Bob Hale *Essential knowledge*

The problem of explaining how we may acquire modal knowledge is a test for any theory of the nature and basis of modal facts. Assuming a certain kind of essentialist account of the latter, I try to show how we may tackle the former, by explaining how knowledge of essence can be gained. I argue that essence can sometimes be known *a priori*, via definition or more generally knowledge of meaning. But much knowledge of essence is at best *a posteriori*. I agree with Kripke that such knowledge is inferential. The central task that remains is to identify and support general principles which will entail the major premises in Kripkean inferences to conclusion about the essences of things. After some discussion of the cases to which Kripke gives most attention—necessities of identity and of origin—I focus on the essentiality of kind membership.