



Definite Descriptions (Oxford Studies in Semantics and Pragmatics)

Paul Elbourne

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This book argues that definite descriptions ('the table', 'the King of France') refer to individuals, as Gottlob Frege claimed. This apparently simple conclusion flies in the face of philosophical orthodoxy, which incorporates Bertrand Russell's theory that definite descriptions are devices of quantification. Paul Elbourne presents the first fully-argued defence of the Fregean view. He builds an explicit fragment of English using a version of situation semantics. He uses intrinsic aspects of his system to account for the presupposition projection behaviour of definite descriptions, a range of modal properties, and the problem of incompleteness. At the same time, he draws on an unusually wide range of linguistic and philosophical literature, from early work by Frege, Peano, and Russell to the latest findings in linguistics, philosophy of language, and psycholinguistics. His penultimate chapter addresses the semantics of pronouns and offers a new and more radical version of his earlier thesis that they too are Fregean definite descriptions.

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