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Theory of Reference

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Introduction

Reference and issues surrounding reference have played a large role in analytic philosophy. The basic question is simple: How do referring terms connect to the world? When I utter, "Mark Twain is the author of *Huckleberry Finn*," then I manage to refer to Mark Twain, and when I utter "Water is wet," then I refer to H_2O. What is the underlying mechanism that is at work when the words pick out the object and the kind?

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Textbooks

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There are textbooks on the philosophy of language that contain significant discussions of reference. Four textbooks are particularly useful. Morris 2007 offers a very clear discussion of description theories, causal theories, Russell's theory of description, and kind names. Lycan 2018 covers many of the same issues of reference in a very accessible way. Stainton 1996 offers a clear overview on meaning and reference, including chapters on both causal theories of names and description theories of names. Devitt and Sterelny 1999 presents a more partisan discussion, including an overview of the main accounts of reference.

Devitt, Michael, and Kim Sterelny. *Language and Reality: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Language*. **Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999.**

A critical discussion presented with a point of view. Includes chapters on description theories of names, causal theories of names, and kind terms.

Lycan, William G. *Philosophy of Language: A Contemporary Introduction*. **New York: Routledge, 2018.**

A very accessible introduction, including chapters on descriptions, description theories of names, and causal theories of names.

Morris, Michael. *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Language*. **Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007.**

A good introduction to the philosophy of language. Includes chapters on Frege's sense and reference, Kripke's account of the causal theory of reference, and Russell's theory of definite descriptions, as well as a chapter on kind terms.

Stainton, Robert J. *Philosophical Perspectives on Language*. **Peterborough, ON: Broadview, 1996.**

A clear but sometimes somewhat technical overview that includes chapters on causal theories of names as well as description theories of names.

back to top

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