

IX.—NOTES.

NOTE ON CONNOTATION AND DENOTATION.

LOGICIANS appear to me to be very confused as to what they mean by Connotation and Denotation. We are told that proper names have denotation but no connotation. Now logicians have wrangled a good deal about the second part of this statement, but no one seems to question the first part. Let us say then that the relation that the names *Mr. Asquith* and *Winston Churchill* have to the men Asquith and Churchill is that the names denote the terms.

We are further told by Mill that adjectives like *white* denote all white things, e.g. snow, writing-paper, etc., and that they connote the quality whiteness. This quality, he says, is denoted by the corresponding abstract noun, viz. *whiteness*. Now Mill fails to notice that *white* cannot denote snow or writing-paper in the same sense in which *Mr. Asquith* denotes the man Asquith or *whiteness* denotes the quality whiteness. To say that snow is white means that it has the quality of whiteness. But to say: This man is Asquith does not mean that he has the quality of 'Asquithness,' but merely that he has the quality of being called *Asquith*. In one sense then *N* denotes *N* means that *N* is the proper name of *N* and not a quality of it; in Mill's other sense it means that *N* is something that has the quality denoted by the abstract noun that corresponds to *N*. It is utterly misleading to use the same name—denotation—for these wholly different relations. Keeping to our original meaning of denotation we must clearly say that both *white* and *whiteness* denote the quality of being white.

We shall then need a special name for the relation between *white* or *whiteness* and particular white things. Let us call this relation *innotation*. Then the word *white* innotes any object which has the quality which it denotes. And the innotation of *white* is all white objects.

Next we come to connotation. According to Mill *white* connotes the quality which *whiteness* denotes. But we have now seen that *white* denotes this quality; so at present we have no need for the word *connotation* at all. Is it needed anywhere? We have not yet considered the case of common nouns. These are supposed to have both connotation and denotation. *Man* is supposed to denote Smith, Brown, etc., and to connote humanity. We clearly cannot allow that *man* denotes Smith, etc. We can, if we like, say that, in our sense of denoting, common nouns—or, at any rate, their plurals—denote classes. But they denote them as wholes; they do not denote the separate members of the class. *Man* or *men* is not the proper name of Smith, though it is not unreasonable to call it the proper name of the class to which Smith and all other men belong. We can now accept Mill's meaning of connotation so long as we notice that it applies solely to common names. The connotation of *man* is the qualities which must be present in any member of the class which *man* denotes. But adjectives will have no connotation; they denote the

connotations of common nouns. Thus *human* or *humanity* has no connotation, but it denotes what *man* connotes. Another confusion is often made here. It is often thought that if a quality be analysable the simple constituents are the connotation of the name of the quality. Thus it would be quite usual to call rationality and animality the connotation of *human*. But the question whether a quality be simple or complex has nothing to do with the connotation of its name. In no case can we reasonably say that the name of a quality has a connotation.

We may sum up as follows: (1) All categorematic words have denotation. (2) Adjectives and the corresponding abstract nouns have the same denotation, viz. the quality of which they are the proper names. (3) The relation between an adjective and a substance which has the quality that the adjective denotes may be called *innotation*. Whatever we choose to call it, it is not denotation. (4) Adjectives and abstract nouns have no connotation whether the qualities which they denote be simple or complex. (5) Common nouns denote classes taken as wholes and not the members of these classes. They connote the qualities which all members of the class must have to be members of it. (6) In general we may say that an adjective *innotes* the members of the class which is denoted by the plural of the common noun whose connotation is the quality denoted by the adjective.

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A meeting of the MIND Association will be held in the President's lodgings at Corpus Christi College, Oxford, on Monday, 15th May, at 4.30 P.M.