

# The Dual Character of Essentially Contested Concepts

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## 1. Introduction

This paper puts forward and examines the claim that essentially contested concepts (hereafter ECCs)—as they are originally presented by W.B. Gallie in his seminal paper “Essentially Contested Concepts” (Gallie 1956b)—share a conceptual structure with dual character concepts (hereafter DCCs) first identified by Joshua Knobe, Sandeep Prasada, and George Newman in “Dual Character Concepts and the Normative Dimension of Conceptual Representation” (Knobe, Prasada, and Newman 2013). The proper employment of ECCs is said to inevitably involve endless and rationally irresolvable yet genuine disputes that are sustained by perfectly respectable arguments and evidence. DCCs are concepts that encode both a descriptive dimension and an independent normative dimension: people employing DCCs have been found to be employing two sets of criteria of category membership that match with the two dimensions, which makes it possible to judge a given object as a category member in either or both senses.

I do not seek to show that ECCs and DCCs match one-to-one with each other. Instead, I explore their distinct and theoretically significant structural affinities that make way for a better understanding of these concept types and their structures. I argue that ECCs encode a descriptive and a normative dimension in much the same way as DCCs. This connection may be thought as accidental or as a mere similarity that does not justify further conclusions, however, and that is why I further bolster my case by juxtaposing natural kind concepts (hereafter NKC) with ECCs and DCCs. Concepts are particu-

larly elusive objects of study. By a three-way comparison I seek a firmer ground for the identification of genuine similarities that indicate a shared structure, as surprising as the combination of these concept types may seem at first. I show that making categorizations with DCCs and NKC requires a reference to an underlying deep structure, and I argue that it is also the case with ECCs. This ultimately means that psychological essentialism has an important role to play in the phenomenon of essential contestability.

Much of my argument rests on evidence amassed by comparing different perspectives on concepts, and therefore it is best to note in advance that both DCCs (see Knobe, Prasada, and Newman 2013; Newman and Knobe 2019) and ECCs (see Evinine 2014) have been directly linked to NKCs before. However, no such connection has been proposed as holding between DCCs and ECCs until this paper. At the end of the day, I claim that the structural commonalities between these three types of concepts outweigh their respective differences for the purpose of explaining the nature of ECCs, specifically. By no means do I wish to suggest that all questions one may have about ECCs will be answered, or even can be answered, by this account. Instead, I hope to offer a theoretical framework for seeing ECCs in a new light and for understanding why many of the issues arise in the first place, especially regarding alleged essentialist underpinnings of Gallie's thesis. Structural similarities between mostly theorized ECCs, recently identified DCCs, and the already well-established class of natural kinds should make ECCs less mysterious as objects of study. Exploring the shared conceptual characteristics should also offer further guidance on which conceptual operations are possible in the case of each concept type, but apart from a few general suggestions made here and there, I am content to leave it to future research.

## **2. Of essentially contested concepts, accrediting valued achievement, and contestation**

At the heart of Gallie's account is a claim that is both striking and unnerving: "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" (Gallie 1956b, 169). Gallie seeks to show that these disputes are genuine and "sustained by perfectly respectable arguments and evidence" even if they are not "resolvable by argument of any kind" (ibid.). There are only four concepts that are originally deemed essentially contested by Gallie: ART, DEMOCRACY, SOCIAL JUSTICE, and CHRISTIANITY.<sup>1</sup> In a later revised work, SCIENCE is included as well, though with some reservations (Gallie 1964, 156, 190). Despite its influence in various fields (see Pennanen 2021, sec. 2.6), Gallie's thesis in its original form is unclearly articulated and highly controversial. Subsequent theorists have typically tried to reconstruct the thesis after which they have discussed and dissected what they understand as its cardinal claims, merits, and failings.<sup>2</sup> A systematic or adaptive reconstruction is beyond the scope of the present paper (instead, see Pennanen 2021), but we should still start by presenting the most important characteristics of ECCs as Gallie understands them.

Gallie offers us seven conditions for ECCs (hereafter "Condition(s)" with Roman numerals as presented below), yet he refers to them as the "conditions of essential contestedness" as well.<sup>3</sup> The Conditions are:

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<sup>1</sup> Gallie uses several different terms and phrasings interchangeably, i.e., "religion" (Gallie 1956b, 187; 1964, 168), "the adherence to, or participation in, a particular religion," "a Christian life" (ibid., 180; 1964, 168–69), "the Christian tradition," and "Christian doctrine" (ibid., 168; 1964, 157). In his final formulation, Gallie appears to prefer CHRISTIANITY (Gallie 1964, 168–70). For a further discussion, see Pennanen 2021, 57, n. 52, 179–84, 451, 462–64. Throughout the text, I will use small capitals to name and refer to concepts.

<sup>2</sup> For a comprehensive overview of various positions, see Collier, Hidalgo, and Maciuceanu 2006; Pennanen 2021.

<sup>3</sup> In Gallie's original texts, the phenomenon of interest is named as "essential contestedness." In literature, it is often presumed that a correct or at least philosophically interesting form is "essential contestability." In the same vein, "essentially contested concept" is often replaced with "essentially contestable concept." These are not interchangeable; for a discussion, see Pennanen 2021, sec. 12.2, 12.3. In the current paper, however, I will disregard this complication as far as the terminology is concerned and refer only to "essentially contested concepts," or ECCs. "Essential contestability" is reserved for a general phenomenon, and "essential contestedness" is invoked only in the case of Gallie's original thesis.

*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 democracy “has steadily established itself as the appraisive political concept *par excellence*.”

*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.” (Gallie 1956b, 170–173, 180, 182)

Gallie’s Conditions have attracted a lot of criticism and most commentators have ended up eschewing one or more of them for various reasons (see Collier, Hidalgo, and Maciuceanu 2006; Pennanen 2021). The orthodox interpretation of Gallie’s

thesis locates the endlessness and inevitability of disputes in the characteristics of a concept which render the disputes over the uses of that concept endless and incapable of being rationally settled (see, e.g., Swanton 1985, 813–15; Bryant 1992, 58; see also Gallie 1956b, 188). Yet it has been argued that, for someone genuinely holding an 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; but cf. Swanton 1985, 815; Waldron 1994, 534). Gallie himself did not rule out the possibility of temporary agreement for practical reasons (cf. Gallie 1964, 211). This arguably leaves room for genuine disputes even if the critical points raised are found to be basically sound (Pennanen 2021, sec. 13.1–13.2). All in all, it is far from a trivial matter where exactly to draw a line between such a dispute's conceptual, practical, and substantive elements, but since it does not directly pertain to the structure of concepts, we can note this and move on.<sup>4</sup>

A chief theoretical worry with respect to ECCs is the possibility that no independently plausible theory of concepts will be able to allow a type of conceptual structure that admits endless and rationally irresolvable disagreements over one and the same and/or mutually shared concept as Gallie claims (Gallie 1956b, see 169, 188, 190, 196; but see also 1964, 177, 211). For instance, according to Frege's view in *Grundgesetze der Arithmetik*, the definition of a concept must be complete, and it must unambiguously determine whether a given object falls under the concept or not; concepts that are not sharply defined cannot be recognized by logic (Ricciardi 2001, 52ff). More generally, especially among philosophers there is a widely held assumption that properties, propositions, and relations that are candidates for being members of linguistic expression are precise in that a number of objects either definitely instantiate or definitely fail to instantiate them; any proposition is likewise either definitely true or definitely false (Braun and Sider 2007, 134). More simply, semantic objects that are designated by concepts or linguistic

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<sup>4</sup> In this article, I do not examine the sense in which relevant disputes are endless and irresolvable either. For a review of a variety of positions, see Pennanen 2021, in particular sec. 12.4.

meanings are thought to be precise. That general standpoint is assumed by the classical theory of concepts which holds that concepts have a definitional structure, i.e., they encode necessary and sufficient conditions for their own application (Laurence and Margolis 1999, 8–9). Clearly, or so it may be claimed, there cannot be genuine contestation over the kind of concept that is understood to pick its object(s) precisely or without any ambiguity or underdetermination. Making conflicting claims that presumably originate in different and quite possibly equally reasonable uses of the same concept is thus ruled out by logical fiat. Yet there is an even simpler way of understanding the problem of conceptual unity, and it generalizes beyond the classical view: how can mutually contesting ways of concept employment serve as legitimate uses of one and the same concept despite the alleged differences at a conceptual level, differences that are meant to generate a dispute in the first place? Relevant differences would also mark different concepts (see also Newey 2001).

The aim of the current paper is not to address the issue of conceptual confusion. Neither do I focus on values or principles or the substance of concepts; an essential contestability thesis is about “structures and procedures” (Freeden 2004, 7). But what do the structures and procedures cover? The last three of Gallie’s Conditions belong to pragmatics rather than to semantics (van der Burg 2017; Pennanen 2021, chap. 10), and if all seven Conditions are understood as conditions of *a concept*, an ECC seems to involve more than is typically understood to fall under a concept’s structure. That is why I am introducing the notion of a *conceptual architecture*, within which I am including the pragmatic circumstances or the context in which people characteristically employ a concept as well as that which is semantically encoded in the concept. The distinction between a concept’s structure and its architecture is not completely clear-cut; for example, a concept’s relations to other concepts can reasonably fall in either category – choosing this way or that way ultimately depends on one’s favored theory of concepts. Neither is my terminological choice completely innocuous: it allows me to discuss the normativity of concept employment without taking a stand on whether that normativity is primarily located in concepts *qua* concepts or in the ways they are employed (i.e.,

in particular contexts). As a result, I do not take a stand on whether contestability is a feature of (certain) concepts or their context of employment. The possibility of conceptual confusion, or the unity problem, is something that I cannot avoid discussing in the following even if I do not claim to provide a solution to it.<sup>5</sup>

To compare a normative dimension of DCCs to that of ECCs, I first need to say a bit more about the way normativity figures in the conceptual architecture of ECCs. On the face of it, the first three Conditions are the most relevant, yet one also needs to pay attention to Gallie's general approximation of what his thesis is about. Gallie does not unambiguously explicate what he means by the notion of "appraisiveness," yet it is clear that his focus is on positive appraisal, i.e., something is taken as an achievement and is evaluated favorably (cf. Gallie 1956b, 184). This positive appraisal is then coupled with a standard that is mutually recognized in spite of the dispute (Gallie 1956b, 197; see also Weitz 1972, 103–4). Gallie's reference to achievements looks to be quite literal: if parties to a dispute consider a thing an achievement, they certainly evaluate it favorably. Contested concepts "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). According to this notion, ECCs should be understood as normative—it is reasonable to further specify the relevant sense as evaluative as there are standards of evaluation involved (van der Burg 2017, 234; cf. Gallie 1956b, 197). Still, Gallie's choice to go with "appraisive" instead of "evaluative" may also be taken to

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<sup>5</sup> All these questions cannot be discussed in just one paper. Nevertheless, I should note that the talk of "architecture" instead of "structure" at this juncture is partly motivated by my doubt that a specific feature of generating endless and irresolvable disputes about a concept's proper use could be encoded in some singular concepts as their invariant and stable feature. For an argument to this effect, see, e.g., Newey 2001, and see Pennanen 2021 for full discussion of the unity problem. In addition, I will briefly summarize central features of the essential contestability thesis that I deem defensible in footnote 19 in sec. 5.

indicate that he refers to normative assessment and judgment more generally.<sup>6</sup>

With the introduction of Conditions (II) and (III), we learn that the achievement in question is meant to be internally complex and variously describable. The idea is that the complex parts or features of the valued achievement are all understood to contribute to what makes the achievement worthy of admiration. By arguing for their views, disputing parties are understood to be advancing different descriptions of the valued achievement, descriptions in which the component parts or features are differently ranked. Therefore, when ECCs become contested, it makes sense to think that there are diverging personal or group-specific evaluations or preferences, which result in conflicting descriptions of the correct way of using the concept, and a mutually recognized standard (of evaluation) at work at the same time. That which is mutually recognized by the disputants appears to have a role of bringing some unity to contestation, yet Gallie clearly thinks that it cannot serve as “a general principle” that decides the issue once and for all (cf. Gallie 1956b, 177–79, 189).

Gallie approximates the way ECCs are contested by presenting an artificial scenario in which different teams vie to be the champions in a continuously proceeding game. A championship in this game is awarded on very unusual grounds: the team that gathers the most support or followers is (effectively) dubbed the champions. Spectators support their chosen teams based on who plays the game best, or the

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<sup>6</sup> Much of the scholarly work done in relation to Gallie’s original thesis has revolved around interpreting what he means, or reconstructing what he should mean, by ECCs being “appraisive.” For different interpretations, see, e.g., Weitz 1972, 103–4; Gellner 1974, 95; Gray 1978, 392; Connolly 1993, 10, 22–3; Freedon 1996, 55–56; Lukes 2005, 14; Collier, Hidalgo, and Maciuceanu 2006, 237; Criley 2007, 33; Boromisza-Habashi 2010, 277; Väyrynen 2014, esp. 472, 474–8, 487; van der Burg 2017, 233–34, n. 16. Some view Gallie’s focus on a positive appraisal as an unfortunate mistake; they claim that there is really no reason to omit unfavorable evaluations from the scope of essential contestability (Freedon 1996, 55–56; see also Garver 1987, 220; Collier, Hidalgo, and Maciuceanu 2006, 216). This is correct if one’s aim is to assess concepts that figure in all sorts of normative judgments, but Gallie’s original writings do not support that interpretation (Pennanen 2021, sec. 4.1, 11.3).



way the game is meant to be played, and each team comes to be ranked based on the level of their specialized or otherwise distinct way of playing the game. Gallie fleshes out the example by describing one particular game that resembles bowling. He observes that

such bowling can be judged, from the point of view of method, strategy and style, in a number of different ways: particular importance may be attached to speed or to direction or to height or to swerve or spin. But no one can bowl *simply* with speed, or simply with good direction or simply with height or swerve or spin: *some* importance, however slight, must, in practice, be attached to each of these factors, for all that the supporters of one team will speak of its "sheer-speed attack" (apparently neglecting other factors), while supporters of other teams coin phrases to emphasise other factors in bowling upon which their favoured team concentrates its efforts. (Gallie 1956b, 173)

Different ways of bowling that are attached with importance represent, outside the artificial example, various aspects or features of a valued achievement that can be ranked differently. It is important to recognize that in both his Conditions (namely II, III, and V) and the description of the artificial example, Gallie requires concept-users to hold the same descriptive features as at least somewhat important aspects of the valued achievement. Contestant teams compete "for the acceptance of (what each side and its supporters take to be) the proper criteria of championship" (Gallie 1956b, 171). As there are "no official judges or strict rules of adjudication" (ibid.) that would decide the question of which team is the most deserving of the championship, the game can go on even after determining the level of support each team has at any given time. In other words, supporters of *every* contesting team continue to regard their favored team as "the champions" or perhaps as "the *true* champions," "*morally* the champions" etc. (ibid.) unless they are convinced otherwise. So even if all groups of supporters may acknowledge the effectiveness of one team in gathering the most supporters, "the property of being acknowledged effective champions carries with it no universal recognition of outstanding excellence – in [a team's] style and calibre of play" (ibid.). The above translates to continuous contestation by concept-users about how

to properly rank various aspects or features of a valued achievement. But, of course, the artificial example is meant to serve as a ladder to Gallie's theoretical claim about ECCs: the proper uses of these concepts are persistently contestable and actually contested by others. To the extent that these concepts have a standard or general usage, it consists of mutually contesting and mutually contested uses (*ibid.*, 169).

The artificial example ends with Gallie affirming that the supporters "continue with their efforts to convert others to their view, not through any vulgar wish to be the majority party, but because they believe their favoured team is *playing the game best*" (Gallie 1956b, 171). I think it is safe to say that the artificial groups of spectators/supporters and contesting teams are meant to coalesce into one in real life. We are evaluators who (passively) deem things better or worse, and agents who (actively) seek to advance or bring into effect that which we consider valuable. A big part of the latter are our attempts to persuade our fellow men. This is enough of Gallie's thesis for now. I will continue examining the nature of ECCs after first taking a look at DCCs and NKC.

### 3. Of dual character concepts and natural kind concepts

DCCs are concepts that encode both a descriptive dimension and an independent normative dimension (Reuter 2019, 1). Concept-users have been found to be employing two sets of criteria for category membership that match with the two dimensions, which makes it possible to judge a given object as a category member in either or both senses (Knobe, Prasada, and Newman 2013, 243, 246–49, 253–54). More specifically, there are cases in which concept-users think that an object is clearly "X" but is not "true X," or is not "X" but is "true X," or is both "X" and "true X." This "double dissociation" sets DCCs apart from a more common notion that category membership can come in degrees (*ibid.*, 253).<sup>7</sup> Dual character concepts have been distinguished by testing, for instance, how a person responds to statements that have a particular form such as "there is a sense in which she is clearly not a scientist, but ultimately, if you think about what it really means to be a

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<sup>7</sup> For early seminal views on the notion of graded membership, see Lakoff 1973, Rosch and Mervis 1975, and Hampton 1979.

scientist, you would have to say that she truly is a scientist" (ibid., 242). In some test scenarios, participants make up their minds with the help of vignettes that provide them with additional information regarding, for instance, the said scientist's motives, capabilities, *et cetera*. Another method is to assess how sensible given statements are when a key term is changed. Based on their experiments, Knobe, Prasada, and Newman conclude that DCCs "support two types of normative judgments ("good" and "true") whereas the control concepts support only one of these types of normative judgment ("good")" (ibid., 245; see also Newman and Knobe 2019; Liao, Meskin, and Knobe 2020).<sup>8</sup>

DCCs have a specific organization or structure that sets them apart from most other concepts. They are "represented via both (a) a set of concrete features and (b) some underlying abstract value" (Knobe, Prasada, and Newman 2013, 243). A given set of concrete features will cohere "because they are all ways of realizing the same abstract values" (ibid., 256), and so the two sets of criteria for the application of a DCC can both be derived from the same set of concrete features. Regarding criteria that match the descriptive dimension, concept-users simply check whether a given object has the right features. In the case of criteria that match the normative dimension, concept-users identify the abstract values that the concrete features serve to realize and then check to see whether the object in question displays these values (ibid., 254). The structure of DCCs can be further elaborated, some-

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<sup>8</sup> The list of DCCs that are tested by Knobe *et al.* 2013 includes FRIEND, CRIMINAL, LOVE, MENTOR, COMEDIAN, MINISTER, THEORY, BOYFRIEND, ARTIST, ARGUMENT, TEACHER, POEM, SOLDIER, SCULPTURE, ART MUSEUM, MUSICIAN, MOTHER, ROCK MUSIC, SCIENTIST, NOVEL. The control concepts are MECHANIC, OPTICIAN, BAKER, BLOG, DOORMAN, MAYOR, WAITRESS, CASEWORKER, TABLE OF CONTENTS, TAILOR, BARTENDER, RUSTLING, WELDER, CATALOG, CHAIR, FIREFIGHTER, UNCLE, CASHIER, STROLLER, OBITUARY, SECOND COUSIN. In the experiment that involves the judgments "good" and "true" (one of the total five) participants were instructed to rate the sentences "That is a good *x*" and "That is a true *x*" with DCCs and control concepts substituted with "*x*" as to how natural or weird they sounded.

what surprisingly, by comparing them to the category of natural kinds.<sup>9</sup>

The natural kind terms refer rigidly to things in the world: the real determinant of the extension is a natural property. The indicators of a concept are thus contingent in that they only point toward an underlying natural essence; the underlying reality provides one with the final criteria (or norms, rules etc.) that constitute the concept (or govern the intension of the respective term). To illustrate, “is wet” may be taken as an indicator that one might be dealing with a natural kind “water,” yet water’s underlying essence is H<sub>2</sub>O. The fact that water is wet is an observable feature of the natural kind “water” but there is a clear sense in which it is merely superficial as far as categorizing items accurately as water is concerned. Even if we would be inclined to think that water in steam form is wet, a solid block of ice certainly is not until it melts. The contingency of indicators is perhaps even more obvious in the case of species categories. Tigers may very well be striped and ferocious but that is neither a necessary nor sufficient criterion for their category membership as tigers. Instead, there is an underlying causal factor (a tiger’s hidden essence if you will) that is ultimately decisive.

Knobe, Prasada, and Newman contend that the same structure is at work with both DCCs and NKC: “In both cases, people show a willingness to go beyond concrete observable features, and in both cases, they seem to be understanding categories in more abstract theoretical terms” (Knobe, Prasada, and Newman 2013, 254). How this plays out with NKC is clear enough. With DCCs, like ROCK MUSIC or MOTHER, people associate the concept “with a collection of features, but they then face a further question about why the category is associated with those specific features and not others” (ibid., 255). The criteria governing the concept give an answer to this question yet, “this time, the answer is not that all of the features share the same underlying causes but rather that they all embody the same abstract values” (ibid.). This is arguably a significant difference: the order of concrete observa-

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<sup>9</sup> A concise yet useful characterization of natural kinds is provided by Crispin Wright in “The Conceivability of Naturalism” (Wright 2003, 359–60) which is the one that I have made use of in this paper.

ble features and an underlying understanding of a category is reversed. Whereas the features or indicators that are typically enumerated for NKC are brought about by an underlying essence, in DCCs the features directly contribute to the realization of some same abstract value(s), i.e., they bring the value that underlies the category about. The question becomes: do the structural similarities between NKC and DCCs outweigh the differences?

There are further studies that show that the distance between NKC and DCC is, at first blush, not as great as one might think. First, Newman and Knobe (2019) draw attention to a body of evidence that suggests that people tend to represent some concepts in terms of a deeper unobservable property or “essence.” Although most of the research on such psychological essentialism has so far been focused on patterns of judgment found for natural kind concepts such as TIGER or WATER, essentialism plays an important role in many other cases as well.<sup>10</sup> Of special interest presently are socially constructed concepts that are ordinarily understood to invoke certain values or ideals (or, they are regarded as “value-laden”). Newman and Knobe claim that these concepts—of which they specifically mention SCIENTIST, CHRISTIAN, and ART (ibid., 586; see also Liao, Meskin, and Knobe 2020; compare Gallie’s list of ECCs in sec. 1)—reflect the same underlying cognitive structure that is applicable in the case of NKC: the tendency to try to explain observable features in terms of a further unifying principle. With NKC, one is dealing with causal essentialism: “the essence of a natural kind is understood as the underlying cause of its various superficial features” (ibid., 587). In the case of socially constructed concepts, essentialism is “Platonic,” i.e., “people appear to believe that what binds together the different features of the category is the fact that they are all ways of embodying the same deeper value” (ibid., 588). Nevertheless, both are cases of (psychological) essentialist representation: there is an unobservable

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<sup>10</sup> “Psychological essentialism” was first dubbed as such by Medin and Orton 1989; see also Medin 1989. For more references to studies on both psychological essentialism and more specifically on the (ordinary speakers’) use of natural kind terms, see Newman and Knobe 2019 and Haukioja, Nyqvist, and Jylkkä 2021, 378–81.

property that is responsible for category membership, and that binds a concept's superficial features together (*ibid.*, 589).

Second, Tobia, Newman, and Knobe (2020) have conducted a series of experiments<sup>11</sup> that aim to uncover people's actual intuitions about Hilary Putnam's famous Twin Earth thought experiment as far as categorization of Twin Earth "water" is concerned. In the thought experiment, Twin Earth "water" has the same appearance, taste(lessness), and other apparent qualities and functions (e.g., it is clear, quenches thirst, and supports life) as Earth water in normal conditions, yet Twin Earth "water" has a complex chemical formula abbreviated as XYZ that essentially differs from H<sub>2</sub>O.<sup>12</sup> Instead of endorsing or rejecting what Tobia *et al.* take as the standard philosophical intuition (cf. Haukioja, Nyquist, and Jylkkä 2021, 397), i.e., that the Twin Earth liquid is not water, research participants were found to assent to two distinct claims: (i) there is a sense in which the liquid is water; and (ii) ultimately, if you think about what it really means to be water, you would have to say there is a sense in which the liquid is not truly water at all (Tobia, Newman, and Knobe 2020, 183). In other words, test subjects' complex reactions to Twin Earth cases displayed a dual character pattern, which Tobia *et al.* take as evidence in favor of the view that NKCs are also employed by making use of two sets of criteria—one set is based on underlying causal properties, the other on superficial properties (*ibid.*).

Tobia, Newman, and Knobe do not claim to have settled the question of which theory of natural kind categorization process is correct, or what the final semantic implications of their findings might be. Research participants' judgments about category membership were found to depend on the context of categorization, which makes a range of interpretations possible (see *ibid.*, 197–205). Nevertheless, they do state that any plausible theory about NKCs should be elaborated to *account for* the dual character pattern of judgment (esp. *ibid.*, 203). The further claim that NKCs share a conceptual structure with DCCs is indirectly supported by recent studies that have either called into question the prevalence of the philo-

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<sup>11</sup> For details, see Tobia, Newman, and Knobe 2020.

<sup>12</sup> For specifics, see Putnam 1975.

sophical Twin Earth intuition or have otherwise demonstrated that NKC's are represented both in reference to their underlying structure and superficial qualities or even by their appearance alone in certain cases (see Haukioja, Nyquist, and Jylkkä 2021).

As to the essentialist employment of DCCs and NKC's in categorization, I assume as an intermediate conclusion that they have similar conceptual architectures. The present extension of theoretical scope from concepts' structures to their architectures is meant to reflect also the finding that the context dependence of terms that denote<sup>13</sup> NKC's may be compatible with several ways of understanding and organizing their criteria of application. Furthermore, in practice, people seem to use terms that denote NKC's in a way that admits double dissociation which is the hallmark of DCCs. This implies that both concept types have structures that consist of two distinct criteria for categorization. Given that the specific aim of my examination is to pump insights to better explain ECCs and the disputes in which they are involved, there is no need to show that NKC's and DCCs have exactly the same conceptual structure, not to mention broader architectures—previous observation about the difference between causal essentialism and Platonic essentialism is more than enough to show that this is not the case. From the standpoint of ECCs and the disputes in which they are involved, what ultimately matters is that categorization judgments are made in like manner with DCCs and NKC's in practice, or at least can be made. In the next two sections, I will argue that the mutual similarities extend also to ECCs. For this, we need to pick up the discussion where it was left at the end of section one.

#### **4. Examining the architecture of essentially contested concepts in light of dual character concepts**

The valued achievement signified by an ECC is understood as internally complex, which results in the conception that there are multiple criteria by which an object may fall under the banner of a concept. Disputing parties endorse conflicting

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<sup>13</sup> In the current paper, I am using the word “denote” in its ordinary meanings “to serve as an indication of” and “to stand for.”

descriptions of the appropriate way of employing the concept; this involves diverging personal or group-specific evaluations in addition to some mutually recognized standard or background that unifies otherwise centrifugal evaluative disagreement (see also sec. 1). Given the centrality of evaluation in the description of how ECCs are characteristically employed aggressively and defensively in a dispute, it is reasonable to assume that to satisfy the application criteria of ECCs “is to satisfy a norm of excellence, as well as a mere precondition of a classification” (Gellner 1974, 95; see also Gray 1978, 389). These 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) (see also Pennanen 2021, 388). As both description and evaluation are needed for employing ECCs aggressively and defensively in a dispute (cf. Condition V in sec. 1), this may lead one to conclude that ECCs are neither purely descriptive nor purely evaluative (see, e.g., van der Burg 2017, 233–34). A dispute over ECCs is best understood as conceptual and substantive (Gray 1978, 391), or as conceptual, normative, and substantive (Besson 2005, 16, 71–72) depending on emphasis.

In the artificial example, contestation takes place over which factor, or which weighted combination of factors, is the most important for playing the game best. Different ways of playing contribute to overall excellence in the game. In formal terms, one should note that Condition (II) has two parts: one stating that an achievement signified by a concept is internally complex, i.e., it admits multiple descriptions; another stating that the worth of the achievement is attributed to it in its entirety. The value of the achievement, or the overall excellence of playing a game as it is meant to be played, is considered to be at least somewhat independent of available ways of employing the concept, or of the ways or styles of playing that game. This feature of ECCs’ conceptual architecture is also shared by DDCs: there is a value or ideal that underlies a concept, and the features that are picked by the concept’s descriptive criteria cohere just because they are all ways of realizing an abstract value (that is signified by a concept), and the



concept's appropriate use needs to meet with the value/ideal at least in certain circumstances.<sup>14</sup>

Contestation over ECCs follows when individuals or groups come to advocate for their own evaluation of which way of employing the concept meets with the underlying value or ideal best, but it appears to take place solely on the evaluative and not on the descriptive side. This is because Gallie, in effect, subscribes to the view that separates descriptive concepts (or conceptual elements) from evaluative concepts (or conceptual elements). The former 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" while the latter 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" (Criley 2007, 36). This enables the users of ECCs to argue that although all proposed alternatives may be, for instance, democracies in some relatively clear sense, only one of them is worthy of being called a democracy. This type of judgment is absolutely central to essential contestability and closely resembles the double dissociation that is the hallmark of DCCs.

The descriptive and normative dimensions of ECCs and DCCs are both similarly independent, but there is also reason to think that categorizations made by employing these concepts involve the same type of normative judgment. A recent discussion of social role DCCs—certain social role concepts such as SCIENTIST or ARTIST are sometimes taken to be the pa-

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<sup>14</sup> As it is, the value-ladenness of ECCs, or essential contestability in general, has been understood in the literature in terms of the inescapability of normative perspective (Connolly 1993, 10, 22-23), as disputes between rival moral and political commitments and/or perspectives (Lukes 1977, 418-19; Gray 1978, 392; Grafstein 1988, 19, 25), or as caused by employing a concept that is oriented towards an ideal which allows endless debate about precisely what it implies (van der Burg 2017, 233-234). Moreover, it has been argued 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 the rule for the correct use of certain contestable concepts is "to elicit a specific value judgement from anyone applying or implementing the proposition in which they appear (Besson 2005, 82). I will briefly mention yet another formulation of value-ladenness by Stokes 2007 in sec. 5.

radigmatic examples of DCCs (Del Pinal and Reuter 2017, 477; see also Leslie 2015; Del Pinal and Reuter 2015)—is very helpful for clarifying the matter. Not all social role concepts are DCCs (e.g., WELDER, BUS DRIVER) though. The normative dimension of social role concepts that obtain higher ratings as DCCs from participants in experiments may have only little to do with the usual or typical function of the corresponding social roles. Instead, the normative dimension of DCCs represents more like an idealization of the basic function of the role (Leslie 2015; Del Pinal and Reuter 2017). For example, being a “true parent” is not solely about having offspring but also involves caring deeply and supporting one’s ward.

This type of idealization is also what Gallie had in mind. To see why this is the case, let me first note that Gallie views RELIGION or CHRISTIANITY as the concept that best satisfies the seven Conditions of essential contestedness (Gallie 1956b, 180–81). In his later *Philosophy and Historical Understanding*, he emphasizes that he wants to consider 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’” (Gallie 1964, 169). The account that immediately follows only partially connects with social roles, yet near the end of “Essentially Contested Concepts,” Gallie notes that

*Some of our moral appraisals command universal assent, but by no means all do so. It is of the first importance to insist that we also use the word “good” (or its near-equivalents and derivatives) with a definitely moral, but just as definitely questionable force: witness such phrases as “a good Christian”, “a good patriot”, “a good democrat”, “a good painter” (when we mean a sincere, sensitive, intelligent, always rewarding—but not necessarily a “great” or a “fine” painter), “a good husband,” and so on. In all these uses, it seems perfectly clear, our concept of the activity in and through which the man’s goodness is said to be manifested, is of an essentially contested character. (Gallie 1956b, 195)*

Gallie’s general idea is that in the case of above social roles, it seems always possible to contest what it really means to be a good husband, for instance, by proposing different criteria for it. What is new is that Gallie now draws attention to the ex-

pression “a good painter” hoping to clarify a special sense that differs from a comparatively unexceptional matter of evaluative degree that “great” or “fine painter” more accurately indicates. Elsewhere, Gallie expresses that sense by using the modifiers “true” (ibid., 171, 177, 178) and “more orthodox” (ibid., 177) which corresponds nicely with the way DCCs are characteristically employed. Even without a comparison to DCCs, it is quite clear that Gallie’s idea of essential contestedness is premised upon the possibility of idealizing (and/or interpreting) in different ways that which is considered to be of value in the case of certain activities or achievements. Literature on DCCs simply clarifies the issue by presenting less complicated examples of the type of normative judgment that is also present with ECCs. Other concepts do not admit such idealization. A welder can certainly be regarded as good at welding, yet (most) people do not find it sensible to speak of “true welders” while the expression “a true artist” is sensible in (most) normal contexts. In “Art as an Essentially Contested Concept” (Gallie 1956a), Gallie speaks of the contestability involved in determining what should count as “a work of art” but he could have just as easily said “a true work of art,” the once-and-for-all uncontestable determination of which requires lasting agreement on what art truly is.<sup>15</sup>

Although there has not been much discussion of conceptual contestability in the literature on DCCs, unlike ECCs, they draw attention to disputes that arise from conflicting descriptive and evaluative uses of a concept.<sup>16</sup> Disputants now employ somewhat distinct sets of criteria that are distinguished by their type rather than employing different sets of criteria of the same type but with more or less different content. Both

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<sup>15</sup> I will continue drawing examples from this article in the two remaining sections as well in order to better connect this type of judgment with other elements of Gallie’s thesis.

<sup>16</sup> The possibility of using words both descriptively and evaluatively does not escape Gallie. According to him, the history of art “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” (Gallie 1956a, 111). Nevertheless, his argument is not about this type of contestability.

cases may be taken as confusions or non-genuine conceptual disagreements but for different reasons. In the former case, if parties are sharing the same concept along with its two sets of criteria of application, their disagreement can easily be resolved by pointing out that they are just employing different sets of criteria. There is no real disagreement unless one of the parties has made some kind of mistake in applying the concept, or disagreement is factual in that parties do not agree on which features an object, to which the concept is applied, has. In the latter case, a parsimonious explanation of what is going on looks to be that the different sets of the application criteria mark different concepts, and not just different uses or functions (perhaps distinguished by type of criteria) of presumably one and the same concept. Gallie himself effectively dismisses the possibility that the relevant type of contestedness originates in a contest over which features should be ranked in the first place (cf. Gallie 1956b, 174, n. 2). Relegating contestation strictly on the evaluative side aims to avoid a situation in which people are simply talking past each other by underpinning the unified identity of conflicting concept-uses to mutually accepted descriptive criteria. Unfortunately, this may result in a sense of contestability that is somewhat impoverished or not far-reaching enough.<sup>17</sup>

In the same vein, analyzing ECCs and DCCs side by side raises the question of whether it is possible for DCCs to be essentially contested. All it would seemingly take is that an abstract value that underlies a concept, and by virtue of which concrete features cohere, were to be contested by disagreeing parties. That would be problematic for reasons that are instructive more generally. To share a concept opposing

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<sup>17</sup> For reasons why a farther-reaching or more encompassing contestability deserves the appellation “essential contestability,” see Pennanen 2021, sec. 15.3. It is not uncommon to claim that essential contestability requires something more or beyond normative disagreement or the absence of universally agreed schemes of values (see Freeden 1996, 55). For instance, Peter Ingram views some concepts as *partially* contestable in that they can be *evaluatively*, but not *essentially*, *contested*. 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 (Ingram 1985, 44–45).

parties need to accept certain things about it and the dispute over the concept('s application) needs to pertain to other things. In the case of DCCs, a category's "essence" can be understood as a placeholder with a clear function: it brings together the features of that category/concept as ways of realizing an abstract value. A dispute over that which unifies the concept, even if cashed as an abstract value or ideal, questions the unity and raises the uncomfortable possibility that parties to the dispute are just talking past each other. The situation is no different in the case of ECCs assuming that they are structurally similar enough to DCCs as the current examination into both concepts' conceptual architectures suggests: disagreement on a ranking order may be taken as evidence of a disagreement that is ultimately about an ECC's deep structure, or about a value or ideal that provides the rationale for grouping certain features together. If this is correct, and contesting such a rationale opens the door for contesting descriptive criteria as well, it is ultimately the reason why one cannot hope to guarantee the unity of the concept by insulating descriptive criteria from contestation. Once the genie is out of the bottle, essential contestability looks to persistently threaten the sense in which concept-users are sharing the same concept. Understanding ECCs as dual character concepts makes no difference based on the current analysis.

The conceptual operations that have been discussed should not necessarily be viewed as mutually available to the other concept type, and nor should it necessarily be thought that, for instance, an essentially contested DCC metamorphoses into an ECC when a value that serves as its deep structure is mutually contested. A typology according to which double dissociation and essential contestability are defining features of ECCs and DCCs is also an option: when concepts whose criteria of application play a dual role in dividing between descriptive and normative criteria of application, and which refer to a deep structure that underlies categorizations, are employed to "doubly dissociate," we are dealing with a concept having a dual character; when concepts' employment results in endless and irresolvable disputes, we are dealing with an ECC. That way there is room for not only ECCs that are not DCCs, and vice versa, but also to different interpretations of these phenomena (or Gallie's original thesis, for that

matter). Not much of substance hinges on this choice though, and it is likely going to be decided not only based on operative theories but also one's scholarly aims.

## 5. Examining the architecture of essentially contested concepts in light of natural kind concepts

To complement the picture of ECCs' specific conceptual structure, I now turn to discuss the conceptual architecture of ECCs in the light of NKC. Natural kinds and that which is represented by ECCs may appear too different to engender fruitful comparisons at the level of terms and concepts, but Simon Evnine succeeds in finding important commonalities between them. Evnine claims that natural kind terms and essentially contested terms [sic] are both species of a single semantic genus: both types of terms "are, on the respective theories, correctly applied to something now 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 2014, 127). In the case of natural kind terms, the exemplars are natural while the operative relation is *belonging to the same kind as*. Here, "something like a deep structure (...) is tacitly assumed to underlie the operative relation" (ibid., 129). In the case of essentially contested terms, the exemplars are cultural while the operative relation is *being the heir of*, a component of which is the relation of *being part of the same tradition as* (ibid., 130).

Evnine's interpretation of Gallie's thesis closely resembles the semantic externalist theory of reference as it is put forward by Putnam and Kripke (Evnine 2014, 126–27), and Evnine finds a lot of significance in Gallie's sixth Condition, i.e., that any ECC or a use of ECC is to be derived from an original exemplar whose authority is acknowledged by all the contestant users of the concept. Yet, the exemplars of NKCs also differ in important respects from those of ECCs:

Natural kind terms are typically names of kinds of natural *objects* or *substances* – water, tin, tigers, electrons. And the exemplars themselves are either objects of the relevant kind or quantities of the relevant substance. In the case of essentially contested terms, the exemplar is something like a stage of a tradition. The exemplar will therefore 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. Evnine 2014, 127

An essentially contested term has the function of picking out something that "has the relation of being the heir of that tradition-stage" (ibid., 130), i.e., of the exemplar. In addition, the internal complexity of the exemplar allows one to pick any element of the tradition and synecdochically treat it as an exemplar itself (ibid., 127–28). For instance, in the case of essentially contested CHRISTIANITY one may treat the Bible and/or the biography of Jesus Christ as an exemplar but the deeds of apostles, ritual practices, and even moral principles and habits of early twentieth century church-goers (and many things more) could also be picked by one's usage of "Christianity" as authoritative (see also ibid., 127–28).

The reference of essentially contested terms like "Christianity" and "art" is historically connected to an exemplary phenomenon. One employs such terms correctly when a referred-to thing has the relation of being the heir to that exemplary phenomenon. The correctness of specific uses may of course be contested. Think of many intense disputes that revolve around the question of who the true heir or successor in a given instance is—the conflict between the Sunni and Shia Muslims is often mentioned as an example. Moreover, Evnine says that "[t]he exemplary phenomena and the things to which such terms correctly refer through their relation to these exemplary phenomena, constitute historical traditions," and the kind of contests that Gallie talks about are, in a manner of speaking, over ownership of traditions (ibid., 119). Such contests are endemic to traditions rather than essential to some group of concepts, and therefore Evnine prefers to speak of essentially contested terms instead of concepts. The relation of heirship does not necessitate or even imply rival claimants even if "it is highly likely that groups will evolve that prioritize the elements of [an exemplar that is rich in internal complexity] differently and hence that a contest will emerge over which party is the real heir of the exemplar" (ibid., 125). This makes Evnine's interpretation a variant of *an*

*admittance to a tradition thesis of essential contestability* (see Pennanen 2021, 233 see also sec. 18.4).<sup>18</sup>

Evnine's reframing answers the question of why Gallie thinks that the clarification of a concept's status as essentially contested requires viewing the concept with a historian's eye in addition to laying out its general (or "logical") characteristics (Gallie 1956b, 181–82, 196–97; see also sec. 5 below). As to ART, 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 helps one to appreciate the peculiar structure of ART and to see that it belongs to concepts that are "*essentially complex*, and, chiefly for this reason, *essentially contested*" (Gallie 1956a, 107). According to Gallie, there are several "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 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" (*ibid.*, 112). Nevertheless, as theories that exclude other reasonable aspects of art, they are "intelligible only as contributions to a seemingly endless, although at its best a creative, conflict" (Gallie 1964, 177). Evnine's account explains why such historical understanding is required. If a term's applications conflict but otherwise seem reasonable individually one may be dealing with an essentially contested term instead of a confusion. Given that essentially contested terms are correctly applied to something if and only if that something has the relation of being the heir of samples or exemplars that have had a role to play in the use of the term, determining the matter requires assessing whether conflicting applications are

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<sup>18</sup> David-Hillel Ruben (2010; 2013) has presented a substantively similar interpretation that focuses on the notions of true succession and faithfulness (to the original exemplar) within a tradition. As Ruben concentrates mostly on (social) epistemological issues, I omit discussing it here. That said, I am indebted to him for considerably broadening my own perspective on Gallie's thesis and essential contestability in general.



traceable and faithful to past exemplars and samples, and whether, as such, they are intelligible.

It seems plausible that dual character terms are also species of the same semantic genus as terms denoting ECCs and NKC<sub>s</sub> given that DCC<sub>s</sub> and ECC<sub>s</sub> on the one hand, and DCC<sub>s</sub> and NKC<sub>s</sub> on the other hand, have been found to share important characteristics. This potentially opens new avenues for study; for example, concerning conceptual judgments in relation to terms that signify social roles. Terms are not quite the same thing as concepts, but I think that one can go a bit further concept-wise (see also sec. 5). The move to a conceptual level can be made explicitly, for instance, by following Newman's and Knobe's (2019) lead: even if essentialism comes in many forms, they argue that people's reasoning about NKC<sub>s</sub> such as TIGER and WATER and essentialist-like intuitions that include people's representation of socially constructed concepts [or DCC<sub>s</sub>] like SCIENTIST or CHRISTIAN reflect the same underlying cognitive structure. Assuming this is correct, one may reasonably conjecture that people's representation of ECC<sub>s</sub> also reflects the same cognitive structure – the sameness should be understood here as a suitably broad generalization or type instead of complete identicalness – and that conceptual operations that are typical to ECC<sub>s</sub> are not necessarily far off even in the case of NKC<sub>s</sub>.

However, there are also important differences between the conceptual architectures of ECC<sub>s</sub> and NKC<sub>s</sub> despite their commonalities. A historical connection between an exemplar and a term seems to admit much more contestability in the case of ECC<sub>s</sub> than NKC<sub>s</sub>. I do not think that it has to necessarily mean that the link between historical samples and exemplars and its current usage is any less social/causal per se, which might suggest a different semantic genus. Following Evinine's view that contests are endemic to traditions, it seems plausible that the difference is attributable to the fact that the communities of experts which ultimately determine the correct way of employing natural kind terms are simply missing or otherwise found lacking in the case of "essentially contested terms." When people come forth with competing (and possibly reasonable) definitions or descriptions of the achievement in question, the conceptual architecture of ECC<sub>s</sub> has historically been formed such that it simply allows more

room for different conceptions to gain traction and be established as reasonable alternatives (see also Pennanen 2021, 211–13). As long as deference to experts is part of the conceptual architecture of NKC, or the conceptual and linguistic practice of employing terms that denote NKC, there is little reason to suspect that endless and rationally irresolvable disputes are about to spring forth. And just as was the case with DCCs before, at some point we may deem such changes significant enough for a given term to denote a different type of concept altogether.

## 6. Further reflection and theoretical implications

In this final section, I (a) present how the kinship between ECCs, DCCs, and NKC reflects on the nature of ECCs while I also (b) assess how it all fits with Gallie's original ideas. Furthermore, in anticipation of criticism, I briefly clarify (c) why I am not confusing empirical and conceptual or logical levels of analysis, and (d) why the sort of essentialism that I advocate is not pernicious.

What can we say about the conceptual architecture of ECCs based on previous findings? Both DCCs and NKC entail a reference to a deep structure that binds together different features picked by a concept, and such "hidden essence" looks to be tacitly assumed also in the case of ECCs. Instead of "Causal essentialism," however, I argue that we are dealing with a modified form of "Platonic essentialism" (cf. sec. 2). An ECC is involved in a dispute when mutually contested and contesting uses of a concept (or even concepts<sup>19</sup>) are

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<sup>19</sup> I do not think that much of substance would be lost by understanding ECCs as second-order concepts or categories of possibly distinct first-order concept uses (cf. esp. Gallie 1956b, 169 about mutually contesting and mutually contesting uses that *make up* some kind of concept). In this picture, essential contestability is primarily about what concepts people should form or adopt in the first place, and "essentially contested concept" may be best considered as a term of art. According to the full essential contestability thesis that I view as defensible, the relevant type of contestability is brought about by anthropocentric concept employment that aims to persuade others (see Pennanen 2021, sec. 18.5 esp.). In short, "ECCs" aim to make the best sense of not only the proper boundaries of (participatory) human activities but they also have the function of facili-

faithful to exemplars and samples, all of which belong or are claimed to belong to the same tradition (or one of its branches) on the grounds that they embody and/or manifest the same abstract value or normative ideal (compare with Newman and Knobe 2019, 588; Evnine 2014, 127–30). The tradition is now understood as an open-ended human activity or practice with a temporal continuity. This still requires some clarification.

In discussing essentially contested DEMOCRACY, Gallie asserts that he is not concerned with either (descriptive) “questions of actual practice” or those “theoretical considerations” that suggest that either democratic or undemocratic consequences flow from certain arrangements. Instead, these particular uses 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” (Gallie 1956b, 183–84; see also Pennanen 2021, sec. 11.3). In the current framework, such “elementary use” is understood to depend on the conceptualization that aims at the true representation of a historically embodied normative ideal or value, the aim that exhibits psychological essentialism. A sample that bears or manifests the normative ideal or value becomes a part of a tradition that is viewed as sustaining and advancing that ideal or value. When people differ on what realizes the ideal or value best, they also come to disagree on how the respective concept is to be applied (see also Besson 2005, 82–83) or, more fundamentally with respect to essential contestability, on how the concept should be formed in the first place (see Pennanen 2021). At stake is not a direction of some social movement per se but effecting changes in how people con-

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tating the best possible solutions to basic human problem areas and/or in connection to broadly understood activities in thought and practice. It follows that contesting concept uses have an endorsement function in addition to an interpretive function, and their contestability is thus a contextual and functional rather than a structural matter which is brought about by the fact of our human condition and an always-present practical possibility of questioning what we should do and why. Most of these features still belong to a concept’s architecture as it is understood in this paper even if explaining the origin of essential contestability requires a (separate) metaphysical thesis.

ceive of and conceptualize issues of importance. Such changes in outlooks may then lead to other changes in the world through concept-users' subsequent doings.

There is still arguably a disconnect between my earlier general characterization of ECCs, the comparisons of DCCs and NKC to ECCs, and the present picture in historical terms. The dilemma is similar to the problem that Gallie too faces: it appears that our present understanding of certain ideals and values is enriched by the knowledge of how we have arrived at this point, but how exactly is the understanding that is provided by a diachronic perspective connected to the synchronic (and, in principle, independently presentable) senses of those ideals and values (cf. Gallie 1956b, 196–97)? Let us take another look at essentially contested ART.

When one claims or rejects a claim that something is “art,” one is inevitably using the term in a contestable way because what one says can easily be recognized as appreciation or criticism from any of the historically manifested and (excessively) one-sided points of view (Gallie 1956a, 113–14). Gallie ends up claiming that this is brought about by the very nature of the arts as activities that are “ever expanding, ever reviving and advancing values inherited from a long and complex tradition” (ibid., 114). More generally,

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’. Gallie 1956a, 114

Notwithstanding Gallie’s curiously reverse formulation, the phenomenon that he is arguably describing is relatively straightforward and commonsensical: we humans engage in many activities or practices from which traditions of thought spring, traditions that are concerned with the best way to sustain and develop ideals or values which the selfsame activities and practices are perceived to manifest. When the aspects or features of an ideal or value make up a complex, or are perceived as such, the ideal or value admits various descriptions of what is of the utmost importance regarding it. Different descriptions espousing differing evaluations may result in the tradition itself becoming complex or branched. Gallie as-

sumes that the conceptualization of relevant ideals and values is at least partly mediated by traditions of thought: we learn to view things in a particular way from various cultural and historical sources, or as part of our everyday interactions with others who are similarly situated, and complex or branched traditions present us with multiple and often mutually exclusive options. This means that the concepts of our ideals and values are also complexly shaped by the past history or "the whole gamut of conditions" (Gallie 1956b, 196) that informs and guides us to endorse and conceptualize those ideals and values. What may at first sight look like an unfortunate confusion from a synchronic perspective may turn out to be an integral part of the social and intellectual fabric locally or universally. A diachronic or historical perspective is now required to separate the wheat from the chaff: we want to understand, indeed, we need to understand, which apparent confusions involve a continuing contestation that is of such significance to us that even our concept of the ideal or value reflects and represents that conflict.

Whether there really is, at the center of a human activity or practice, a singularly identifiable ideal or value that is collectively sustained and developed—or in different terms: it is normatively binding—is somewhat beside the point. What matters is that people appear to believe that certain exemplars and samples are embodying a deeper value. There may be no telling whether, in any given instance, it is really so. Psychological essentialism merely represents a belief that there are essences; whether one's knowledge about particular "essences" is accurate or not is a completely different matter (cf. Gelman and Wellman 1991, 229). In other words, "psychological essentialism refers not to how the world is but rather to how people approach the world" (Medin 1989, 1477). This means that the current theoretical framework for understanding ECCs cannot establish that having disputes that are centered around psychologically essentialized representations is necessarily a perfectly rational thing to do. The disputants perceive there to be an ideal or value that underlies each

concept use (or gives it a point<sup>20</sup>), and they disagree about what everyone should make of it.

The present understanding of ECCs also complements the way we understand both DCCs and NKC. I have already mentioned the possibility that DCCs and NKCs may become essentially contested in suitable circumstances even if this might mean that such concepts should then be viewed as ECCs instead. In addition, we are getting a better sense of the workings of socially constructed DCCs especially. It is one thing to say that people associate a concept with a collection of features based on a value they perceive to be underlying the concept, but quite another to understand the process in which these features and the perceived underlying value come together as a basis for different categorizations that the concept licenses. For instance, think of ROCK MUSIC, which has been claimed to be a DCC (Knobe, Prasada, and Newman 2013). It is certainly not the case that we are free to associate rock music with any set of features or any value if we wish to employ the same concept with our fellows and thus share in their thought-processes. Instead, we have access to cultural information about rock music based on which we conceive of samples or exemplars as belonging to the same historical continuum that we perceive as embodying value that is characteristic to rock music. Sometimes concrete features (e.g., the sound that is centered on the amplified electric guitar; lyrics about social and political themes etc.) seem more relevant, sometimes a deeper value (e.g., rebelliousness<sup>21</sup>). Nevertheless, because DCCs have a structure similar to ECCs, there is reason to suspect that the kind of historical understanding that Gallie sought comes in handy also in the case of socially constructed DCCs.

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<sup>20</sup> For different senses of “the point of a concept,” see Queloz 2019. See also Pennanen 2021, sec. 18.2, for a discussion in the context of essential contestability.

<sup>21</sup> One way that DCCs may differ from ECCs is that they may perhaps be associated with *several* relatively distinguishable values that underlie a concept and tie concrete features together (e.g., authenticity and rebelliousness and perhaps more in the case of rock music). Whether this difference is real, or something that manifests in people’s actual conceptual judgments, requires further empirical study.

I suspect that not everyone will agree with my current take on the nature of ECCs, so let me try to anticipate and briefly answer a couple of lines of criticism. First, one might want to object that the necessity of contestedness can be inferred from the empirical fact of contestedness only on pain of fallacy (cf. Ball 2001, 35) or that the modality of contestability is quite different from contestedness, and that I make a category mistake by appealing to empirical studies. However, just the same as a word- or term-usage is commonly taken as an indication of an underlying conceptual and/or cognitive structure, I do not see why systematic psychological studies that explicitly aim to reveal such structure(s) could not. A philosophical examination that adequately respects the rules of logic can continue from there, just as it would with any other information about the world. However, my case would be somewhat weakened if a (rational) philosophical intuition or insight about concept usage were markedly different or somehow more reliable than the layman's judgment—given that the three concept types look to share even more characteristics with each other, in practice, if NKC's also follow a dual character pattern. However, in absence of a convincing argument to the effect that a professional philosophical insight and the layman's judgment are different, one should minimally withhold from making that assumption (Machery 2017).

Evidence of what people's ordinary judgments regarding certain concepts are or in what ways they apply linguistic expressions that, for all we know, stand for these concepts, is very relevant in any case. Getting to the bottom of conceptual aspects of the intractable disputes of our time does not seem feasible without paying attention to the way people actually employ concepts, for example, to categorize items. From this perspective, disputing parties' conflicting judgments and their distinct patterns are something to be understood and explained, not explained away. Nevertheless, while there are established and relatively uncontroversial methods of testing people's conceptual judgments in psychology and cognitive science, none of the sort were utilized by Gallie nor do I employ them in this paper. The material question "Is there really that kind of concept?" is particularly hard one for a philosopher to answer positively, and often the only recourse is to

argue for the coherence and explanatory value of one's account. To get beyond a pure theory or stipulation requires more—not fewer—empirical studies that are well-thought and precise.

Second, some may find my invocation of essentialism objectionable. It is commonly presumed that Gallie wants to avoid a commitment to essentialism or that this is at least what he should do. According to one critical remark, Gallie “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” (Gellner 1974, 99). This type of metaphysics is commonly shunned today, and undoubtedly for good reason. So is it completely misguided to appeal to a form of psychological essentialism, let alone one dubbed as “Platonic essentialism?” Not at all, and there are other scholars too who have already come close to my position. For instance, Michael Stokes (2007) points out that requiring an exemplar enables a defense against the charge of Platonism, yet he wonders if it is possible to identify the important features of the exemplar without some intuitive understanding of an ideal type, in which case the exemplar would not offer a complete defense against such a charge (Stokes 2007, 690n22; compare with Gallie 1956a, 99–102). Stokes does not elaborate on specific forms that the intuitive understanding of the ideal type might assume; nevertheless, he holds that ECCs can be seen to admit different conceptions “because of continuing disputes about the most justifiable understanding of the values which underlie the concept” (Stokes 2007, 693).

The above points are, of course, very much in line with what I have been saying in this paper. The current framework significantly adds to the matter by (i) clarifying the structure of ECCs, (ii) illustrating by comparison that ECCs as a class of concepts is not as mysterious as might seem at first, and (iii) offering a way to track a conceptual mechanism that looks to be required by ECCs: psychologically essentialist categorization tendencies in everyday conceptual judgments need to be considered in conjunction with an externalist or historicist interpretation of essential contestability. There is no dubious metaphysics here; whatever it is that is “hidden” in an ECC—an ideal type, a value as a deep structure that gives point to a



category's features, or something similar—it is conceptualized into existence by concept-users themselves. For all the talk of Platonic essentialism, psychological essentialism and by extension the current theoretical framework are compatible with *not* accepting a type of Platonic idealism about our conceptual categories.

Finally, is there any reason to believe that my account of ECCs is consistent with any theory of concepts at all? Gallie himself was not satisfied with the prevalent method of seeking definitions in terms of necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for all concepts (Gallie 1956b, 185n3; see also Pennanen 2021, 32–34, 50, 98–100), or the notion that empirical sciences should provide the model for understanding concepts in other fields as well (Gallie 1956b, 168, 179, 197–98). ECCs exhibit features that may be viewed as more properly belonging either to the prototype theory, the exemplar theory, or the theory-theory, which all have challenged and to different extents replaced the classical theory of concepts.<sup>22</sup> The theory-theory connects especially well with psychological essentialism as it allows people to access a mentally represented theory when they make certain category decisions (Laurence and Margolis 1999, 46). It also coheres well with Gallie's choice to treat proposed theories and definitions as the concrete vehicles of essential contestability (e.g., Gallie 1956a, 112; 1964, 177; quoted in sec. 4). Psychological essentialism does not require a detailed understanding of the matter in question or clearly developed views about the nature of the property (Laurence and Margolis 1999, 46), and neither does the theory-theory. A theory behind an advocated concept use could also be a folk theory,<sup>23</sup> or perhaps mutually contesting concept-users just otherwise act as if their concepts contain "essence placeholders" (see Medin and Ortony 1989,

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<sup>22</sup> For general features of these theories, see, e.g., Laurence and Margolis 1999 or Murphy 2002.

<sup>23</sup> Interestingly, Knobe, Prasada, and Newman speculate that conceptual representations of those employing DCCs may be shaped by "normative theories" about abstract values, theories which serve to unify certain category features rather than others (Knobe, Prasada, and Newman 2013, 255). For a tentative account of what this might mean in relation to Gallie's thesis, see Pennanen 2021, 371, n. 374, 434.

184). The latter option should be compatible with several other theories of concepts as well.

## 7. Conclusions

In this paper, I have examined whether ECCs have a dual character by comparing them to DCCs and NKC. The answer is affirmative: there are striking similarities between ECCs and DCCs. First, categorizations made by employing ECCs and DCCs make use of two sets of criteria, descriptive and normative. It may be possible to cash the specific nature of these criteria in different ways, yet current findings support the conclusion that ECCs encode both a descriptive dimension as well as a somewhat independent normative dimension for categorization. Both ECCs and DCCs admit their users to dissociate the two dimensions in a way that licenses normatively guided categorizations “true X” and “not true X” in addition to more ordinary classifications “X” and “not X.”

Some empirical studies on ordinary speakers’ use of natural kind terms and related conceptual judgments suggest that conceptual judgments involving NKCs also evidence a dual character pattern. Unlike with DCCs and ECCs as they are originally presented by Gallie, assuming the presence of the two sets of criteria goes against an established theory in the case of NKCs, which gives one pause. Although there may be good reasons to stick to a textbook definition with NKCs or natural kind terms, for the present purposes it is enough to identify a common pattern in ordinary judgments between these concept types as it renders ECCs less mysterious as a class of concepts. I also discussed the possibility that the terms denoting ECCs and NKCs respectively are species of a single semantic genus. While natural kind terms are correctly applied to something if and only if it bears the relation of “belonging to the same kind as” to samples or exemplars that have played a historical role in the use of the term, in the case of ECCs the operative relation is “being the heir of” a component of which is the relation “being part of the same tradition.” This goes a long way towards explaining why historical understanding is required in the case of ECCs: determining the matter requires assessing whether conflicting

uses of concepts are traceable and faithful to past exemplars and samples and, as such, whether they are intelligible.

The contestability that arises from conflicting verdicts on the applicability of a concept based on the two sets of criteria is not really discussed in the literature on ECCs, literature that mostly focuses, in Gallie's footsteps, on contestation that plays out on the normative side. Still, disagreements over which set of criteria should be used for categorization in a given case is still a live possibility in disputes involving ECCs given their dual character. Then again, studies on DCCs have hitherto overlooked the possibility that a dispute could arise over how to understand a concept's underlying abstract value. Concepts such as ART, SCIENCE/SCIENTIST, and CHRISTIANITY/CHRISTIAN that have been independently put forward as candidates for being DCCs are also examples of ECCs that Gallie mentions. However, the assumption that the values underlying concepts can be contested does not come without a cost: identifying contestability at the level of a concept's structure introduces the unity problem—i.e., disputing parties may not be employing/contesting the same concept—which is difficult to solve, and this potentially applies to both DCCs and ECCs. Essential contestability appears to constantly challenge the acceptable boundaries of conceptual identity and variation, but it may also lead one to question whether the insight behind Gallie's thesis can even be captured by the view that understands concepts *qua* concepts as the origin of essential contestability. Therefore, and somewhat paradoxically, I cannot give a conclusive answer to the question of whether DCCs could become essentially contested given that the very notion of such contestedness/contestability is somewhat questionable. Nevertheless, assuming that the unity problem is solvable or that it can be worked around, it may still be separately advisable to classify "DCCs" that become essentially contested more simply as ECCs. The final determination of what is what depends heavily on one's background view or theory of concepts.

Second, I have proposed that ECCs are accompanied with a form of psychological essentialism, dubbed "Platonic Essentialism." Gallie's commitment to essentialism has been critically suggested in the literature before, yet after comparing the features of NKC and DCCs, and then considering ECCs

together with DCCs, it becomes possible to see ECCs in a different light. Now, an ECC is involved in a dispute when mutually contested and contesting uses of a concept are faithful to exemplars and samples, all of which belong or are claimed to belong to the same tradition (or one of its branches) on the grounds that they embody and/or manifest the same abstract value or normative ideal. Contesting uses both aim and are claimed to be true representations of a historically embodied normative ideal or value, which exhibits psychological essentialism. I defended this view against the charge of taking concepts to be immutable and eternal entities, and I also gave a brief answer to the objection that the necessity of contestation, or a concept's contestability, cannot be grounded in empirical facts about concept employment.

The current account of ECCs is able to take seriously the criticism that an advocate of ECCs might end up subscribing to Platonic idealism while incorporating essentialism in a modified psychological form as a key factor in the overall explanation. This also means that ECCs are value-laden not necessarily because that which falls under a concept's extension is intimately connected to a value, or that the value somehow inheres in the concept, but because concept-users simply consider certain exemplars and samples of the concept as manifestations or realizations of the ideal or value. People's normative differences are then reproduced in the ways they apply the concept. This perspective of essential contestability is only concerned with the way disputing parties conceptualize the contested issue in question, and contestability thus becomes a matter that originates in their beliefs, attitudes, and practices. The current theoretical framework is potentially compatible with multiple theories of concepts, although it leans towards the theory-theory view or some hybrid-view that entails it.

The conceptual architectures of ECCs, DCCs, and NKC are similar enough to suspect that DCCs and even NKC could also become involved in contestation that is much like Gallie describes in the case of ECCs. It arguably requires the right conditions, though, and some of the conditions that should be different for there to be essential contestability may be integral to employing the type of concept in question. Changes in a concept's architecture may therefore mark shifts

from one concept type to another. Establishing these effects requires further study, both theoretical and empirical. Given that essential contestability is a phenomenon that is intimately tied to both culture and history, separating contributing factors from everything else that is or could be going on is not an easy task. Recognizing the dual character of ECCs is a start.

Reframing essential contestability in terms of psychological essentialism is a fresh perspective to the phenomenon of essential contestability which also points toward an improved, full essential contestability thesis. The new framework is compatible with most of the insights of Gallie's original thesis while steering clear of some of its logical problems. By grounding the structure of ECCs in certain conceptual operations of disputants rather than in the joints of reality, my account more generally suggests that the dispositions of the parties to a dispute are crucial for understanding essential contestability.

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