Theories of Reference: Summary

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1 Quotational ‘Fido’–Fido Theory

The property the person/object called such-and-such fixes the reference and represents the meaning of a proper name.

(1) ‘Aristotle’ means ‘the person called >Aristotle<’

2 Description Theory (Frege/Russell)

A definite description fixes the referent of a proper name and represents the meaning of the proper name. (Frege: proper names have a sense.)

2.1 Varying Description Theory

Different speakers may associate different definite descriptions with the same proper name.

(2) Aristotle = the teacher of Alexander
(3) Aristotle = the most famous scholar of Platon

2.2 Fixed Description Theory

There’s one definite description that fixes the referent of a corresponding proper name.

(4) Aristotle = the teacher of Alexander

3 Bundle Theory (Searle)

The meaning of a proper name is a possibly large bundle or cluster of descriptions. The reference of the proper name is fixed by most of those descriptions, but some of the descriptions in the bundle might be false or determine another referent.

(5) Aristotle = {the teacher of Alexander, the greatest philosopher of all times, the scholar of Platon, the successor of Plato at the Academy, the first true natural scientist, …}

4 New Theory of Reference (Kripke)

The reference of a proper name is initially fixed by an act of baptism, e.g. using ostension (pointing gestures; indexicality; deixis) or using a definite description. But in order to understand a proper name, no description has to be known. The speaker simply must intend to use the proper name such that it has the same reference as fixed by the initial act of baptism, and the proper name is passed on from link to link in a causal chain of actual uses of the name according to this intention.