

## Rudiments of a Theory of Reference

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The last fifteen years have witnessed a vigorous and extremely interesting debate concerning two competing views about the nature of semantic reference. One of these views is perhaps best described as a counterpart of the Redundancy Theory of Truth. Its most basic component is the thesis that pairs of sentences like (1) and (2) are more or less equivalent in point of assertional content.

- (1) "Snow" refers to this stuff.
- (2) This stuff is snow.

The other view claims that our term "refers" stands for an empirically manifest relation that has causal and explanatory significance, and by implication it asserts that there is a large gulf between the content of sentences like (1) and the content of sentences like (2). Both views have been presented and compared in a number of recent writings, including influential papers and books by Devitt [1,2], Field [6], Friedman [8], Leeds [12], Putnam [16], and Soames [18].

The present paper sketches a theory of reference which I believe to have the merits of each of these views and the flaws of neither. In Section 1 I try to fix ideas by describing the two views in greater detail and by presenting their main shortcomings. Sections 2 and 3 set the stage for the theory I wish to recommend by describing two semantic concepts that are employed by an imaginary linguistic community. Both concepts are simpler in several respects than any of the concepts we actually employ, but, as it turns out, there are some striking similarities between our thought and talk about reference and thought and talk about reference in the imaginary community. Building on these similarities, Section 4 states the central hypothesis of my theory of reference and presents some supporting arguments. Finally, in Section 5 I cite several features of our concept of reference that lie beyond the scope of my central hypothesis, and I argue briefly that it may be possible to extend the hypothesis in such a way as to accommodate them.

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