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Gary Ostertag (editor)

Definite Descriptions: A Reader

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ANALYZING DEFINITE DESCRIPTIONS À LA RUSSELL AND OTHERS

STEPHEN H. LEVY

This excellent anthology reproduces classic papers on Russell's Theory of Descriptions and the wealth of philosophizing on language inspired by it. The work grapples with several interrelated questions, including "What is necessary for a name or description to refer to an object? for a name or description to have meaning or sense? Must an object exist if we are to refer to it? Can a description be used referentially, *i.e.*, to refer?" Russell's grappling with Meinong's answers to these questions eventually led to his theory of descriptions. The book neatly balances a disputatious point of view on the issues with a historically focused one. It is suitable for an upper-level undergraduate, or graduate, level course in the philosophy of language or philosophic logic. Besides Russell's, other papers included are from the philosophers P.F. Strawson, Stephen Neale, Keith Donnellan, Karel Lambert, H.P. Grice, Christopher Peacocke, Saul Kripke, Howard Wettstein, Scott Soames, and Stephen Schiffer. Because an anthology of reasonable size must omit something, a few papers one may wish to find here are not included. Frege's "Sense and Reference" comes to mind, in light of the intrinsic value of his work and its historical influence on Russell and later discussions, but the selections from Russell and Carnap discuss Frege (38,126). Ostertag notes and discusses additional papers he would like to have included, and provides a most welcome and extensive bibliography. In his introduction, he provides insightful analyses of several of the leading arguments recurring in the literature on the subject and connecting the essays in this volume.