

JOHN HOOKER

## BRODY ON ESSENTIALISM

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I concur with the general strategy of Brody's recent account of what an essential property is,<sup>1</sup> but I will show that it errs on at least three counts. Yet these shortcomings are avoided in the revamping of Brody's theory that I present afterwards.

Brody analyzes essentiality in terms of the Aristotelian distinction between alterations and substantial changes. He states that a property *P* is essential to a thing *x* just when it is impossible that *x* cease to have *P* and continue to exist; i.e., just when the loss of *P* would constitute a substantial change, not a mere alteration of *x*.

My first objection Brody himself discusses. He first observes that, for him, an essential property *P* of *x* need *not* be one that *x* has with de re necessity; for, *P* need only be had by *x* in *all possible futures* (not necessarily in all possible worlds) in which *x* exists. But Brody maintains that his theory captures the 'other' traditional notion of essentiality: the one whereby a thing's essential properties determine its *kind*. Yet traditionally, if *P* determines a kind, then all of *P*'s exemplars are of that kind; i.e., everything that has *P* has *P* essentially. My objection here is that Brody's theory violates this rule. For, following Plantinga,<sup>2</sup> if *x* has any given property *P* essentially and *y* does not have *P*, and *y* has *Q* accidentally, then the property *having P or Q* is (on Brody's theory) had essentially by *x* and accidentally by *y*. An essential property in Brody's sense, then, need not determine a kind at all.

In his defense Brody first remarks that the above Plantingan argument is "perfectly general and applies equally well to any theory of essentialism."<sup>3</sup> But here Brody is mistaken; the argument assumes that if *P* is essential to *x*, then so is *having P or Q*. But this assumption would not hold in a correct theory of *kinds* anyway; for example, although *being a man* probably determines a kind, it is doubtful that *being a man or a rusty penknife* does. Furthermore, Bennett proposes a theory of essentialism<sup>4</sup> wherein *P* is essential to *x* whenever it is impossible that *anything* have *P* once and exist without it later. In this theory, Brody's assumption does

*not* hold, and indeed it is clear that for Bennett *no* property can be had essentially by some things and accidentally by others.

But Brody's main defense is to suggest that a theory of propertyhood can be developed wherein contrived disjunctives like *having P or Q* would not be genuine properties. But this, even supposing it is feasible, is to little avail, since the problem it is supposed to solve is also posed by entirely uncontrived properties. For example, solidity is (I would say) a property whose loss no ice cube can survive, but whose loss *can* be survived by any puddle that is frozen through-and-through. Hence, on Brody's theory even the uncontrived property of solidity is had essentially by some things and accidentally by others. It follows that Brody has failed to account for kindhood.

Brody entertains but also fails to dispel a second objection. He concedes that all 'tensed' properties such as *being at place P at time t* are, on his theory, essential to their possessors (though they hardly seem so) since, once had, they cannot be lost. Brody's solution is to declare that tensed properties, which evidently are properties whose possession amounts to "having certain properties at certain times," are not genuine properties. But consider the properties *being Ford's grandfather* and *being a native of Metuchen, New Jersey*. However inessential they may seem, they also turn out to be essential to any possessor, and they are not obviously *tensed*. If indeed they are not, then Brody's problem remains. If they are, it is very unclear just what a 'tensed' property is supposed to be. Brody would do better to restrict his theory, not just to untensed properties, but to what I call *local* properties: roughly, properties whose attribution at any one time speaks only to what the world is like at that time. (For instance, the properties redness, beauty and triangularity are local, whereas *having never been red*, *being mortal* and the three troublesome properties above are nonlocal.) As I myself will employ the notion shortly, I will stipulate that locality is analyzable (though only after much effort<sup>5</sup>), but just the same Brody's theory is considerably weakened by its inability to handle *nonlocal* properties.

Finally, I claim that Brody's account of essentiality is circular, because it appeals to the cognate notion of trans-world identity. Brody staunchly denies such circularity, on the strength of the fact that the only kind of identification he must make is that of "some object that exists in a world [say, *W*] whose past and present is identical with the past and present of

the actual world [ $A$ ], with an object that exists now.”<sup>6</sup> But Brody has not explained what it means to say that  $W$ 's past and present is in fact ‘*identical with*’  $A$ 's past and present, over and above being merely *indiscernible from* it. Indeed, it would seem that the ‘identity’ of  $W$ 's past and present with  $A$ 's amounts to no less than the *identity of objects* in  $A$  with those in  $W$  that (up through the present) are indiscernible from them. Hence Brody resorts to cross-identification.

Brody might reply that the mere indiscernibility of  $A$ 's past and present with that of  $W$  is in fact *tantamount to* their identity, because there simply *are* no possible worlds that are indiscernible up through the present as  $A$  and  $W$  are and yet fail to coincide during the same period.<sup>7</sup> But this view leads to contradictions. We can conceive of two similar individuals  $x'$  and  $y'$  in  $W$ , which up through the present are respectively indiscernible from  $x$  and  $y$  in  $A$ , and which go on to ‘swap roles’ in  $W$  later. That is, after some future time  $t'$  in  $W$ ,  $x'$  and  $y'$  remain respectively indiscernible from  $y$  and  $x$  (note the order) as they appear in  $A$  after some future time  $t$ . If indiscernibility were tantamount to coincidence (in the above sense), then  $x'$  and  $x$  would have to be identified (in virtue of their indiscernibility after  $t$  and  $t'$ ), as would  $x'$  and  $y$  (in virtue of their indiscernibility up through the present). But  $x$  and  $y$  are distinct, and a contradiction results. Identity of temporal segments of worlds, then, must be something *more* than their indiscernibility, and Brody is left without an explanation of *what* more it is.

I will now revise Brody's theory so as to avoid the difficulties I have discussed. But first let me introduce two plausible claims which I will call on later.

- (1) If  $P$  and  $Q$  are local properties that  $x$  does not essentially lack, it is possible that  $x$  have  $Q$  after having had  $P$ .

Now any apple, say, can have *being red* and can have *never having been red*, and no apple can have them in succession. But this is because the latter property is not *local*. So long as  $P$  and  $Q$  are *local*, I believe that (1), though hardly beyond dispute, is at least worthy of serious consideration (consideration which would fill another paper the size of this one).<sup>8</sup>

- (2) If world  $U$  is indiscernible from the actual world  $A$  up through the present, and if the individual  $x'$  in  $U$ , indiscernible during

this period from  $x$  in  $A$ , goes on to have  $Q$  later, then it is possible that  $x$  go on to have  $Q$  later.

This claim ensues from the principle that the only thing that can prevent the *coincidence* of  $A$  and  $U$  up through the present is a situation something like that in the role-swapping example above. For, notice that in this example there remains the question as to whether the coincidence of  $A$  and  $W$  should be disallowed after  $t$  (in order to allow their coincidence up through the present), or vice-versa. The way to resolve this dilemma is to stipulate that *one* world indiscernible from  $W$  (call it  $V_1$ ) coincides with  $A$  up through the present, and that *another* one (call it  $V_2$ ) coincides with  $A$  after  $t$ ;  $V_1$  is distinguishable from  $V_2$  in virtue of the different way it coincides with  $A$  (and hence in virtue of the identity of its inhabitants). The upshot is that whenever there is a world (such as  $V_2$ ) that is prevented from coinciding with  $A$  up through the present, it is prevented from doing so only because there is another, duplicate world ( $V_1$ ) that is *allowed* so to coincide. Returning to (2), then, there is at worst a world *indiscernible from  $U$*  that *does* coincide with  $A$ , and in which  $x$ 's look-alike (up through the present) *is* identical with  $x$ ; thus  $x$  itself can go on to have  $Q$  later.

Now I can state my revision of Brody's definition of essentiality, in two stages:

- (3a) If  $Q$  is local, and if  $P^*$  is the exhaustive local property now had by  $x$  (i.e., that local property that entails<sup>9</sup> all the local properties now had by  $x$ ), then  $x$  has  $Q$  *essentially* just in case it is impossible that anything having  $P^*$  go on to have the complement of  $Q$  later.
- (3b) If  $P^*$  is as above, then  $x$  has  $Q$  (be it local or nonlocal) *essentially* just in case  $x$  has  $Q$  and it is impossible that anything having  $P^*$  go on to have later the exhaustive local property  $L^*$ , so long as it is possible that something having  $L^*$  also have the complement of  $Q$ .

Brody's theory is inadequate both as an account of *de re* necessity (by his own admission) and of *kindhood* (as I have shown). (3b) likewise fails to account for *kindhood*, but thanks to (1) and (2), the essentiality (3b) describes is precisely the possession of a property with *de re* necessity. To see this, let us first suppose that  $x$  has  $R$ , but *not* with necessity *de re*;

I will show that  $x$  does not have  $R$  *essentially*, in the sense of (3b). (I will demonstrate the converse of this shortly.) Since  $x$  does not have  $R$  with necessity *de re*, it is possible (*de re*) that  $x$  have not- $R$  ( $R$ 's complement). Choose any one of the worlds in which  $x$  in fact has not- $R$  at some time  $t$ , and let  $L^*$  be the exhaustive local property had by  $x$  at  $t$  in that world. Thus  $L^*$  and not- $R$  are compatible. Also, by (1),  $x$  can go on to have  $L^*$  later. Hence it is not the case that nothing can have  $P^*$  and  $L^*$  in succession whenever  $L^*$  and not- $R$  are compatible. Thus, by (3b),  $x$  does not have  $R$  essentially.

To demonstrate the converse of the above claim, it will be convenient to prove a lemma:

- (2') If  $P^*$  is the exhaustive local property now had by  $y$ , and if it is possible that some  $y'$  have  $P^*$  and  $Q$  in temporal succession, then  $y$  itself can go on to have  $Q$  later.

From the antecedent of (2') we know that there is a world  $W$  in which  $y'$  has  $P^*$  at some time  $t$  and has  $Q$  later. Furthermore, *every* individual  $z'$  in  $W$  at  $t$  is such that it has the same exhaustive local property  $L^*$  at  $t$  that some  $z$  presently has in  $A$  (and vice-versa: the same is true with  $A$  and  $W$  interchanged). Otherwise,  $y'$  would have at  $t$  a local property, e.g. *being contemporaneous with something that now has  $L^*$* , presently lacked by  $y$ , which contradicts the fact that  $y'$  at  $t$  and  $y$  at the present time both have  $P^*$  and hence have the same local properties. (The vice-versa is similarly shown.) Therefore  $W$  at  $t$  is indiscernible from  $A$  at the present time (since for two worlds to be indiscernible at a certain time is, I claim, simply for their corresponding inhabitants to exhibit the same local properties at that time). Next, I submit that there is a possible world  $W'$  that is indiscernible from  $A$  up through the present and that coincides with  $W$  from  $t$  on. (The reasoning here is that the indiscernibility of  $W'$  and  $A$  up through the present amounts to an agreement on which *local* properties are exhibited at each time during this period, and that what  $W$  is like at and after  $t$  puts no logical restriction on which *local* properties *could* have been instantiated before  $t$ .) Thus,  $x'$  in  $W'$  is easily seen to be indiscernible from  $x$  in  $A$  up through the present. So, by (2),  $x$  itself can go on to have  $Q$  later.

Now, supposing that  $x$  has  $R$ , but *not* essentially (in the sense of (3b)), I will derive that  $x$  does not have  $R$  with necessity *de re*. If  $P^*$  is as above,

then we have by (3b) that some  $y$  can have  $P^*$  and  $L^*$  in succession, even when  $L^*$  and not- $R$  are compatible. But by (2'),  $x$  itself can therefore have  $P^*$  and  $L^*$  in succession, and *a fortiori*  $x$  has  $L^*$  in some world  $W$  at some time  $t'$ . I submit that for  $x$  to have not- $R$  as well at  $t'$  it is sufficient (since  $L^*$  is exhaustive and compatible with not- $R$ ) that  $x$  have  $L^*$  at  $t'$  and that certain other *local* properties  $L_1, L_2$ , etc., be instantiated at certain other times (for example, if not- $R$  is *having never been red*, for  $x$  to have not- $R$  at  $t'$  it is sufficient that  $x$  have  $L^*$  at  $t'$  and that the local property *now existing at time when everything is yellow* be instantiated at every time previous to  $t'$ ). But since  $x$ 's having the local property  $L^*$  at  $t'$  puts no restriction on what local properties can obtain at other times, there is a world  $W'$  coincident with  $W$  at  $t'$  in which  $L_1, L_2$ , etc., do obtain at the specified times. Hence  $x$  has not- $R$  in  $W'$ , which means that  $x$  does not have  $R$  with necessity de re. As for the *second* difficulty I saw in Brody's analysis, I have overcome it, too, since (3b) obviously accounts for the essentiality of *all* properties (local *and* nonlocal).

Finally, (3b) is free of circularity, since it defines essentiality in terms of ordinary de dicto possibility.<sup>10</sup> Rather than speak of the properties that  $x$  *in particular* can go on to have later, (3b) speaks of the properties that *any* individual can have, once having had  $P^*$ . Thus the essentiality of  $Q$  turns simply on the *compatibility* of the properties  $P^*$  and *later having*  $L^*$ , where  $L^*$  and not- $Q$  are compatible (or simply on the compatibility  $P^*$  and *later having*  $Q$ , if  $Q$  is local), and there is no need to identify  $x$  across possible futures. A particular ice cube  $x$ , for example, has essentially the local property of solidity (I would say), since ice cubes in general (and hence, in particular, ice cubes having  $x$ 's present local properties) are evidently *not the sort of thing* that can later be nonsolid.

*Vanderbilt University*

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Baruch Brody, 'Why Settle for Anything Less than Good Old-Fashioned Aristotelian Essentialism?' *Nous* 7 (1973), pp. 351-65.

<sup>2</sup> Alvin Plantinga, 'World and Essence', *Philosophical Review* 79 (1970), p. 465.

<sup>3</sup> Brody, p. 363.

<sup>4</sup> See Daniel Bennett, 'Essential Properties', *Journal of Philosophy* 66 (1969), pp. 487-99.

<sup>5</sup> Locality is a much subtler notion than it first appears; two necessary (though insufficient) conditions that  $P$  be local are: (a) there is no property  $Q$  such that necessarily,  $P$  is instantiated at a given time  $t$  only if there is some time other than  $t$  at which a

concrete particular instantiates  $Q$ ; and (b) there is for no time  $t$  a property  $R$  that is remotely local with respect to  $t$ , such that necessarily,  $P$  is instantiated at  $t$  only if there is some other time at which  $R$  is *not* instantiated (where  $R$  is remotely local with respect to  $t$  just in case for each  $t' \neq t$ , a given  $x$ 's having  $R$  at  $t'$  is equivalent to the instantiation of certain local properties at specified times other than  $t$ ). A thorough analysis of locality appears in my dissertation, 'Essentialism and Trans-World Identity', Vanderbilt University, 1974, pp. 133–64.

<sup>6</sup> Brody, p. 354.

<sup>7</sup> I grant Brody that this is true, and trivially so, if in order to be indiscernible, two things must both have, or else both lack, even a property like *being identical with  $x$* . But I do not require agreement on such properties for indiscernibility; otherwise, in order merely to understand indiscernibility of world-segments one would have to understand cross-identity (since to predicate  $x$ -identity across worlds is obviously to cross-identify  $x$ ), and Brody's account would be even more clearly circular than as described above.

<sup>8</sup> See my dissertation, pp. 207–24.

<sup>9</sup> Property  $P$  entails  $Q$  just in case it is impossible that something simultaneously have  $P$  and lack  $Q$ .

<sup>10</sup> And (3b) is superior to Plantinga's kernel-function translation of *de re* into *de dicto*, since I have dispensed with Plantinga's *de re*-ish 'proper names'. See his *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford University Press, 1974), pp. 29–43.