

An Introduction to Anti-Essentialism or Relationism

Kawasaki, Ken (Given Name), Dr.
Emeritus Professor of Kochi University
Professor of Kochi University of Technology
kenknym@aqr.e-catv.ne.jp
<http://home.e-catv.ne.jp/kawasaki-knym/index.html>

Outline of the Lecture:

This lecture gives an elementary explanation of anti-essentialism, and assumes students as the audience regardless of their majors. Adducing a few examples, the lecture intends the students to deepen their understanding of anti-essentialism. Anti-essentialism becomes comprehensible if it is compared with essentialism, the doctrine that essence has a real existence. Physics is a typical example of a scholastic learning based on essentialism. There, scientists believe in the essence of matter, and search the universe for it.

Anti-essentialism is also the doctrine expressed by adding the prefix “anti” to the term “essentialism.” Contrary to the construction of “anti-essentialism” anti-essentialists do not deny the existence of essence that essentialists believe in. Anti-essentialists accept the existence of essence, but deny the establishment of the existence of essence as the first principle. Furthermore, anti-essentialists can provide an explanation about how essence is born. This means that anti-essentialism has a wider perspective than essentialism, on which all types of scholastic learning are based in the present day.

The following short story about George Washington’s hatchet well describes one of characteristic features of anti-essentialism. Apart from whether the story is historically true or not, the hatchet is known as a proof of his honesty. Imagine a museum where the hatchet is exhibited. The plate says: “This is the hatchet by which George Washington cut a cherry tree down. Its handle was replaced twice and its head was also replaced three times.”

You may know that story as a joke, but anti-essentialists consider it to be an excellent example of the anti-essentialist way of thinking. Do you find an interest in anti-essentialism?

Students are expected to bring notepads or laptops to the lecture, if possible.