
Subject: Pointer Problem

Posted by [J.D. Smith](#) on Mon, 14 Jul 1997 07:00:00 GMT

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This is a possible pointer problem which may affect some of you. See what you think about the following code:

```
IDL> a=ptr_new()
IDL> print,ptr_valid(a)
0
IDL> help,*a
% Unable to dereference NULL pointer: A.
% Execution halted at: $MAIN$
IDL> b=ptr_new(notavalidvariable)
IDL> help,b
B          POINTER  = <PtrHeapVar2>
IDL> print,ptr_valid(b)
1
IDL> help,*b
<PtrHeapVar2>  UNDEFINED = <Undefined>
IDL> print,*b
% PRINT: Variable is undefined: <PtrHeapVar2>.
% Execution halted at: $MAIN$
```

Note here that 'notavalidvariable' is a fake, undefined variable. B is assigned to an undefined heap variable, as if /ALLOCATE_HEAP had been specified. Consequently, ptr_valid see's b as valid. This behavior is mildly irksome in that the convenience of assigning pointers without checking the contents of that which they are being assigned to is lost. It is also non-intuitive.

JD
