

# Why the Causal Theory of Reference Cannot be Applied to Theoretical Terms?

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## Abstract

Realist accounts of reference maintain that the theoretical terms of (approximately) correct theories do really refer, i.e. they designate (types of) entities (individuals, properties or relations) that exist spatio-temporally. They also maintain that there is a transtheoricity or continuity of reference in the sense that, when a theoretical term refers to a real entity in virtue of belonging to a correct theory, it is usually the case that at least some of the previous uses of that term (or sometimes another term), which forms part of the vocabulary of a theory that has been rejected, designate the very same entity. In the present article, we argue that any proposal in this tradition trying to ensure the transtheoreticity of reference is questionable because it does not take into consideration all the (essential) conditions which all together fix the reference of a theoretical term. We consider two versions of the causal theory of reference due to Kitcher and Psillos respectively, and Field's account, a related approach which is realist but not causal. We defend that all of them do not serve to identify all the conditions that are necessary for fixing the reference of theoretical terms.