PHILOSOPHY RESEARCH ARCHIVES VOL. XII, 1986-87

14. REFERRING, DEMONSTRATING, AND INTENDING

ROD BERTOLET

PURDUE UNIVERSITY

ABSTRACT. Demonstratives have been thought to provide counterexamples to theories which analyze the notion of speaker reference in terms of the intentions of the speaker. This paper is a response to three attempts to undermine my efforts to defend such theories against these putative counterexamples. It is argued that the efforts of Howard Wettstein, M. J. More and John L. Biro to show that my own attempt to defuse the putative counterexamples offered by David Kaplan fails, are themselves unsuccessful. The competing view of demonstration which I endorse is clarified further by the discussion.

At first glance, demonstratives appear to be good cases for those who hold that speaker's intentions determine speaker's reference, due to the indeterminacy inherent in physical acts such as pointing. If I point to the west and utter 'That's mine', it is natural enough to suppose that I've referred to the dog to the west rather than a host of fleas or a spectacular sunset because it is the dog that is the object of certain of my intentions. It is then perhaps surprising that demonstratives provide some difficult cases for what I will inelegantly term the intention-theorist, but David Kaplan has argued that such difficulties do arise. I once published a brief article maintaining that Kaplan's putative counterexamples are not clearly successful. At least three people have attempted to show that the thesis of those three pages was not sustained. The present paper is a reply to these critics.¹

It should be conceded at the outset that no additional arguments for the intention-theorist's position will be provided. The burden of this paper is rather to establish that the criticisms directed against my treatment of Kaplan's examples are not decisive. The issue at stake is large enough to I hope justify such attention to detail, for that issue is whether it is possible to construct a viable theory of speaker, as opposed to semantic, reference which makes what the speaker refers to a function of some set of intentions that speaker has. The alleged counterexamples attempt to establish that if a speaker uses personal pronouns or demonstratives while suffering certain mistaken assumptions, these mistakes force us to override the intentions of the speaker in ascertaining what is referred to. Against Kaplan and his defenders, I shall try to show that these examples do not refute theories which make speaker's reference a function of the speaker's intentions.

The precise details of an intention-based theory are, happily, not particularly relevant, since Kaplan's examples will work against all intention-based theories if they work against any. We may operate with the most easily stated version of the view and ignore its frills: let us say with Donnellan that a speaker refers to x iff x is the individual about whom (or which) the speaker intended to predicate something, and get to work.²

I. KAPLAN'S FIRST EXAMPLE

Kaplan presents two counterexamples to intention-based theories in "Dthat". Each is brief enough to quote in full.

A person might utter:

(28) I am a general intending—that is 'having in mind'— de Gaulle, and being under the delusion that he himself was de Gaulle. But the linguistic constraints on the possible demonstrata of 'I' will not allow anyone other than de Gaulle to so demonstrate de Gaulle, no matter how hard they try.³

The key question here is whether what the speaker intended to demonstrate and what the speaker actually demonstrated are distinct. The correct answer, despite what Kaplan assumes, appears to be a negative one. It is certainly correct to say that the speaker demonstrates himself and not de Gaulle. But it is not true that he did not 'have himself in mind', since the poor fellow thinks that he is de Gaulle. From his point of view (the only one relevant here) there is no such thing as having de Gaulle rather than himself in mind. Hence the example does not successfully pry apart an intended and an actual demonstratum.

II. WETTSTEIN'S REPLY

Howard Wettstein thinks otherwise. He embellishes the example a bit by having Ahern, the speaker, teaching history, and producing such remarks as ". . . and then I marched triumphantly into Paris". He suggests that resistance to the claim that Ahern has de Gaulle rather than himself in mind, since Ahern thinks he is de Gaulle, is misplaced, and offers the following justification for this rebuttal:

One who wishes to speak about a particular item he has in mind but has mistaken it for a different item, will often use a singular term that conventionally applies not to his intended referent, but to the item he has confused it with. Someone says, "What is that man doing out there?" Another responds, mistaking the man they see for Jones, "It looks like Jones. Jones appears to be raking the leaves". The second speaker wishes to answer a question about "the man out there". Yet due to his mistaken belief, he uses a term which fails to conventionally apply to that man. Similarly, if I mistakenly take myself to be de Gaulle, I may use his name when I really want to convey information about myself, as in "De Gaulle is hungry". Given that same mistaken belief, I may use a term that applies to me, e.g., 'I', when I really want to communicate about de Gaulle. Surely the first

person pronoun is not immune to this intended reference vs. conventional application phenomenon.4

The difficulty with this reply is that it is question-begging. The issue is whether Ahern does have de Gaulle and not himself in mind (or vice versa), and there is simply no defense of this claim in this passage. If we assume this to be so, what Wettstein says links the example to a more general linguistic phenomenon, but what is needed is a defense of this assumption. Wettstein goes on to qualify his view a bit by admitting that since Ahern suffers delusions of grandeur, he does have himself as well as de Gaulle in mind. But he attempts to finesse this by making these havings-in-mind unequal, one subsidiary to the other. Thus, Ahern "intends to communicate about himself only insofar as he takes himself to be de Gaulle".5 This still requires us to assume that when Ahern intends to communicate about de Gaulle he does not intend to communicate about himself, and this is still the point at issue. That is, Wettstein's proposal turns on the assumption that Ahern's intention to communicate about de Gaulle is distinct from a further intention to communicate about himself which he might go on to form, and the assumption that this further intention is not yet formed when Ahern intends to communicate about de Gaulle. But again, for Ahern, from Ahern's point of view, there simply is no such distinction (which is why he says things like 'And then I marched triumphantly into Paris').6 So this line of attack on my attack is not compelling.

III. KAPLAN'S SECOND EXAMPLE

Let us turn to Kaplan's other purported counterexample, which runs as follows:

Suppose that without turning and looking I point to the place on my wall which has long been occupied by a picture of Rudolf Carnap and I say:

(27) Dthat [I point as above] is a picture of one of the greatest philosophers of the twentieth century.

But unbeknownst to me, someone has replaced my picture of Carnap with one of Spiro Agnew. I think it would be simply wrong to argue an 'ambiguity' in the demonstration, so great that it can be bent to my intended demonstratum. I have said of a picture of Spiro Agnew that it pictures one of the greatest philosophers of the twentieth century. And my speech and demonstration suggest no other natural interpretation to the linguistically competent public observer.

Later on the same page, claiming that there are limits to what even the best of intentions can do, Kaplan adds that "No matter how hard I intend Carnap's picture, . . . I do not think it reasonable to call the content of my utterance true".

My suggestion about this example, to describe it quite briefly, was that we might distinguish what a speaker demonstrates from what he refers to and says something of, and while allowing that Kaplan, in the example, demonstrates the picture of Agnew, we could still hold that he nonetheless refers to, and says something of, the picture of Carnap,

which was the intended referent, just as the intention-theorist would predict. It is as we shall see important to note that it was not claimed that this is clearly correct on intuitive grounds. Indeed it was explicitly allowed that Kaplan's intuitions were probably stronger here: the point was that with a fully worked-out theory and the distinction lately noted a theorist might reasonably maintain an intention-based theory in the face of the apparent force of the example. This is important because ultimately, it is theories with their relative strengths and weaknesses that must be compared with one another, and not simply a theory and difficult examples.

What of this distinction between demonstrating and referring? It was motivated by appeal to an example involving a conversation with a colleague in which I utter 'Carnap's book is difficult for my students', mistakenly picking up and showing my colleague the copy of Korzybski's Science and Sanity which had lain next to my copy of Meaning and Necessity on my desk. The point was that it is a mistake to identify what is demonstrated (Korzybski's book) with what is referred to (Carnap's book), that what is referred to is the same as what the speaker intended to refer to, though admittedly distinct from what he demonstrates. Thus might an intention-theorist deflect Kaplan's case, or so it was claimed. We shall next look at some reasons for thinking otherwise.

IV. MORE'S OBJECTIONS

M. J. More argues that

... if, as Bertolet suggests, the content of what is said is determined, in the case of demonstratives, by what the speaker means then presumably he would want to say of the example that it is one in which what the demonstrative stands for is Carnap's picture but what is demonstrated is Agnew's picture. But this is odd.8

Well, sure. As was noted earlier, I grant that Kaplan's intuitions have the upper hand, so it has already been conceded that this is odd. I only protest that the principle 'If it's odd it ain't right' itself ain't right. Actually, things may be somewhat less odd than More makes them out to be, since he suggests that I hold that what the demonstrative stands for is the picture of Carnap. If this is a matter of the semantic relation between the demonstrative and that picture, no view has been endorsed on this matter; I hold only that what the speaker refers to is the picture of Carnap. (More's opening sentence does indeed suggest that he is concerned with "the semantic content of . . . demonstratives", an account of "their contribution to the truth-conditions of the sentences in which they occur". This is certainly an interesting issue, and one can sort of see how someone might think I was attempting to engage it. But I wasn't, and considerations of this sort are irrelevant to the issues I was actually attempting to engage.)

More's complaint would have more force if it were accompanied by an alternative treatment which got rid of Kaplan's example without forcing us to say anything 'odd', and he thinks it is. But it is far from clear that this is right. More wants us to distinguish what I meant to refer to from what I meant, and to use this distinction to support the claim that Kaplan's phrase 'intended demonstratum' is ambiguous. The

idea is that I did mean the picture on the wall (the picture of Agnew), that this is what is demonstrated and what the demonstrative-token stands for, and that Kaplan has therefore failed to show that what I meant is different from what the demonstrative-token stands for. The picture of Carnap is merely what I meant to refer to, not what I meant. It should be noted that the notion of meaning an object is a subtle one, deserving more discussion than the eleven lines More gives it and the space I have allows. But briefly, it seems that Prior and Searle (whose views More notes) are correct in saying that the claim that I meant the picture on the wall is just wrong. This claim at any rate puts no less strain on our intuitions than does my own suggestion. It is difficult to see how to raise the argument above the level of intuition here, but consider how you, the speaker, would react if you were the unlucky utterer of 'Dthat is a picture of one of the greatest philosophers of the twentieth century', and upon hearing the giggles of your audience you turned around and found yourself pointing a a portrait of Agnew. Your most natural reaction would be 'I didn't mean that (or, dthat)!'. Nor will this change when you are informed that you can say that although you did mean that, you didn't mean to refer to it. More's critique is simply not persuasive.

V. BIRO'S CRITICISM

The most detailed criticism comes from John Biro, who thinks that the attempt to use the distinction between what is demonstrated and what is referred to to disable Kaplan's picture example fails because of a mistake about demonstration. He thinks that it is the pointing together with the utterance containing 'dthat' which constitute the act of demonstration. My error, then, is supposed to lie in construing the picking up of Korzybski's book, in my example, as 'by itself constituting an act of demonstration'. The problem, Biro maintains, is that "it is possible that one can refer to x (and thus say something of x) while at the same time picking up y (rather than x, as intended), but it doesn't follow from this that one can refer to x in a similarly independent way while demonstrating y (rather than x, as intended). Picking up y and demonstrating y are not the same thing—more is involved in the latter than in the former".9

Now of course there are lots of things which, in the course of a day's meanderings, we pick up without demonstrating, but I can't see that I said anything inconsistent with this claim. But I do think less is needed for demonstrating an object beyond picking it up than does Biro, who continues his discussion as follows:

The role of 'dthat' in Kaplan's example is precisely to tie the physical act of pointing to the reference made (and thus the content of the assertion) in a way the picking up of a book without the accompanying verbal demonstrative fails to do. Without the verbal demonstrative accompanying it, the mere physical act (picking up or pointing) is not an act of demonstration (consider picking up or pointing to the picture in Kaplan's example, but saying "Carnap is one of the greatest philosophers of the twentieth century"—the strict analog of Bertolet's example). What makes such physical acts of demonstration in the relevant sense is precisely the fact that the verbal demonstrative in the utterance accom-

panying them ensures that the utterance is about the object of the physical act. Unless there is a verbal demonstrative present or implied, there is nothing to link the utterance with the physical act.¹⁰

While most of this is entirely correct, it seems mistaken on the most crucial point. More importantly though, it joins the issue between Biro and myself without resolving it. There is, so far as I can see, no argument in Biro's discussion to favor his description over mine. This is not to say that he gives no arguments; those he offers, however, seem inconclusive. I shall consider Biro's subsequent remarks first, and then recur to the passage just quoted.

Noting that I described my picking up of Korzybski's book as inadvertent, Biro observes that it would be wrong to describe the pointing to Agnew's picture in Kaplan's example as inadvertent. This may be, but just what would it show? I did not suppose or intend the cases to be exactly parallel. The point was to motivate driving a wedge between demonstration and reference by appeal to an example different from the sort Kaplan offers, and then to import the distinction into our construal of Kaplan's actual example. One reason why this is important is that the example that motivates the distinction is one in which there is no dispute over what the speaker refers to. If the distinction were simply introduced in the context of Kaplan's own example, it would have at least the appearance of being no more than an ad hoc device cooked up to escape a telling objection (or worse still, such a device used in service of begging the question against the force of the examples by assuming an interpretation which is illegitimate if the examples are sound). But it is not such a device; the distinction between what is referred to and what is demonstrated is motivated by a case which does not share the controversial features of Kaplan's example. (Moreover, while my choice of words was likely unfortunate, if not inadvertent, the point was that I picked up and displayed Korzybski's book thinking that it was Carnap's--being confused about which book was on the left side of my desk--which is not all that remote from pointing to a spot on the wall at which I wrongly presume a picture of Carnap to be hung. This is not to say that there are no differences between the cases.) Biro concludes his objection with a final example, a variant of my own which comes closer to Kaplan's original case. There is but one book on the desk, our prankster having replaced my cherished Meaning and Necessity with a copy of Science and Sanity.

Here I would again not be said to have picked up the (wrong) book inadvertently, but neither would I (on any natural interpretation of my surveyors) be said to have referred to any book other than Korzybski's in saying "Dthis is difficult for my students". Even if I intended all along to pick up and refer to Carnap's, and if instead of saying "Dthis is difficult for my students", I had said "Carnap's book is difficult for my students", there would still be no way for my surveyors to connect my physical act of picking up a book with my utterance. Unless the nonverbal context led them to make adequate allowances, they could not take my physical act to be an act of demonstration, certainly not an act of demonstrating Carnap's book, which is nowhere to be seen.¹¹

One may grant the point about the inappropriateness of 'inadvertently' (though one may want to mildly protest that a certain kind of mistake is still made). One may further grant the claim about what the natural interpretation of Biro's surveyors would be. It does not however follow that those surveyors have mapped the terrain accurately. Some examples, even if not new examples, may help here. The natural interpretation of my utterance of 'The shooting of the dogs was terrible!' may well be incorrect, most likely will be incorrect if you have been following the controversy about citizens who shoot stray dogs but are unaware that the circus is in town. (And even if you were aware of this you might not recognize that the intended interpretation was that the dogs that were trained to fire specially modified weapons at targets were lousy shots.) The sentence 'The gay activists were asked to stop demonstrating at the state capitol' has a reading -- a distinctly unnatural and difficult to hear reading, but a reading nonetheless--'Some people were demonstrating, somewhere or other, and the gay activists were asked, at the state capitol, to stop them'. What such examples show is that it is a mistake to follow Kaplan and Biro in placing much stress on what one's audience will take one to be saying, referring to, or whatever. That your audience has no natural way of coming to the belief that you have said that p or referred to x just doesn't entail that you haven't said that p or referred to x.

Suppose either yourself or myself to be having a bad day, so that while as far as you can tell I am producing impeccably arranged sentences of English, you don't have the foggiest idea what it is that I'm saying. One possible explanation for this counterfactualized situation is that I have consistently hit upon hopelessly obscure but correct ways of expressing myself. You don't get it. It doesn't follow that I didn't say it. (A similar point holds for our attempts to explain philosophy to others. Just consider, for a brief painful moment, your own less successful lectures and conversations.) So, to come to the point, it might well be that in Biro's final example, even if I had uttered 'Carnap's book is difficult for my students', my surveyors would have no way to connect my picking up the book with my utterance. This merely shows that my surveyors would be out of luck, in that they would not be able to figure out what I was trying to do.¹² Too bad for them; too bad for me. But it is entirely consistent with this that I referred to Carnap's book but demonstrated Korzybski's.

Perhaps it is now clear why Biro's comments join the issue without resolving it. Our dispute concerns the nature of demonstration, and whether my example involves a case of demonstration. I take the physical demonstration accompanying a verbal demonstrative to be a guide to the speaker's referent rather than a determinant of that referent, in much the same way that a description appended to an utterance of 'this' ('this--the X') would be a guide to the referent. As one may describe the wrong thing (give a description fitting something other than the referent), one may point to the wrong thing. Biro disagrees; he sees a conceptual link between what is demonstrated and what is referred to by the utterance of a verbal demonstrative. But there is in his paper no justification for the claim, quoted six paragraphs back, that there is such a link.

Though this is somewhat complicated by his allowance for 'implied' verbal demonstratives, Biro maintains that without the verbal demonstrative accompanying a physical act of picking up or pointing, that act is

not an act of demonstration.¹³ Suppose so. He further maintains, as we have seen, that what makes such physical acts acts of demonstration is the fact that the verbal demonstrative in the utterance accompanying them ensures that the utterance is about the object of the physical act. But this doesn't follow from the previous point, and it is not at all clear that it is true.

One might instead hold, as I do, that what makes such physical acts acts of demonstration is the speaker's intention to point to an object which is the same as the speaker's referent (and perhaps the referent of the verbal demonstrative), where this performance is designed to aid the hearer in understanding which object the referent is. Given his false belief that the picture of Carnap is on the wall, the speaker then intends to, and does, point to the space on the wall where he thinks Carnap's picture hangs. The best of intentions can, as Biro and Kaplan insist, fail to be realized, due to the unsurprising fact that one can be mistaken about what one is (without looking!) pointing at or picking up. But this only means that the intention to point to that thing which is the speaker's referent can fail to be satisfied, so that the 'wrong thing', a thing other than the speaker's referent, could be demonstrated. It is, by the way, interesting that these claims are wholly consistent with what Kaplan says about demonstrative uses, which is that he will speak of a demonstrative use of a singular denoting phrase "when the speaker intends that the object for which the phrase stands be designated by an associated demonstration".14 This is no more than interesting, since a footnote enjoins us from taking this as a definition, but still, it gives us the lack of conceptual linkage between the referent and what is demonstrated that I am suggesting.

One final objection 15 deserves discussion. It is that my treatment of the two examples displays a troubling lack of parallelism; that such parallelism would require that we say of the de Gaulle case that Ahern's speaker reference is himself (= de Gaulle) rather than himself (= Ahern). Well we can't say that, since Ahern isn't de Gaulle. While on the one hand, there is no clear reason to expect parallel treatment, on the other, there is an important similarity. The similarity is simply that in each case it is maintained that it is the speaker's intentions that determine the speaker's reference. The reason for not expecting much similarity beyond this is that Kaplan's two examples attack the intention-theorist's view in quite different ways. In the de Gaulle example, it is denied that the speaker has the relevant intention (an intention to refer to or predicate something of himself, or as Kaplan puts it, that he has himself in mind). In the pictures example, it is maintained that while the intentions the intention-theorist relies on are present, they simply fail to determine the referent. The reply to the former example is basically that a coherent description of it demands that the speaker does have himself in mind; no misleading pointings intrude on this case, so there is no point of application for the distinction between what is referred to and what is demonstrated. But this distinction does have a point, and is applied, in the reply to the latter example; one should expect that the examples will be treated differently.16

It may be worth noting that while there seem to clearly be cases in which the object of the physical act must be the object referred to by the verbal demonstrative, they are not exactly typical uses of demonstrative expressions. Cases of this sort include picking a winning ticket in a lottery ('Dthis [I reach into the barrel and grasp a ticket] is

the winning entry') and picking a student to answer a question by planting a fingertip somewhere on the class roster without looking. It would appear to be utterly absurd to insist that I had mistakenly selected John when I had intended Mary--but this is because there is no one to even serve as a candidate for the intended referent other than the unlucky person at whose name my finger came to rest. Now for one thing, these are hardly paradigm cases of uses of demonstratives. But in addition, they aren't cases in which intentions fail to determine reference: the speaker's intention is precisely to refer to, put on the spot, whoever it is whose name his finger points to or whoever it is who holds the ticket he extracts. This is the explanation of the incoherence of supposing that there is some other person who is the one the speaker actually intended.

We are left, then, with the question of whether, in Kaplan's example, it is possible to claim that one picture is demonstrated and another referred to. Biro's claim that this is not possible because it does not involve a demonstration has not been established. It is possible to instead claim that the object demonstrated and the object referred to are distinct. Absent a convincing argument for one side of this dispute, we are left with a standoff—the very standoff I initially attempted to secure for the theorist who wishes to ground speaker's reference in speaker's intentions. So far as I can see, there is still nothing in the literature that shows that such a theorist must give up this idea.¹⁷

ENDNOTES

- Kaplan's examples appear in "Dthat', reprinted in P. French, T.E. Uehling and H.K. Wettstein (eds.), Contemporary Perspectives in the Philosophy of Language (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1979); my discussion of the examples appears in "Demonstratives and Intentions", Philosophical Studies 38:1 (1980). The criticisms of this discussion are in Howard Wettstein, "How to Bridge the Gap between Meaning and Reference", Synthese 58:1 (1983), M.J. More, "Demonstratives and Intentions Again", Philosophical Studies 41:2 (1982), and John L. Biro, "Intention, Demonstration, and Reference", Philosophy and Phenomenological Research 63:1 (1982).
- See Keith S. Donnellan, "Speaking of Nothing", Philosophical Review 83:1 (1974), 16. I do not mean to endorse this particular version of the theory; indeed I argue against it in "Speaker Reference", forthcoming in Philosophical Studies.
- 3 Kaplan, "Dthat", 396-7. He actually presents this example second.
- Wettstein, "How to Bridge the Gap", 68.
- Wettstein, "How to Bridge the Gap", 69. See also 81, n. 23, where it is perhaps clearest that these intentions are held to be distinct.
- There are of course cases in which I might have myself in mind but not have Bertolet in mind. However, these require that I be suffering from amnesia or some delusion or confusion which requires that I not believe myself to be Bertolet. For most of us, there is a clear difference between intending to communicate about de Gaulle and intending to communicate about ourselves. But this is precisely because we do not

suffer Ahern's delusion: under that delusion, the difference evaporates for Ahern. None of this requires us to deny that the situation would change if Ahern were to become aware of his delusion. Thus Wettstein is quite right to observe that "Were he to learn about his mistake (and somehow not become catatonic), he could still accomplish his communicative goal by simply substituting 'de Gaulle' for 'I'". ("How to Bridge the Gap", 69) But this does not affect the present point.

- ⁷ Kaplan, "Dthat", 396. 'Dthat' is Kaplan's coined term for a demonstrative use of 'that'; phrases in square brackets describe the relevant demonstration and are not part of the utterance.
- More, "Demonstratives Again", 194. A way additional to the one discussed in the text in which More mischaracterizes my view concerns the description of content as being determined, as in this passage, by what the speaker means.
- 9 Biro, "Intention", 38.
- Biro, "Intention", 38.
- 11 Biro, "Intention", 38-39.
- This also might not be so; they might well, in trying to figure out what on earth I was doing, hit upon the thought that I believed Carnap's book was on the desk, and so picked up the book intending to show them Carnap's book. There is certainly no guarantee of this though.
- In a footnote, Biro says that he allows for implied demonstratives "to allow for cases where the nonverbal context makes it clear the physical act and the utterance are connected in the way a verbal demonstrative would make explicit" ("Intention", 38). I am not clear what Biro thinks constitutes this connection, which, as I would put it, the nonverbal context merely makes clear. I take it to be the speaker's intentions.
- 14 Kaplan, "Dthat", 389.
- 15 Issued from the editorial office of this journal.
- This may miss the point of the objection. The point may rather be that since it is claimed that the picture referred to is the one the speaker has mistaken the picture of Agnew to be (namely, the picture of Carnap), we should expect that it would be claimed that Ahern has referred to the person he has mistaken himself to be (namely, de Gaulle). But this involves a misunderstanding of the pictures example. The speaker hasn't mistaken a picture of Agnew for a picture of Carnap, as he might in looking at a picture of Agnew and for some silly reason taking it for a picture of Carnap. He rather has a mistaken belief about where the picture of Carnap is.
- I am grateful to Bill Rowe and Martin Curd, and also to the referees and editor of this journal, for comments which have led to improvements in this paper.