

Essence. Nowadays this is analyzed modally as just de re necessity.

x is essentially ϕ iff x is necessarily ϕ , that is, at all possible worlds w containing x , x is ϕ

Aristotle had a different view.

x is essentially ϕ iff it is part of “what x is” to be ϕ

A canonical specification of what x is sometimes called x 's *real definition*. This might sound funny; we are used to thinking words can be defined, but things? Yet there are reasons to distrust the modal analysis. Here are some troublesome-seeming consequences.

1. Existence comes out essential, not just to God.
2. All necessary truths make for essential properties.
3. Everything's essence encodes everything else's essence.
4. Intuitive counterexamples: Socrates and {Socrates}
5. Mishandles dependence relations: should be y is essential to x iff x depends on y .

But how would definitional conception of essence work, and how would it help? x 's definition is a certain bunch of propositions about x . ϕ is essential to x if it flows in some strong sense from x 's definition. Suppose for argument's sake that my real definition is this: x is a human being; x descended from zygote z .

1. It isn't part of my definition that I exist
2. It isn't part of my definition that $2+3=5$
3. Nothing about you flows from my definition, certainly not your essence
4. {S} is defined as the set whose sole member is Socrates. Socrates is not defined in terms of {S}
5. Numbers are modally essential to me, but not definitionally essential.

Started by saying definitions are usually of words. Real definition seemed like an extension. But maybe verbal definitions are a special case of real definition. Maybe the real force of saying

bachelors =df unmarried men

is that the meaning of 'bachelor' has a certain real definition:

bachelor applies to a thing iff **unmarried** and **man** apply to it.

Now we've got newfangled (old-fangled) essence in place of de re modality. How does de dicto modality fit into the picture? According to Fine,

$\Box_x \phi \Rightarrow \Box \phi$.

Conversely? Well, there is also the notion of ϕ 's truth flowing from definitions of *several* things

$\Box \phi \Rightarrow$ there are some things x, y , etc. such $\Box_{x, y, \dots} \phi$.

So tables are completely turned. Verbal definition, far from displacing real, verbal becomes a kind of real, viz. real definition of meaning. Rather than necessity being prior to essence, necessity is truth-in-virtue-of-things'-essences.