Lecture 1
Descriptivism & Objections

1. <u>**The Dialectic**</u>

Millian theory of names	names have **no meaning beyond their referents**
Objection: Problem of **empty names**	Meaningless propositions or inflated ontology
Objection: **Frege's puzzle**	Identity statements between two names for the same object turn out to be tautologies.
Descriptive theory of names	names are veiled descriptions
Causal theory of names	names get their meaning in virtue of their causal history

2. <u>**Russell's Descriptivism**</u>
   - Names are **veiled definite descriptions**.
   - E.g 'Mary Wollstonecraft' *means* 'the Enlightenment philosopher who wrote *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*'. Formally:

$$\exists x \forall y((Px \wedge Vx) \leftrightarrow x = y)$$

Problems, Solved.
   - **Empty names**
     - Names have meaning in virtue of expressing a quantified statement.
     - They merely express a *false* statement.

   - **Identity statements**
     - Names may express **different descriptions**
     - It can be contingently true that each description picks out the same object.

3. <u>**Objections to Russellian Descriptivism**</u>

Descriptions and Entailment
On Russell's descriptivism, there must be a description that applies to one and only one individual.

<u>Problem</u>:
Suppose for the sake of example that the following is a uniquely referring description of Mary Wollstonecraft (call it '**MW**' for ease of reference):

The person who was an Enlightenment philosopher,
who wrote *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*,
who wrote *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters,*
and
who was the mother of Mary Shelley.

$$\exists x \forall y((Px \wedge Vx \wedge Tx \wedge Mx) \leftrightarrow x = y)$$

Suppose someone says the following sentence:

(Eng) Mary Wollstonecraft was English.

On Descriptivism:
   - (Eng) *entails* MW
   - If I believe MW to hold of Mary Wollstonecraft, and I assert (Eng), **I also assert MW**

Ambiguity
We know (of) individuals under many different descriptions.

On descriptivism, it follows that: every name will be ***wildly ambiguous*** between any number of different referring descriptions.

Problem:

Suppose some philosophy student (P) knows Mary Wollstonecraft under the description:

'the author of *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*'.

Suppose some English student (E) knows Wollstonecraft under the description:

'the mother of Mary Shelley'.

Suppose they each assert the following (respectively):

P$_1$: *Mary Wollstonecraft was not born in London.*
E$_1$: *Mary Wollstonecraft was born in London.*

On Descriptivism, these are equivalent to:

P$_2$: *The author of* A Vindication of the Rights of Woman *was not born in London*.
E$_2$: *The mother of Mary Shelley was born in London.*

P$_1$ and E$_1$ are logically **inconsistent**, but P$_2$ and E$_2$ are logically **consistent**.

Kripke's Modal Objection

(1) Mary Wollstonecraft might not have written *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*.

(2) Someone else could have written *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*.

✖ (3) Mary Wollstonecraft might not have been Mary Wollstonecraft.

✖ (4) Someone else could have been Mary Wollstonecraft.

Important Notion: **Rigid designation**

A is a **rigid designator** iff
A refers to the same object at all possible worlds.

Problem:

On descriptivism, (1) and (2) **collapse** into (3) and (4).

To say (1) just is to say (3), since 'Mary Wollstonecraft' *means* (among other things) 'the person who wrote *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*'.

Kripke's Epistemic Objection

(5) If the author of *A Vindication* exists, then the author of *A Vindication* is the author of *A Vindication*.

(6) If the author of *A Vindication* exists, then Mary Wollstonecraft is the author of *A Vindication*.

(5) is **knowable a priori** and (6) is not.

Problem:

On descriptivism, (6) means (5). So, if descriptivism is true (6) is knowable a priori.

Kripke's Semantic Objection
Observation:
We can successfully refer to someone even when we know them under a *false* **description**.

E.g. Many people think that Aretha Franklin is the writer of the song "Respect" when in fact Otis Redding wrote the song.

Problem:

Suppose S, who holds this (mistaken) belief, says:

"Aretha Franklin was a great singer."

On descriptivism, this will mean:

'The writer of the song "Respect" was a great singer.'

So, S refers to Otis Redding when they use 'Aretha Franklin'.

If the **observation** is right, then descriptivism is false.

True Claims about Fictional Entities

Intuitively, a proposition like the following one is true:

Luke Skywalker lived on Tatooine.

Problem:

On descriptivism, this is equivalent to:

There exists exactly one person who was
Anakin's son, and who trained with Yoda,
and that person lived on Tatooine.

This proposition is false.

If two propositions have different truth-values, then they are not logically equivalent.

So, 'Luke Skywalker lived on Tatooine' is not equivalent to this quantified expression.