Synonymy Descriptivism

1. **Synonymy Descriptivism**:
   Synonymy Descriptivism is the view that:

   (i) Proper names are definite descriptions; but

   (ii) Proper names do not **look like** definite descriptions – they're disguised.

   (Kripke calls this the Frege-Russell view.)

   > Frege and Russell both thought, and seemed to arrive at these conclusions independently of each other, that Mill was wrong in a very strong sense: really a proper name, properly used, simply was a definite description abbreviated or disguised. Frege specifically said that such a description gave the sense of a name. (p. 27)

   (a) **What (i) means: Proper names refer by describing**: What it means to say that proper names are definite descriptions is **that they refer by describing**: A proper name refers to a certain individual in virtue of expressing a condition which singles that individual out. So: according to Descriptivism, 'Aristotle' refers to a certain person (rather than his father or his dog) in virtue of expressing a condition which singles that individual out (rather than his father or his dog).
   [**BLACKBOARD**]: Draw the inclusion cartoon.
   [**TERMINOLOGY**]: Call the condition expressed by a definite description its *associated condition*.
   [**Example**]: The associated condition of 'the shortest spy' is *being a spy shorter than any other spy*.

   (b) **What (ii) means: Proper names do not wear their associated conditions on their face**: The associated conditions for most definite descriptions is plain to see. The associated condition for 'the man who corrupted Hadleyburg' is: *being a man who corrupted Hadleyburg*. The associated condition for 'the richest student at UVM' is: *being a person at UVM richer than any other person at UVM*. If Descriptivism is true, then there are some definite descriptions whose associated condition is not so easy to determine. What, for instance, is the associated condition for

'Aristotle'?

definite description	**associated condition**
"the man who corrupted Hadleyburg"	*being a man who corrupted Hadleyburg*
"the richest person at UVM"	*being a person at UVM richer than any other person at UVM*
"Aristotle"	***???***

(c) **Kripke's account of association**:
[**TERMINOLOGY**]: An *account of association* provides a general specification of which condition is associated with a given proper name.
For instance, an account of association will tell us which condition is associated with 'Aristotle'.

> [O]rdinary names refer to all sorts of people, to whom we can't possibly point. And our reference here seems to be determined by our knowledge of them. Whatever we know about them determines the referent of the name as the unique thing satisfying those properties. For example, if I use the name 'Napoleon', and someone asks, 'To whom are you referring?', I will answer something like, 'Napoleon was emperor of the French in the early part of the nineteenth century; he was eventually defeated at Waterloo', thus giving a uniquely identifying description to determine the referent of the name. (p. 28)

2. **The Contrast View: Millianism**: Kripke contrasts Descriptivism with a view that he attributes to Mill, according to which proper names have "denotation, but no connotation". (He qualifies Mill's view to suggest that, though some names might have connotations for some people, those connotations are irrelevant to the semantic theory of the name.)
VIA NEGATIVA: Millianism is not characterized positively by Kripke. Instead, it is characterized as the idea that names do not refer in the way that definite descriptions do. Thus, Millianism, as characterized by Kripke, does nothing to provide a positive answer to the question of the semantic bond. It just tells us that a Descriptivist answer to that question is wrong.

   Kripke tells us that Descriptivism is wrong, even though Mil-

lianism doesn't have Descriptivism's explanatory power.

> It would be nice to answer all of these arguments. I am not entirely able to see my way clear through every problem of this sort that can be raised. Furthermore, I'm pretty sure that I won't have time to discuss all these questions in these lectures. Nevertheless, I think it's pretty certain that the view of Frege and Russell is false. (p. 29)

3. **The importance of an account of association**: Descriptivism cannot be assessed without an account of association. An account of association tells us in general which condition is expressed by a given proper name. If we do not know which condition is associated with a given proper name, then we cannot answer the question of the semantic bond for that name.

   Suppose somebody told us that the proper name 'Aristotle' is associated with **some condition or other** which singles out its referent. Then we wouldn't know **how the name got associated** with that particular condition, or **why that condition** (rather than, say, one singling out Plato) got associated with the name. We want to know the mechanism by which a name is bound to a certain referent, and the Descriptivist simply hasn't explained the mechanism if he hasn't explained how a name comes to express whatever condition it ends up expressing.

   And if we have no **general** specification of which conditions get associated with names, then we will not have a **general** answer to the question of the semantic bond.

4. **Kripke's two accounts of association**:

   (a) **Knowledge**: A condition C is associated with a name N by a speaker S iff C contains everything S knows about the referent of N.

   (b) **Little Lecture**: A condition C is associated with a name N by a speaker S iff S expresses C in response to the question, 'To whom, or what, do you refer by your use of the name N?'

   Problems with the Knowledge account:

(a) **All knowledge expressed by proper names turns out to be (nearly) analytic**. For instance,

(1) Napoleon was emperor of the French.

turns out to be a disguise for

(2) The emperor of the French in the early part of the 19^{th} century who was defeated at Waterloo was emperor of the French.

(2) is (nearly) analytic, so (1) is too, on Synonymy Descriptivism + the Knowledge account. This is implausible.

(b) **Circularity?** The condition depends on us having an independent means of referring to the right person, so that we have **knowledge about** Aristotle that can ground our reference to him. So: at best, it just fobs off the question of the semantic bond onto a similar question regarding our knowledge; and at worst the account is circular, insofar as our having knowledge about Aristotle depends on our have a name which refers to him. (This concern is David Kaplan's; I have never seen to the bottom of it.)

Problems with the Little Lecture account:

(a) **You haven't given that many lectures**: you use lots of proper names, without having been asked to give a little lecture about them. You, for instance, have probably never been asked, 'To whom or what do you refer by your use of the name 'Dave Purcell'?'
PROPOSED SOLUTION: go dispositional.

(b) **People are crazy**: Who knows what somebody will do when asked to whom or what they refer by their use of 'Aristotle'? Maybe he picks his nose; Maybe he just refuses to answer; maybe he entertains himself by making shit up.
PROPOSED SOLUTION: idealize, idealize, idealize.

5. **A variation: cluster theory**: Many (Searle, Wittgenstein) have felt that it is too simplistic to think that the referent of a name must satisfy **a single condition** associated with a proper name (p. 31). Instead, they say, we associate a number of conditions, *e.g.* with 'Aristotle', and the name refers to an individual in virtue of that individual's satisfying most of those conditions. [**BLACKBOARD**]: Draw the Aristotle cartoon.

(CLUSTER THEORY) A speaker S's use of a proper name N refers to an individual x in virtue of x's satisfying most of the conditions $C_1, C_2, C_3, \ldots$ S associates with N.

BUT NOTICE: Cluster theory can be assimilated to Synonymy Descriptivism; Cluster theory claims, in effect, that a proper name like 'Aristotle' expresses the condition:

(3) The individual who satisfies most of: $C_1, C_2, C_3, \ldots$.

Thus, there's really nothing new in (CLUSTER THEORY).

6. **Synonymy Descriptivism and the semantic bond**: The answer to the question of the semantic bond is: a use of a proper name refers to an individual in virtue of expressing a condition which singles that individual out. The condition expressed by a given use of a proper name is the one associated with the name by the speaker. [FILL IN YOUR FAVORITE ACCOUNT OF ASSOCIATION HERE.]

   The four puzzles:

   (a) **The parrot vs. the child**: The child associates a condition with her use of 'Aristotle'. The parrot does not.

   (b) **Newman1**: The *singling out* relation between a certain (future) individual and the condition, *being the first child born in the* 22^{nd} *century* is not causal, so the semantic bond can be future-oriented without invoking some weird kind of backwards causation.

   (c) **Objects outside our light-cone**: likewise, the semantic bond can connect objects outside our light cone without invoking some weird kind of "faster-than-light" causation.

   (d) **Reference-Switching**: reference can switch when speakers associate different descriptions with old names.

Louis deRosset – Spring 2011

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2. **The Contrast View: Millianism**: names do not refer by describing; they just **tag**.

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   PROPOSED SOLUTION: go dispositional.

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   PROPOSED SOLUTION: idealize, idealize, idealize.

   Reformulated Little Lecture: A condition C is associated with a name N by a speaker S iff S **would express** C in response to the question, 'To whom, or what, do you refer by your use of the name N?' **if she were sincere, cooperative, sane, not too busy, *etc.***

5. **A variation: cluster theory**

   (CLUSTER THEORY) A speaker S's use of a proper name N refers to an individual x in virtue of x's satisfying most of the conditions $C_1, C_2, C_3, \ldots$ S associates with N.

   There's nothing new in Cluster Theory:
   (3) The individual who satisfies most of: $C_1, C_2, C_3, \ldots$.

6. **Synonymy Descriptivism and the semantic bond**

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