Necessity and Essence  
Distinct Distinctions
Two Distinctions

❖ Essentialism Motivated
❖ Essentialism Clarified
❖ Challenges to Essentialism
❖ Approaches to Necessity: a Prospect of Reduction
Essentialism Motivated

- Two categories of properties: deep and shallow.
  - Some features S might well lose while continuing to exist.
    - For instance, Socrates would continue to exist if he lost his pallor by spending the day at the beach.
    - Call these shallow properties.
  - Some features are such that should S lose them, S would cease to exist.
    - For instance, Socrates would cease to exist if he were put into a compactor and forged into a doorknob. Along the way, he would lose, for instance, the property being human, since no doorknob is a human being.
    - Call these deep properties.
  - The difference between deep and shallow properties has traditionally thought to approximate a distinction between essence and accident.
Essence and Modality

❖ One proposal: essential properties are just those a subject has necessarily.

❖ Let us call this the modal theory of essence (MTE):

❖ \( \phi \) is an essential property of \( x =_{df} \) necessarily, \( x \) is \( \phi \).

❖ This is just to say, then, that \( x \) cannot exist without being \( \phi \).

❖ \( \phi \) is an accidental property of \( x =_{df} \) (i) \( x \) is \( \phi \); and (ii) possibly, \( x \) is not-\( \phi \).
Various properties are trivially true of everything that exists:

- logical and categorial properties
  - (i) being red or not-red; (ii) being identical with the number nine or not
- set theoretic properties
  - Socrates is necessarily a member of the singleton set \{Socrates\}.

These properties do not tell us *what* their bearer is.

Further, some properties stand in asymmetric dependency relations to others, even though they are equally necessary.

The deeper properties here are candidates for being essential.
Aristotelian Essentialism (AE)

- As traditionally conceived, philosophical definitions (seek to) reveal the essence-specifying features of things; essences constitute the natures of their bearers.

- So, e.g., Socrates is essentially rational.

- He is also necessarily capable of grammar, though an account of his grammatically asymmetrically depends upon an account of his rationality.

- This remains so even though: Necessarily, Socrates is rational iff Socrates is capable of grammar.

- AE: $\phi$ is an essential property of $x = \text{df} \ (i)$ necessarily, $x$ is $\phi$; and (ii) $\phi$ is in an objective sense an explanatorily basic feature of $x$. 
1. Mathematicians are necessarily rational, but not necessarily two-legged.

2. Cyclists are necessarily two-legged, but not necessarily rational.

3. There is at least one cycling mathematician, namely Ricky.

4. If (1), Ricky is necessarily rational; if (2) Ricky is not necessarily rational.

5. If (2), Ricky is necessarily two-legged; if (1), Ricky is not necessarily two-legged.

6. So, Ricky is and is not necessarily rational; and Ricky is and is not necessarily two-legged.

7. If (1) and (2), as arbitrarily selected examples of necessary and contingent properties, lead to such flagrant contradictions, then the necessary/contingent distinction (and with it, the essential/accidental distinction) is untenable and must be rejected.

8. So, the necessary/contingent distinction (and with it, the essential/accidental distinction) is untenable and must be rejected.
Necessity *de dicto* and *de re*

- **Necessity *de dicto***: a proposition (*dictum*) has the property of being necessarily true.
  - It is necessary that all bachelors are unmarried.
  - It is necessary that nine is greater than five.

- **Necessity *de re***: some entity (*res*) has a property necessarily.
  - Ricky is necessarily rational.
  - This square is necessarily four-sided.
(1) and (2) may each be taken either *de re* or *de dicto*. Thus:

- **Taken *de dicto*, we have:**
  - (1\textsubscript{dd}) It is necessarily true that mathematicians are rational.
  - (2\textsubscript{dd}) It is necessarily true that cyclists are two-legged.

- **Taken *de re*, we have:**
  - (1\textsubscript{dr}) Every mathematician has the property of being necessarily rational.
  - (2\textsubscript{dr}) Every cyclist has the property of being necessarily two-legged.

- **Taken *de dicto*, then (1) and (2), as (1\textsubscript{dd}) and (2\textsubscript{dd}), are unobjectionable. But then we cannot accept (4) and (5) and the subsequent inference to (6).**

- **Taken *de re*, as (2\textsubscript{dr}), (2) is false. (It is not the case that every cyclist has the property of being necessarily two-legged.) So, (4), (5), and (6) cannot be derived.**
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2. Cyclists are necessarily two-legged, but not necessarily rational.

3. There is at least one cycling mathematician, namely Ricky.

4. If (1), Ricky is necessarily rational; if (2) Ricky is not necessarily rational.

5. If (2), Ricky is necessarily two-legged; if (1), Ricky is not necessarily two-legged.

6. So, Ricky is and is not necessarily rational; and Ricky is and is not necessarily two-legged.

7. If (1) and (2), as arbitrarily selected examples of necessary and contingent properties, lead to such flagrant contradictions, then the necessary/contingent distinction (and with it, the essential/accidental distinction) is untenable and must be rejected.

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The Purport

- These contentions do not undermine the traditional more-than-merely-modal distinction into essence and accident.

- So far, then, the intuitive distinction between shallow and deep properties, explicated as Aristotelian Essentialism, remains unscathed.

- So, the distinction between essential and accidental properties remains viable.