

## Semantics without Reference

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**Abstract** A theory of reference may be either an *analysis* of reference or merely an account of the correct use of the verb “to refer”. If we define the validity of arguments in the standard way, in terms of assignments of individuals and sets to the nonlogical vocabulary of the language, then, it is argued, we will be committed to seeking an *analysis* of reference. Those who prefer a metalinguistic account, therefore, will desire an alternative to standard semantics. One alternative is the Quinean conception of validity as essentially a matter of logical form. Another alternative is Leblanc’s truth-value semantics. But these prove to be either inadequate for purposes of metatheory or philosophically unsatisfactory. This paper shows how validity (i.e., semantic consequence) may be defined in a way that avoids the problems facing these other alternatives to standard semantics and also permits a metalinguistic account of reference. The validity of arguments is treated as a matter of logical form, but validity for forms is defined on analogy with the definition of semantic consequence in truth-value semantics.

The contemporary concept of reference is tightly bound up with standard formal semantics. These entanglements constrain what we may accept as a theory of reference. Under these constraints, an acceptable theory of reference has proven very difficult to devise. The problem of reference might be easier if logic could make do with some other kind of semantics. One alternative might be to define validity in terms of logical form. Another might be to give a substitutional interpretation of the quantifiers. Unfortunately, both of these alternatives have

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