
Direct Reference

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There are two competing notions of direct reference. According to the first, ‘Millian’ notion, a directly referential expression is like a tag which is directly assigned to a particular object without there being ‘a semantic mechanism to search for and determine the referent’ (Marti). Proper names are directly referential in that sense and they stand in contrast to definite descriptions, whose mode of reference determination is satisfactoral. According to another, ‘Kaplanian’ notion of direct reference, what characterises direct reference is the fact that the propositional constituent corresponding to a directly referential expression is an object rather than an individual concept or ‘mode of presentation’. No less than proper names, indexicals are, and definite descriptions can be, directly referential in that weaker sense, despite carrying descriptive content. I will defend the Millian position and argue that the mental file framework enables us to make sense of it even with respect to indexicals or referentially used descriptions.