

Workshop: Empirical Data and Philosophical Theorizing (EDPT)

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‘Ambiguous Reference’

(co-written with Shaun Nichols And Ron Mallon). One of the most notorious debates in the philosophy of language is that between defenders of the causal-historical and descriptivist theories of reference. Whereas most philosophers involved in the debate support one or the other of the theories (or perhaps some combination of them), we adopt a different approach. We think that there is a sense in which both theories are correct. In particular, we think that natural kind terms can sometimes take on a causal-historical reading and at other times take on a descriptivist reading. The meaning will shift depending on the conversational setting. We report on some original experiments which support the thesis.