The Argument from Empirical Inadequacy

1. **A consequence of any form of Descriptivism**:

   (CONSEQUENCE) If a speaker S uses a name N to refer to some individual x, then S associates some condition with N that singles out some individual or other.

   This consequence follows from the claim that a name refers to an individual in virtue of being associated by its user with a condition which singles that individual out.

2. **Add in the Little Lecture Account of Association**:
   Together with (CONSEQUENCE) the Little Lecture account of association implies::

   (SUFFICIENT INFO) If a speaker S uses a name N to refer to some individual x, then S's little lecture that she would offer (under ideal circumstances) would contain enough information to single out some individual or other.

   Thus, **any** form of Descriptivism, added to the Little Lecture account of association, implies (SUFFICIENT INFO). (CHALLENGE: Can you draw the corresponding consequence for the Knowledge Account of association?)

3. **Insufficient Information**:
   Speakers use names to refer to individuals, even though they do not associate enough information with those names to single anything out at all.

   > The average person, according to [Descriptivism], when he refers to Cicero, is saying something like 'the man who denounced Cataline' and thus has picked out a certain man uniquely. It is a tribute to the education of philosophers that they have held this thesis for such a long time. In fact, most people, when they think of Cicero, just think of *a famous Roman orator*, without any pretension to think either that there was only one famous Roman orator or that one must know something else about Cicero to have a referent for the name. (pp. 80-1)

4. **The Argument From Empirical Inadequacy**:
   Any form of Descriptivism we have discussed so far, wedded to the Little Lecture account of association, implies (SUFFICIENT INFO). But (SUFFICIENT INFO) is, as an empirical matter, false. For instance, competent users of 'Cicero' may use that name to refer to Cicero, even though on prompting (under ideal circumstances) they would not give enough information to single Cicero or anyone else out. Hence (SUFFICIENT INFO) is false, and thus any form of Descriptivism.

5. **What's in the Language-User's Mind**:
   In my view, the argument from empirical inadequacy is the most powerful (and simplest) of all of Kripke's objections to Descriptivism. The reason is that the argument does not target some ancillary consequence of the Descriptivist view (*e.g.* for modality or *a priority*); nor does it turn on the question of whether you can be totally and completely wrong about something. Instead, it seems to indicate that the entire Descriptivist strategy for answering the question of the semantic bond is on the wrong track.
   The Descriptivist Strategy is: answer the question of the semantic bond by looking ***in the language-user's mind*** for information that will single out some individual as the referent.
   [**BLACKBOARD**]: Draw the "head" cartoon.
   Kripke's argument, if successful, shows that this strategy simply will not explain the semantic bond in all (or even most) cases. The language-user's mind is the wrong place to look.
   Slogan from Putnam: "Slice the pie any way you like, [what determines reference] ain't in the head!"

6. **Another, more famous, argument**: [I believe this argument is more complicated (and hence less convincing), however.] Since the information in the language-user's mind does not suffice to single out the referent of the name, there is a situation, just like the actual situation, in which things (otherwise) seem just the same to the language-user, but his name refers to Cato instead. This sort of argument is called a 'twin Earth' argument.
   [**BLACKBOARD**]: Draw the "twin Earth" cartoon.

   (a) **The Twin-Earth Scenario**: There is a situation, just

like the actual situation, in which things (otherwise) seem just the same to the language-user, but her use of the name 'Cicero' refers to Cato instead.

(b) **Same Info**: The ***independently characterized*** information in the language-users mind is the same in the two situations, actual and Twin-Earth.

(c) **Conclusion**: The referent of the language-user's name is not (independently) singled out by the information in her mind.

7. **Does Deference Help?**:
Recall that part of a Descriptivist response to the semantic argument involved *deference*: a language-user's associating a condition with a name that referred to someone else's use of the name. In our little story, for instance, Jen associated with 'Vanilli' the condition expressed by "the individual to whom Peter's use of 'Vanilli' refers." [**BLACKBOARD**]: Draw the chain cartoon.

It seems to me that deference does not help, because, as an empirical matter, that's not the answer that normal speakers would produce if they were prompted to give a Little Lecture (even under ideal circumstances). Empirically speaking, most people just don't ever think or know very much about the uses they and others make of words. And most of the time they have no idea who to defer to anyway.

> I may then say [following Strawson's deference strategy], 'Look, by 'Gödel' I shall mean the man Joe thinks proved the incompleteness of arithmetic'. Joe may then pass the thing over to Harry. [. . .] If you could be sure yourself of knowing such a chain, and that everyone else in the chain is using the proper conditions and so is not getting out of it, then maybe you could get back to the man by referring to such a chain in that way, borrowing the references one by one. However, although in general such chains do exist for a living man, you won't know what the chain is. You won't be sure what description the other man is using, so the thing won't go into a circle, or whether by appealing to Joe you won't get back to the right man at all. [. . .] You may not even remember from whom you heard of Gödel. (p. 90)

There are four problems with the deference strategy here:

(a) **The threat of circularity**: perhaps the chain of deference comes around in a circle. No explanation would be given for the semantic bond.
[**BLACKBOARD**]: Draw the circle cartoon.

(b) **Missing Memory**: you may not know or remember to whom you should defer.

(c) **Mistaken "Memory"**: you may misremember the person to whom you should defer.

(d) **Empirical Inadequacy**: Jen's case is rather special. As a matter of fact, it would not occur to most people (even on reflection) to give the deferential answer.

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   (**PUTNAM'S SLOGAN**) Slice the pie any way you like, [what determines reference] ain't in the head!

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