In *The Magic Prism* Wettstein advocates for a radical change in the philosophy of language, from the traditional approach of prioritizing thought over language, to that of prioritizing language over thought. In the traditional outlook, reference is achieved by being cognitively mediated; the mind necessarily provides a mental representation, the cognitive fix, of the item in question.

The new approach, which Wettstein dubs *direct reference*, proposes that reference can be cognitively unmediated. That is, the mind does not have to provide a mental representation of the item in question. Wettstein’s thesis consequently is that: “The reference of words is not to be grounded in the mind’s grasp of things it thinks about. Quite the contrary, one of the ways we become equipped to think about things is by having words that as our practices go, stand for things.” (Wettstein 2004:4)

Wettstein’s arguments focus on those notions that are generally held by philosophers of language and grammarians to essentially involve mental representation. The notions examined include: propositions, names, indexical expressions (pronouns and demonstratives), indirect speech, belief content, and belief reports.

Wettstein first presents the diverse ways in which leading philosophers of the “traditional or representational” philosophy of language, especially Gottlob Frege and Bertrand Russell, describe propositions. He also presents the different ways in which the leading philosophers of “modern or direct reference” philosophers of language, including Ludwig Wittgenstein, David Kaplan, John S Mill, etc., described the above mentioned linguistic items. Wettstein then presents counterexamples for the views of traditional philosophy and also shows his dissatisfaction with some of the views of the pioneers of direct reference philosophy, whom he sees as having partly held onto the traditional thinking.
To challenge the mental representation requirement in the above notions, Wettstein raises several issues.

One issue Wettstein raises is indeterminacies created about the nature of propositions, from the conflicting descriptions of a proposition by the pioneering proponents of this notion. For example, Gottlob Frege considered sentential senses (propositions) to be thoughts themselves, complete mental representations of the items referred to. But Bertrand Russell considered propositions to include the mental representations of items and the items themselves. Furthermore, Wettstein raises the indeterminacies of the propositional form of a sentence, when uttered by different people, or at different times, or in different places—also the case where a sentence contains nonexistent objects, like Shakespeare’s fictional Hamlet. If a proposition were to be the mental picture of a sentence, how could Hamlet, who is nonexistent, feature in the proposition?

He also mentions the apparent absence of individuating information in the reference made by proper names and indexical expressions (e.g., John, he, that, etc., are associated with no particular mental picture and yet are used to refer to specific people or items).

Another issue is the apparent lack of relation between the reporter and content in indirect speech and belief reports. In “John said that…” or “John believed that…” the reporter is not asserting anything in the imbedded phrase; neither does he refer to anything. Hence Wettstein’s denial that there is a (mental) relational situation between the reporter and what is reported or believed.

These issues, and others not mentioned here, are what Wettstein presents to make a case for reference without active participation of the mind and takes a position on the above-mentioned items as follows: a) On propositions (applying also to belief contents): “Moreover, the idea of propositions seems out of sync with the direct reference antirepresentationalist tendency” (p. 230). b) On proper names (and descriptive names), he holds the idea that names are tags and stand for their bearers; they refer directly to the individuals. “A bearer is an assignee, and the job of the name is, as Mill says, simply to make its assignee a subject of discourse” (p. 86). c) On indirect discourse and belief reports, he writes: “To sum up I don’t take the embedded sentence of an indirect discourse report as a device of reference, nor do I take an indirect discourse sentences to be relational” (p. 202).

Wettstein’s overall position on the mental representation requirement is: “Direct reference, as I am developing it, is radically antirepresentational. Reference is seriously direct: No senses, no modes of presentation, not even characters-as-mini-modes-of-presentation or casual chains as mediators” (p. 221).

It is, however, worthy to note the following weaknesses about the issues that Wettstein raises on the items under investigation: First is that indeterminacy over the nature of propositions arises when a proposition is considered to be the thought itself, which is linguistically encoded in a sentence. This view is understood by many authorities on the subject to be inaccurate. A more plausible explanation is that sentences encode semantic representations which are incomplete logical forms as pointed out by Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson: “Sentence meanings are sets of semantic representations, as many semantic representations as there are ways in which the
sentence is ambiguous. Semantic representations are incomplete logical forms, i.e. at best fragmentary representations of thoughts” (Sperber and Wilson 1986:193).

The apparently inaccurate descriptions offered by Frege and Russell of propositions would therefore not be a strong enough reason to make the idea of a proposition questionable.

A second weakness is that the references made by names and indexical expressions in the absence of individuating information may be understood by the notion that some information is stored from a personalized viewpoint, as pointed out by Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson: “It seems plausible that in our internal language we often fix time and space references not in terms of universal co-ordinates, but in terms of a private logbook and an ego-centered map; furthermore most kinds of reference – to people or events for instance – can be fixed in terms of these private time and space co-ordinates” (Sperber and Wilson 1986:192).

A third weakness is with indirect discourse, translation, and belief reports. It ought to be observed that constructing a reporting sentence, including the imbedded clause, is essentially dependent on the reporter’s memory and entails mental representation. Consequently, indirect discourse, translation, belief reports, and reporting in general are explained more convincingly in terms of the interpretive dimension of language use. That is, that there is only a resemblance between the propositional form of the original thought and that of the clause used to represent it, as explained by Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson.

In his project to deny the mental representation requirement in reference, Wettstein mainly presents counterexamples against the traditional hypotheses that uphold mental representation. His explanations, however, have some weaknesses as pointed out. It would have been of help if he had proposed an illustrational model to support his hypothesis that language may function independent of the mind.

This work would benefit linguists and translators mainly at the theoretical level.

References