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

\[ x \text{ is essentially } \phi \text{ iff } x \text{ is necessarily } \phi, \text{ that is, at all possible worlds } w \text{ containing } x, \ x \text{ is } \phi \]

Aristotle had a different view.

\[ x \text{ is essentially } \phi \text{ iff it is part of “what x is” to be } \phi \]

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. \phi 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

\[ \text{bachelors =df unmarried men} \]

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

\[ \text{bachelor applies to a thing iff unmarried and man apply to it.} \]

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,

\[ \Box, \phi \implies \Box \phi. \]

Conversely? Well, there is also the notion of \phi’s truth flowing from definitions of several things

\[ \Box \phi \implies \text{there are some things } x, y, \text{ etc. such } \Box x, y, \ldots, \phi. \]

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.