



ESSENTIALISM: PARADISE LOST

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

This thesis argues for the incoherency of the putative distinction between those properties which are possessed essentially - in a **metaphysical** sense - by an object and those which are possessed only accidentally. This thesis is thus a critique of **metaphysical** essentialism.

In chapter one I distinguish various kinds of essentialism, possibility and necessity. I explore both metaphysical and semantical issues associated with the essential/accidental distinction.

I examine Quine's related attack on quantified modal logic. The burden of Quine's objections is carried by his antipathy to metaphysical essentialism, arguments against which he leaves undeveloped.

In chapter two I remedy this defect and develop a line of attack on the essential/accidental distinction by adapting and systematising an argument of Chisholm's in his seminal paper of 1967. I consider various lines of response by the essentialist and find them wanting. I concede that the weakest point in my attack on essentialism is an appeal to a principle about the transworld identity conditions of individuals.

Given this concession, my discussion changes tack in chapters three and four. I grant irenically the coherence of the essential/accidental distinction. In chapter three I argue that even given this concession there is no cogent case to be made for the claim commonly advanced by essentialists that an object's origin is essential to that object's identity. What I take to be the strongest argument for origin essentialism is in effect self-refuting because it appeals to the very principle of transworld identity which grounds my rejection of essentialism in chapter two.

In chapter four I argue that there is no compelling ground to believe that an object essentially satisfies - in a **metaphysical** as opposed to a conceptual sense of 'essentially' - the sortals which are true of it.

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