address the challenges a concept-centered thesis confronts. On the other hand, a historical development thesis at the level of individual concepts cannot appeal to an irreversibility argument, or at least I cannot conceive how one could confirm it with respect to a single concept alone. Even though the concept would be accessed through the shared structural pattern of term usage (16.3), that would

traditions with their own norms of rational inquiry, the aspect that Mason perceives as a feature of the imperfection conception (see 12.4).

go only so far as establishing contestability by empirical means. The resultant thesis would not be strong enough.

The historical understanding thesis is harder to articulate, concisely, than the development thesis. In general, it rests on the historicist assumption that concepts are entities that cannot be separated from their historical context, and that one needs understanding that is distinctively historical, or historiographic. Strictly speaking, it is not necessary to assume that the relevant type of concepts are unique products of their development histories, yet it often goes hand in hand with the requirement of historical understanding. Importantly, though, the concept in question can itself be the product of grasping “it” historiographically as well, in which case there is no entity called ‘concept’ that is claimed as mutable⁴⁸⁵. Nothing in what has been said makes such concepts particularly contestable, not to mention essentially so, which remains a challenge for any such concept-centered account of essentially contestability.

Interpreting Gallie’s original account as a historical understanding thesis is possible, especially considering that Gallie’s revised argument for essentially contested concepts given in *PHU* prods the reader to that direction. Yet already at the end of *ECC*, Gallie states that the consideration of the present uses of a concept is not enough, and that one needs to consider the pedigree of the concept to gain an insight into how the concept is used. He also notes that “to appraise something positively is to assert that it fulfills certain generally recognized standards” and, because of it, clarification or improved understanding of an appraisive (read: essentially contested) concept is to be obtained in a special way. So whatever standards the concept fulfills, we may be able to understand the standards better by considering how the concept “came to be.” (*ECC* 197–8; cf. *PHU* 158.) Overall, Gallie’s choice of words along with the briefness of his exposition suggest, however, that he had not yet thought the issue through at the time *ECC* was written. It also leaves the final role of the original exemplar hanging: since Gallie allows—perhaps even requires—that one’s use is to be *compared* and *contrasted* with earlier vaguer, more restricted, or more confused uses, there appears little reason to think that attaining historical understanding reduces to the consideration of the original exemplar as some kind of correct starting position (but see Abbey 2005, 466, 468).

In *PHU*, Gallie speaks of both historical understanding and historical appreciation: “the adequate understanding of [essentially contested] concepts involves some appreciation of their history” (*PHU* 189, also *PHU* 158). ‘Historical understanding’ means “the appreciation of certain human aims, choices, valuations, efforts, deeds,” i.e., things that are attributed exclusively to

⁴⁸⁵ One example outside the essential contestability literature is W.H. Walsh’s (1974) notion of a colligatory concept, i.e., a higher order concept that brings “a series of events together by describing them from an aspect that makes them intelligible or relevant in an explanation” (Halldén 1997, 204). The basic idea is roughly this: even though the industrial revolution in 18th and 19th century Britain is certainly an amalgam of various historical and economic events, or individual happenings, in order to grasp the significance of that period one needs to think of the period itself as an at least somewhat continuous whole with possibly more than a few trends and processes that come together under INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION.

individuals acting on their own, in concert with others, and/or as representatives of their group or cause (PHU 75–6). Later in the book, it becomes known that moral judgment, which is “primarily directed on to individuals and their actions in particular situations,” presupposes historical understanding in a broad sense (PHU 204), or that “some exercise of historical understanding is a necessary prerequisite of every moral judgment and decision” (PHU 156). It is thus an ability that is vital to human practical reasoning. Gallie also marks historical understanding as “something *sui generis*, inasmuch as it is the understanding of how some particular outcome came to be” (PHU 126), and it is clear that the outcomes he speaks of are human outcomes, or outcomes that are brought about by human action.

‘Appreciation,’ on the other hand, appears to refer to the intelligibility/reasonability of the claims (12.4; 13.4; see e.g., ART 106) that are presented in the kind of dispute which I call decision-based reasonable disagreement⁴⁸⁶ (18.1). This is because Gallie perceives such appreciation as a matter of degree, attitude-wise, as well as concerning scholarly depth and quality, and that “in practice we would all recognise the need of a lower limit beneath which the supporters of some exotic interpretation must be assigned to the lunatic fringe.” By contrast, Gallie adds, “one hall-mark of a civilised man is that he possesses at least some sense of the different historic inheritances of the causes to which he adheres” (PHU 189–90). This would not even be noteworthy, I think, if not for the underlying assumption that causes and values to which a person adheres come to be reflected in what that individual considers most significant in a valued achievement signified by an essentially contested concept. Historical understanding as consideration of how something came to be and the appreciation as sensitivity to difference come together somewhat when one faces the task of considering the reasonability/intelligibility of normative standards and values, which have historical roots, and which are fulfilled by the concept signifying a related achievement (see esp. ECC 197–8).

With the notion of a decision-based reasonable disagreement at hand, and by taking further into account the *ad hominem* sense of rationality that is present in Gallie’s thesis (13.4), it might be uncharitable to say that Gallie conflates things. Nevertheless, the emerging idea, above, is too convoluted for its own good, which probably partly explains why Gallie’s attempt to introduce historical considerations is often overlooked⁴⁸⁷. As to grounding essential contestability in

⁴⁸⁶ Alternatively, one could discard my idea and concentrate on the more general characteristics of Gallie’s disputes. For instance, Leslie Green understands them as satisfying the following four conditions: “(1) they are genuine arguments and not merely verbal disputes, rationalizations, special pleadings or simple confusions; (2) arguments apply to them without being convincing to all; (3) these arguments are essentially historical at least in the sense that they turn on traditions of usage; (4) the continuation of the disputes is of value.” Green adds that “Conditions (3) and (4) are the ones most readily jettisoned by those social theorists anxious to expand the domain of essential contestability.” (Green 1987, 17.)

⁴⁸⁷ This is not all what Gallie says about historical understanding since the issue is discussed extensively from a more general perspective in other chapters of *PHU*—there is also a whole chapter titled “The historical understanding” (PHU 72–104). That being said, I am mostly content to leave the matter as it is; I have not found a clear enough way to connect Gallie’s

the historical intelligibility of human activities and valuations, the argument seems to be that valued achievements to which the notion of historical intelligibility applies are essentially complex, and hence contestable (see esp. ART 107, 110; see also PHU 162). But as I have already argued, the complex conceptual structure alone is not enough to render concepts essentially contestable. I doubt whether there is much more to what Gallie says in that regard. Gallie does speak of history disclosing "a growing recognition of the fact the word 'art' is most usefully employed (...) but as an appraisive term accrediting a certain kind of achievement" (ART 111/PHU 174), and of seeing "how the history of the concept of art forces recognition of (...) complexity upon us" (ART 111/PHU 175). Such histories *may* disclose that realization to those who choose to interpret them in a certain way, but it clearly *does not force* it, literally speaking (cf. ART 112). Thus, ART remains essentially contestable for only those who perceive it as such, based on a history, present usage, or whatever.

Mario Ricciardi has named the Galliean variant of essential contestability 'the Primacy of Historical Understanding Thesis'⁴⁸⁸ (Ricciardi 2001). Rather than perceiving Gallie's thesis as ahistorical, Ricciardi takes Gallie to be criticizing analytic philosophy that is unaware of the historical dimension of language, and *ECC* is "still regarded as a seminal contribution by those arguing against analytic philosophy." The statements like "there is a crisis of analytic philosophy" and "analysis is not enough" are "often coupled with allusions to 'essential contestability'." (Ricciardi 2001, 39-42.) If language is historical, it should be reflected on proper philosophical methods, or as Ricciardi sums up the matter:

There is no point in analysis. What philosophers should do is reconstruct the genetic processes leading to a particular idea or theory. Analysis might be appropriate for the natural sciences, but when dealing with human affairs, what philosophers need is history – a kind of collective biography (...) According to Gallie, the aim of philosophy is historical understanding, that is, the understanding of human reality and of the social world, an unfolding of the narrative structure of our knowledge of these facts. Ricciardi 2001, 39, 42

The position criticized by Ricciardi may be untenable but not nearly as easily attributable to Gallie as Ricciardi seems to think. Per my reading, Gallie does not make the sweeping claim attributed to him in the quote above⁴⁸⁹. But Ricciardi

interest in historical narratives, or how they function in historical explanations and as part of the historical understanding, to essentially contested concepts. Alternatives that spring to mind, like conceiving essentially contested concepts *as* stories, or narratively understood (for some relevant material, see PHU 22-7, 32-9, 53-4, 65-6, 70, 89-90, 97, 102, 105, 124, 127, 136, 138, 143, 148), require too much speculation even for my taste, not to mention stretching what is meant by 'concept' in the current study.

⁴⁸⁸ Ricciardi asserts that the official interpretation of essential contestability, or "*Essential Contestability Thesis* proper," which is exemplified by the conception advocated most famously by William Connolly (1973/1993), is "importantly different" from Gallie's account. Ricciardi notes that the primacy of historical understanding -view is generally associated with the thinkers such as Vico, Hegel, Croce, and Collingwood (Ricciardi 2001, 41).

⁴⁸⁹ I am unable to locate the claim in PHU 140-56 that Ricciardi himself cites. See also PHU 9 for the summary of Gallie's intentions.

ups the ante further by claiming that Gallie considers historical understanding as primary with respect to conceptual analysis. This primacy entails denying that items need to be identified and classified on the basis of their features, since what is truly needed is to tell an explanatory story.

To tell (or follow) a story of something, one needs to know what sort of thing that something is. Every narrative is *about* items in a world (real or fictitious), and there is no way of talking (or thinking) about these items unless one uses words and concepts. Ricciardi 2000, 47

The crux of the issue thus appears to be, astonishingly, that Ricciardi understands Gallie as arguing that telling historical stories should supersede the employment of concepts *altogether*, or that one does not *really* need concepts as long as one has narratives – this interpretation is probably facilitated by Ricciardi’s assumption that Gallie does not know the difference between words and concepts (Ricciardi 2000, 52).

For the record, Gallie does not make such an argument. There are passages supporting a much more moderate reading, according to which Gallie sees historical understanding as a distinct and irreducible, but also an “ancillary,” form of understanding that is not primary in the sense of being overriding⁴⁹⁰ (PHU 105–7, 126, 129–30; ART 112; but cf. Gellner 1974, 97–8). Furthermore, when Gallie says that “the word ‘art’ is most usefully employed, not as a descriptive term standing for certain indicatable properties, but as an appraisive term accrediting a certain kind of achievement” (PHU 174), whether right or wrong, he is talking about comparative usefulness in terms of our human purposes (cf. 18.5) and not about disregarding the identification of descriptive features altogether. Perhaps Ricciardi presumes that Gallie’s essentially contested concepts being appraisive have no descriptive components whatsoever; perhaps he takes Gallie’s (historical) over-intellectualization of essentially contested concepts as their sole shareable content⁴⁹¹; it is hard to say. It is clear, though, that the position Ricciardi attributes to Gallie is both uncharitable and a stretch.

When a historicist thesis entails the claim that some object can be identified, present tense, as what it is only by referring to a past originator or exemplar, or *mutatis mutandis* regarding current and past uses of concept, one appears to commit a genetic fallacy. Gallie’s original thesis could perhaps avoid this

⁴⁹⁰ Some of Gallie’s remarks, *when read in isolation*, could be taken to suggest otherwise (see e.g., PHU 224 that is cited by Ricciardi 2000, 47; cf. PHU 222 regarding “doing metaphysics” as a historical human activity). See also Syrjämäki (2011, 173) for the conception that ‘better understanding’ obtained through historical understanding could be measured within historical or spatial contexts without assuming it to be ‘complete understanding’ of the matter under dispute. Tullio Viola remarks that Gallie’s reflection on the “followability” of histories is a mode of knowledge that has a supportive, and thus not superseding, role in relation to logical-scientific reasoning (Viola 2019, 250). I agree with both Syrjämäki and Viola on this.

⁴⁹¹ By ‘over-intellectualization’ I refer to the idea that was discussed in 18.2 in reference to explaining a concept through its evaluative or practical point. Such explanations can provide additional understanding concerning how a concept is employed, but they are not strictly speaking necessary to share the concept unlike the concept’s animating or inferential point.

objection (7.2), but that is mostly because he is not wholeheartedly committing to either the historical development thesis or the historical understanding thesis *as the explanation of the origin of essential contestability*. The historical development thesis, in which the current circumstances of using certain concepts are both irreversible and contestability inducing, can still avoid the accusation of fallacy by stating that the concepts *as we currently employ them* are essentially contestable. It is just that our current situation is the product of unique historical development. The historical understanding thesis, however, cannot appeal to *past* development that brings about *present* contestability; it must show how a mode of understanding that is characteristically historical is *the reason for* contestability, i.e., essential contestability originates in its application.

The most straightforward way of transposing Gallie's thesis into the historical understanding thesis would be to replace Condition (I), appraisiveness, with the requirement of historical understanding as historiographic judgment of events and developments in connection to the valued achievement signified by the concept, while other Conditions would depict features of diachronic trajectories that serve as material to be contested. But where does a concept enter the picture?

Simon Evnine (2014) offers us a novel interpretation of Gallie's essential contestedness that I consider informative both concerning a historicist concept-centered thesis, in general, and Gallie's original thesis, in particular. I have already discussed his views here and there, but the present discussion picks the matter up from where it was left after the review of Condition (VI), the original exemplar (7.2).

According to Evnine, the exemplar can consist of anything that might be an element of an internally complex tradition, or "any element of a tradition may itself be picked out and treated synecdochally as an exemplar itself." In other words, the "exemplar is a stage (perhaps a temporal part⁴⁹²) of a tradition." An essentially contested term [sic] is correctly applied *iff* it bears a proper sort of relation to samples or exemplars that have played a historical role in how the term is used. That relation is *being heir of*, and thus a given term "serves to pick out something that has the relation of being the heir of that tradition-stage." *Being part of the same tradition as* is a component of the heirship-relation. (Evnine 2014,

⁴⁹² Evnine states that, for convenience, he takes a tradition to be a spatio-temporally extended concrete individual or particular (Evnine 2014, 119, 128, 130). This makes it easier for him to present essentially contested terms and natural kind terms as analogous with respect to how they reference things in the world. Evnine thinks that his argument does not hinge on adopting this view of traditions (ibid., 128n13). I think he is right *as long as* the different view adopted refers to traditions as something in the world in a semantic externalist fashion. In principle, then, one could replace the notion of a tradition as a concrete particular with a richer notion like, say, Alasdair MacIntyre's conception of a tradition as "an argument extended through time in which certain fundamental agreements are defined and redefined as in terms of two kinds of conflict: with critics and enemies external to the tradition who reject all or at least key parts of those fundamental agreements, and those internal, interpretative debates through which the meaning and rationale of the fundamental agreements come to be expressed and by whose progress a tradition is constituted" (MacIntyre 1988, 12).

127–30.) Evnine thinks that the kind of contests that Gallie was after “arise because people fight for ownership, as it were, of traditions that are important to them” (ibid., 119), and we can already see why that is the case: if a party contests another’s use of an essentially contested term, what is contested, in fact, is the judgment and claim of being heir of X.

The current account bears close resemblance to David-Hillel Ruben’s (2010; 2013) view that is centrally about faithfulness or true succession within a tradition (see 12.4). As I see it, Ruben’s examination of the ways in which the kind of contests, to which both he and Evnine refer, are carried out is excellent as are his insights on the features of traditions and their membership. Those developing an admittance to a tradition thesis should pay close heed to his texts⁴⁹³. The ace up Evnine’s sleeve, however, is that he claims to make sense of how terms employed by rival parties figure in contests over heirship, which is one step closer to essentially contested *concepts*. Ruben, on his part, is content to say that Gallie’s original concerns can be discussed “almost without using the concept of a concept” because the source of disputes is located elsewhere (Ruben 2013, 35; see also Ruben 2010, 261). However, Evnine also makes it clear that it is not necessary to talk of concepts (or perhaps even terms) in the context of Gallie’s thesis, but he chooses to speak of essentially contested concepts, or terms, for the “sake of continuity with the existing literature” (Evnine 2014, 119).

Evnine claims, strikingly, that natural kind terms and essentially contested terms are both species of a single semantic genus. The reference of natural kind terms, in semantic externalism, is not determined by associated descriptive content (cf. 16.4); rather, “current uses of the term continue to be connected to the original sample (...) through the (causal) historical connections between the sample’s baptism and current usage.” (Evnine 2014, 126–7). To repeat, an essentially contested term is correctly applied *iff* it bears a proper sort of relation to samples or exemplars that have played a historical role in how the term is used. Evnine thinks that this is also how one should interpret Gallie’s thesis, an argument that he supports with a close examination of the most opportune of the live examples by Gallie, i.e., CHRISTIANITY. (see ibid., 123–5). The obvious difference between the two sets of terms is that the exemplars of natural kind terms are natural while the exemplars of essentially contested terms are cultural; the latter will thus serve as part of traditions themselves (see before). Furthermore,

In the case of natural kind terms, something is correctly referred to by a use of a term just in case it belongs to the same kind as the exemplar. So the operative relation is belonging to the same kind as. (...) Something like deep structure, then, is tacitly assumed to underlie the operative relation. Evnine 2014, 129

From the above, Evnine goes on to argue that essentially contested terms are part of a semantic phenomenon “in which we introduce a term with reference to a set

⁴⁹³ There is also a follow-up discussion in *Social Epistemology Review and Reply Collective*, summarized by John Williams in “True Succession and Inheritance of Traditions: Looking Back on the Debate” (Williams 2014).

of samples and the principle only that the term refer to things that are of the same kind (however that is determined) as the members of that set." In the cases of both essentially contested terms and natural kind terms, "it is necessary for something to be correctly described by such a term that it bear to the exemplar (...) the relation one thing has to another when both are parts of some single thing." For instance, when something is correctly described as Christianity, "there must be an individual tradition of which the exemplary stage and the currently described phenomenon are both, literally, parts." The same is true in the case of natural kinds: the species 'tiger' contains both an animal described as a tiger and sample tigers. This is the mark of the semantic genus of which both essentially contested terms and natural kind terms are varieties: the reference to an exemplar and the identity relation "makes all the terms in this semantic genus historical, genetic, or externalist." (Evnine 2014, 130-1.) A semantic externalist does not need to presume that there is nothing to meaning that is internal to the speaker, only that meaning is determined at least in part by features that are external (Kallestrup 2011, 2).

The assumption that one's use of a concept is derived from the original exemplar through the (causal) historical connections between the sample's baptism and current usage should not be taken to mean, I think, that there is only one connecting line that is traceable to roughly the same historical source. For instance, when a tradition that is formed around a valued achievement branches into several sub-traditions for doctrinal reasons, it is only to be expected that the adherents come to employ the term that is used to refer to the tradition at large in a way that reflects their unique stance concerning the doctrinal difference that brought about the branching. And what is more, even if the members of each sub-tradition were to adopt a clearly distinct naming convention to mark the differences, nothing stops them from contesting that other sub-traditions truly meet with the requirements of the more general category to which they consider them to be rightful heirs or true successors. In this picture, the fact that any given exemplar can exemplify several different things becomes a part of the explanation of contestability rather than a major flaw (see also Criley in 14.2).

Although it would probably be indicative of a confusion to have a contest over which substance, ice or water steam, is of the same kind as the liquid H₂O samples, the matter is nowhere as clear in the case of "essentially contested terms," especially since their belonging to the same kind as -relation is conceived in terms of being the heir of -relation. Determining their kind involves several difficulties: the transition from concrete (i.e., from an exemplar or set of samples) to general (i.e., a kind) can be done in innumerable ways (ibid., 129); disputes over who is a rightful heir [or the true successor] cannot be resolved without established, institutionalized methods for determining which party is right (ibid., 133-4; see also 12.4); and effectively synonymous notions like true succession and faithfulness are many-many relations, non-transitive or asymmetric, and they admit degrees (Ruben 2010, 264-7), which makes any claim of unique heirship or true successorship highly contestable. This is a real dispute that only appears

definitional due to rival parties' inclination to resolve it by definitional fiat, while the heirship or the ownership of tradition is at issue instead (Evnine 2014, 134).

With respect to natural kinds, Hilary Putnam asserts that "The extension of our terms depends upon the actual nature of the particular things that serve as paradigms, and this actual nature is not, in general, fully known to the speaker" (Putnam 1975, 164). If that is so, it would seem to be the next logical step to try to describe or propose theories of what exactly that nature is. Sally Haslanger urges, more generally, that we must "be attentive to the possibility that what's in our heads may not only be incomplete, but may be actively masking what's semantically going on" (Haslanger 2005, 12). In the case of the conceptual practice within which essentially contested concepts or terms are employed, the disputants hold that there is a kind to be referred to in conjunction with the term-usage. What they most notably *may* fail to realize is that the conceptual practice in which they engage, or are seen to engage, dictates that the membership of "the kind," or the class, is determined in terms of being the heir of- relation. The boundaries of the class are now just as contestable as the related heirship-judgments that form the basis for different ways of employing the term that denotes the kind. Since there is no real method of testing the final veracity of heirship-judgments, one may be tempted to think that there is nothing more to be done than to resolve the issue analytically by accepting one definition or description as the most preferable. That outcome is effectively precluded if the corresponding expression, term, or word is complexly used in several somewhat conflicting, yet historically intelligible ways to denote an open-ended achievement – as could be the case with some of the terms that are often taken to stand for essentially contested concepts⁴⁹⁴.

To conclude, it is of interest to note that we have now gone from end to end in depicting the nature of essentially contested concepts: essentially contested concepts are no longer considered as criterially governed, or descriptive, concepts that are contrasted with natural kinds concepts, but pretty much the other way around. How is this difference in interpretation even possible? I think that is because Gallie presents us with the situation in which rival parties argue for different descriptions of a valued achievement, and he seeks to show how they may still refer to the same thing despite the divergence, but Gallie ends up tackling the issue in two very different ways: (i) by requiring that the constitutive criteria of a concept stay the same although they are weighted differently; and (ii) by locating the elements that guarantee the common reference in historically chained term-usage. (i) suggests that the common reference is guaranteed by the uniformity of descriptive content between rival parties while (ii) points towards an externalist and referentialist explanation, generally speaking. Gallie ends up vacillating between these approaches, which is almost by design given his

⁴⁹⁴ Whether that is *in fact* so in a given case is no longer a matter for the kind of arm-chair inquiry like the current study. One may attain additional empirical insight by exploring the matter through a descriptive conceptual genealogy that traces different ways of using the linguistic term in connection to social practices at different times. See Haslanger 2005 for suggestions how to combine genealogy with semantic externalism, especially with reference to social kinds.

explicit intention of trying to understand how a concept's logical and historical sense are connected in discussing artistic, religious, and political problems (ECC 196). Unfortunately, Gallie does not achieve an adequate synthesis of the two positions, which contributes to the opacity and esotericism of his thesis.

To me it seems that Gallie was not content with the conception that the concepts characteristically employed in certain fields of philosophy, or perhaps in humanistic studies or social sciences more generally, are straightforwardly determined through a description that a person has "*in mind*" (ECC 172n1). It is of course only later that Putnam famously proclaimed that meanings "ain't in the head" (Putnam 1975, 144), but there is a case to be made that Gallie shared similar concerns. For instance, some time before *ECC* and *ART*, Gallie argued against "crude mentalism," or the notion that people "need to have the same actual "thoughts" in order to communicate information to each other" (Gallie 1948, 310). Earlier still, Gallie affirmed that words are social instruments in that their use can be understood by reference to other thinking selves of which one has equally direct knowledge; meaning is a social phenomenon, and thought can be understood only as a social process (Gallie 1938, 72–75, 78–9). Gallie is also on the record for maintaining, explicitly, that all of one's "meanings may become liable to correction in some way, as the result of the advance of enquiry" (Gallie 1938, 77–8). Most notably, though, in discussing the "logically obscure" conceptual structure of 'scientific,' Gallie states that

Its history, therefore, is the history of its successive uses, or of the successive stages of its developing use; and since, on the present hypothesis, our history of scientific ideas is carried up to the present, it must include an understanding of the relations of the correct, currently accepted uses of the term 'scientific'. Gallie 1957, 132

Finally, Gallie's thesis can also be located somewhere between the two historicist theses and semantic externalism. This is as forceful a conclusion as one can make confidently; the connections Gallie can be seen to make between the approaches remain much too obscure and suggestive for that to be otherwise. As is clearly illustrated by Evnine's (2014) particular treatment, the issue largely turns on how the original exemplar is understood. What makes the comparison between a historicist thesis and semantic externalism doubly interesting is how external or environmental features—the 'original exemplar' and the subsequent 'changing circumstances' in Gallie's terminology (6.1; 7.1)—are taken to contribute to contestability. It appears that the historicist thesis is open to an objection that the non-essentialism requirement (12.3) is violated: essentially contested concepts would have their nature virtually entirely because of the epoch one lives in (cf. MacIntyre and Blumenberg before). Developing the essential contestability thesis further along semantically externalist lines might help in conceiving how a first-order essentially contested term is the product of the active intellect of disputing parties: the term's characteristic use is not individuated by the external environment alone, although it being used that way depends on bearing certain (historical-)causal relations to that environment. The emerging perspective could

then be combined with the notion of historical contestability (esp. Waldron and Ingram) that I presented earlier (see 12.2).

18.5 Rearticulation of essential contestability

In conclusion to part four, I summarize my interpretation of essential contestability that I consider an improvement on Gallie's thesis of essential contestedness. I call it *the combinatory account*. Essential contestability is now understood to be brought about by anthropocentric concept employment (see 18.3) that aims to persuade others (see e.g., 13.4; 14.1) within the parameters set by decision-based reasonable disagreement (see 18.1). Although the specific formulation is unique, most of the ingredients of the combinatory account are by no means my original innovations⁴⁹⁵. In fact, I have already presented, developed, and defended those elements earlier in this study, but they are now explicitly articulated as a part of a consistent whole. I start by describing the special function that the combinatory account attributes to relevant concept-uses and move from there to discuss the nature of a dispute and the way disputants relate to each other and to a contested matter. I end up concluding that essential contestability should be understood to be about concept-formation.

The anthropocentric concept employment means that essentially contested concepts have the function of interpretively facilitating the best possible solutions in basic human problem areas and/or in connection to broadly understood human activities in thought and practice (18.3). These concepts are commonly used in connection to participatory social practices and activities; they are employed by people to understand themselves and the practices in which they engage (cf. 16.4). It follows that essentially contested concepts have an endorsement function in addition to an interpretive function. These concepts are also employed reflexively to describe and evaluate as the two facets of a single categorization (17.4). Debates over how to best make the needed conceptualizations are centripetal rather than centrifugal, not because the concepts that are involved somehow force it, but because the concepts are employed in connection to a common problem and/or in close relation to an activity that is capable of addressing such problem.

Ernest Gellner finds Gallie's original idea of what happens in historically long-drawn-out disputes dialectical by its nature: "Like the dialectic, his idea stresses an affinity between the movement of thought and life" (Gellner 1974, 99). The combinatory account does not aim to be a dialectical position, but it may be taken to have dialectical consequences when activities become repeated (cf. *ibid.*, 97-8). Since the concepts in question have an anthropocentric/interpretive

⁴⁹⁵ As I see it, the combinatory account takes up Gallie's original ideas and runs with them to their logical conclusion with the help of the secondary literature. Ultimately, it is up to the reader to decide whether the current proposal is a charitable interpretation of Gallie's thesis or a unique interpretation of essential contestability.

function, they are often the concepts of open-ended activities that aim to address human problems. Such activities are repeated as life goes on and thought seeks to trace the contours of the activities by conceptualizing them anew when needed. Gallie's claim of conceptual progress becomes intelligible with this background, even if his original formulation is a bit misleading (cf. ch. 9). The normative standard for evaluating that progress could come from the assessment of our capability to address relevant problems, although determining whether the progress is made or not can still be contested.

Essential contestation is not a logically necessary outcome of employing some concepts, it is rather an ever-present possibility that is rooted in a form of life. It is conceivable that there is a possible world, or an imagined society (cf. 13.3), in which matters related to aesthetics, morality, and politics, for example, do not become incessantly contested. That is not, however, our world or our society. Were things different, the shared form of life would likewise be different. That is to say that the essentiality of contestation is grounded culturally as well as in our human condition. This is the primary sense in which the combinatory account understands the related contestation as essential. It is mostly a matter of perspective whether such contestation should be termed "characteristic" instead (cf. Hurley 1989, 45–8 or see 14.1). By that I mean to say that the relevant type of contestation manifests, in any case, as part of our social and cultural life, and some issues are characteristically contested while others are not. There is no fixed list of concepts that are properly subject to essential contestation before they are actually contested, not even in relation to basic human problem areas or long-standing features of human condition⁴⁹⁶. The reference to the human condition or form of life becomes crucial, however, in determining whether the type of contestation that is characterized by the concept-employment that the combinatory account describes is an essential feature of our human condition or a shared form of life. The combinatory account makes a bold claim that it is, and that ultimately makes the combinatory account strong enough to be a proper thesis of essential contestability (cf. 15.3). By contrast, the particular object or content of essential contestation is always determined by a decision-based reasonable disagreement. In this regard, an essentially contested concept does not find a foundation in the human condition but in a human activity or practice which is shaped by contingent social and cultural factors, and which shapes the way of employing that concept, in turn.

To offer an example, a concept like SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT can be considered as an essentially contested concept according to the combinatory account, even if the problem it is employed to address, i.e., how to productively live and plan for a future in an environment that is gradually becoming more unbearable due to humanity's impact, is not a long-standing feature of human

⁴⁹⁶ That being said, it is exceedingly likely that a concept like SOCIAL JUSTICE is regularly under essential contestation because it is constantly employed in a fashion described by the combinatory account. That is also why its other and perhaps rarer uses may easily be construed as advocating for a specific view (or a solution to a common problem) as one contestant among others (cf. 18.1).

condition (although it could be a relatively new one in the current era of Anthropocene). What matters is that a problem or problem area is highly significant, the concept in question is employed anthropocentrically and with an aim to persuade, and contestation over the matter is not a blip on the radar but comes with a reasonable expectation that the matters revolving around the term/concept are contested for the foreseeable future (cf. esp. Connolly and Gray in 12.4). In many such cases, the root of the problem may be traceable to human condition, ultimately, but that is not strictly speaking necessary since the combinatory account also admits those concepts that are closely connected to (broad) human activities and practices as valued achievements. Sustainable development can be considered a human activity that is also a valued achievement, but it may also be considered a valued achievement within an economic activity, and many things more. The more a given term figures in connection to different human activities—while a lot rides on how the accompanying conceptualization is specifically made—the more avenues there is for the term to stand for an essentially contested concept.

The facilitation of solutions is the animating point of a concept in its function as an essentially contested concept; that is, when the concept is employed anthropocentrically/interpretively in the above fashion (see also 18.2; 18.3). Grasping that animating point—as the aim or goal concept-users pursue in contesting the concept, and in terms of which concept-users make sense of the practice of using the concept (see 18.2)—is part of a higher-order intellectual feat of recognizing the concept's status as essentially contested. That recognition is based on a (further) conceptualization concerning how a (first-order) concept or term is employed in a dispute (cf. later). This intellectual feat also includes the awareness that it is expected that one's use of the concept will become contested (cf. ch. 7) and that any semblance of consensus is determined through decision-based reasonable disagreement (18.1).

One may successfully employ an essentially contested concept anthropocentrically/interpretively in a dispute without having the higher-order recognition of that special function. Yet a concept-use ought not to be conceptualized as the employment of essentially contested concept if the concept is not also used to endorse certain views or values with the aim of promulgating them further, or the concept-user does not think that others should also endorse the same views or values. The endorsement function of essentially contested concepts is most clearly displayed in the way essentially contested concepts are characteristically used in sustaining and developing a valued achievement (signified by a concept) to the optimum (cf. 9.1). A lower-order recognition that one is contesting the matter in order to change other people's minds is needed for there to be a right type of conceptual contest, or a competitive affair in which one use of a concept is argued to be superior to another use. Otherwise, it would be possible for rival parties to engage in a contest without any awareness of the fact that they try to best each other. Achieving the lower-order recognition is easier than achieving the higher-order recognition, and I stress that only the

lower-order *recognition* is strictly speaking necessary for essential contestability to get off the ground according to the combinatory account.

I have now distinguished two animating points, the anthropocentric/interpretive function and the endorsement/advocacy function, behind employment of essentially contested concepts. That is tantamount to defining the employment of essentially contested concepts in accordance with those functions. The two functions could be further divided into four functions (as indicated by the slash symbol). The reasoning behind the current distinction is that the anthropocentric subject matter requires interpretive assessment, and endorsing a particular interpretation is a preference that is also, or can always be construed as (cf. 18.1), an advocacy position in an ongoing contestation over the matter⁴⁹⁷. Overall, the issue is thus not about what *kind* of concept one is employing but *how* the concept is used, or what is the respective conceptual practice. The combinatory account thus localizes essential contestability on the level of conceptual practices.

Given that the higher-order recognition of the anthropocentric/interpretive function is not required for one to engage in a conceptual practice that is characterized by essential contestation, the question of the disputants' adequate motivation to continue contesting the issue with the full awareness of the nature of the dispute (cf. 13.1) is distinct from what constitutes the employment of essentially contested concepts. It is relatively easy to see how a person's lower-order recognition of the fact of contestedness can change or mature, in time, into a fully-fledged recognition that participants in a dispute are employing the concept anthropocentrically/interpretively. The latter disposition is more intellectually taxing, but it does not entail the impossibility of arguing for the superiority of one's preferred concept-use. Furthermore, the combinatory account understands disagreement that ensues from seeking solutions to common problems interpretively as a rational undertaking. Specifically, the disagreement is rational in the sense that the parties involved are practically rational in striving towards the best possible solutions (cf. 13.2), and it can be commonly acknowledged that one may arrive at different conclusions in one's particular appraisive situation and/or on the basis of multifarious evidence. The rationality is now seen as a feature of the anthropocentric/interpretive conceptual practice rather than any specific way of conceptualizing the issue. This marks an important difference between the combinatory account and the kind of thesis that understands the conceptual practice of employing essentially contested concepts as being characterized by mutual recognition of all competing concept-uses as epistemically reasonable.

As a condition for essentially contested concepts, decision-based reasonable disagreement is a key feature of the combinatory account. In addition to tracking what is arguably the character of the disputes that Gallie theorizes, the idea of such disagreement brings together four dispute-related theoretical conceptions

⁴⁹⁷ This accords with the spirit of Gallie's original thesis – especially with *Artificial* (3.3; 11.1).

that complement the combinatory account⁴⁹⁸. Those conceptions are about the formation of the area of disagreement, the nature of (the area of) disagreement, the mode of rationality that is operative in such disagreement, and the manner in which rival parties' argumentation proceeds based on what the disputants find mutually acceptable. I will now present how these issues relate to each other in the combinatory account.

The decision-based reasonable disagreement is fundamentally a theoretical idea that aims to cope with the unity problem— i.e., the theoretical difficulties that arise from the assumption that a concept is shared and contested at the same time (see 14.2; 15.1)—at the non-semantic or non-conceptual level. For that purpose, the area of disagreement between rival parties is understood as the zone of reasonable disagreement. The views that are admitted to the zone of reasonable disagreement—indeed the views that are *decided* as reasonable even if they come to conflict rather than to coincide—reflect a variety of mutually contested and contesting uses of concepts/terms, of which an open-ended essentially contested concept is comprised (18.1; cf. later). When I speak of 'decision' I mean it in the broad sense to also include effects of which the rival parties may not be completely aware, or which they do not intend.

The views that are decided upon as reasonable can include conclusions of varying strength and character. It is expected that both the decision to deem some views more reasonable than others and the ultimate choice by each (reasonable) party to prefer one view over others are affected by different sorts of norms, values, and either individual or communal standards. When the stakes of employing a concept one or another way are high, it is of considerable practical significance which specific view or concept-use is preferred and ultimately adopted. Essentially contested concepts typically signify achievements and ideals that matter to people, and often tremendously so. Yet the mundanity of a dispute in no way curtails the scope of what can be taken as efficacious considerations; a decision-based reasonable disagreement in the current sense extends beyond what is conveyed in particular exchanges. (cf. 18.1.)

Some essential contestability theses, like the reasonable disagreement thesis, *may* set a high bar for mutual justifiability based on shared evidence (cf. 13.2) while a more politically oriented account *may* admit as reasonable pretty much everything rival parties, or audiences they try to persuade, deem somehow acceptable from their standpoints. The combinatory account, however, favors understanding the required criteria of rationality as internal to a given dispute. Ultimately, it is the job of disputants to (actively) determine the appropriate guiding principles for comparative evaluation of the reasonableness of diverging (first-order) concept-uses. Other than that, the disputants are free to change the

⁴⁹⁸ This is really how the combinatory account earns its name: the account combines various elements and insights from Gallie and his commentators under the rubric of one thesis. For example, the anthropocentric and interpretive dimensions of concept employment form one clear combination that is based mainly on the ideas of Care (1973), Kekes (1977), Gray (1978), Dworkin (2011), and of course Gallie.

relevant parameters for assessing the reasonableness⁴⁹⁹. By bringing up other possible theses and the latitude they grant, I do not do so only to make a comparison. As I see it, the way the criteria of rationality for employing the concept are determined in each given case (by a group, in a dispute, within a discipline etc.) partly constitutes the mutual conceptual practice of employing the concept. There may now be different conceptual practices that still involve the use of the same term or word, and all those practices do not necessarily manifest essential contestability.

To illustrate the latter point, we may note that those philosophers who subscribe to ardent moral cognitivism while accepting the scientific-ideal framework for analyzing concepts are likely to accept much less latitude for how 'justice' may be contested than those political theorists who lean towards a form of expressivism while accepting the language-focused framework (see also 16.3). Let us now suppose that there are two different practices for using 'justice,' and that the respective latitude for using 'justice' within the practices closely match with what is considered appropriate by the imagined philosophers and political theorists. In addition, we should assume that the way that the political theorists are using the term manifests essential contestability while that is not the case with the philosophers' usage. But should we now conclude that (a) 'justice' is not essentially contested because philosophers say so, or that (b) 'justice₂' by the political theorists is essentially contested while JUSTICE is not, or that (c) JUSTICE₂ by the political theorists is essentially contested while JUSTICE₁ by the philosophers is not? In localizing essential contestability to conceptual practices, the combinatory account leaves room for (c). The issue is not that philosophers and political theorists would attribute a drastically different content to their respective concepts of justice. Rather, different rationalities guide their conceptual practices, and that is the level on which the combinatory account distinguishes essentially contested concepts from other concepts.

Furthermore, the combinatory account understands the domain of essential contestability as an area of choice, uncertainty, and commitment (13.2). The uncertainty comes from the absence of uncontested general principles or standards capable of transcending the conflict once and for all. The commitment stems from the endorsement of solutions to a problem that are contrived by employing essentially contested concepts interpretively. It is worth pointing out that the absence of uncontested general principles for resolving the dispute is also a matter that disputants have "decided," even if only by virtue of continuing to contest the matter while their favored principles become contested by others. Were the rival parties to come to accept any such principle that is also capable of resolving the dispute (cf. 12.4), there would no longer be a dispute over the proper way to use a concept but a mutual agreement assuming no one has made an error – and no essentially contested concept.

⁴⁹⁹ The term 'parameters' is introduced here to include a broad range of relevant things like norms of good conduct in a debate, valid ways of introducing and handling the evidence, and how to respond to different standards of evaluation. Minor differences between the disputants in this regard do not result in distinct conceptual practices.

My presupposition of decision-based reasonable disagreement might remain rather *ad hoc* if not for the conceptions of transitional rationality and *ad hominem* reasoning and argumentation (13.4) that describe how such disagreement can be carried out. I will now discuss these conceptions in turn in connection to the theoretical needs of the combinatory account. The point of emphasizing the role of transitional rationality is to find a way of dealing with claims and positions that have separate and possibly independent justificatory grounds, and between which universal and definitive agreement is most unlikely. That can be the case when the disputants are assumed to have chosen how they employ a concept/term from their unique standpoint, or in their particular appraisive situations as Gallie would say (see 11.4). Moreover, a person undergoing a conversion can identify the transition directly as the correcting of an error; the conversion becomes self-justifying. There is no need to consider such individual conversion as radical or irrational if the transition consists in the overcoming of a confusion or the recognition of a hitherto ignored relevant factor. Similarly, others can view the conversion at least as intelligible when a rational path is traceable between the past and the present view of the individual. (13.4.)

Be that as it may, at least some criteria or standards are needed for rational comparison, even if they would not determine what is the uniquely correct way of using the concept in a particular instance. Since the combinatory account understands essentially contested concepts as being employed in connection to highly significant human problems with which various activities and practices grapple, it locates one set of possible criteria in reciprocal recognition of certain human constants or modes of understanding that are able to serve as mediating elements deeply embedded in the human life form (cf. 13.4; 18.3). That type of reciprocal recognition can be called a shared pre-understanding. Some such pre-understanding is arguably required for humans to share a form of life, and it could be also taken to involve contents other than the strictly cognitive. Nevertheless, it is only fair to state outright that what I refer to as the pre-understanding is a bedrock that turns my spade in the current study, at least as far as finding further justification for the availability of the common criteria is concerned⁵⁰⁰ (but see also 13.4).

The point of emphasizing the *ad hominem* reasoning and argumentation (13.4) is to show that engaging in argument that starts from that which is accepted by other debaters does not have to evince irrationality. Given the

⁵⁰⁰ I do not mean to say that one could not find various manifestations of such pre-understanding. It is only that establishing it in a particular case plausibly requires a fair bit of discipline-specific empirical research in addition to philosophical theorizing. For example, it is *conceivable* that nearly every human being acknowledges that being disrespected is something negative or to be avoided, and that can ground further norms, standards, and criteria concerning proper moral conduct. That is so even if people were to disagree to some considerable extent what falls within the range of being disrespected (perhaps outside certain paradigm cases), not to mention how one should conduct oneself morally. I mean to say that simply ascribing this function to a primitive sense of disrespect, or to a shared psychological feeling of what amounts to disrespect, or the like, would count as ill-advised speculation when lacking further empirical backing. To make that type of case(s) goes beyond the limits of the current study.

endorsement/advocacy function of essentially contested concepts, it makes perfect sense to focus on the personal and collective commitments of people one seeks to persuade. I do not mean to say that one could not reason and argue for one's views *at all* outside the adherences of one's rivals by appealing to established facts, for instance. But it is *not necessary* to transcend the particular perspectives of the disputants in order to persuade them. If no arguments that can secure the conviction of the universal audience are available, *ad hominem* reasoning and argumentation may take their place as a rational approach, especially when suspending judgement is not a practical option (13.2; cf. below). The rivals can be motivated to carry out a decision-based reasonable disagreement without presuming the possibility of universal agreement since the expected success of their efforts to persuade others does not hinge on that being possible.

Persuasion should be distinguished from justification by virtue of an incontrovertible argument, and being persuaded should be distinguished from being absolutely convinced (cf. 12.4). When all arguments have been adduced, and there is no single way of employing a concept anthropocentrically and interpretively that can gain (universal) agreement, being persuaded to adopt *a* concept-use enables further inferences and practical action. On many occasions one does not have the luxury of abstaining from judging on the grounds that one yearns for certainty or demands conclusive evidence. At worst it is a sign of practical feebleness. (13.2.) Thus, the practical justifiability of using a concept in one manner rather than another does not need to be based on extensive deliberation or an objectively well-reasoned choice. Yet it needs to be intelligible, a big part of which is that one's choice is appropriately responsive to reasons which stem from one's particular appraisive situation that can include individual as well as collective (or cultural) considerations. Many actual intractable disputes may indeed be riddled with unfortunate errors of rationality. But setting an inhuman bar for what counts as rational conduct in practical contexts can only result in marginalizing the applicability of one's theoretical framework to real-world disagreements.

Do both academic and laymen disputes involve the type of concept employment that I have described here? Is the combinatory account applicable in the case of concepts like ART, DEMOCRACY, and SOCIAL JUSTICE? As should be evident by now, the combinatory account does not seek to cover all possible cases in which one's use of a certain word, term, or concept becomes contested by someone else. As subject to essential contestability, it identifies only those concepts-uses that are anthropocentric/interpretative, that are mutually contested within a decision-based reasonable disagreement, and that aim to persuade or convert others (more precisely, have an endorsement/advocacy function).

In any case, in the case of philosophical or laymen disputes over SOCIAL JUSTICE, for instance, I find it plausible that the concept is often employed with the (partial) purpose of addressing a general and highly significant human problem (e.g., how people should act in, and organize, their social relations).

Whatever is termed or described 'socially just' is an answer to that problem in addition to whatever else it is. I find it at least equally plausible that not every such use matches with the animating point of actually furthering a valued achievement, practically or intellectually, and hence some uses would fall outside the ambit of essential contestability. That being said, there is no stopping someone from construing such uses as if they would entail the same animating point, in which case one might become a (possibly unwilling) participant to essential contestation (18.1). Importantly, the same is true with respect to the animating point that comes with employing a concept as an essentially contested concept. The analyst may reframe a host of merely loosely connected term-uses as if they were answers to a common problem and thus ascribe essential contestability to them. I think this is relatively uncontroversial, especially given our liberty to conceptualize matters in a variety of ways; for instance, by picking different features as salient and combining them in surprising or fantastic ways.

However, notable theoretical difficulties arise due to the combinatory account guising itself as a concept-centered thesis (see ch. 15 intro) that accepts *Concept-Object* (i.e., the actual object of contestation is a concept/term). *Concept-Object* is ultimately *the* assumption that the two challenges (15.1; 15.2) bring into question. The claims that come with *Concept-Structure* (i.e., the locus of contestation inheres in that concept/term owing to its special characteristics and/or how the concept is inherently structured or organized) and *Concept-Function* (i.e., essential contestability arises due to a special way a concept is employed) are specific answers to how *a concept* can be centrally involved in essential contestation. The combinatory account discards the idea that the origin of essential contestability is located in a special structure of a special kind of concept. By replacing *Concept-Structure* with *Concept-Function*, I find essential contestability in the specific way a concept or term is employed. Doing so evades the two horns of a dilemma that confronts attempts to produce a concept-centered thesis of essential contestability.

On the one horn, the combinatory account avoids a fundamental problematic that seems to constantly sidetrack attempts to locate the origin of contestability *in* a concept's structure. Whichever way we might want to describe a concept's features or characteristics, it makes sense to think that it would be employed identically by two identical concept-users with identical purposes in identical circumstances (and so forth). But if there were a difference between the users, or between their purposes, or between their circumstances (or whatnot), the difference in how they specifically employ the concept *can be* attributed to that factor instead. For instance, even if the concept would allow selecting from mutually conflicting disjunctive features depending on one's purposes, an ensuing contestedness would be attributable to those purposes rather than to the concept's disjunctive organization. Now it can be claimed that there is no compelling reason to think that contestability originates in the concept, and thus there is no sense to speak of essentiality of such contestability in connection to concepts. Then again, if the features or the characteristics of the concept(s) that is(are) employed in a dispute would be different, we can attribute contestability

to that difference and deem that the disputants are simply employing different concepts. All in all, this casts doubt on the strategy of locating the origin of mutually contesting uses of a concept within a concept by describing the features of that concept alone, even if the concept that is used differently needs to be able to accommodate or enable any variety of its uses (assuming that one deals with a single concept to begin with).

On the other horn, the combinatory account resists a temptation to discard concepts as central objects of interest. For instance, the admittance to a tradition thesis (see 12.4; 18.4) may be a good approximation of the kind of contestation that Gallie seems to have in mind, or at least one aspect of it. The return the thesis gets from being less ambitious in terms of conceptual scope is that it is quite defensible as a description of disagreement over (the inheritance of) a tradition. However, concepts are involved only coincidentally. The same could perhaps be said about the anthropocentric/interpretive concept employment if not for the fact that the combinatory account constantly articulates essential contestability in terms of how terms and concepts are employed and finds it to be, ultimately, a matter of concept-formation (cf. later).

The combinatory account does not resolve the issue of concept-sharing at the level of precisely demarcated first-order concepts, but it seeks to circumvent the problem by positing a popular conception as a mutually acknowledged amalgam of different views (see 18.1). Such a popular conception is understood as the product of a historical process; it is the current stage to where discussion on a topic to which the concept is intimately connected has led, and it can serve as an argumentative conceptual plateau for further contestation (18.1).

The way a popular conception comes into being can be understood both diachronically and synchronically. What could have started as a common attempt to find an answer to a humanly significant problem or issue by using a word or term in a way that involves incompatible normative standards or principles, can later reach a stage in which the boundaries of variance are stabilized and the terminological versatility becomes generally accepted in connection to one valued achievement or ideal⁵⁰¹. When the rivalling standards and principles come to be perceived as part of the same evaluative continuum that a term signifies (cf. 12.2; 14.2), the term refers to one and the same concept, albeit a contestable one. Alternatively, the conceptual practice of employing the term could have been shaped to be of the kind that invoking the term elicits others to judge anew the idea that has been signified by the term. In that case, the contestable concept would display “the characteristic of requiring a reflective participatory response in order to ascertain what is appropriately regarded as falling under the concept” (Halpin 2001, 161; see also 17.4). In both ways of

⁵⁰¹ This particular conception is analogous to how I earlier described a movement from the initial stage that is characterized by ambiguity to the stage of experimentation or contestation in which mutually ambiguous descriptions are transformed into a single vague concept (see 14.2). For the relevant sense of vagueness (i.e., vagueness as uncertainty), see 12.1. However, there is a fine line between what should be termed ambiguity, and genuine contestability; some would say that ‘essentially contested concept’ becomes a term of art in the current context.

understanding the matter, an essentially contested concept that consists of different competing uses stands for an amalgam of culturally connected views.

The intellectual results of the anthropocentric/interpretive concept employment are apt to be accumulated and systematized in disciplines that deal with issues closely related to general human problem areas, or broad activities, institutions, and practices that we have for addressing such problems. Philosophy and various humanistic and social scientific fields of study are the prime candidates for the job, and the presence of anthropocentric/interpretive concept employment with an endorsement/advocacy function can at least partly explain why concepts within these fields appear particularly contestable. Theorizing and (cross-)disciplinary knowledge (cf. 17.1) appears to have a role in contributing to essential contestability quite simply because both may be needed for solving the problems to which the anthropocentric/interpretive concept employment aims to provide the best possible solutions. One's choice to use the concept in a particular way is informed by everything one knows about how to best solve the problem at hand – that knowledge need not be considered as an inherent part of the concept as it rather provides one with reasons to adopt one conceptualization over another. Over time, and along with other relevant social, cultural, and historical factors, the interconnectedness of specialized knowledge and the variety of concept-uses adds to the complexity of what is under contestation. Of course, not everything that informs debates over essentially contested concepts is systematized within various disciplines. There are various *endoxa* that are widely acceptable and which, for that reason, may guide how the disputants come to use the concept (cf. 18.1). *Endoxa* are culturally available ways of valuing and seeing things, and they are accumulated in a common cultural reservoir rather than organized theoretically within disciplines. *Endoxa* are thus culture-dependent and culture-specific, and they should be distinguished from a group of minimal, noncontroversial truisms about persons and their environment (18.5). The latter are much closer to what I refer to as the shared pre-understanding (in form of life).

My current proposal cannot easily be combined with a view of conceptual analysis as an enterprise that is solely concerned with rival parties' corresponding mental contents as a shared cognitive structure, or the like. Instead, the combinatory account frames attempts to find grounds for calling something 'x' as part of the formation of the concept that is embryonic, inchoate, or in search of its meaning (see 18.2; cf. 6.1; 12.1). Such concepts could be termed 'philosophical' in the present framework, especially if their philosophicalness is mainly due to a normative drive to perfect them in connection to given human purposes (see also 18.3). To find the best possible answers to persistent human problems is an exercise that can be undertaken in relative solitude while being motivated by a sheer intellectual curiosity. However, by seeking to persuade others, one seeks to effect *changes in the world*, changes that come by virtue of others adopting one's preferred use of a concept. As Robert Grafstein observes, the "logic of the situation is that the common world is divided over the kind of social order it will be and, in effect, over which conceptual lense [sic] will be

appropriate" (Grafstein 1988, 23). From a slightly different perspective: since the mutually conflicting concept-uses are tied to different solutions to a common problem, the conflict is also due to the fact that those solutions are viewed as practically incompatible. The disputes that are characterized by essential contestability cannot be satisfactorily captured on a conceptual axis alone: they are also substantive and practical⁵⁰².

It may be further objected that the combinatory account contains a few crucial flaws. First, in attempting to shift the interpretation of essential contestability towards how certain concepts are employed, or terms are used, it still frames the debates by relying on a controversial theory of concepts. Here, I refer especially to my brief discussion of *endoxa* in relation to folk theorizing as part of a descriptive outlook. By presenting the matter in that way, however, I am not subscribing to, nor advocating for, any theory of meaning or reference. I am simply describing what may reasonably take place in such disputes. If the disputants offer conflicting descriptions or definitions of a valued achievement *as if* they were subscribing to a descriptivist outlook, one needs to illustrate how *that* situation could lead to an especially pervasive kind of contestability. Sometimes parties concerned are very explicit in their attempts to resolve the dispute analytically, i.e., by presenting a description or definition as the one that others should self-evidently accept.

For example, in Finland a few years ago, there was a hard-to-categorize disagreement that revolved around the question of whether the law that grants the status of marriage to couples should be modified to accommodate same-sex couples by eliminating gender terms from the law's phrasing. Another law that allowed the same-sex couples to enter into a civil union had already been in effect for some time, but the new initiative was pushed in the name of equality between different sexual orientations. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the initiative met considerable resistance from various quarters before the bill was eventually passed in the Finnish Parliament, and the modified marriage law has now been effective since the 1st of March 2017. Back then, it was not uncommon to hear an argument that "the concept of marriage is defined as a union between a man and a woman, because a marriage is a Christian concept" among other, more substantive claims⁵⁰³. In this case, we appear to have many of the hallmarks of

⁵⁰² In this respect, essential contestability has a considerable overlap with the political, which goes a long way towards explaining why many commentators, in addition to Grafstein just quoted, have understood Gallie's thesis as quintessentially political (cf. Grafstein 1988, 24–5).

⁵⁰³ This can also be perceived as a rhetorical stratagem that aims to move the debate onto the terrain that one prefers. That appears to always be the case when one attempts to resolve a dispute that involves substantive disagreement with a definitional fiat. Moreover, it seems clear that such a real-world dispute is not going anywhere as a definitional dispute, or as a dispute over the meaning of words (cf. 17.1). The resolution that one can hope for, in this case, is to persuade enough people of the substance of one's argument and to leave specious analytical arguments out. For example, instead of appealing to the marriage as a Christian concept, one would do well to appeal to it as a Christian institution. Others may disagree, of course, but that is then a substantive, not analytical, matter *unless* the disputants make it both a substantive and analytical matter by contesting the issue that way.

essential contestability: MARRIAGE signifies an institution that parties to a dispute, religious or not, consider a valued achievement either directly or indirectly, and it is culturally complex in having various legal, spiritual, romantic *et cetera* aspects. Similarly, the practice of marriage can be seen, and is often explicitly understood, as a solution to a problem, or rather, to multiple (possible) problems that range from proper arrangement of social relationships and their legal protections to one's standing in the eyes of God and the congregation. There is a clear sense in which the proper way to order a union between partners is a basic human problem, as are the demands of a personal and communal spiritual life, even if the institution of marriage has gone through changes over the years as people have interpreted and conceptualized it anew. We have a vested interest in solving such problems to the best of our ability, and the marriage becomes a valued achievement as a solution (to a complex or multifaceted problem). This leads to employing MARRIAGE while endorsing (or attacking) specific social and cultural conceptions. I think it is also safe to say that, as far as anyone can tell, the need to set the terms for a union between partners in some way is not going away in future. Other parallels to the combinatory account are not hard to find.

Second, it may be claimed that the combinatory account does not describe contestability that is clearly about or involving (see 14.1) a single concept. If so, am I forced to adopt an explanatory strategy that affirms the involvement of distinct conceptual contents in an otherwise genuine dispute revolving around a single term (cf. 15.2)? In fact, I think that the combinatory account would not bear an insurmountable loss were it to be affirmed that that there is not *always* a single concept involved, or possessed by rival parties (cf. 15.1), in a decision-based reasonable disagreement. I think so partly because I consider my account robust enough as a description of a certain type of deep-seated and pervasive disputes that turn partly, but importantly, on how the disputed matter is conceptualized in the first place. One could now state that differences between "uses" are semantically close enough and/or otherwise acceptable to "a concept's" users so that they form either a semantic cluster (which is divisible into more fine-grained contents), an evaluative cluster (of accompanying standards that are considered relevant), and/or a pragmatically imparted common topic that is culturally and theoretically prone to be conceptualized in different yet interlocking ways. With suitable adjustments, one can still understand the matter in terms of a decision-based reasonable disagreement that takes up the different uses and churns out a *new* object, for which it determines proper boundaries. The change of gears is possible because the combinatory account does not attempt to posit *a* special kind of concept as the *origin* of essential contestability.

Third, it may be granted that the combinatory account works well enough without presuming a single shared concept to be always involved in a dispute. But is there reason to assume that the single concept could be present, in any way, shape, or form, in the type of contestation that I describe? Are there grounds for an even more controversial claim that such a concept also consists of its mutually conflicting uses? That would be the second sense in which contestation over a concept can be considered essential as the essential elements of a concept would

be contested. These questions occupy the rest of the section, and they can be posed both at the macro- and micro-level.

I start with the macro-level. There may be several theoretical frameworks within which the idea of contesting a single concept becomes sensible, but in one such framework a pattern of word- or term-use is identified as forming a conceptual fabric that is then called a 'concept'⁵⁰⁴ (see 16.3). In the case of essential contestability, that is not enough, of course. It must also be plausible enough that the emerging fabric consists of conflicting anthropocentric/interpretive concept employment⁵⁰⁵. The fabric can be apprehended as a synchronic entity, but it comes into existence through a diachronic process that is open-ended and ongoing. The current theoretical framework can thus accommodate the kind of conceptual analysis that understands the attempt to find grounds for calling something 'x' as part of the formation of the concept that is embryonic, inchoate, or in search of its meaning (see before). Metaphorically speaking, the "concept" in question "hovers" between its contestant users who do not fully possess it, because their competing uses are the very material of which the conceptual fabric consists⁵⁰⁶. That fabric can now be called 'essentially contested concept,' and each conflicting word- or term-use that forms a part of it is incomplete in the sense that it does not cover the whole fabric that consists of all those uses. This explanation fits nicely with my previous statements about essentially contested concepts as a popular conception. The obvious drawback is that it is not evident that the rival parties are even able to refer to such conceptual fabric and/or popular conception that consists of mutually conflicting elements, not to mention that they would intend to do so⁵⁰⁷. Simply stipulating it would be unsatisfactory, and plausible ways to do so might need extra-assumptions like Evinne's heirship-relation (18.4) that move the focus of the debate.

If the above is understood from the perspective of the analyst, there is nothing deeply mysterious about it. Something on these lines is arguably behind numerous claims, according to which one or another concept is contested, that

⁵⁰⁴ Instead of 'fabric' one could also refer to 'structure.' With the current usage, I wish to avoid unnecessary confusions.

⁵⁰⁵ The current talk of plausibility is reminiscent of Gallie's formulation of Condition (VII) (9.1). This is no coincidence, but the matter will become more pronounced a bit later.

⁵⁰⁶ This claim does not amount to a stronger anti-realist claim that also the things thus conceptualized are constituted through contestation or in a decision-based reasonable disagreement. Although many essential contestability theses tend to be anti-realist or "non-realist" (Grafstein 1988, 11), the combinatory account is not anti-realist. If anything, the combinatory account's emphasis on essential contestability as a typical feature of the human condition illustrates a realist position. There is an important sense in which conceptualizations can be viewed as part of social reality, but for the present purposes it is enough to affirm that participants to a dispute believe something and conceptualize accordingly. The realist can accept that as a fact and move on (ibid., 13) without committing to anti-realist views.

⁵⁰⁷ A type of semantic externalist explanation of how this could take place is probably needed, which is not surprising at all given how Gallie himself somewhat vacillates between historicism and semantic externalism (cf. 18.4).

are most often made in fields like political philosophy and theory, or in the study of various social and cultural particulars. For instance, Elías Palti (2005a) states that political languages consist of a characteristic form of their production rather than consisting of statements or contents of discourse. Such languages are semantically undetermined, and they “send us back to second order level of symbolic reality, the modes of the production of concepts.” Citing Jesús Mosterín, Palti observes that “a political language is composed of *conceptors* (concepts of concepts),” and he further claims that making a history of political languages demands transcending both the surface discourse as well as the level of its semantic contents (or the “ideas” that are argued for). (Palti 2005a, 128.) In the current study, I am not making the argument that essential contestability is either a requirement or explanation of “the political,” a consequence of employing a political language, or inextricably linked with the political realm. Still, I think Palti is on the mark regarding the relation of the analyst’s concepts and the political language. More to the point, I also think that one who analyzes patterns of word- or term-usage, which exhibit conceptual unity and are characterized by anthropocentric/interpretative concept employment, is positioned similarly.

The possibility of a micro-level answer at the level of individual disputes is an intriguing theoretical prospect. Although it faces much the same difficulties as the macro-level explanation, it points more clearly towards a possible solution that is available at both levels. Still the statement that a concept consists of its mutually conflicting uses is just about as paradoxical as it gets. In addition, it does not seem possible to possess one and the same concept with others and argue that one’s own use is right while others are wrong when the concept in question is individuated by its possession conditions (15.1). But what if essentially contested concepts are individuated in some other manner? More specifically, I have in mind a configuration in which there is no pre-existing essentially contested concept before contestation, but such concept comes to be constituted and individuated as the product of the ongoing dispute.

If we consider a dispute that manifests essential contestability from a perspective that brackets its historical and social context, I do not find it sensible to suppose *one*, pre-existing, *concept* before contestation that would only later become contested. This means adopting, instead, what I have been calling ‘the unifying process approach’ (14.1; 17.3). As far as specific (micro-level) disputes are concerned, one does not select from available uses, views, or conceptions that somehow already belong to a certain concept that is already shared. Rather, different uses, views, or conceptions form a part of the concept that is constituted in the dispute, because the dispute itself is importantly about which concept one should adopt. Before the dispute, that question is still undecided because no arguments have yet been made for one or another particular understanding or conceptualization. When the arguments and evidence have been presented, the disputants may convert to adopting a different concept (or “use,” conceptualization, view *et cetera*) or they may hold steadfastly to the one that they have preferred all along. As an entity, an essentially contested concept does not sensibly consist *either* of the concepts that the disputants *had* before contestation

or of the concepts that the disputants *have* after contesting the matter. To the extent that there is a special kind of concept involved in disputes manifesting essential contestability, its reference is determined as the product of the ongoing dispute which is still undetermined. Following John Gray, I have characterized essential contestability as an area of uncertainty that remains when all arguments have been adduced. An essentially contested concept stands for an inchoate concept when the arguments are still being adduced. The competing conceptions thesis that I discussed earlier follows a similar logic, even if its proponents do not characterize the overall phenomenon the same way the combinatory account does (see 17.3).

If an essentially contested concept is a concept at all, it looks to be a second-order concept. Participants to a dispute are partaking in the formation of the inchoate essentially contested concept, whether they are aware of it or not, when they engage in the right sort of conceptual practice and dispute⁵⁰⁸. Their common contribution to the dispute is the prerequisite for a further conceptualization that there is an essentially contested concept involved. That is how the essentially contested concept originates in the conflicting anthropocentric/interpretive concept-uses (if that much latitude is granted by one's theory of concepts), or alternatively, in the anthropocentric/interpretive employment of distinct concepts (albeit often denoted by the same word or term) that come into conflict. Such a concept cannot be individuated by its possession conditions as far as the rival parties are concerned since none of the parties actually possess that concept as a first-order concept that becomes contested in a dispute. Alternatively, they possess it as a theoretical concept that may have no immediate bearing on how they are employing their mutually contested first order concept(s)⁵⁰⁹. This

⁵⁰⁸ For Gallie, the unity of an essentially contested concept resides in the conception of its optimum development (9.1). For me, the unity of the essentially contested concept, as I have described it here, resides in the conception that the dispute is over concept-formation.

⁵⁰⁹ My present discussion might be taken to suggest a commitment to a specific theory of concepts – perhaps most plausibly to some kind of use theory – which would be at odds with my explicit goal of not committing to any such theory. To clarify, the combinatory account seeks to mark off the boundaries within which a viable concept-centered thesis can be put forward, and it can be further specified according to the requirements of a given theory of concepts. That being said, the combinatory account does not strive to be “philosophically neutral” in the sense that every theory of concepts is compatible with it. However, it is not as limiting as one might suppose at first. The combinatory account does not make many claims about the *nature* of concepts. That includes both first-order concepts employed by disputants, and the second-order concept that is the concept under the umbrella of which the distinct first-order concepts that are actually possessed and used in a dispute by the disputants fall. The combinatory account does make claims concerning how the first-order concepts are, or rather can be, *employed* for essential contestability to make sense. I do not consider those claims as controversial by themselves, but one could of course object that concepts should not be individuated on the basis of how they are employed to begin with. That issue goes beyond the scope of this study.

If essentially contested concepts were considered first-order concepts that are straightforwardly accessible and possessable by the disputants, they would need to be constituted (or come into being) directly through their different uses for a concept-centered thesis of essential contestability to make sense, I think. Perhaps such a concept that is vague in Gallie's technical sense (see 12.1) consists of different uses when there is an evaluative

becomes clearer if a distinction is made between 'concept' as that which differentiates a thing from other things and assigns meaning to it, and 'category' as a second-order concept that groups several concepts according to its own rules⁵¹⁰. The analogy to those rules is found in how the disputants determine what to include in and exclude from the decision-based reasonable disagreement (and thus from what falls within the essentially contested concept, now also by definition).

In the end, the idea of a decision-based reasonable disagreement is needed to have a right type of conceptual contestation: the genuineness of contestation is predicated on the decision to include partisan uses of terms or concepts as relevant for the present dispute that is both conceptual and substantive. The concept that is contested is still inchoate, and the rival parties aim to make it "definite" by steering the debate that is both conceptual and substantive to their liking. The conceptual part of the dispute is thus over concept-formation. From one point of view, parties to a dispute can consider themselves as contesting what is so far an inchoate concept as the ongoing product of their dispute *while*, from another point of view, they could consider their respective "concept-uses" as manifesting distinct concepts, even if closely related to the substance or the topic of the dispute.

I think it makes sense to understand the substantive and conceptual elements of the relevant type of disputes as closely intertwined, even if analytically distinguishable. To become persuaded of how things are, a person needs to adopt or employ the concept that is required to come to that conclusion, to differentiate things that need differentiating, to make the required inferences *et cetera*. To become persuaded of how things should be conceptualized, a person needs to come to the conclusion that things are *this* way rather than some other way. Such intertwinement probably explains why many of Gallie's readers appear ready to count substantive claims as contributions to conceptual disputes. I previously proposed that the debate over what I call 'C-making features' (see 17.2) is relevant, because that debate is the sole window to the concept that is formed intersubjectively (18.1). In the case of disputes that are substantive and

continuum that holds the concept together as an amalgam of culturally connected views, or as a popular conception. This alternative arguably requires a theory of concepts that can admit (abstract) complex concepts as cultural products that are formed and shaped collectively through usage as well as accessible and possessable by the disputants *in addition to* what is stated about how such a first-order concept is characteristically employed in a dispute manifesting essential contestability. It is a considerably more demanding and specific claim theory-wise than the second-order view.

⁵¹⁰ Note also how Gallie speaks of a *category* of human activity in relation to essentially contested concepts (cf. 11.3). The essentially contested concepts appear to be such categories, and thus one might want to speak of 'an extra categorization' instead of 'an extra conceptualization' in reference to. In any case, I have opted to use the term 'conceptualization' because 'categorization' might suggest that there is nothing more to the second-order concept than shared features or similarities between the first-order concepts or concept-uses. Instead, the kind of second-order concept to which I am referring *also* comes with a more specific assessment or judgment concerning the interrelation between first-order concepts or concept-uses. Or as Gallie might want to say: it is a higher-order intellectual feat (cf. ECC 192/PHU 187).

over concept-formation, the specific ways that rival parties employ their concept(s) come loaded with substantive claims. The combinatory account presents one cohesive perspective to a particular subset of such disagreements, i.e., to those manifesting essential contestability, while taking an overall perspective to the dispute at hand instead of focusing on only one possible aspect of it (e.g., value disagreement).

The move to a broader context adds a social and historical layer to a quite complicated theoretical arrangement, which renders the entity that is called 'essentially contested concept' extraordinarily complex. Nevertheless, the "extra" conceptualization that results in a second-order concept, that I have characterized as an operation available to the analyst, does not require anything out of the ordinary. Rival parties can similarly assess, judge, or interpret whether the dispute that they are having is partly over concept-formation, and that determination is made on the same grounds that the analyst makes it. In addition, both the analyst and the rivals are similarly privy, in principle, to what falls within an essentially contested concept at the macro-level. That content consists of competing, and most often culturally accessible even if otherwise obscure, claims that touch on both conceptual and substantive aspects of the contested matter (e.g., what is socially just). A sort of historical understanding as sensitivity to others' concerns as (relatively) intelligible is surely called for, and it certainly seems that identifying any macro-level or micro-level dispute as involving an essentially contested concept requires empirical assessment. Although I have not conducted any such analysis myself, it should be clear enough why that is needed in actual instances if what I say here is found acceptable.

As to the final status of essentially contested concepts, I hereby find myself in agreement with Eugene Garver who states that "the idea of essentially contested concepts will have to be saved in a form which will concede that it cannot offer a definitive test for which concepts qualify as essentially contested." However, I disagree, by and large, with his assertion that "there can be no demarcation criterion that will determine whether a given concept is essentially contested or not." (Garver 1990, 252). In the current section, I have presented the criteria for demarcating essentially contested concepts from the rest as second-order concepts. They are thus the products of conceptualizations that are based on how (possibly several) first-order concepts are employed. I nevertheless do agree with Garver to the extent that we cannot know *a priori* whether this or that first-order concept is essentially contested.

Furthermore, the combinatory account can be said to adopt a key feature from the processual conflict thesis (see 13.3): that the type of argument, disagreement, or dispute the rivals are having is constitutive of essential contestability. In addition, the combinatory account is also compatible with the admittance to a tradition thesis (see 12.4). That is because the combinatory account can affirm that many, if not even most, disputes over an anthropocentric/interpretive concept employment occur between adherents to a tradition, movement, discipline *et cetera* and are informed by accumulated or systematized cultural knowledge or relatively unsystematized *endoxa* (cf. 18.1; cf.

before). In the cases that these other theses describe, it is at least often, if not always, reasonable to assume that the parties to a dispute are employing different (first-order) concepts while they use the same word/term/expression. That is something that the combinatory account can easily grant.

CHAPTER 19: CONCLUSIONS

This concluding chapter summarizes the key findings of this treatise. My study set out to offer (i) the most detailed discussion of the thesis of essential contestedness to date; (ii) an extensive account of the critical reception of Gallie's thesis; and (iii) an improved account of essential contestability. I claim that in parts one, two, and three I have accomplished my major goals (i) and (ii). Part four has also contributed to (i) and (ii) by adding to the critical examination of Gallie's thesis and by presenting several contrasting perspectives that mostly stem from the secondary literature. At the end of part four, I presented my interpretation of essential contestability, and that arguably meets with my major goal (iii). Furthermore, I set out to clarify four more specific issues. They are, briefly, (a) the status of Gallie's seven conditions of essential contestedness; (b) the claim that essential contestability originates in a special structure of a limited group of concepts that can be determined in advance; (c) the scope of essential contestation over the concept; and (d) the relation of disputes to essentially contested concepts (see also ch. 1). In the following, I will offer a presentation of my findings concerning these issues, and other significant claims and conclusions made in the study.

In chapter two of part one, I identified late Wittgensteinian linguistic philosophy (2.3), Peircean pragmatism (2.4), and a historical philosophical tradition in which critical philosophy of history finds its place (2.5) as the most important influences on Gallie's thesis of essential contestedness. I suggested that the intellectual attractiveness of the thesis that has subsequently led to its wide dissemination is primarily due to two factors: the imaginative potential of the term 'essentially contested concept' and Gallie's ability to predict later philosophical developments (2.1). Gallie is a philosopher who stands at the crossroads of different intellectual traditions. I have shown that to be the case especially with the way Gallie can be situated broadly within the Wittgensteinian tradition and between the classical view of concepts and the later psychological theories on concepts, i.e., the prototype theory and the exemplar theory (2.3). In addition, with its particular focus on historical and genetic development of

concepts, the thesis of essential contestedness can also be considered a precursor to semantic externalism (2.5; 2.6; 18.4). However, since the budding insights in Gallie's works have come to fruition only later, I conclude that Gallie is to be considered a transitional thinker, at most, with respect to these themes.

As I have illustrated in part one, the reception of the thesis of essential contestedness has varied from a general acknowledgment, especially as a part of professional know-how of (mostly Anglo-American) political theorists, to an outright dismissal, usually by those who object to Gallie's concept of a concept. The bulk of scholars have nevertheless been content to utilize 'essentially contested concept' as a common catchphrase that is somehow self-explanatory, as a reference to mere heatedness of disputes, and/or in designating a particularly intractable value disagreement. In any case, as is shown throughout this study, Gallie has also attracted many notable theorists either as straightforward advocates of an essential contestability thesis, or to otherwise comment, criticize, or further apply his ideas. My study finds that the influence of illustrious commentators has shaped the theoretical debate over essential contestability considerably, and that has also led to the fragmentation of the critical discussion. I have observed that, today, one can encounter references to Gallie's thesis in different philosophical strands and traditions (e.g., analytical political philosophy, postmodernist political theory) but also in many other disciplines beside philosophy (e.g., social and political sciences, law studies). (2.6.) The academic debate around Gallie's thesis is still ongoing and somewhat healthy with unique interpretations having been introduced in the last decade (e.g., the admittance to a tradition thesis; see 12.4).

In part two, I examined the thesis of essential contestedness by first inspecting how Gallie argues for it in *ECC* (ch. 3), after which I laid out the reasoning behind the seven Conditions of essential contestedness (chs. 4–9). The latter discussion was also supplemented with an extensive review section in the case of each Condition. Part two ended with the discussion of one of the specific issues in need of clarification, or (a): the elucidation of the status of the Conditions (ch. 10). It is to these issues that I now turn, with a special emphasis on understanding the status of Conditions. Due to the structure of the study, some of these conclusions are partially grounded in discussions conducted in the subsequent parts.

I have claimed that one's interpretation of the status of the seven Conditions largely decides what modifications one considers warranted. Focusing on the semantics leads one to eschew some of Conditions as irrelevant or misleading. The last two Conditions, especially, would appear unnecessary and unhelpful; this position is repeated in the literature time and time again. By contrast, I have argued for an already available reading of Gallie's thesis that divides the seven Conditions into two clusters, those belonging to semantics and those belonging to pragmatics. The dividing line between the clusters should be roughly set to traverse Condition (V), for which Gallie gives substantially different

formulations⁵¹¹ (ch. 7; see also ch. 10). Because my alternative does not necessitate completely discarding any of the original Conditions, I have argued that it is a well-reasoned starting point for anyone who seeks to understand what Gallie is after (ch. 10). More generally, what could perhaps otherwise be taken as a relatively tightly-confined linguistic philosophical matter is further complicated by the fact that arguments over the status of essentially contested concepts tend to be ontological (about the posited entities “concepts”) or metaphysical (about the way concepts are). As the commentators’ background theories appear quite varied, and the contexts in which concepts can be “employed” or “used” are as myriad as the contexts in which we exercise our cognitive functions, the host of potentially relevant considerations is vast.

Next, I offered my general conclusions concerning the specific Conditions. Conditions (I) to (IV) are viewed as relatively uncontroversial, even if different interpretations still abound. One notable point of contention may arise by interpreting a concept’s appraisiveness as evaluativeness (ch. 4), and possibly further considering the evaluation as an inherent and inseparable feature of a concept. However, essentially contested concepts—as they are formulated through (I) to (IV)—are not semantically evaluative in any special way (17.4). Another popular approach is to locate the origin of contestability within a concept’s complexity (ch. 5). Here the idea of a cluster concept is often invoked (5.2), but ultimately to no avail as I have suggested (17.5; 17.6). Moreover, I have drawn attention to Gallie’s implicit assumption that the component parts of the valued achievement, or those features that are picked out by the criteria of the contested concept, appear completely predetermined (5.2; 17.2). That was found especially problematic because it would preclude the possibility of contesting their selection.

I have proposed that it is fruitful to interpret Gallie’s reference to valued achievements that are signified by appraisive concepts more literally, and that takes us straight to Conditions (II), (III), and (IV): there is a variously realizable open-ended achievement that is signified by a concept that is employed to appraise the ways to realize the achievement (cf. 18.3). As a result, there are several possible descriptions of what is of significance in the case at hand while employing the concept. I have also further argued that Gallie considered the valued achievements both abstractly, as normative ideals, and concretely, as historical accomplishments (4.1; 11.2; 11.3) of a mostly intellectual nature (cf. 9.2). In addition, I have claimed that Gallie’s essentially contested concepts form thematic rather than hierarchic conceptual relations (7.2; 8.2; 11.3; 18.3).

The last three Conditions are considerably more controversial than the first four, even if within the first four there is still ample room for disagreement as I have illustrated. Gallie himself divides Condition (V) into different formulations

⁵¹¹ Whether Condition (V) belongs to semantics in opposition to pragmatics depends on which aspects of it are under scrutiny (cf. 7.1). In addition, I say “roughly” because it is possible to interpret some of the four Conditions quite pragmatically as well. For instance, one could easily interpret (IV) in terms of large-scale openness at the social or societal level (6.2; ch. 10).

that seem to touch on a few distinct issues (7.1). A typical reading of (V) favors the formulation—often at the expense of other formulations—in which the aggressive and defensive usage of a term/concept is affirmed. However, if that means *de dicto* or *de re* ascription of contestability *to a concept*, it can be criticized (15.3). A more plausible way of looking at the matter is to view (V) as a description of what rival parties are doing when they dispute the matter at hand. The engagement of rival parties in a contestation can be the requisite for essential contestability rather than it being the case that certain concepts have contestability as their ineliminable property. In addition, I have found that Condition (V) has a significant role in Gallie’s theoretical scheme, especially in relation to how it contributes to the unity of essentially contested concepts (ch. 7; 14.2). Examining the characteristics of the dispute that manifests essential contestedness helps make sense of both the mutual appreciation and the reciprocal recognition as parts of (V) while also according with other explanations provided by Gallie, like the account of justified conversions (11.4).

I have claimed that (VI) and (VII) can be reframed as backward- and forward-looking perspectives, respectively, to a matter that is under contestation (chs. 8, 9). That aims at the sense in which the valued achievement that the concept represents has a temporal continuity as a historically embodied normative ideal (see also 11.3). To identify such historical continuities plausibly requires pre-existing knowledge of relevant cultural connections rather than being something instilled in the semantics of the term/concept. However, it is exactly because Gallie’s thesis consists mostly of such external and descriptive explanation of what conditions exist when disagreement occurs that his thesis is lacking in terms of why essential contestedness takes place in the first place. None of the Conditions can guarantee the irresolvability and endlessness of the dispute alone, and neither is there any clear combination of them that succeeds in doing so (ch. 10).

As to the secondary literature, my study shows that there is a great deal of disagreement on how specific Conditions should be understood. Interpreting Condition (II) in cluster terms comes closest to some semblance of consensus (cf. 5.2). Some of the differences seem to arise from the use of different terminology and/or background theory. Many contributions could thus charitably be considered complementary perspectives on a commonly identified, though not necessarily precisely demarcated, phenomenon. A less charitable conclusion would be that the available interpretations are too scattered to plausibly be about a common target. The latter conclusion is further supported by a later finding that there are no established interpretations regarding the role played by what I call the elements of essential contestedness: indeterminacy, contestation, essentiality, and irresolvability (ch. 12).

As to my own interpretation, I demonstrated that Gallie is much more interested in how a concept or term is employed in a dispute than is commonly assumed (cf. 3.1), and that ultimately leads me to develop a thesis of essential contestability in similar terms (ch. 18, esp. 18.5). My position stands in contrast to one thing on which most commentators *do* seem to agree: that in Gallie’s work,

the origin of essential contestability lies in the structure of essentially contested concepts. Partly because of that, and partly because I have presented the reader with a veritable cornucopia of different views during the treatise, someone might argue that my study contributes to further pernicious diffusion of the topic. That is not the case for three reasons. First, becoming aware of the multiplicity of interpretations should prevent one from leaping to hasty conclusions. The last 60 years have seen many attempts to state what essential contestability is exactly all about, but those attempts taken together have created the current fragmentation of the debate that my study addresses. Second, the terminology that I have introduced during the study for discussing and analyzing the phenomenon has been put forward to consolidate the debate, not to mix things up further. For example, the distinction between a concept-centered thesis, an admittance to a tradition thesis, and a processual conflict thesis is highly useful for ordering different strands of the already existing discussion. Three, my study argues for an improved account of essential contestability that is more viable than the available alternatives. If I am even halfway correct, the ensuing diffusion is certainly not pernicious.

In part three, I continued the task of interpreting the original point of the thesis of essential contestedness by concentrating on those aspects that are not adequately captured by the specific formulations of Gallie's Conditions. As in part two, there are myriad authorial interpretations. My examination has provided grounds for identifying four critical pressure points in Gallie's thesis that mark broader issues in the case of which Gallie fails to convince. First, I illustrated that the full import of 'essentially' in 'essentially contested concepts' is not made clear, and that obscurity is one of the main reasons behind the ambiguity concerning what is contested or contestable according to the thesis (12.2; 12.3; 12.4). There is no agreement between the commentators either as to how the essentiality should be understood in the current context (12.3). Second, the rationality of carrying out an endless and irresolvable dispute (12.4) as a contest over how a concept should be employed was illustrated to be at least somewhat questionable from the standpoint of disputants (13.1; 13.5). Gallie was found to offer little remedy to that beside his account of justified conversions that I explicated and complemented with the notion of the zone of reasonable disagreement (11.4). As a further corrective, I identified a conception of transitional rationality that I argue to be operative in such disputes and in such conversions (13.4). I also supported my view that it can be rational for the disputants to engage in the disputes that Gallie describes with two other expositions. The first one illustrates how one may rationally and steadfastly hold on to one's use of a concept even in the absence of the possibility of universal agreement as a practical matter (13.2). The second one establishes *ad hominem* argumentation and reasoning as the mode in which essential contestation between rival parties is conducted (13.4).

The third critical pressure point is Gallie's inability to guarantee that the disputes he describes are genuine cases of conceptual contestation instead of conceptual confusion. More specifically, in this study I have identified and

rejected three distinct arguments to that effect. First, I claimed that Gallie's argument for establishing the genuineness of disputes fails. Gallie tries to achieve that end by demonstrating that at least some conversions in the face of irresolvable and endless disputes can be considered rational. It is not enough to guarantee the dispute's genuineness (11.4; 13.2; 14.1). Second, I established that Gallie's situational justification for the continued use of essentially contested concepts, i.e., roughly the claim that Conditions (VI) and (VII) distinguish essentially contested concepts from those concepts that are subject to confusion, is not capable of guaranteeing the unity of a contested concept (chs. 8, 9; 14.2). In this, I join most of the critical commentators, although I present the matter in slightly different terms. And third, I developed Gallie's scant remarks on how one should consider the initial ambiguity of different descriptions in connection with Condition (V) into a full-blown argument that understands the unity of essentially contested concepts as being determined through contestation (14.2). I claim that this last argument is the best that Gallie can charitably be seen to offer in response to the unity problem that jeopardizes the thesis of essential contestedness. Although I claim that the argument is ultimately successful with certain modifications (cf. 18.1; 18.5), I illustrated that the argument is inadequate as it stands (14.2; 15.1; 15.2).

In part three, I also commented and clarified several obscure issues as well as answered some worries with respect to Gallie's original presentation. Of those, the following are new contributions to the literature. First, I illustrated that the artificial example of championship as a model for the characteristics of essentially contested concepts is potentially highly misleading (3.3; esp. 11.1). Second, I elucidated what Gallie means by an elementary use and a standard general use (of an essentially contested concept). Even more importantly, I clarified Gallie's remarks concerning activities in general, and a category of human activity in particular (11.2; 11.3). Apart from the status of the Conditions, the way in which one understands the relation between activities and essentially contested concepts is perhaps the single most decisive issue that determines how one understands the overall phenomenon in Galliean terms (cf. 11.3; 18.3). Third, I claimed that Gallie's technical sense for vagueness is persistent uncertainty concerning what properly falls within a concept and on what grounds. This reflects the openness of an activity that stands for or seeks to develop a valued achievement that the now "open" concept denotes (6.2; 12.1). The accompanying ambiguity that manifests in disputants' different descriptions of that valued achievement may be transformed to conceptual unity in suitable conditions (e.g., in a right type of dispute or over the course of history) (14.2; cf. 12.2). Fourth, I examined the objection that essential contestability is a thoroughly liberal idea and, as such, not applicable outside modern liberal democracies (13.3). My treatise affirms that Gallie has clear liberal sentiments, yet the idea of essential contestability does not require a particularly liberal society or conduct. Fifth, I identified the rationality that is operative in Gallie's thesis as transitional, while argumentation and reasoning have *ad hominem* character (13.2; 13.4). Sixth, I suggested that Gallie is working under the basic premise that the parties to a

dispute must share meanings of the terms/concepts that they further contest (14.1). This gives Gallie the impetus to posit a special kind of concept, i.e., an essentially contested concept, the contestability of which supposedly explains disagreement that is, perhaps somewhat unbeknownst to Gallie, both conceptual and substantive. I illustrated that Gallie fails to adequately consider other options, namely that a dispute over how to use a term/concept may be genuine although it involves distinct concepts (cf. 15.2). Seventh, I introduced the term 'the unity problem' to describe the concern that an essentially contested or contestable concept is not unified enough, or that a single shared concept cannot become contested to begin with (14.2). The unity problem has been identified in the literature before. The current study is, however, the first one to take some distance to the problem and present proposed and potential solutions side by side.

In part four, I conducted a sustained examination into the defensibility of the strong concept-centered thesis of essential contestability. I argued that essential contestability, in the strongest sense, needs to go straight to the heart of the matter: it should reach the intension of the concept, threatening the shared core of the concept, while still allowing rivals to share the concept (15.3). This connects with the issue (c) that I have sought to clarify. If disputes involving essentially contested concepts are merely about concept-application, disputants may also share an uncontestable conceptual core that need not be threatened in any way. In that case, the contestation does not extend far enough. A concept/conception thesis of essential contestability that presumes a common core concept while relegating contestability to its specifications (17.3), and the claim that essential contestation is quintessentially a matter of mere evaluative contestability without impinging on a descriptive nucleus (17.4; cf. 17.2), were also argued to fail for essentially the same reason. I also examined the claim that the right kind of application dispute could threaten a concept's intension as well, but that conception fell short of establishing essential contestability, instead ending up with, at most, a sense of uncertainty (17.6) By contrast, I have argued that the disagreement that should be of special interest to us is over formation of concept that is presently considered as inchoate (see. (d) below). Since the rival parties are still able to steer the direction of the inchoate concept's development, and thus affect its "final" or at least soon-to-be form, the contestation over how that is done reaches the intension and threatens the sharing of any would-be conceptual core.

Taken together, chapters 17 and 18 check off the issue (b) that I set out to clarify, and by clarification to repudiate: the conception that essential contestability originates in the special structure of a limited group of concepts that can be determined in advance. My examination of alternative conceptions revealed that there is no clear way of guaranteeing or showing that a concept is essentially contested *due to* its special structure or organization (ch. 17). The alternative views and perspectives that I deemed insufficient in this respect included the following: understanding the relevant disputes as disagreement over the correct weighting of the concept's otherwise shared criteria (17.2); the

concept/conception thesis that presumes a common core to the concept (17.3); the particular organization of the descriptive and evaluative elements of the concept, as the matter has been explicitly discussed in the literature – especially a view that would attribute a unique sort of semantical evaluativeness to these concepts/terms (17.4); and a cluster structure or the presence of essentially contested concepts in broader conceptual constellations (17.5). These failures led me to find grounds for essential contestability in the special way a concept or term is employed (ch. 18) and finally to propose the combinatory account in those terms (18.5).

The last big issue, (d), that I wanted to clarify in the current treatise, concerns how essentially contested concepts should be understood as concepts that are constituted in a dispute. It is tempting to start by assuming that somewhere first exists a concept that later becomes contested in a dispute, but that might ultimately be merely a mirage unless one backs it up with a theory of concepts that admits concepts to be such entities. In the current study I have avoided subscribing to any theory of concepts by rule, and thus it would not even be possible for me to conclude that there can or cannot be contested concepts that are also mutually shared or possessed by rival parties *because* they are precluded or supported by the correct understanding of concepts' fundamental nature. What I established, instead, is that there is a specific second-order sense in which an essentially contested concept, as a theoretical entity, can be captured by a conceptualization about mutually conflicting concept- or term-uses (18.5). That enables the assertion that an essentially contested concept is constituted by mutually conflicting concept/term uses – without those uses there would not be that concept – and it also means that the identification of the essentially contested concepts is a case-by-case matter. This is the analyst's perspective on the issue, and I argued that it is readily acceptable as such.

However, to secure a more controversial claim that *such a concept* may also consist of *its* mutually conflicting uses, I appealed to the idea of the decision-based reasonable disagreement (18.1). I suggested (18.5) that parties to a dispute can, from one point of view, consider themselves as contesting what is so far an inchoate concept as the product of the dispute they are having. From another point of view, they can consider their respective concept-uses as evidencing distinct concepts, even if closely related to the topic at hand. Given the distinction between the first-order and second-order concept, it is possible to acknowledge both things at the same time. What is not possible is to possess such a concept, as it always remains an inchoate would-be product of active dispute. I thus claimed that an essentially contested concept in this particular sense cannot be distinguished by its possession conditions, and that does away with the first challenge that I identified at the start of part four (15.1). However, I succumbed somewhat to the second challenge (15.2) to the extent that the combinatory account does not seek to exclude disputes in which one has reason to think that parties employ different concepts. Whether the rival parties are, or sometimes were, considering the conflicting uses as the uses of the same concept, depends on how their dispute actually progresses, how they are able to argue for their

case, what cultural assumptions are effective, and so forth. In the end, the external analyst perspective and the internal contestant perspective are merged into one as far as the identification of an essentially contested concept is concerned.

The ultimate argumentative prize and objective in disputes manifesting essential contestability is that others come to accept one's way of employing a possibly distinct concept as part of a solution to a shared and characteristically human problem. That ultimately means effecting changes in the world that come by virtue of others' acceptance: they have formed the concept in accordance with one's preference, which affects how they think and act. I have suggested that this dynamic in large part explains why essential contestability may appear to be a quintessentially political phenomenon. (cf. 18.5.)

More generally, I have argued that the combinatory account is able to integrate most of the significant features that are attributable to a thesis of essential contestability that takes its cue from Gallie's thesis (cf. 18.5). I further claimed that the combinatory account goes significantly beyond Gallie's original presentation while also resolving the key problematics that I have previously identified as ailing the thesis of essential contestedness. In addition, the combinatory account modifies the concept-centered thesis (see ch. 15 intro) and lends or reinterprets features from what I have called the admittance to a tradition thesis (12.4) and the processual conflict thesis (13.4; 17.3). As to the significance of my study to the further discussion on the topic, I claim that I have presented the most comprehensive and careful analysis of Gallie's original thesis to date. I have also laid out a number of theoretical issues that are relevant to the examination of the concept-centered thesis, introduced terminology to discuss those issues, and pointed towards several other ways of understanding essential contestability and its origin. It is my sincere wish that other scholars find this study useful, even if they do not concur with its specific conclusions.

Those who yearn to find even more in the thesis of essential contestedness, or in essential contestability in general, may find my conclusions unsatisfying. For them, I hope my study serves as a challenge to do it better, much like Gallie's thesis has been for many, myself included. For others, perhaps a befitting revision of a thesis of essential contestability.

SUMMARY IN FINNISH

Uppiniskaisen ja laaja-alaisen moraalisen ja poliittisen erimielisyyden läsnäoloa voidaan pitää modernin maailman ja erityisesti liberaalidemokraattisen yhteiskunnan erottamattomana piirteenä. Monet erimielisyydet vaikuttavat käytännöllisesti katsoen mahdottomilta ratkaista rationaalisin argumentein, mutta käydyt kiistat ovat usein erittäin tärkeitä niin henkilökohtaisista kuin myös kollektiivisista syistä. Ihmisillä on erilaisia päämääriä ja tavoitteita, joita perustelemme järjestyksellisesti katsomillamme syillä ja uskomuksilla, ja ymmärrysemme itses- tämme ja sosiaalisista suhteistamme riippuvat asiaankuuluvista käsitteellistyksistämme. Sillä mitä pidämme oikeana, sopivana, oikeudenmukaisena tai kau- niina (ynnä muina sellaisina asioina) on meille valtavan paljon merkitystä. Käsi- tyksemme maailmasta ovat meille monessa mielessä tärkeitä, läheisiäkin. Olemme usein ymmällämme, hämmentyneitä tai jopa vihastuneita kohdates- samme syvälle käyvän moraalisen, poliittisen tai esteettisen erimielisyyden. Kuinka toinen saattaakaan ajatella niin?

Työssä analysoin Walter Bryce Gallien (1912–1998) väitettä, joka antaa yh- den mahdollisen vastauksen. Gallien mukaan on olemassa joukko olennaisesti kiistanalaisia käsitteitä (*essentially contested concepts*), jotka tuovat mukanaan ra- tionaalisesti ratkeamattomia ja päättymättömiä mutta silti täysin aitoja kiistoja. Kenenkään kiistelijöistä ei ole tarvinnut tehdä virhettä eivätkä he puhu toistensa ohi. Sen sijaan kiistelijät voivat kukin vedota täysin varteenotettavaan todistus- aineistoon ja siten päätyä eriäviin mutta yhtä lailla oikeutettuihin lopputulemiin koskien sitä, kuinka käsitettä tulisi käyttää. Olennainen kiistanalaisuus on seu- rausta käsitteen sisäisistä ominaispiirteistä tai muista sen asianmukaista käyttöä määrittävistä tekijöistä. Olennaisesti kiistanalaisina käsitteinä Gallie piti demo- kratiaa, taidetta, kristillisyyttä ja sosiaalista oikeudenmukaisuutta. Gallien teesi on intellektuaalisesti haastava ja jossain määrin levottomuutta herättävä. Käsi- teiden voidaan katsoa olevan ehdottoman tarpeellisia korkeammassa kognitiivi- sissa prosesseissa ja niin ollen Gallien väite vaikuttaisi lopullisesti sulkevan oven yhteisymmärryksen mahdollisuudelta; mitään asiaa koskevia arvostelmia tai päätelmiä ei voisi tehdä päättymättä loputtomiin erimielisyyksiin ja kiistoihin.

Gallien alkuperäinen argumentti voidaan paikantaa kolmeen työhön: artik- keleihin "Essentially Contested Concepts" (1956a) ja "Art as an Essentially Con- tested Concept" (1956b) sekä monografiaan *Philosophy and Historical Understan- ding* (1964). Kyseiset tekstit muodostavat tutkielmani ensisijaisen tutkimuskirjal- lisuuden, mutta ehdoton valtaosa lähteistä koskee jatkokeskustelua olennaisesti kiistanalaisista käsitteistä. Hyödynnän myös muuta Gallien tuotantoa, kun se on tarpeen syvemmän ymmärryksen saavuttamiseksi. Ajatusta käsitteiden olennai- sesta kiistanalaisuudesta on puitu ja sovellettu erityisesti niillä tutkimusalueilla, joissa eri käsitteiden tai termien käyttötavat, tai ylipäätään eri tavat analysoida ja jäsentää sosiaalisia ja kulttuurillisia ilmiöitä, tulevat jatkuvasti kyseenalaiseksi selvien tai verrattain kiistattomien arviointiperusteiden puuttuessa. Filosofia, po- litiikan tutkimus, oikeustiede sekä monet muut yhteiskunta- ja ihmistieteet ovat tyyppillisiä sovellusaloja. Aina ei ole ollut kovinkaan selvää, miten kukin

kirjoittaja on asian itse ymmärtänyt – näin on etenkin ollut sovellettaessa teesiä suoraan eri tapausesimerkkeihin. Gallien alkuperäisen selonteon rajallisuus ja monet epäselvyydet ovat lisäksi myötävaikuttaneet teoriakeskustelun pirstaloitumiseen. Pyrin korjaamaan asiaa esittämällä toistaiseksi tarkimman ja kattavimman esityksen Gallien teesistä ja sen kriittisestä vastaanotosta. Esitän myös aiempien käsitysten pohjalta muodostetun uuden tulkinnan, jota kutsun yhdistelmäselonteoksi olennaisesta kiistanalaisuudesta (*combinatory account of essential contestability*).

Tutkielma jakautuu neljään osaan, joiden sisällöt lomittuvat keskenään ja täydentävät toisiaan eri tavoin. Ensimmäisessä osassa kuvaan lähestymistapaani tutkimuskohteeseeni, esitän työni tavoitteet ja tärkeimmät kysymyksenasettelut, erittelen vaikutteita Gallien ideoiden taustalla ja arvioin hänen teesinsä myöhempää vaikutusta. Toisessa osassa jäsenän seitsemää ehtoa, jotka Gallie on asettanut olennaisesti kiistanalaisille käsitteille. Käyn seikkaperäisesti läpi, millaisia tulkintoja Gallien lukijat ovat tehneet, mitä he ovat kritisoineet ja mitä tarkennuksia on tehty tai vaadittu tehtäväksi. Kolmannessa osassa syvennän ymmärrystä Gallien kuvaamasta ilmiöstä, erittelen olennaisen kiistanalaisuuden tunnusmerkkejä ja arvioin perusajatuksen mielekkyyttä ja johdonmukaisuutta eri näkökulmista. Neljännessä osassa keskityn käsittekeskeiseksi teesiksi nimittämäni tulkintalinjan arviointiin. Käsittekeskeisen teesin mukaan kyse on yksittäisen käsitteen kiistanalaisuudesta ja kiistanalaisuuden alkulähde paikannetaan käsitteen erityislaatuiseen rakenteeseen. Yritän löytää käsittekeskeiselle teesille vankat perusteet siinä kuitenkin onnistumatta. Päädyn esittämään vaihtoehdoisen näkemyksen, jonka mukaan kiistanalaisuus seuraa erityisestä tavasta käyttää käsitteitä ihmiskeskeisesti ja tulkinnallisesti hakiessa ratkaisuja tärkeillä inhimillisillä ongelma-alueilla tai yhteydessä laveasti ymmärrettyihin ja yleisiin inhimillisiin aktiviteetteihin. Neljännen osan päättävään lukuun olen koonnut tärkeimmät johtopäätökseni. Seuraavaksi esittelen tutkimukseni aihepiiriä ja sisältöä verrattain yleisellä filosofisella tasolla⁵¹².

Liki kaikki käsitteistä sanottu on jollain tapaa teoreettisesti kiistanalaista. Gallie menee vielä askeleen pidemmälle väittäessään, että joukko erityislaatuisia käsitteitä saa aikaan päättymättömiä ja ratkeamattomia kiistoja. Teesi olennaisesta kiistanalaisuudesta on siten haastettavissa kahdella pääasiallisella tavalla: joko (a) olennaisesti kiistanalaiset käsitteet eivät ole erityislaatuisia tai niitä ei ylipäätään voi olla tai (b) kyseisten käsitteiden käytöstä ei voi seurata aitoja, päättymättömiä ja rationaalisesti ratkeamattomia kiistoja. Kriittinen jatkokeskustelu on pääsääntöisesti koskenut sitä, mikä tai mitkä Gallien esittämistä seitsemästä ehdosta voisivat saada olennaisen kiistanalaisuuden aikaan.

⁵¹² Olen valinnut tämän muodon työni suomenkielisen yhteenvedolle siksi, että lukijalle piirtyisi jäsentynyt kuva Gallien teesistä, sen merkittävimmistä teoreettisista ongelmakohdista ja puolustamastani vaihtoehdoisesta käsityksestä Gallien alkuperäisen käsityksen rinnalla. Teemasta on käyty varsin vähän keskustelua Suomessa ja vielä vähemmän suomeksi. Tutkielmani on laaja ja olen joutunut sivuuttamaan osittain tai kokonaan useita taustoittamista enemmän vaativia huomioita ja johtopäätöksiä niiden tutkimuksellisesta kiinnostavuudesta huolimatta. Monet kysymykset jäävät epäilemättä avoimiksi, mutta varsinaisessa tutkielmassa olen käsitellyt näitä asioita toki syvällisemmin.

Gallien mukaan olennaisesti kiistanalainen käsite on arvioiva siinä mielessä, että se merkitsee tai lukee ansioksi (*signifies or accredits*) jonkin arvostetun saavutuksen (ehto 1). Kyseisen saavutus on sisäisesti monimutkainen, joskin arvostettu kokonaisuutena (ehto 2), ja eri tavoin kuvailtavissa (ehto 3). Saavutus on myös muunneltavissa ennakoimattomilla tavoilla muuttuvissa olosuhteissa, mikä tekee saavutusta merkitsevästä käsitteestä avoimen (ehto 4). Ajatuksena on, että monimutkaista arvostettua saavutusta merkitsevän käsitteen käyttäminen vaatii saavutuksen muodostavien (deskriptiivisten) osatekijöiden asettamista johonkin arvojärjestykseen. Sen voi tehdä monin eri painotuksin (ja kenties myös tavoin), mikä heijastuu arvostettua saavutusta merkitsevän käsitteen sovelluskriteereihin. Lisäksi Gallie korostaa keskinäisen kiistelyn muodon ja sitä koskevien uskomusten merkitystä olennaisessa kiistanalaisuudessa. Käsitteitä käytetään aggressiivisesti ja defensiivisesti, osapuolet ainakin jossain määrin arvostavat kriteereitä, joiden puitteissa toiset käyttävät käsitteitään eri tavoin, ja osapuolet tiedostavat, että heidän tulee pitää kiinni omista käyttötavoistaan toisia käyttötapoja vastaan (ehto 5). Käsitteen kehitystä ja kasvua koskeva historiallinen ymmärrys on myös välttämätöntä paremman ymmärryksen saavuttamiseksi käsitteen yleisestä, ja siis kiistanalaisesta, käytöstä. Olennaisesti kiistanalaisen käsitteen jatkuva käyttö on Gallien mukaan oikeutettua, kun osapuolten sopivimpina pitämät käyttötavat johdetaan alkuperäisestä malliesimerkistä (*original exemplar*) (ehto 6). Lisäksi alati jatkuvan kilpailun oman käyttötavan tunnustamisesta tulisi uskottavasti johtaa alkuperäiseen malliesimerkkiin liitetyn saavutuksen optimaaliseen ylläpitoon tai kehitykseen (ehto 7). Alkuperäinen malliesimerkki ei välttämättä ole yksi henkilö, teos tai vaikkapa historiallinen tapahtuma. Kyseeseen tulevat myös erilaiset aatteet, pyrkimykset, liikkeet ja traditiot, joilla on historiallista jatkuvuutta ja jotka voivat mahdollisesta epämääräisyydestään huolimatta toimia malli- tai tyyppiesimerkkinä käsitteen käytölle. Gallien näkökulma käsitteisiin ja niiden kiistanalaisuuteen on täten diakroninen.

Yllättävää kyllä, Gallie ei lopulta puhu paljoakaan käsitteistä ja niiden ominaispiirteistä, ei ainakaan eksplisiittisen jäsennellysti. Sen sijaan Gallie viittaa usein joko käsitteen merkitsemään/viittaamaan arvostettuun saavutukseen tai sanan tai termin yleiseen ja vakiintuneeseen käyttötapaan, joka sopivissa tapauksissa tarkoittaa, merkitsee tai edustaa (*stand for*) sitä, mitä Gallie kutsuu olennaisesti kiistanalaiseksi käsitteeksi. Yhtäältä asiantilaa selittänee se, että väite olennaisesti kiistanalaisista käsitteistä on nähtävissä käsitteitä koskevan klassisen näkemyksen implisiittiseksi ja immanentiksi kritiikiksi: huomion kohteena olevassa käsitteellisessä kiistassa vastakkaiset määritelmät törmäävät yhteen, mutta sikäli kuin niiden oletetaan koskevan samaa arvostettua saavutusta, ei kyseistä saavutusta voi enää tyydyttävästi käsitteellistää tarkkarajaisen määritelmällisesti ja/tai välttämättömin ja riittävin ehdoin. Gallien teesi myös jossain määrin ennakoii myöhempiä teoreettisia kehityskulkuja niin käsitteiden prototyyppiteorian kuin myös semanttisen eksternalismin suhteen. Toisaalta kolme viimeistä ehtoa eivät koske käsitteiden tai termien semantiikkaa lainkaan; ne lukeutuvat paremmin pragmatiikkaan sen laajassa merkityksessä. Teksteissään Gallie pääosin kuvaa ja analysoi tietynlaista erimielisyyttä tai kiistaa (*dispute*) sen sijaan, että hän

selväsanaisesti erittelisi, miksi käytetyt käsitteet itse asiassa saavat aikaan loputtoman ja rationaalisesti ratkeamattoman kiistan eli olennaisen kiistanalaisuuden. Tutkimuskirjallisuudestakaan ei löydy vastaansanomaton argumenttia sen puolesta, että yksi tai useampi Gallien alkuperäisistä seitsemästä ehdosta olisi olennaisen kiistanalaisuuden aiheuttaja.

Olennaisesti kiistanalainen käsite on kaiken kaikkiaan vaikeasti jäsennettävä entiteetti. Perusongelmaksi muodostuu käsitteellisen yhtenäisyyden vaatimus: ei ole selvää, missä mielessä kiistelijät jakavat yhden ja saman käsitteen, jonka sopivasta käytöstä he kuitenkin ovat eri mieltä. Filosofiasa käsitteet usein ymmärretään tarkkarajaisiksi entiteeteiksi, joilla on selvästi määritelty status erilaisissa loogisissa järjestelmissä; liki mikä tahansa asianmukaista käyttöä koskeva eroavaisuus kielisi kahden tai useamman erillisen käsitteen läsnäolosta. Mikäli erimielisyyden osapuolet jatkaisivat kiistelyä yhden ja saman käsitteen sopivasta käytöstä, puhuisivat he toistensa ohi ja kyse olisi käsitteellisestä sekaannuksesta. Olennaista kiistanalaisuutta koskevasta tutkimuskirjallisuudesta löytyy erilaisia vastauksia tähän yhtenäisyysongelmaksi (*unity problem*) kutsumaani problematiikkaan. Ratkaisuyrityksissä pyritään tavalla tai toisella takaamaan vallitsevan erimielisyyden tai kiistan aitous eli se, että osapuolet ovat eri mieltä tai kiistelevät samasta asiasta. Verrattain harvoin ongelmaa on pyritty ratkaisemaan suoraviivaisimmassa muodossaan; osapuolet voivat hyvinkin kiistellä jaeituissa kulttuurillisissa puitteissa ja/tai osapuilleen samasta asiasta, mutta olennaisesti kiistanalaisen käsitteen yhtenäisyys *yhtenä käsitteenä* jää tutkimuskirjallisuudessa toistuvasti vaille täysin tyydyttävää artikulointia.

Yhtenäisyysongelman suoraviivaisin ratkaisu vaatisi joko oman yksityiskohtaisen ja kattavan käsiteteorian tai eksplisiittisen selonteon siitä, miten jokin jo vakiintuneista käsiteteorioista voi hyväksyä olennaisesti kiistanalaisen käsitteen tai selittää sen tunnusomaiset piirteet. Gallie ei esitä minkäänlaista yleistä käsiteteoriaa, ja tutkielmassani pyrin myös itse tietoisesti välttämään sitoutumista mihinkään yksittäiseen näkemykseen käsitteistä. Asia on ongelmallinen, koska Gallie näyttäisi jättävän olennaisesti kiistanalaisten käsitteiden piirteet vaille täsmällistä artikulaatiota nimenomaan käsitteinä, mikä merkittävästi hankaloittaa koko teesin tulkintaa ja siten myös yhtenäisyysongelmaan tarkoitettua ratkaisun täsmällistä erittelyä. Toisinaan on esitetty, että Gallie yksinkertaisesti sekoittaa sanan tai termin käsitteen kanssa. Näen asian pikemminkin niin, että Gallie ymmärtää olennaisen kiistanalaisuuden prosessiksi tai olosuhteiksi, joissa termin tai käsitteen lähtökohtaisesti erilaiset merkitykset tai sisällöt tulevat käsitellyiksi yhden ja saman käsitteellisen entiteetin alla siten, että niiden välinen jännite säilyy eikä esimerkiksi erilaiset merkitykset tai sisällöt ylittävää sublaatiota tapahdu. Kuudennen ja seitsemännen ehdon eksplisiittinen tarkoitus onkin välttää käsitteellinen sekaannus ja mahdollistaa aito erimielisyys tai kiista käsitteen käyttöä koskien. Kyseisiä ehtoja on kuitenkin kritisoitu hyvin paljon ja pääasiallisesti siksi, että ne ovat ongelmallisia *käsitteen* ehtoina (vrt. myöh.).

Olennaisessa kiistanalaisuudessa voisi ajatella olevan kyse pelkästään käsitteen soveltamista koskevasta kiistasta siten, että osapuolet jakavat käsitteen ongelmattomasti. Tutkielmassa oletan, että olennainen kiistanalaisuus on

poikkeuksellisen vahvaa, syväluotaavaa tai laajalle ulottuvaa kiistanalaisuutta. Käsitteen soveltamista koskevat kiistat kuitenkin tyypillisesti koskevat reuna- tai rajatapauksia samalla kun käsitteen ytimeistä tai paradigmaattisista tapausesi-merkeistä vallitsee yksimielisyys. Kyseessä on verrattain arkipäiväinen käsitteellisen kiistanalaisuuden muoto. Esitän, että vahvimmassa mahdollisessa käsityksessä käsitteen olennaisesta kiistanalaisuudesta kiistanalaisuuden tulisi ulottua yhteisen käsitteen ytimeen niin, että se asettaa jo jossain määrin kyseenalaiseksi, jakavatko kiistelijät edes yhden ja saman käsitteen. Tässä mielessä yhtenäisyysongelman ilmentämä uhka käsitteellisestä sekaannuksesta on vahvan kiistanalaisuusteesin ominaispiirre pikemminkin kuin valuvika. Kiistanalaisuuden tulisi kattaa arvioivan käsitteen kaikki sovellukset siten, ettei niiden keskinäistä paremmuutta voi (kiistattomasti) määrittää. Mutta Gallie vihjaa, että olennaisessa kiistanalaisuudessa olisi kyse myös siitä, että osapuolet eivät voi olla täysin varmoja, kuuluvatko kaikki esitetyt käyttötavat tai sovellukset todella saman käsitteen piiriin. Itsepintainen ja pysyvä epävarmuus tekee käsitteestä tietyssä mielessä epämääräisen (*vague*), kuten Galliekin pikaisesti mainitsee. Hänen viittauksensa asiaan on kuitenkin varsin hämärä, eikä se sellaisenaan riitä ratkaisuksi yhtenäisyysongelmaan. Joka tapauksessa Gallien erityiseksi ansioksi voidaan lukea laajan tutkijakunnan huomion kiinnittäminen mahdollisuuteen, ettei aikamme uppiniskaisten moraalisten, poliittisten ja esteettisten kiistojen käsitteelliseen ulottuvuuteen saada riittävää teoreettista tarttumapintaa ymmärtämällä käsitteet yksinomaan tarkkarajaisiksi määritelmiksi.

Tietomme käsitteiden luonteesta nojaa kyseenalaistettavissa oleviin teoreettisiin oletuksiin, eikä suoraviivaista ja kiistatonta tapaa kuvatun kaltaisten käsitteiden yhtenäisyyden osoittamiselle välttämättä ole. Mikäli olennaisesti kiistanalaisten käsitteiden mukanaan tuomia erimielisyyksiä tai kiistoja voitaisiin pitää joistain muista syistä aitoina ja rationaalisina, antaisi se kenties jonkinlaista epäsuoraa tukea sille, että kiistan alla on yksi ja sama käsite. Onhan nimittäin niin, että käsitettä koskevan erimielisyyden ollessa aito, osapuolet ovat eri mieltä samasta käsitteestä (huom. virhepäätelmän mahdollisuus). Gallie selvittää kiistan luonnetta keinotekoisella esimerkkitalanteella, jonka myötä demokratiaa, taidetta, kristillisyyttä ja sosiaalista oikeudenmukaisuutta koskevat erimielisyydet vertautuvat urheilujoukkueiden kannattajakuntien väliseen jatkuvaan kilpailuun siitä, mikä joukkue pelaa peliä parhaiten tai siten kuten peliä *on tarkoitus* pelata. Keinotekoisessa esimerkissä mestaruutta ei voita joukkue, joka tekee eniten pistesuorituksia, vaan joukkue, joka kerää eniten suosiota. Kilpailu mestaruudesta on jatkuvaa, eikä kukaan ole pakotettu pitämään muuta kuin alun perin kannattamaansa joukkuetta mestareina, mutta henkilö voi tulla suostutelluksi ajattelemaan toisin.

Keinotekoinen esimerkki antaa lukijalle vaikutelman, että kyse olisi ensisijaisesti poliittisesta ilmiöstä, mutta se tuskin on ollut Gallien varsinaisena tarkoituksena. Kukin arvioi asiaa omista lähtökohdistaan (*particular appraisive situation*), mutta arvojen ja intressien vastakkaisuuden sijaan osapuolet vetoavat yhtä lailla varteenotettaviin argumentteihin ja todistusaineistoon ja kenenkään ei voi kiistattomasti sanoa olevan toista oikeutetumpi eriävään käsitykseensä. Väitteiden

looginen vakuuttavuus tai voima (*logical force*) on oletetusti ratkaisevaa, olkoonkin ettei se ole universaalista tai määrity objektiivisesti. Käydyt kiistat ovat Gallien mukaan rationaalisia ja aitoja, jos voidaan osoittaa, että henkilöiden pysyminen omassa näkökannassaan tai kääntyminen (*conversion*) toiseen kantaan on oikeutettua. Henkilö on oikeutettu käyttämään käsitettä tietyllä tavalla kun (i) käyttötavan säilyttäminen tai vaihtaminen on ymmärrettävää ottaen huomioon henkilön aiemman käsityksen ja sen perusteet sekä uuden huomioitavan seikan (esim. esitetyn väitteen tai tehdyn huomion) ja sen puolesta puhuvat asiat; (ii) kyseinen seikka tulee tunnustetuksi relevantiksi asian kannalta myös muiden toimesta, vaikkei se välttämättä saisikaan heitä kääntymään jonkin toisen käyttötavan kannattajiksi. Kohta (i) koskee kiistelijöiden rationaalisuutta, jonka Gallie lopulta suoraviivaisesti ulottaa koskemaan itse kiistan rationaalisuutta, kun taas kohta (ii) pyrkii jollain tavalla varmistamaan kiistan aitouden osapuolten keskinäisen hyväksynnän kautta.

Tutkielmassa esin yllä esitettyä huomioimalla, että kääntyminen yhdestä käsitteen käyttötavasta toiseen tulee kääntyjän omasta näkökulmasta oikeutetuksi ennen kaikkea biografisesti. Rationaalisuus tulee tällöin ymmärtää transitionaaliseksi niin, että käsitteen uusi käyttötapa tulee arvioiduksi parannukseksi aiempaan käyttötapaan nähden. Henkilön vakuuttaminen jonkin käyttötavan paremmuudesta vaatii siten *ad hominem* argumentin (\neq *ad personam*), jossa hänen erityiset arviointilähtökohdansa tulevat jollain tavalla huomioiduiksi. Kaiken kaikkiaan Gallien huomio on normatiivisessa oikeutuksessa, eikä hän käsittele lainkaan vaihtoehtoa, jossa kiistan osapuolet pyrkisivät pakottamaan tai psykologisesti manipuloimaan toisiaan. Oikeutuksen arviointi on tapauskohtaista sen sijaan, että universaalista yksimielisyyden mahdollisuutta pidettäisiin rationaalisuuden vaatimuksena. Rationaalisuutta (*rationality*) tulee siis arvioida suhteessa kunkin erityisiin lähtökohtiin, mutta yleisempi järjestyksellisyys (*reasonableness*) tulee nähdäkseni varsinaisesti tunnustetuksi ja vahvistetuksi vasta intersubjektiviivisessä prosessissa, jossa osapuolet arvioivat eri vaihtoehtojen ja niitä tukevien todisteiden tai argumenttien asianmukaisuutta.

Gallien konkreettisemmista esimerkeistä käy puolestaan ilmi, että kiistelijät vetoavat erilaisiin käsityksiin, määritelmiin, teorioihin ja yleisluontoisiin näkemyksiin tai asenteisiin, jotka koskevat arvostettua saavutusta, johon kiistanalainen käsite viittaa. Eri näkökannoissa pyritään tavoittamaan ja arvioimaan monimutkaisen arvostetun saavutuksen tärkeimmät piirteet tai aspektit, joihin kiistanalaisen käsitteen sovelluskriteerit viime kädessä pohjautuvat. Erityisesti taiteen käsitteen tapauksessa käy selväksi, että näkökannat ovat myös aiemmin historian saatossa esitettyjä ja urauurtavia. Kyse on siten intellektuaalisesta ja käytännöllisestä kehityskulusta, joka on johtanut nykytilanteeseen, jossa käsite on olennaisesti kiistanalainen. Gallie kehystää vastakkaiset käsitykset, määritelmät ynnä muut sellaiset eriävät näkemykset osiksi intellektuaalista ja/ tai käytännöllistä traditiota, jolle ominaisia arvoja kiistelijät pyrkivät parhaansa mukaan edistämään käyttämällä (esim. taiteen) käsitettä tietyllä tavalla, puolustamalla käyttötään ja kyseenalaistamalla muut käyttötavat. Kolme viimeistä ehtoa olisi nähdäkseni nyt syytä ymmärtää kuvaukseksi prosessista tai olosuhteista, joissa

osapuolten voi katsoa viittaavan samaan arvostettuun saavutukseen huolimatta siitä, että he ovat kyseisestä saavutuksesta ainakin jossain määrin sekä käsitteellisesti että sisällöllisesti eri mieltä. Osapuolten saatavilla oleva tieto ja ymmärrys arvostettua saavutusta koskien, ja siten heidän esittämänsä väitteet ja niiden perustelut, suhteutuvat tai sulautuvat tällöin osaksi olosuhteiden kuvausta, joiden myötä käsitteellinen yhtenäisyys tulee (väitetyksi) taatuksi. Gallien seitsemän ehdon puitteissa asian voi ymmärtää niin, että viides ehto luonnehtii nykytilannetta eli kiistelijöiden toimintaa kiistassa, kuudes ehto tavoittaa heidän taaksepäin suuntautuvan näkökulmansa arvostetun saavutuksen historialliseen kehityskulkuun ja seitsemäs ehto ilmentää osapuolten eteenpäin suuntautuvaa näkökulmaa siihen, kuinka arvostettua saavutusta tulisi toteuttaa tai kehittää olosuhteiden sallimalla tavalla nyt ja tulevaisuudessa.

Gallien kuvaus kiistan luonteesta ja hänen tapansa vahvistaa erimielisyyden tai kiistan aitous ovat omiaan hälventämään käsitteiden ja muun asiaankuuluvan välistä eroa. Se on varteenotettava huoli käsitteiden olennaisesta kiistanalaisuudesta puhuttaessa yleisemminkin. ”Muulla asiaankuuluvalla” tarkoitan tässä arvoja, normeja, normatiivisia periaatteita, teorioita, uskomuksia siitä kuinka asiat ovat tai kuinka niiden tulisi olla ynnä muita sellaisia seikkoja, jotka voivat liittyä käsitteiden refleksiiviseen normatiiviseen käyttöön osana erilaisia arvostelmia ja väitteitä. Omaksuttujen arvojen ja arvostusten ohjausvaikutus siihen, mitä henkilö itseasiassa pitää sosiaalisesti oikeudenmukaisena, on eräs esimerkki refleksiivisyydestä: asianmukaisena pidetty deskriptio tulee valituksi oletetusti evaluaation ohjaamana. Koska Gallie kehystää vastakkaiset käsitykset osaksi yhteistä traditiota, jolle ominaisia arvoja kiistelijät pyrkivät edistämään, vaikuttaisi juuri traditiosta kumpuavilla arvoilla olevan tärkeä tehtävä siinä, kuinka osapuolet arvioivat arvostetun saavutuksen (deskriptiivisiä) osatekijöitä. Silloin on kuitenkin jokseenkin epäselvää, mikä käsitteen ja arvojen välinen eksakti suhde on – esimerkiksi missä mielessä käsite on ”arvolatautunut” – tai mitä olennaisesti kiistanalaisella käsitteellä (esim. taide) itse asiassa käsitteellistetään (esim. taide ideaalina tai sen ilmentymänä *vai* taide eri taiteenlajeista tai ilmaismuodoista koostuvana historiallisena käytäntönä ja perinteenä).

Tutkielmassani käyn läpi tapoja, joilla edellä mainitut muut asiaankuuluvat seikat tuppaaavat helposti sekoittumaan käsitteiden kanssa. Yleisesti ottaen väitän, että olennaisesti kiistanalaisten käsitteiden sopivaa käyttöä koskevat kiistat tulisi ymmärtää ensisijaisesti käytännöllisiksi. Erilaisilla uskomuksilla, todistusaineistoilla ja rationaalisilla argumenteilla on tärkeä merkitys kyseisissä kiistoissa jo siitä yksinkertaisesta syystä, että olennaisesti kiistanalaiset käsitteet käsittelevät maailmaa, jota uskomukset koskevat, johon liittyen voimme kerätä todistusaineistoa ja jonka asiantiloja ja entiteettejä koskien voimme muodostaa argumentteja. Kuitenkin varsinainen valinta eri käyttötapojen välillä on myös käytännöllinen ja siten potentiaalisesti myös mitä moninaisempien arvojen, normistojen ja uskomusten ohjaama. Kun kiistely käsitteiden käytöstä on linkittynyt arvojärjestelmiin ja kilpaileviin elämäntapoihin, kiistojen väliaikaisellakin lopputuloksella on paljon käytännöllistä merkitystä. ”Muusta asiaankuuluvasta” tulee relevanttia osana laajempaa kontekstia, jossa käsitteitä käytetään tällä tavoin.

Mielestäni tätä asiaa ei ole helppoa tai välttämättä edes tarkoituksenmukaista artikuloida yksinomaan käsitteiden sisäsyntyisiin piirteisiin tai erityislaatuiseen rakenteeseen vedoten.

Yleisesti ottaen en ole vakuuttunut, että Gallien tapa vahvistaa erimielisyyden tai kiistan aitous on pätevä. Tutkielmassa esitän, että käsitystä olennaisesta kiistanalaisuudesta tulisi täydentää Gallien itse rivien väliin jättämällä ajatuskullalla: kiistan osapuolten oma yhteinen arvio siitä, mikä kelpaa järkeenkäyväksi argumentiksi tai todistusaineistoksi käsitteen asianmukaisen käyttötavan suhteen, muodostaa järkeenkäyvän erimielisyyden alueen. Erityisesti tutkimuksellisissa yhteyksissä kyseisen alueen voisi ajatella koostuvan erilaisista arvostettua saavutusta koskevista määritelmistä ja teorioista, mutta ei ole mitään varsinaista syytä ajatella, etteivät myös yleisluontoisemmat käsitykset tai asenteet voisi tällöin tulla kyseeseen. Ideana joka tapauksessa on, että kilpailevat näkemykset ovat historian saatossa muodostuneet järkeenkäyviksi yhden ja saman arvostetun saavutuksen vaihtoehtoiksi aspekteiksi, ja viime kädessä näin nähdäkseni on, koska ihmiset ovat antaneet ja antavat niille kyseisen aseman.

Kuten edellä on käynyt ilmi, Gallien alkuperäisessä teesissä arvostettua saavutusta koskevilla ja toisistaan eroavilla näkemyksillä on paikkansa arvostetun saavutuksen ja sitä merkitsevän käsitteen historiallisessa ja evaluatiivisessa jatkumossa. Historiallisen ymmärryksen mukanaan tuoma herkkyys eri näkemyksille auttaa puolestaan ymmärtämään, miksi arvostettua saavutusta merkitsevä termi/käsite on nykypäivänä olennaisesti kiistanalainen. Lisäksi Gallie ajattelee, että ajan saatossa muodostuneet ja verrattain laajasti hyväksytyt tavat käyttää käsitettä ovat oikeutettuja vähintäänkin historiallisesti ymmärrettävinä (*intelligible*). Eri tavoissa käyttää käsitettä voisi olla kyse jonkinlaisesta yleisinhimillisestä tai kulttuurillisesta pääomasta, jonka kiistelijät jakavat tai joka on heidän ulottuvillaan, ainakin periaatteessa. Gallie toteaaakin olevansa kiinnostunut eritoten laajalle levinneistä tai yleistajuisista käsityksistä (*popular conception*). Sellaiset käsitykset voivat kenties olla riittävän epämääräisiä mahdollistaakseen useita kilpailevia muotoiluja, mutta Gallie vaikuttaa joka tapauksessa ottavan eri näkemykset tai arvostetun saavutuksen aspektit/osatekijät annettuina, mikä lyö essentialistisen leiman niitä merkitseviin käsitteisiin.

Ei ole selvää, sitoutuuko Gallie historiallista ymmärrettävyyttä vahvemman käsitykseen eri käyttötapojen oikeutuksesta. Tavallisesti häntä on kuitenkin tulkittu niin, että kiistelijät ovat vahvassa mielessä oikeutettuja käyttämään käsitettä toisistaan poikkeavin ja vastakkaisin tavoin tai että kyseessä on järkeenkäypä erimielisyys (*reasonable disagreement*). Käsitys olennaisesta kiistanalaisuudesta järkeenkäypänä erimielisyytenä voidaan nähdä kolmanneksi teoreettiseksi pääväitteeksi (käsitteiden erityislaatuisen luonteen ja niiden myötä ilmaantuvien päättymättömien ja rationaalisesti ratkeamattomien kiistojen ohessa), jonka kieltämällä teesi olennaisesta kiistanalaisuudesta voidaan suoraan haastaa.

Gallien kuvaaman kiistatyyppin aitous ja rationaalisuus on kyseenalaistettu myös muilla tavoin. Voidaan muun muassa kysyä, onko päättymättömään ja ratkeamattomaan kilpailuun tai kilpailunomaiseen kiistaan osallistuminen

ylipäättään mielekästä, saati sitten rationaalisin argumentein. Kiistan osapuolten tietoisuus kiisteltävän asian olennaisesta kiistanalaisuudesta ei myöskään vaikuta sopivan yhteen sen kanssa, että osapuolet väittäisivät itse olevansa oikeassa samalla kun muut ovat väärässä. Jos tietoisuus olennaisesta kiistanalaisuudesta tarkoittaa tietoisuutta siitä, että kyseistä käsitettä voi käyttää oikeutetusti eri tavoin, kuinka noita käyttötapoja voisi enää pitää väärinä? Ei ole myöskään täysin selvää, missä mielessä tarkasteltavat kiistat ovat evidentialisia. Vastakkaisiin johtopäätöksiin voidaan päätyä muun muassa siksi, että jokin osapuolista on käsitellyt todistusaineistoa väärin tai osapuolet eivät yksinkertaisesti jaa samaa todistusaineistoa. Siinä ei ole mitään erikoista. Mikäli osapuolet puolestaan jakavat saman todistusaineiston eivätkä tee virhettä sen käsittelyssä, miten yksi ja sama todistusaineisto voisi oikeuttaa kiistelijöiden vastakkaiset uskomukset käsitteen sopivaa käyttöä koskien? Viimeaikaisten järkeenkäyviä ja vertaiserimielisyyksiä (*peer disagreement*) koskevien keskustelujen valossa asia voidaan esittää niin, että vastakkaiset doksastiset asenteet (propositiota koskien) eivät ole virheettömästi ja täydellisesti jaetun todistusaineiston puitteissa mahdollisia. Kaiken kaikkiaan tutkimuskirjallisuudessa usein toistuva huoli on, että olennainen kiistanalaisuus ei ole koherentti idea tai että käsityksen johdonmukaisuus vaatii hyväksymään radikaalin relativismin, ekspressivismin, nihilismin tai jonkin muun sellaisen katsantokannan, joka on joko (väitetysti) itsessään epätoivottava tai yhteensopimaton kiistan oletetun rationaalisuuden kanssa.

On perusteltua sanoa, että Gallie ei käsittele erimielisyyden tai kiistan epistemologiaa vaadittavalla tarkkuudella tai riittävän laajasti. Työssä kuitenkin väitän, että kiistaan osallistuminen voi olla täysin mielekästä, vaikkei yksiselitteisesti parasta ja sopivinta käsitteen käyttötapaa voitaisikaan määrittää. Vertaileva arviointi eri käyttötapojen välillä on yhä mahdollista etenkin kunkin omista lähtökohdista käsin, vaikka asian lopullisesti ratkaiseva periaate tai mittapuu loistaakin poissaolollaan. Kiistojen käytännöllinen merkitys tekee vertailusta välttämätöntä ja mahdollisuus saada toinen käyttämään käsitettä eri tavoin riittää motivaatioksi käydä käytännöllisiä kiistoja. Rimaa käsitteen käyttötapojen järkeenkäypyydelle ei pidä asettaa epäinhimillisen korkealle, kun kyse on käytännöllisistä kiistoista. Ihmisinä toimimme säännöllisesti erilaisten olettamusten varassa, joille ei välttämättä ole löydettävissä kiistattomia tai pitäviä perusteita.

Todistusaineiston käsittelyä analysoidessa tulee kiinnittää erityistä huomiota kiistan luonteeseen. Doksastisten asenteiden kolmijaon mukaan henkilö voi uskoa, että p , uskoa että, $ei-p$, tai pidättäytyä uskomuksesta kokonaan. Koska käsitteen käyttöä koskeva erimielisyys on luonteeltaan käytännöllinen, ei arvostelmasta pidättäytyminen ole relevantti vaihtoehto, vaikka puhtaasti tiedollisissa erimielisyyksissä arvostelmasta pidättäytymistä voisikin pitää uniikisti rationaalisenä johtopäätöksenä tilanteessa, jossa todistusaineisto ja argumentit eivät ole konklusiivisia. Käytännöllisessä kontekstissa vaihtoehtoja on kaksi: tehdä p tai olla tekemättä p , jolloin arvostelmasta pidättäytyminen rinnastuu jompaankumpaan vaihtoehtoon tilanteesta riippuen. Tiedollisen hyveen sijaan kyse olisi pikemminkin inhimillisestä heikkoudesta tai itsepetoksesta. Ylipäättään tuntuu uskottavalta ajatella, että käsitteiden käytöstä *jollain tavalla* ei varsinaisesti voi

kokonaan pidättäytyä korkeammissa kognitiivisissa prosesseissa kuten päättelyssä tai evaluatiivisessa ajattelussa, vaikka ne verrattain vapaaehtoisia ja tiedostettuja prosesseja ovatkin. Esimerkiksi päätellessä jostakin jotakin käsitteitä käytettäneen aina jollakin tapaa jonkin toisen tavan sijasta. Tästä muutoin melko triviaalista huomiosta tulee kohdallinen, kun olennaista kiistanalaisuutta jäsennetään käytännöllisluonteisena ilmiönä kiistelijöiden itsensä näkökulmasta.

Tutkielmassa keskityn käsitekeskeiseksi teesiksi nimittämäni käsitykseen olennaisesta kiistanalaisuudesta. Nähdäkseni käsitekeskeinen teesi perustuu kahdelle oletukselle; (i) kiistelyn kohde on käsite tai termi; (ii) kiistely saa alkunsa kyseisessä käsitteessä tai termissä sen erityisten ominaisuuksien tai sisäsyntyisen rakenteen tai organisaation vuoksi. Tutkielman edetessä esitän käsitekeskeiselle teesille kaksi selvää vaihtoehtoa: (a) käsityksen, jonka mukaan olennainen kiistanalaisuus koskee pääsyä tradition piiriin (*admittance to a tradition thesis*); (b) käsityksen, jonka mukaan väittely tai kiista, johon kiistelijät ottavat osaa, konstituoii olennaisen kiistanalaisuuden (*processual conflict thesis*). Suosimani tulkinta olennaisesta kiistanalaisuudesta lainaa piirteitä molemmista vaihtoehdoista. En käsittele niitä työssäni syvällisesti, mutta jo vaihtoehtojen tunnistaminen luo tarpeellisen kontrastin liki itsestään selvänä tulkintana pidetylle käsitekeskeiselle teesille. Asia on mahdollista ymmärtää toisinkin.

Asetan käsitekeskeiselle tulkinnalle kaksi haastetta. Ensimmäisen haasteen mukaan ei ole mahdollista, että osapuolet kiistelisivät yhdestä ja samasta käsitteestä, mikäli käsitteet yksilöidään niiden hallussapitoehtojen kautta. Tämä hienostuneempi versio yhtenäisyysongelmasta pureutuu suoraan siihen, kuinka käsitteiden voi ajatella olevan yksilöitävissä tai eriteltävissä. Toisen haasteen mukaan Gallien kuvaamien kiistojen luonteenomaiset piirteet voidaan selittää, vaikka osapuolet eivät jakaisikaan samaa käsitettä. Kyseessä voi edelleen olla aito kiista käsitteen/käsitteiden sopivasta käytöstä, kun kyseessä on metalingvistinen neuvottelutilanne, tai kun osapuolet pyrkivät suostuttelemaan vastapuolta muuttamaan asiaa koskevaa intressiään esittämällä kiistan keskiössä olevalle sanalle tai termille eri määritelmiä. Nämä näkökulmat herättävät kysymyksen, voisiko Gallien kuvaama kiistatyyppi olla aito käsitteellinen kiista, vaikka osapuolet tosiasiallisesti käyttäisivätkin eri käsitteitä.

Käsitekeskeisestä teesistä ei tule luopua kevyesti, mistä syystä pyrin löytämään sen mahdollisille muodoille perusteita tutkimuskirjallisuuteen tukeutuen. Analysoin muun muassa käsitteen ja käsityksen välistä erottelua (*concept/conception*) kiistanalaisuuden mahdollisena selityksenä. Totean selityksen ongelmalliseksi pääasiallisesti siksi, että erottelussa oletetaan käsitteillä olevan sinänsä täysin ongelmattomasti jaettu käsitteellinen ydin, jonka täsmennyksiä eri käsitykset ovat. Kiistanalaisuus ei ulotu tuolloin riittävän syvälle. Arvioin myös, seuraako käsitteen kiistanalaisuus erityisestä arviointitavasta tai evaluatiivisten ja deskriptiivisten elementtien välisestä suhteesta. En löydä poikkeavan laatuista kiistanalaisuutta Gallien arvostetun saavutuksen osatekijöiden ja käsitteen sovel-luskriteerien vertailevasta arvioinnista. Nostan esiin myös muita näkemyksiä käsitteiden evaluatiivisuutta koskien. On kuitenkin syytä olettaa, etteivät olennaisesti kiistanalaiset käsitteet tai niitä vastaavat ilmaukset ole semanttisesti

evaluatiivisia millään erityisellä tavalla. Pohdin lisäksi mahdollisuutta, että olennainen kiistanalaisuus seuraa käsitteiden kompleksisuudesta tai rypäsluonteesta (vrt. *cluster concept*), mutten löydä pohjaa epätavanomaisen vahvalle tai laaja-alaisella kiistanalaisuudelle, joka sopii yhteen käsitekeskeisen teesin perusoletusten kanssa.

Lopulta päädyn korvaamaan käsitteen rakennetta koskevan oletuksen (ii) funktionaalisella selityksellä (ii*): olennainen kiistanalaisuus seuraa erityisestä tavasta käyttää käsitteitä. Puolustamani yhdistelmäselonteko olennaisesta kiistanalaisuudesta väittää (ii*), ja selonteko kykenee myös sisällyttämään pitkälti samat sisällölliset seikat, jotka tekevät käsitekeskeisen tulkinnan kahdesta päävaihtoehdosta omilla tavoillaan houkuttelevia. Yhdistelmäselonteon mukaan olennaisesti kiistanalasta käsitettä käytetään ihmiskeskeisesti ja tulkinnallisesti päätösperustaisen järkeenkäyvän erimielisyyden puitteissa, kun osapuolet pyrkivät suostuttelemaan toisiaan käyttämään käsitettä halutulla tavalla. Yhdistelmäselonteko kokoaa useita tutkimuskirjallisuudessa jo aiemmin esitettyjä huomioita ja kehittää teesiä olennaisesta kiistanalaisuudesta eteenpäin.

Tutkimuskirjallisuudessa on jäänyt verrattain vähälle huomiolle, että Gallie yhdistää olennaisesti kiistanalaiset käsitteet merkityksellisiin inhimillisiin aktiviteetteihin tai tärkeinä pidettyihin sosiaalisiin ja/tai intellektuaalisiin käytäntöihin. Taide, kristillisyys ja tiede, jonka olennaisen kiistanalaisuuden suhteen Gallie on kahden vaiheilla, toimivat tässä kelpo esimerkkeinä. Olennaisesti kiistanalaiset käsitteet ovat Gallielle aktiviteettien tai käytäntöjen kategorioita, ja kyseisten kategorioiden temaattiset (eivätkä niinkään hierarkkiset) alakäsitteet voivat myös olla olennaisesti kiistanalaisia oikeissa olosuhteissa. Kiistoissa on puolestaan kyse pitkälti siitä, kuinka laajalle kyseisiä käsitteitä tulisi ulottaa ja millaisin kriteerein sekä painotuksin. Kyse ei siis ole ainoastaan saavutusten, aktiviteettien tai käytäntöjen kuvailusta vaan lisäksi niiden potentiaalisten piirteiden arvioinnista eli eräänlaisesta idealisoinnista, mikä pitkälti selittää käsitteiden käytön refleksiivisyyden.

Yhdistelmäselonteko ottaa näistä seikoista vaarin huomioimalla, että olennaisesti kiistanalaisia käsitteitä käytetään ihmiskeskeisesti. Kysymys siitä, millainen käsitteen sovellusalan pitäisi olla, on arvostettujen inhimillisten aktiviteettien ja käytäntöjen tapauksessa (itse)tulkinnallinen. Kyseisten aktiviteettien ja sosiaalisten käytäntöjen parhaina pidetyt tulkinnat voidaan puolestaan nähdä vastauksiksi kysymyksiin, jotka nousevat esiin tärkeillä inhimillisillä ongelma-alueilla, jolloin eri vastaukset ilmentävät kilpailevia elämäntapoja, arvoja ja asenteita. Tästä näkökulmasta on myös ehkä paremmin ymmärrettävissä, miksi operatiivinen rationaalisuus on järkevää mieltää transitionaaliseksi: kyse on omakohtaisesta (ja mahdollisesti omaa viiteryhmää koskevasta) ideaaliorientoituneesta ja jatkuvasta tulkintaprosessista. Useat ongelma-alueista, kuten kuinka kohdella toisia tai suhtautua toisiin, liittyvät läheisesti yhteiseen elämänmuotoomme. Esimerkiksi taiteen käsitettä voidaan käyttää hakiessa ratkaisua esteettiseen merkityksellisyyteen liittyviin inhimillisiin haasteisiin ja pyrkimyksiin, jotka voidaan ratkaista tai toteuttaa mitä moninaisemmin tavoin ja painotuksin erilaisissa sosiaalisissa ja kulttuurillisissa yhteyksissä. "Uusia" ongelma-alueita voi myös

ilmaantua. Esimerkiksi kestävä kehityksen käsitettä käyttäen voidaan käsitellä tuotannon, kulutustottumusten ja elinpyrkimysten sopivaa suhdetta talouskasvun edellytyksiin tilanteessa, jossa ylisukupolvinen ja mahdollisesti peruuttamattoman luontokatastrofi uhkaa merkittävästi heikentää elinedellytyksiä globaalisti. Kiistelyn lopullinen palkinto ja tavoite on, että toiset hyväksyvät oman käyttötavan käsitteen oikeana tai sopivana käyttötapanä mitä tulee yhteisen ihmillisen ongelman ratkaisuun. Tässä suhteessa kiistan käytännöllisessä ulottuvuudessa on kyse hyväksynnästä seuraavien muutoksien aikaansaamisesta maailmassa: toiset ovat muodostaneet käsitteen halutulla tavalla, mikä vaikuttaa siihen, kuinka he ajattelevat ja toimivat, tai mitä he edistävät ja vastustavat.

Yhdistelmäselonteko ei väitä, että kiistanalaisuus on joidenkin käsitteiden analyttinen osa, jolloin kyseisiä käsitteitä ei voisi käyttää ilman erimielisyyttä tai kiistaa. Toisin sanoen voi olla täysin mahdollista puhua esimerkiksi taiteesta puhtaasti deskriptiivisessä mielessä, vaikkakin sanottu voidaan aina toisten toimesta tulkita tai kehystää pyrkimykseksi puhua jonkin tietyn taidekäsityksen puolesta tai edistää yksiä arvoja joidenkin toisten arvojen sijaan. Yhdistelmäselonteon mukaan olennaisesti kiistanalaisen käsitteen tunnusmerkkinä on käsitteen erityinen ihmiskeskeinen ja tulkinnallinen käyttö, kun tarkoituksena on vakuuttaa toiset oman käyttötavan oikeutuksesta päätösperustaisen järkeenkäyvän erimielisyyden puitteissa (vrt. alla). Olennaisesti kiistanalainen käsite on täten tunnistettavissa ja yksilöitävissä sille ominaisen käsitteellisen käytännön tai kontekstin perusteella. Toisin ilmaistuna olennaisesti kiistanalaisella käsitteellä eli käsitteellä ihmiskeskeisesti ja tulkinnallisesti käytettynä on innostava tarkoitus (*animating point*): arvostettu saavutus tai ideaali pyritään käsitteellistämään parhaalla mahdollisella tavalla, koska sillä on keskeinen rooli yhteisen ihmillisen perusongelman ratkaisussa. Henkilöt, jotka eivät pyri ratkaisemaan riittävän samanlaista ongelmaa, eivät myöskään osallistu riittävän samanlaiseen käsitteelliseen käytäntöön, jotta olisi mahdollisuus puhua olennaisesti kiistanalaisuudesta yhdistelmäselonteon tarkoittamassa mielessä. Näin siis vaikka he näyttäisivät käyttävän samaa käsitettä. Asiaa voi valottaa kristillisyyden (tai kristillisen elämäntavan, kuten Gallie varioi) käsitteen avulla: ateistinen käsitteen käyttäjä voi luotettavasti tunnistaa asioita kristillisyydeksi siinä missä uskovainenkin, ja näin ollen hän omaa kristillisyyden käsitteen yhtä lailla. Ateisti ei kuitenkaan jaa pyrkimystä käsitteellistää ja toteuttaa kristillistä elämäntapaa parhaalla mahdollisella tavalla eikä hän niin ollen sitoudu yhteen kristillisyyden käsitteen käyttötapaan ja pyri vakuuttamaan muita kyseisen käyttötavan paremmuudesta. Mikäli niin on, ateisti ei käytä kristillisyyden käsitettä samassa kontekstissa tai saman käsitteellisen käytännön mukaisesti kuin uskovainen, mistä syystä kyse ei ole olennaisesti kiistanalaisesta käsitteestä sitä määrittävien ehtojen puitteissa.

Vaadittavan sitoutumisen tai käsitteelliseen käytäntöön osallistumisen aste on vaikea määrittää. Näyttää käytännössä mahdolliselta, että henkilö (esim. ateisti) voisi käydä kiistaa asiasta *ikään kuin* hän sitoutuisi yhteen käsitteen (esim. kristillisyyden) käyttötapaan, jolla hän pyrkii edistämään ja kehittämään käsitteen merkitsemää arvostettua saavutusta samalla kun hän pyrkii suostuttelemaan muita omaksumaan kyseisen käsitteen käyttötavan. Kiistelijän omilla

uskomuksilla ei tarvinne olla ratkaisevaa merkitystä sen suhteen, millaiseksi kiista muodostuu ja kuinka se etenee. Vastaavasti toiset (esim. uskovaiset) voivat aina tulkita kyseisen henkilön sanomiset siinä valossa, että hän osallistuu heidän kanssaan samaan käsitteelliseen käytäntöön, ja jatkaa asiasta kiistelemistä sillä oletuksella. Viime kädessä asianlaita määrittyy jo edellä mainitun päätösperustaisen järkeenkäyvän erimielisyyden (*decision-based reasonable disagreement*) myötä.

Yhdistelmäselonteko kehittää Gallien implisiittistä ajatusta järkeenkäyvän erimielisyyden alueesta eksplisiittiseksi käsitykseksi päätösperustaisesta järkeenkäyvästä erimielisyydestä. Aito erimielisyys vaatii aina jonkin verran samanmielisyyttä mitä tulee erimielisyyden kohteeseen, eivätkä yhtä aikaa käsitteelliset ja sisällölliset kiistat ole tästä poikkeus. Olennaisessa kiistanalaisuudessa ei mielekkäästi voi olla kyse tilanteesta, jossa eri käyttötavat nousevat yhteensovittamattomista (*incommensurable*) käsitteellisistä kehyksistä, koska eri käyttötapojen vertaileva arviointi kävisi mahdottomaksi. Kiistelijöillä täytyy myös olla joi-takin yhteisiä tai edes potentiaalisesti yhteisiä kriteereitä eri käyttötapojen vertailemiseksi, jotta toisen osapuolen suostuttelu olisi rationaalisin keinoin mahdollista. Gallien suosiman historiallisen ymmärrettävyyden sijaan paikannan mahdolliset järkeenkäypyyden kriteerit, jotka eivät kuitenkaan riitä ratkaisemaan kiistaa lopullisesti, elämänmuodon jakamiseen vaadittavaan inhimilliseen esiyymmärrykseen, jota laajasti hyväksytyt ympäröivää sosiaalista todellisuutta koskevat itsestäänselvyydet raamittavat. Kyseinen esiyymmärrys on yleisluonteista ja epämääräistä, hämääkin, enkä näe syytä olettaa, että se olisi sisällöltään täysin johdonmukaista tai yksiselitteistä. Kun kukin arvioi käsitteenkäytön sopivuutta esiyymmärrystasoiseen kriteeristöön tukeutuen, omista lähtökohdistaan käsin, erilaisten arvojen, normien sekä asenteiden valossa ja kiistattomasti konklusiivisten arviointistandardien puuttuessa, päätyminen vastakkaisiin jhotopäätöksiin käsitteen sopivasta käytöstä on odotettua. Yhdistelmäselonteko saa metafyyssisen sävyn: kiistanalaisuus ymmärretään *olennaiseksi* suhteessa elämänmuotoon ja sille tyypillisiin inhimillisiin aktiviteetteihin tai käytäntöihin.

Kun kiistan kohteen tunnistamisen edellytyksenä oleva käsite oletetaan jo lähtökohtaisesti kiistanalaiseksi, aktiivinen ja rationaalinen kiistely vaatii osapuolilta vähintäänkin implisiittisen päätöksen koskien sitä, koskevatko potentiaalisten kiistakumppaneiden käsitteen tai käsitteiden käyttötavat yhtä ja samaa asiaa. Kiistan osapuolet hyväksyvät, että kilpailevat ehdotukset eivät ole asiaankuulumattomia. Asiaankuuluvuus on epämääräinen käsite, ja tarkempi rajanveto on yksi neuvoteltavissa tai kiisteltävissä oleva asia muiden joukossa, kun konklusiivisia ja kiistattomia mittapuita tai ratkaisuperiaatteita ei ole käytettävissä. Kyse voisi nyt olla yksinomaan sisällöllisestä kiistasta, elleivät osapuolet olisi samaan aikaan ainakin jossain määrin epävarmoja siitä, mihin tapauksiin käsitettä tulisi ylipäätään ulottaa, mitkä tapauksista ovat paradigmaattisia, millaisin sovelluskriteerein käsitettä tulisi käyttää ja kuinka kyseisiä kriteereitä tulisi painottaa. Tehtyjä valintoja voi perustella eri tavoin, mutta sikäli kuin tarkoituksena on suostutella toinen vaihtamaan käsitteen käyttöään, erilaisia perusteita esittäessä täytyy samalla huomioida, miten toisen voi vakuuttaa tai mitä hän

ylipäättään voisi hyväksyä. Päätösperustaisen järkeenkäyvän erimielisyyden alue muodostuu tällaisesta kanssakäymisestä.

Päätösperustaisessa erimielisyydessä on kyse myös mukaan ottamisesta ja ulossulkemisesta. Sen määrittäminen, miten arvostetuista saavutuksista pitäisi tai olisi syytä ajatella, on aina käytännöllisesti katsoen rajanvetoa koskien sitä, kuka saa äänensä kuuluviin tai kenen näkemykset tulevat huomioiduksi. Gallie itse keskittyi normatiiviseen oikeutukseen, mutta päätösperustaisen järkeenkäyvän erimielisyyden idean myötä on mahdollista huomioida, millä tavoin olennainen kiistanalaisuus pitää sisällään poliittisen hetken tai vaiheen. Yhdistelmäselonteko kykenee paikantamaan tuon hetken suoraviivaisesti ja uskottavasti redusoidutta koko ilmiötä luonteeltaan poliittiseksi: maailmaa koskevia (sisällöllisiä) väitteitä edeltää valinta asianmukaisista käsitteistä ja niiden käyttöta-voista, ja tuolla valinnalla on toisinaan huomattavan paljon poliittista merkit-ystä. ”Edeltämisestä” puhuminen voi tässä helposti johtaa harhaan; olennaista kiistanalaisuutta ilmentävät kiistat ovat joka tapauksessa sekä käsitteellisiä että sisällöllisiä. Sellaiset kiistat ovat uppiskaisia myös poikkeuksellisen muuntu- vuutensa vuoksi: käsitteiden oikea käytötapa on jatkuvasti kyseenalaistettavissa ja kiistanalaiset sisällölliset seikat, argumentit ja todistusaineisto ovat jatkuvasti tulkittavissa ja järjestettävissä uudelleen uusien käyttötapojen mukaisesti.

Yhdistelmäselonteko tekee merkittävän myönnytyksen pyrkiessään kiertä- mään käsitteen yhtenäisyydestä ja hallussapidosta aiheutuvat ongelmat: kiistan osapuolet eivät välttämättä jaa yhtä ja samaa käsitettä. Olennaisesti kiistanalai- nen käsite olisi tällöin edelleen tunnistettavissa ja yksilöitävissä sille ominaisen käsitteellisen käytännön tai kontekstin perusteella. Nyt kyse kuitenkin on erillisten käsitteiden käyttöä koskevasta toisen asteen käsitteellistyksestä tilanteessa, jossa osapuolet pyrkivät vakuuttamaan toisensa siitä, millä tavoin kiistan koh- teena oleva arvostettu saavutus, ideaali ja/tai aktiviteetti tulisi ymmärtää sekä sisällöllisesti että käsitteellisesti osana yhteisen ongelman ratkaisua. Kiistan ai- touden kannalta ei ole tällöin ratkaisevaa, jakavatko osapuolet yhden ja saman käsitteen, vaan osallistuvatko he riittävän samanlaiseen käsitteelliseen käytän- töön, jonka tunnusmerkkinä on yhdistelmäselonteon kuvaama erityinen tapa käyttää käsitettä.

Kiistelijöiden ensimmäisen asteen käsitteitä koskeva toisen asteen käsite on teoreettinen konstruktio, joka on tarpeen viitatessa arvossa pidettyjen saavutus- ten tai aktiviteettien ”idealisointia” (vrt. aiemmin) koskevien kiistojen käsitteel- liseen ulottuvuuteen. Osapuolet eivät pidä sitä hallussaan ensimmäisen asteen käsitteenä, jonka yhden käyttötavan puolesta he argumentoivat ja jonka vastak- kaiset käyttötavat he samalla kiistävät. Toisen asteen käsite toimii tällöin kiistan vielä toistaiseksi määrittelemättömänä kohteena tai kiistakapulana niin, että osa- puolet pyrkivät vaikuttamaan sen ”myöhemmin” saamaan sisältöön. Tässä mie- lessä se pikemminkin representoi kiistan lopputuleman kannalta ratkaisevan tär- keän käsitteellisen ulottuvuuden yhtenäisyyttä tai yhtenäisyyden puutetta ja asettaa epämääräisyydestään huolimatta puitteet käytävälle kiistalle (eikä niin- kään kiintopistettä). Se on siis eräänlainen kontekstisidonnainen ajattelun apu- väline; käsitteellinen kategoria, joka tulee konstituoiduksi vain osana meneillään

olevaa (tai mahdollisesti oletettua) kiistaa kiistelijöiden itsensä tai sivustaseuraajien toimesta. Mikäli osapuolet päätyisivät lopulta olemaan yhtä mieltä siitä, kuinka heidän tulisi kiistanalainen asia käsitteellistää, voisivat he edelleen toki olla asiasta sisällöllisesti eri mieltä, mutta ilman olennaisen kiistanalaisuuden mahdollisuutta.

Vaikka en tutkielmassani sitoudukaan mihinkään tiettyyn käsiteteoriaan, päädyn suhtautumaan ensimmäisen asteen olennaisesti kiistanalaisten käsitteiden olemassaoloon varauksella. Tutkimuskirjallisuudesta ei nähdäkseni löydy niiden olemassaololle riittävää tukea, ja käsitekeskeiselle teesille asettamani kaksi haastetta ovat tällöin myös hyvin painavia. Koska yhdistelmäselonteko hylkää oletuksen, että olennainen kiistanalaisuus on seurausta käsitteen sisäisestä rakenteesta, sen ei tarvitse olettaa yhden erityislaatuisen käsitteen läsnäoloa kiistan luonteen selittämiseksi. Olennainen kiistanalaisuus on sen sijaan seurausta tietystä tavasta käyttää muutoin täysin tavanomaisia käsitteitä. Toisen asteen käsitteen filosofisena tarkoituksena on lähinnä artikuloida missä mielessä kiistan osapuolet tai sivustaseuraajat voivat käsitteellistää eri käsitteiden/käyttöjen koskevan yhtä ja samaa jännitteistä mutta eräässä mielessä vasta tulemissa tilassa olevaa ja siten abstraktia käsitteellistä entiteettiä. Näin voidaan kiinnittää huomiota siihen, mistä olennaisessa kiistanalaisuudessa käsitekeskeisestä näkökulmasta on kaikista ytimekkäimmin ilmaistuna kyse: käsitteenmuodostuksesta.

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