ESSENCE AND NECESSITY

DISTINCT DISTINCTIONS
TWO DISTINCTIONS

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

❖ φ is an essential property of x =df necessarily, x is φ.

❖ This is just to say, then, that x cannot exist without being φ.

❖ φ is an accidental property of x =df (i) x is φ; and (ii) possibly, x is not-φ.
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 $x =_{df}$ (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.
DE DICTO AND DE RE

☢ 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.
(i) and (2) may each be taken either de re or de dicto. Thus:

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

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

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

Taken de re, as (2dr), (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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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.
AN ANALYSIS OF NECESSITY?

Two claims:

- The necessary/contingent distinction is distinct from the essence/accident distinction. (They are not even co-extensive.)

- Still, Aristotelian Essentialism is partly defined in terms of de re necessity.

  - Perhaps this is a case explaining the obscurum per obscurius?

Our question:

- What is necessity?
NECESSITY IS A MODE OF TRUTH

Some true propositions:

. . .are necessarily true: Blue is a colour.

. . .are contingently true: One word in this sentence is blue.

Some false propositions:

. . .are contingently false: One word in this sentence is red.

. . .are necessarily false, which is to say impossible: The word ‘sentence’ is blue but not coloured.

p is necessarily true (or, necessary) iff p is not possibly false (or, it is not possible that not-p)

p is possibly true (or, possible) iff p is not necessarily false (or, it is not necessary that not-p)

p is contingently true (or, contingent) iff p is possible but not necessary
Here philosophers begin to diverge, but we may think of degrees of modality as given by expanding domains of quantification:

- **Physical possibility:**
  - It is possible that a lecturer walk about, but not possible that she levitate and lecture seated in the air. Still, if the laws of nature are contingent, this is metaphysically or logically possible.

- **Metaphysical possibility:**
  - It is not possible that the lecturer be a sofa, or that a circle be square. Still, these are not logical impossibilities—they are not contradictions.

- **Logical possibility:**
  - Nothing is both a lecturer or not a lecturer, or both circular and not circular.
A proposition is necessary iff it is true in all possible worlds.

A proposition is possible iff it is true in at least one possible world.

A possible world is a complete history of some universe.

One possible world, ours, is actual.

The others are merely possible worlds—ways things might have been but are not.
REDUCTIVE DEFINITIONS?

- The Leibnizean Biconditionals may be offered as reductive definitions of modality—as accounts of modality in terms of truth.

- N.b. that this will be non-circular only if we have available a non-modal definition of a possible world.

- One possibility (Lewis): x is a possible world iff (i) x is a maximal spatio-temporally interrelated whole; and (ii) anything spatio-temporally related to any part of x is a part of x.
TWO CONCERNS

✧ Actualism

✧ What exists is co-extensive with what is actual: there are no mere *possibilia*.

✧ Circularity

✧ A survey of modal space demands truth-makers for *all* possibilities.

✧ The account must be both genuinely reductive and materially adequate.

✧ The worry is that its being materially adequate challenges its status as genuinely reductive.

✧ Any guarantee that there be a truth-making world for each possibility and no truth-making world for any impossibility evidently requires an implicit appeal to the very modal notions targeted for reduction.

✧ Without the benefit of reduction, there seems no reason to abandon the comforts of actualism.
ALTOGETHER THEN . . .

- The Leibnizean Biconditionals may be accepted as correct without being taken as reductive.
- One may speak of possible worlds consistent with a commitment to actualism (...properties are actual).
- They are ways things might have been—but are not.