HOW DEMONSTRATIVES DENOTE

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My concern here is with what Colin McGinn aptly describes as 'the mechanism of reference' in an interesting paper which is itself so-called[1]. The general question of what determines the denotation of a referring expression[2] has occupied philosophers of language for about a century now, but it is not yet dead. One reason for this is that until very recently most workers in the field have concentrated almost exclusively on proper names or purely general definite descriptions, ignoring context-sensitive indexical expressions, sometimes on the ground that they are supposedly eliminable. These days we may take it for granted that they are not. Indeed, as McGinn argues[3], indexical expressions are the *primary* means of referring linguistically. Thus, any theory of reference which ignores them is at best incomplete.

Although I will be concentrating on indexicals here, I would like to make a few remarks about other referring expressions. So far as the relation of reference is concerned, purely general definite descriptions are not, it seems to me, problematic. 'The *F*', if general, denotes the one and only thing which is *F*, or it denotes nothing. The only reason one could have for doubting this is that it does not apply to typical everyday definite descriptions like 'the table' as standardly used. This, however, is beside the point, for such descriptions are tacitly indexical, and our formula is not meant to cover them.

Proper names are somewhat more troublesome, although not as troublesome as the mass of the literature on them would suggest. They are extremely puzzling if we view them as *the* basic referring expressions of ordinary language (perhaps alongside general definite descriptions), for in that light it is hard to see how they could make suitable contact with the world. But proper names are not referentially basic. They belong, rather, to the same general type as anaphoric pronouns, which denote only through their connection with their linguistic antecedents[4]. Of course, the antecedent of an anaphoric pronoun always occurs in the same discourse[5] as it, whilst that of a name may occur in an earlier discourse (and usually does). But this merely hints at one of the major uses of names[6] without reflecting on the claim that their denotations are derivative.

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A full defense of this claim does not belong here. A couple of considerations are, however, worth mentioning. Firstly, there is the fact that we typically give proper names their denotations using *other* kinds of referring expressions, as e.g., when we say 'Let's call *him* Deuteronomy'. Secondly, there is the fact that it is improper to use a name in a discourse without a special introduction unless one has reason to believe that one's audience has had commerce with it[7]. Thus, e.g., while 'Henry wrote a book about it' will serve in one group, it may have to give way to something like '*My friend Henry* wrote a book about it' or '*A man called Henry* wrote a book about it' in another.

Proper names, then, are inter-discourse anaphors, and their denotations are typically determined by their linguistic antecedents. This is the heart of the matter. Unfortunately, it is not the whole of it, for there are deviant cases which must be accommodated, such as descriptions which in the course of time become names, and mistakenly applied names which stick. I am not going to pursue such issues here, particularly as I cannot improve on Gareth Evan's last incisive assault on them.[8]

We turn, then, to indexicals. In Kaplan's terminology, the class of indexical expressions includes both *pure indexicals* and *true demonstratives*[9]. A pure indexical is an indexical whose denotation in a context can be determined automatically by an audience. Examples of pure indexicals are 'I', 'here', 'now', 'today', and 'yesterday'. A true demonstrative is an indexical whose denotation in a context may be opaque to an audience in the absence of some sign (such as a gesture, or a hint discernible in an earlier utterance) of what the speaker means to be talking about. In their indexical uses, i.e. when they do not occur as grammatical words or anaphoric pronouns, 'this', 'that', 'he', 'she', and 'it' are examples of true demonstratives.

All examples I have given so far are simple expressions. But there are also compound indexicals, which may of course have non-indexical components. Thus, e.g., we have 'the day after tomorrow', 'my eldest child', 'that man', and 'the present King of France'. Then there are the so-called 'improper' definite descriptions. In my usage, a definite description is improper if its denotation depends on the context of utterance in a way which is not overtly expressed by an indexical element in the description[10]. Thus, e.g., 'the tree in the back yard' and 'the Queen of England' as standardly used are improper. 'The *present* Queen of England', although also context-sensitive, is nonetheless proper. The overt presence of an indexical element in a definite description does not, however, guarantee that it is proper. For a description may be context-sensitive in more than one way, as in the case of 'the present wife', the denotation of which hinges both on the time of utterance and on which man is being talked about. Definite descriptions which are context-independent have been referred to as 'general'. As I have hinted, there are very few of them in everyday

speech. Indeed, most everyday definite descriptions are not only indexical but also improper, and a substantial number of them are true demonstratives. And this of course is one reason why most philosophical theories of definite descriptions clash somewhat with our linguistic intuitions.

At the rather crude level of analysis to which I aspire in this paper, there is no problem about the mechanism of reference in the case of pure indexicals. In any context *C*, 'I' denotes the speaker in *C*, 'now' denotes the time of *C*, 'here' denotes the place of *C*, 'my present wife' denotes the woman who is married to the speaker in *C* at the time of *C*, 'the day after tomorrow' denotes the day two days later than the day of *C*, and so on[11]. The mechanism is not causal, but contextual and conceptual. In the case of simple pure indexicals it is purely contextual. All this is fairly obvious.

The case of true demonstratives is not so clear. In this paper, I look briefly at four possible answers to the question of how they denote, and promote one of them. In doing so, I focus chiefly on 'that' and expressions of the form 'that *F*', but am influenced by the fact that these elementary demonstratives are of the same general semantic kind as many typical everyday definite descriptions. I should stress that I am concerned only with the determination of demonstrative reference, and not with any other aspect of the meaning or logical behaviour of demonstratives.

The Description Theory

What, then, determines the denotation of a demonstrative in a context? According to the description theory[12], the work is done by a *proper* definite description containing no true demonstratives which, so to speak, occupies the same place in the speaker's thought as the demonstrative occupies in his linguistic expression of it. The denotation of a demonstrative, the story goes, is just the denotation of the associated description, 'the *F*', and *its* denotation is simply the one and only object satisfying the predicate '*F*'. If '*F*' is not uniquely satisfied, then the demonstrative is taken to have no denotation. The theory as developed so far applies directly only to 'this', 'that', and 'it'. In the case of 'he', 'she', 'that *G*', and other compound demonstratives, some constraints should perhaps be placed on what the associated description may be, but there is no need to develop the point here.

Given the battering the description theory of *names* has received from Kripke and others[13], it is tempting to reject the description theory of demonstratives without further ado; and the theory is, I believe, inadequate. But before we leave it we should see precisely what is wrong with it. For the standard objections to the description theory of names do not apply trivially to the description theory of demonstratives, particularly as our version of the theory allows that the definite

description associated with a demonstrative on a given occasion need not be general but may contain pure indexicals. Thus, the theory allows, e.g., that the denotation of a certain token of 'that man' may be determined by the definite description 'the man who is now sitting directly opposite me', or 'the man I have just now finished speaking to', or 'the man at whom I am now pointedly staring'. Given that we are talking about reference-determination and not meaning, this is not entirely implausible. Most mature speakers have the ability to supply fairly adequate approximations of purely indexical definite descriptions such as those I have just given when asked to identify what they are referring to by means of a given demonstrative. In the standard case, I suggest, the denotation of the demonstrative *is* the denotation of such a description.

There are, however, plausible exceptions involving factual errors on the part of the speaker, as when he claims to be referring to the nearest Impala that he can see when his demonstrative 'that antelope' in fact denotes a Springbuck. But cases like this are not knockdown counterexamples. For the description theorist can consistently argue that the definite description a speaker produces in answer to the question 'What are you referring to?' may not be identical with the one which he supposedly thinks. When a speaker says 'that antelope' he might think 'the antelope I now see with such and such a shape and such and such markings', where he cannot express the exact shape and markings he has in mind in English. We may interpret the theory as allowing for this sort of possibility. The speaker might then say that he is referring to an Impala because he mistakenly believes that only Impalas have the relevant shape and markings. But then the description he utters is not the one which determines the denotation of his demonstrative, and so does not count against the description theory.

The question arises of whether, for any given utterance of a demonstrative, there is always some definite description of the appropriate kind (not necessarily expressible in English) which has the same denotation as the demonstrative, no matter how confused the speaker may be about the properties of the thing denoted. I do not see any way of establishing that there are cases in which there is no such description. Even if the speaker is almost totally wrong about the object—as when 'that antelope', used in the veld at night, succeeds in denoting a rock—it is possible to find an appropriate definite description to serve as the mental correlate of the demonstrative. In the case at hand something like 'the nearest thing I now perceive which has the appearance to me of an antelope' would do the job. This sort of possibility suggests that it is futile to look for knockdown counterexamples to the description theory. On the other hand, I certainly do not *consciously think* descriptions like the relatively safe one I've just given every time I utter a demonstrative, and I see no reason to suppose I do so *unconsciously* other than that the move begs the question in favour of the description theory.

But there is a better reason for rejecting the theory. It has to do with the fact if the theory is to be at all plausible, we must suppose that the first person singular, 'I', almost invariably occurs in definite descriptions which supposedly determine the denotations of true demonstratives. It *must* be there to ensure the appropriate degree of context-sensitivity. But to think a description involving the first person singular is to think self-consciously of oneself. And this raises the question of whether we can think of something before us *without* thinking self-consciously of ourselves. My own view is that we can, that for the most part we do, and that it is very likely that at some stage during infancy we could not do otherwise. 'That' precedes and does not presuppose 'me'. At any rate, there *is* a difference between being *merely* conscious of something which happens to be before one, and being conscious of it *as* something which one is experiencing. But a plausible development of the description theory appears to involve assimilating the former to the latter[14].

The Causal Theory

The causal theory[15] avoids these difficulties. According to this theory, which is at present no more than a mere sketch, the denotation of a demonstrative in a context is the causal source of the speaker's utterance of that demonstrative. More specifically, a demonstrative denotes an object iff there is a non-deviant causal chain connecting some feature of the object with the utterance of the demonstrative. So the story goes. Despite the difficulty of converting it into a full-fledged theory, the picture is attractive. At any rate it rings true in typical cases of demonstrative reference, including cases which challenge the description theory.

Because causal theories are so easy to sell these days I will not waste much time trying to make this one plausible. But one supporting example will not come amiss. Consider, then, the case of our man unintentionally using the demonstrative 'that antelope' to refer to a rock. Why is it that we are willing to say that the rock is the denotation of the demonstrative? Because the speaker perceives the rock, and the experience he has in perceiving it contributes causally to his saying 'that antelope'. What we have here is a causal chain of the required sort. It is, moreover, one which might have further links which determine the same rock as the denotation of a later utterance of 'it' or 'the thing I saw'. So the theory has its attractions.

However, in the paper I have already referred to, McGinn offers four putative counterexamples to the causal thoery[16]. Three of them involve situations which are far too contrived for my taste. But the other is convincing, and it is possible to produce indefinitely many more which are relevantly like it. The general formula is as follows: The speaker in the situation correctly believes on *indirect* evidence that there is an *F* in a certain location, and on the strength of this belief points in the

direction of the object and says something like 'That *F* is *G*' without actually looking at the object. I think you will agree that in such cases the denotation of 'that *F*' is the object in question even though it is not connected with the speaker's utterance by the sort of causal chain required by the causal theory.

In support of this general observation let me quote McGinn's example in full:

> Consider a factory inspector certifying cars as roadworthy as they come off an assembly line. His job is to say, as successive cars pass by, 'that car is certified as roadworthy'. Normally, he looks at each car and utters his incantation while gesturing in the appropriate direction; but on this occasion he absentmindedly looks away as a new car arrives before him, while uttering his usual sentence accompanied by his usual gesture. It seems clear that his utterance of 'that car' stood in the relation of reference to the car in front of him, causally unconnected as (by hypothesis) they were; this is shown (inter alia) in the fact that the inspector could be accused of saying something false if the car turns out not to be roadworthy[17].

Cases like this may not be typical or paradigmatic, but they are normal, and I see no way for the causal theorist to get around them short of making a distinction between two uses of demonstratives (perhaps along the lines of Donellan's referential-attributive distinction[18]), and restricting his theory to one type. But this would be a self-defeating move.

The description theory, incidentally, can be modified to cope rather nicely with McGinn's example (and others of the same kind). For it is quite plausible in this case to suppose that the denotation of 'that car' is determined by some definite description such as 'the car at which I am now gesturing', or 'the car opposite me now'. Of course, it is not to be supposed that the inspector would actually think such a description every time he utters 'that car'. But it can be argued that in the circumstances imagined there is a conventional link between the demonstrative and the description, and there is no reason why the description theory should not be adjusted to recognize this sort of possibility. This would not, however, save it from my earlier criticisms.

The Demonstration Theory

The demonstration theory[19], as I shall call it, also copes well with McGinn-type examples. According to this theory, an utterance of a true demonstrative is incomplete unless it is accompanied by an act of pointing or some equivalent gesture—what Kaplan calls a 'demonstration'. It is this demonstration which is supposed to determine the denotation of the demonstrative. In a slogan: the denotation of a demonstrative is the demonstratum of the associated demonstration.

Challenged to account for the fact that demonstratives are not invariably accompanied by overt gestures such as pointings, tell-tale eye movements, or the like, the demonstration theorist has two alternatives:

(1) He can attempt to achieve a better fit between his theory and linguistic practice by broadening the notion of a demonstration to take in much more than overt gestures of a kind which we would intuitively regard as functionally equivalent to pointings.

(2) He can respond to the challenge, as McGinn does, by claiming that his rule of reference for demonstratives 'has the status of an *idealisation* of actual linguistic practice'[20].

Although alternative (1) appears initially to be something of a cheat, I believe it to be the better choice. Alternative (2) is in any event self-defeating. For one thing, once one makes the 'idealisation' move, one gives one's opponents the right to make it too, and I see no reason to think that it can be applied with *more* justice to the demonstration theory than to the other two theories we have considered. It seems merely a cheap way of avoiding counterexamples. Then there is the sort of justification which demonstration theorists who make the move are forced to provide in the face of the fact that their rule of reference is quite *regularly* violated in perfectly normal circumstances.

The core of McGinn's justification is as follows:

> When we are in doubt about a speaker's demonstrative reference because of an ambiguous gesture lazily executed we tend to resort to a precise rule of the kind specified; we get the speaker to point out exactly which apple he wanted. If someone is pressed in this way to make his reference clear (determinate) and points with resolute and taut finger two inches to the side of his intended referent, then he can be accused of misusing the conventions of language[21].

Let me say at once that the bit about mispointing has no more to do with demonstratives than it would if the person had been asked out of the blue which was the *largest* apple and had pointed two inches to the side of *it*. If he does that he is *not* misusing the conventions of *language*, but making a mistake, or attempting to mislead, or (perhaps) misusing the conventions of *pointing*. Why precisely does this not hold if he is asked to identify the thing he referred to by means of his demonstrative? The next thing to note is that a speaker who is asked to make his reference clear need not do so by means of a gesture. If we ask for pointing, pointing is what we will hopefully get; but we are not forced to ask for it. Finally, and here we get to the heart of the matter, it makes no sense to ask a speaker to identify what he was referring to by means of a demonstrative unless we suppose that it *already* has a denotation. Thus, the pointing which later *identifies* that denotation cannot be the mechanism by which it refers. But how can the lazy and inaccurate gesture which accompanies the utterance of the demonstrative do the job, since by hypothesis it does not find its mark? It can not, unless we sneak the speaker's intentions into the story in a way which would involve giving up the demonstration theory.

As I have claimed, then, the demonstration theorist's best answer to the existence of apparently widespread counterexamples is alternative (1) - that of broadening the notion of a demonstration to cover more than overt gestures towards something. This move *does* have some justification. For there is no question that, e.g., the timing or intonation of an utterance containing a demonstrative—or the look on the speaker's face which accompanies it—may play the same identificatory role in a conversational situation as an associated pointing. Saying 'that man' immediately after he has left our company is a pretty good way of identifying him. Likewise, the accent with which one utters 'the President' may determine its denotation as Reagan rather than Mitterand. And most of us have some experience of what a skillfully executed twitch or grimace can do to fix a speaker's reference.

Let us allow, then, that *any* observable feature of a speaker's behaviour may function as a demonstration on some occasion or other. But, pending a general theory concerning the conditions under which a feature of behaviour counts as a demonstration of an object, we should insist on certain makeshift standards when evaluating the demonstration theorist's response to putative counterexamples to his theory. In particular, we should not accept his claim that a demonstration is present in any given case unless (1) he is able to specify which voluntary feature of the speaker's observable behaviour the demonstration consists in, and (2) he can give an intuitively plausible account of how in the given circumstances that feature of behaviour could serve to draw the audience's attention to the thing which the speaker means to be talking about. Without some such constraints a 'demonstration theory' employing the extended notion of a demonstration would lose all touch with the crude gesture theory it is meant to refine.

The refined demonstration theory probably fits typical conversational situations fairly well, or can be made to do so. It *must* be that we usually demonstrate the denotations of our demonstratives somehow or other. How else would our audiences be so successful in identifying what we are talking about? But even if a demonstrative is accompanied by a demonstration of the object it denotes, it does not follow that the demonstration *determines* the denotation. Its function may be simply that of *assisting the audience to identify* the denotation. And if it functions thus it plays no part in the mechanism of reference itself. Now, it would be foolish to claim that demonstrations always function as mere conversational aids, for there are cases like that involving McGinn's factory inspector in which they obviously do far more. But, as I shall argue, this is not the only kind of case.

For one thing, it is possible for the denotation of a demonstrative to be distinct from the demonstratum of the associated demonstration, as when a speaker carelessly points at the wrong thing. Consider, e.g., the case of Sam pointing in the general direction of a group of men and saying 'That's the President'. Let us suppose that Sean, on the basis of

the exact orientation of Sam's finger, asks whether he is referring to 'the big guy on the left' (who happens to be a bodyguard), and Sam replies that he is not talking about him, but about 'the big guy in the plaid suit' (who happens to be the President). I find it quite natural here to say that Sam's 'that' denotes the President rather than his bodyguard. In this particular case you may disagree. But providing you allow that my view is not nonsense, you will have to grant that there may be circumstances in which denotation and demonstratum come apart, and that is all that is needed to undercut the demonstration theory.

A stronger point against the demonstration theory is that, even if the notion of a demonstration is extended in the way I have suggested, there are undoubtedly utterances of demonstratives which denote but which are not accompanied by demonstrations. Imagine, e.g., the case of a scrupulously honest and excessively sensitive dinner guest who would like to express satisfaction with what he is served, but who enjoys none of it except the dessert, after which he says '*That* was delicious' without nodding in the direction of the plates in which it was served or doing anything equivalent which would indicate that he is talking about the dessert rather than the whole meal. I say his 'that' denotes the dessert. The demonstration theory says it denotes nothing.

There are even cases in which it is difficult to see how one could demonstrate what one means to refer to by means of a demonstrative. Suppose, e.g., there is a flash of lightning just as I poke you in the ribs from behind, and you immediately shout 'What's that?', meaning the pressure on your ribs rather than the flash of light. Your 'that' surely denotes the source of pressure, and not the source of light. And it does so even if you lack the talent to somehow demonstrate the one rather than the other as you discover yourself giving vent to your surprise in words. I do not see any way for the demonstration theorist to handle examples like this.

The Mental Reference Theory

What I shall refer to as 'the mental reference theory'[22] has all the advantages and none of the disadvantages of the three theories I have discussed so far. The core of the theory is the simple claim that *the denotation of a demonstrative is the referent of the mental act of reference which that demonstrative expresses on that occasion.* In other words, the denotation is the object of the act of *thinking of*[23] which that utterance of the demonstrative expresses. In these formulations the coincidental notions of a mental act of reference and an act of thinking of something are meant to be construed broadly enough to cover not only 'direct' reference, but also mental reference 'by description'.

The important relation of *expressing* which the theory appeals to cannot be fully explicated here. It is, however, largely a *causal* relation between *token* thoughts and *token* utterances. But it is not a simple

causal affair. An utterance of a demonstrative does not express a mental act of reference unless (1) the speaker is somehow aware of the convention according to which the sound which the demonstrative consists in is a denoting expression in the relevant language, (2) he intends to use that sound *as* a denoting expression, and (3) his utterance of the demonstrative is a non-deviant causal result of his mental act of reference *in conjunction with* this awareness and this intention. Thus, the notion of expressing we are concerned with presupposes the existence of linguistic conventions. Despite that, it is a *natural* and non-arbitrary relation which is not subject to the whim of the speaker. We are not free to decide which mental acts our demonstratives are to express.

The account I am advancing does not in itself include a theory concerning the determination of mental reference. The success of the account, however, does depend on the possibility of an adequate theory of mental reference which entails that mental reference does not always involve linguistic reference. I am not going to elaborate such a theory in detail. In order to avoid the pitfalls of both the description theory and the causal theory, however, it must allow that there are different types of mental reference which involve different mechanisms. Thus, one very basic way of referring mentally to something is to discriminate it perceptually—to focus, as we say, on that thing. (Perceptually discriminating something *is* thinking of it and thus referring to it, and nothing over and above successful perceptual discrimination is required in order to achieve reference.) In this case the mechanism of mental reference is causal, as it also is in the case of mentally referring to something by remembering it. Another way of referring mentally is, so to speak, to think 'the *F*'. Assuming 'the *F*' is purely general, then the mechanism is wholly conceptual: The object of the act of reference is the unique item which fits the concept '*F*'. But if the act of thinking *F* necessarily involves perception or memory, then the mechanism is also causal. And if it involves, say, thinking self-consciously of oneself, then it is also contextual.

The mental reference account of demonstratives does not place any restrictions on the kind of mental act of reference which a given utterance of a demonstrative expresses. An indexical 'that' is of course particularly well suited to express perceptual reference, and in the typical case it probably does so. It is this that underlies the attractions of the causal theory of demonstrative reference. For when a demonstrative is mentally grounded in perception, then the mechanism by which its denotation is determined is entirely causal. But demonstratives do not have to express perceptual discriminations or even memory traces of them. It is, e.g. possible, so to speak, to think 'the chair at which I am now pointing' while pointing over one's shoulder and saying 'that chair'. In cases like this causality plays a very minor role in determining the denotation of the demonstrative. A demonstration, however, is essential, and with the aid of a 'mental description' does the important work.

Our theory gives a unified account of how demonstratives denote. It nonetheless allows that the mechanism involved may vary from utterance to utterance, even for a single demonstrative expression (i.e., for a single expression-type, like 'that'). But it does not imply that any demonstrative is ambiguous as one might expect in view of this variability. For from the point of view of the theory itself, the variability is an accidental fact about mental reference, on which linguistic demonstrative reference rides piggyback.

For all its attractions, the theory may be challenged on the ground that there are tokens of demonstratives which denote despite the fact that they are not accompanied by mental acts of reference. We have, e.g., signs which say 'Do not park on front of this sign', telephone answering devices with tape recordings which say 'The doctor will be in this afternoon', and bored factory inspectors who mindlessly utter 'That car is certified as roadworthy' twice a minute. The proper response to examples like this is to restrict the theory to primary utterances of demonstratives—those that are fully intended and intelligent. We can then explain how other demonstratives denote by showing how they function as substitutes for primary demonstratives. For it is only because of the existence of primary demonstratives that the others can be seen as denoting expressions at all.

Our theory may also be challenged on the ground that it appears to ignore the distinction between *speaker's reference*—what a speaker means to be talking about when he utters a term—and *semantic reference*—what his term actually denotes according to the linguistic rules[24]. But is there any such distinction in the case of demonstratives? I think there is. Suppose I wrongly believe that a certain Van Gogh is directly behind me, and that I point over my shoulder in that direction while saying 'That picture is a masterpiece' and thinking 'The picture at which I am pointing is a masterpiece'[25]. If I actually point at a poor photograph of Mussolini, then my utterance of 'that picture' denotes the photograph (semantic reference), even though I intend to refer to a certain Van Gogh (speaker's reference).

Examples like this show that the distinction between semantic reference and speaker's reference applies in the case of at least some compound demonstratives. They also illustrate that, where the distinction does apply, it is *compatible* with the core of the mental reference theory. For the mental act/s of reference grounding our claims about speaker's reference may be separate from the act on which semantic reference depends. There is thus good reason for thinking that the present challenge is answerable. A fully adequate answer to it would involve modifying and developing the theory in such a way as to do justice to the semantic relevance of the component parts of compound demonstratives. But that would require another paper and more. Here it is enough to observe that in the case of a simple 'that' used to express perceptual reference, the distinction between speaker's reference and

semantic reference collapses. And this is a substantial argument *for* the mental reference theory.

The last objection I shall touch upon is that the mental reference theory flouts an important methodological principle[26]. Very roughly, the principle in question is that a semantic convention which assigns denotations to a referring expression must be such that mastery of that convention would help an audience to ascertain the denotation of an utterance of the expression on the basis of purely *public* facts about the context of utterance. Although there is some difficulty in making this principle precise, I am inclined to accept what I take to be the jist of it on the strength of the fact that natural languages are public institutions which are learnable on the basis of public facts about language use. This does not, however, mean that mastery of the relevant convention must in principle enable someone who is fully aware of the publicly accessible facts to ascertain the denotation of a referring expression in *every* possible speech situation. It means only that he should be able to ascertain the denotation *in general* (as we say), or for the most part. And to require much more than this is to fly in the face of the obvious fact that there are occasions on which the only way to ascertain the denotation of a referring expression is by discovering how it was *meant* by the speaker, as e.g. when, in an unlikely situation, someone uses the name 'Cicero' to pick out, not the famous Roman, but his neighbour's cat (who is also known by the audience to be so-called).

The question arises, then, of whether the mental reference theory is compatible with an adequate version of our methodological principle. I claim that it is. For there can be no doubt that the information that a demonstrative denotes the object of the mental act of reference which it expresses *can* help a listener to ascertain on the basis of public facts about the relevant speech situation what a particular utterance of, say, 'that' denotes. Indeed, this information gives him an appropriate strategy for working out the denotation: Given what he knows about the speaker and his interests, and given the immediately preceding conversation, the most notable features of the non-linguistic context, and the usual behavioural cues, he should try to figure out what the speaker is most likely to be thinking of when he utters the relevant token. This strategy is not merely appropriate. It is also, I claim, the one we actually follow—automatically and unconsciously, for the most part, but carefully and consciously when it is not obvious what the 'that' in question denotes and it is not easily possible to ask the speaker himself. Of course, the strategy is not always successful. But that is just what we should expect. For, as the mental reference theory would suggest, and as we in any case know from experience, the denotation of a demonstrative can be beyond the grasp of those who hear it.

That is all I shall say in defense of the mental reference theory here. In conclusion, let me stress that I do not claim to have given a perfectly adequate version of the theory, or indeed to have defended it at all fully.

What I believe I have done is to give a strong *prima facie* case for the theory *vis-à*-vis its rivals, and to show in outline how it can be defended against several important objections[27].

NOTES

[1] Colin McGinn, 'The Mechanism of Reference', *Synthese* 49 (1981), pp. 157-186.

[2] Note that this is distinct from the question 'How does an audience determine (i.e., ascertain) what a given referring expression denotes?' I am not directly concerned with the latter question here.

[3] *op. cit.*, especially pp. 170-173.

[4] cf. McGinn *loc. cit.*

[5] A discourse may be as short as a sentence or as long as a novel, and may involve one or more speakers.

[6] See P. F. Strawson, *Subject and Predicate in Logic and Grammar* (Methuen, London, 1974), pp. 42-48.

[7] The same observation is made by Evans in support of a different point. See Gareth Evans, *The Varieties of Reference* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1982), p. 310.

[8] Evans *op. cit.*, Ch. 11.

[9] David Kaplan, *Demonstratives* (unpublished monograph, 1977), especially pp. 7-10. I do not distinguish the two kinds of indexicals in quite the same way as Kaplan since his way begs the question in favour of what I shall refer to as the demonstration theory of demonstrative reference.

[10] Some describe a definite description as improper if it has no denotation. It is more usual, I think, to so describe it if it has no denotation when construed as proper in my sense (whether it is or not). I don't know whether anything counts as standard usage here. Obviously, 'improper', in the present context, is not pejorative.

[11] As Vic Dudman notes (personal communication), 'now' sometimes does not denote the time of utterance, as in 'The King now faced a terrible decision'. Similar remarks apply to other pure indexicals. We can, I think, accommodate the point by allowing that the context relative to which an utterance is to be evaluated does not always coincide with the actual circumstances of the utterance, even though it usually does.

[12] The version of the description theory presented here owes most to two papers by Stephen Schiffer: 'The Basis of Reference', *Erkenntnis 13* (1978), pp. 171-206, and 'Indexicals and the Theory of Reference', *Synthese 49* (1981), pp. 43-100.

[13] See, e.g., Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1980); Keith Donnellan, 'Proper Names and Identifying Descriptions', in Davidson and Harman (eds.), *Semantics of Natural Language* (Reidel, Dordrecht, 1972), pp. 356-379; and Gareth Evans 'The Causal Theory of Names', reprinted in Schwartz (ed.), *Naming, Necessity and Natural Kinds* (Cornell U. P., Ithaca, 1977), pp. 192-215.

[14] The same criticism applies to the Lewis-Chisholm theory of belief, according to which every belief consists in the ascription of a property to oneself. See David Lewis, 'Attitudes *De Dicto* and *De Se*', *Philosophical Review* 88 (1979), pp. 513-543, and Roderick M. Chisholm, *The First Person: An Essay on Reference and Intentionality* (Harvester, Brighton, 1981).

[15] For a statement of the theory—which is modelled on the causal theory of names (see references in note 12)—see McGinn, *op. cit.*, pp. 158-159.

[16] *op. cit.*, pp. 161-162.

[17] *loc. cit.*

[18] See Keith Donnellan, 'Reference and Definite Descriptions', reprinted in Schwartz (ed.), *Naming, Necessity and Natural Kinds* (Cornell U. P., Ithaca, 1977), pp. 42-65.

[19] The name is mine. The theory is advocated by Kaplan, *op. cit.* pp. 7-10, 34-49 and McGinn, *op. cit.* pp. 163-170.

[20] McGinn *op. cit.*, p. 163.

[21] *op. cit.*, p. 164.

[22] The present version has important affinities to the *'Fido'-Fido* theory developed in Schiffer, 'The Basis of Reference' (see note 12), but for reasons apparent from my discussion of the description theory, I reject Schiffer's view that mental reference to things other than oneself is always descriptive reference.

[23] I mean the *material* object (in the sense of G. E. M. Anscombe, 'The Intentionality of Sensation: A Grammatical Feature', in R. J. Butler (ed.) *Analytical Philosophy*, Second Series (Blackwell, Oxford, 1968), pp. 158-180), not the intentional object.

[24] See, e.g., pp. 14-15 of Saul Kripke, 'Speaker's Reference and Semantic Reference', in French, Uehling, and Wettstein (eds.), *Contemporary Perspectives in the Philosophy of Language* (U. of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1979), pp. 6-27.

[25] This example is a variant of one due to Kaplan. See p. 396 of 'Dthat', in French *et.al.*, *op. cit.* pp. 383-400.

[26] I am grateful to David Lumsden for pressing this objection on me. Space limitations prevent me from doing full justice to his arguments.

[27] Earlier versions of this paper were read at the Spring Colloquium in Philosophy, Cape Town, September 1982, and at the Annual Conference of the New Zealand Division of the Australasian Association of Philosophy, Auckland, May 1983. I am grateful to Vic Dudman, Russell Wahl and to participants at the above meetings, especially George Hughes, David Lumsden and Denis Robinson, for useful questions and comments.