Temporal Essence
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There has been a resurgence of work recently on essentialism. Prior deserves some of the credit for this resurgence, but his work is largely ignored by most of those working on the topic. This is unfortunate, since his writings have something important to contribute to these debates. I will not outline all the ways Prior's work could contribute, but will focus on one question: what kind of essence is most basic? And even here I will focus only on two candidates: temporal essences and haecceities.

Although he did not, to my knowledge, explicitly acknowledge the multiplicity of the kinds of essence, bringing these questions to his work yields some interesting insights. While I do not think he was right about everything, his work deserves more careful consideration by those working in essentialism.

Temporal Essence

One of Prior's central concerns throughout his life was time, a philosophical issue with many sister problems, including the problem of change. The basic problem of change is this: What is the difference between a superficial change in an underlying substratum and a passing away? This problem has an instance that is existentially immediate: personal identity across time. Some changes a person undergoes are only accidental: skin color may change in the sun, hair color may change with age, tastes may change with education, but it is a single person undergoing these changes. But what of an injury that alters personality or erases memory?

There is a tradition of distinguishing essential properties from accidental properties, where essential properties are those that survive change and accidental properties are those that do not. (See Aristotle *De Int* 4a10, *Met.* 1028a31–33, and Copi 1954.) But there is some confusion about how exactly to specify the distinction between accidental and essential properties. For example, Mackie (2006) gives two non-equivalent definitions of what she calls "Weak Aristotelian" essentialism. Using tense logic and standard modal operators together, we can symbolize the two definitions (with 'Aφx' to mean 'x is always φ' and 'Sφx' to mean 'x is sometimes φ'):[1]

φ is an essence of x iff $\Box A(\varphi x \rightarrow G\varphi x)$.

φ is an essence of x iff $\Box A((\exists y\, y=x) \rightarrow \varphi x)$.

The first definition says that φ is a property that x cannot lose; the second says that φ is a property that x must have at all times it exists. But clearly a property that an entity cannot lose is different from a property that the entity has at all times in its existence. After about 450 BC, but not before, Socrates was an adult. He was not an adult at all times in his existence, and hence being an adult is not an essential property according to the second definition. But it is an essential property according to the first, since (after about 450 BC)

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[1] Prior (1957) uses the symbols 'L' and 'M' for these notions. The other temporal operators are Prior's.

Socrates could not cease being an adult without ceasing to exist. Similarly, if the second definition lacked the necessity operator, Socrates' being sunburnt might be a counterexample going the other way: Imagine that Socrates in fact stays out in the agora or on the fields of Potideia his whole life and so remains sunburnt throughout his existence. Socrates' property of being sunburnt would be a temporal essence on the first definition but not the second, since Socrates might have gone inside without going out of existence.

I call this temporal essentialism. It is clearly not what Quine (1960) had in mind when he talked of "Aristotelian essentialism," and is clearly not what Kripke (1971) or Fine (1994) had in mind in their talk of essentialism. Why, then, should we call this a kind, or conception, of essence? Two reasons: First, there is an august philosophical tradition of speaking of this notion as what Aristotle meant when he introduced the notion of essence. Second, an essence is supposed to be a property that is fundamental with respect to some philosophically interesting problem. Because temporal essence is the fundamental property with respect to the problem of change, it can legitimately be called a kind of essence. Prior's (1965) insistence that we ask "*When* is it possible?" may at first seem naive, but the moral to learn from it is that neither the standard modal version nor post-Finean reworkings of essence can do all the work we want essence to do.

Haecceity

A different notion of essences takes every entity to have a unique non-qualitative property, what has been called a "haecceity." Kaplan (1979) defined haecceitism as the view that an individual at one world can be identified with an individual at another world without regard to their properties. One may be a haecceitist, in Kaplan's sense, without believing in haecceities, and some have denied that they exist. But there is a relatively innocuous sense of the term on which it is uncontroversial that there are haecceities, or at least as uncontroversial as anything in philosophy can be. The haecceity of x is the property (in as weak a sense as you like) of being x. We can specify this more formally:

φ is a haecceity of x iff φx & φ is non-qualitative & $\forall y(\varphi y \leftrightarrow y=x)$.

It may, however, be adviseable to strengthen this definition. To modify one of the examples in Prior (1960), imagine that Julius Caesar and Mark Antony switch haecceities. Not that Caesar's mind or soul has been transplanted into Antony's body, but that the haecceity of Caesar now has all the qualitative properties of Antony and vice versa. Is such a case possible? The definition given above of 'haecceity' does not rule it out. There is at any time only one individual who has a given haecceity, even if haecceities can change. If such a situation is one that we want to eliminate, we could strengthen the final conjunct of the definition. One way to strengthen it is to add an alethic modal operator; another way is to add a temporal modal operator:

φ is a haecceity of x iff φx & φ is non-qualitative & $\Box\forall y(\varphi y \leftrightarrow y=x)$.

φ is a haecceity of x iff φx & φ is non-qualitative & $A\forall y(\varphi y \leftrightarrow y=x)$.

These definitions are not equivalent, as some things are necessary without being always the case, and vice versa. Which adjustment is better? Several passages in Prior's work (see Prior 1960, 1965, and 2012) address this issue and—perhaps surprisingly—show Prior as not holding the temporal version of haecceity. But as this issue is tightly related to the issue of

whether haecceity is more or less fundamental than temporal essence, I consider this more in the next section.

Comparing Essences

Now the question arises: Is either of these notions more basic?

Fine (1994) argues that essence in his sense is more basic than essence in the modal sense—roughly, de re necessity—in that every essence is necessary, but not every de re necessity is essential. Fine's arguments have been influential, and many philosophers now agree in distinguishing essence and necessity. We can pose a similar question about haecceity and temporal essence. If all haecceities are temporally essential and there are no other temporal essences, the two notions would be equivalent. If there were an example of a temporal essence that was not a haecceity but no examples of haecceities that were temporally accidental, haecceity would be more basic. (And similarly if there were a haecceity that was temporally accidental but not temporal essences other than haecceities.) There is another possibility: if some haecceities are temporally accidental and some temporal essences are not haecceities, neither notion is more basic.

It is obvious that there are some temporal essences other than haecceities. If there are any qualitative temporal essences, there are temporal essences that are not haecceities. If more-concrete examples are wanted, time-indexed properties (e.g., Socrates was born at time t) are a fertile source of them. Any time-indexed property is temporally essential, since it is had at every moment the entity exists. In fact, a time-indexed property cannot be lost: on every world on which the entity has that time-indexed property, the entity has it throughout its existence. But haecceities are not time-indexed properties. So, at least some time-indexed property will be temporally essential but not a haecceity.

So, temporal essence is not more basic than haecceity. What about the other way? Are there haecceities that are temporally accidental?

Such a question might seem conceptually confused. If an entity lost its haecceity, it would cease to exist, so clearly all haecceities are temporally essential. But such a case is possible according to the original definition of 'haecceity'. The case of Caesar and Antony switching places is just such a case of haecceities being temporally accidental. The second definition, likewise, allows the possibility of haecceities being temporally accidental: Imagine that x is φ, and on all possible worlds x is φ and whatever is φ is x, but this is a result of some metaphysically necessary change; it used to be the case that x was not φ. Then φ would (now) be a metaphysically necessary haecceity but not temporally essential. As for the third definition, it is, of course, conceptually confused to claim that haecceities are temporally accidental according to this definition, as this definition builds in temporal essence. So a large part of the issue of whether haecceities are temporally essential is which definition to adopt.

Prior's work has interesting things to say about this. In this abstract, I will consider only one, contained in Prior's response to the fission cases he considers in Prior (1965). Here he imagines that a thing x has divided in two (y and z) such that x=y and x=z, but y≠z. He is willing to consider this a "serious objection to Leibniz's law," and seeks some weaker principle than Leibniz's law that will satisfy our intuitions but not involve this difficulty. One such principle is this:

$$x=y \rightarrow (x=z \rightarrow (y=z \lor P(y=z) \lor F(y=z))).^{[2]}$$

The tensed disjuncts here indicate temporally accidental haecceities. If x was once y but is not now, x and y must have once had the same haecceity but no longer do. Hence, haecceities can change. Prior, at least, is willing to seriously consider the possibility of haecceities that are not temporally essential.

It seems to me that Prior is wrong here, that the conception of haecceities require them to be unchanging. But however this question is decided, it seems clear that alethic modality alone is insufficient to deal with these issues. Prior is right that we should consider time.

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[2] The first edition of *Papers on Time and Tense* (Prior 1968) cites this principle as this: "CIxyCIxzAAIyzPIyzFIyz" which is translated in the new edition as "Ixy ⊃ (Ixz ⊃ (Iyz ∨ PIyz ∨ FIyz))," with 'I' instead of '='. But this is a mistake. Prior has given two "observations"; the first involves replacing the 'I' as a relation of identity with a connective. His second observation moves away from that, back to "the level of identity of individuals," so it is clear that it is identity he means here. As identity is elsewhere symbolized '=', it should be here are well.