Empiricists, especially twentieth-century empiricists, have typically accepted a certain conventionalist epistemological doctrine. The doctrine can be put as follows: The meaning of a predicate can be stipulated by definition. When this is done, the people who have given the definitions as well as anyone who understands the definitions come to have two epistemological privileges. They can know the truth of certain statements about the world "independently of experience," or "a priori," or "without empirical investigation." And they can know these statements to be true incorrigibly; that is, with a degree of assurance that no evidence gained by empirical observation could override. Both of these privileges supposedly result from the fact that if, say, I have stipulated that sets are to be called 'totally ordered' if and only if they have the properties $G$ and $H$, I can then know that all totally ordered sets are $G$ simply by reflecting upon my stipulative convention. This requires no empirical investigation, so I have the first privilege. All it does require is scrutiny of my own mental states, in this case my having mentally accepted a rule for applying a term, and all such judgments about one's own immediate mental states can be known incorrigibly according to the Cartesian tradition upon which empiricism was built. I shall call precisely the view I have just described "empiricist conventionalism."

It was also typical of empiricism to treat all meaningful predicates as though they had been stipulatively defined, so that the simple this-is-what-it-means definitions of terms in a mathematics textbook were viewed as paradigm cases of linguistic conventions in general. This oversimplified conception of the system of conventions which give a term meaning in a natural language led empiricists to extend the epistemological privileges supposedly available in the case of stipulatively defined terms to the general case of all meaningful predicates, including such favorites as 'bachelor', which almost certainly was
never stipulatively defined. "Analytic" truths were everywhere, and knowledge both a priori and incorrigible could be had on literally any subject. It might be boring, but it was easy to get and unshakeably grounded.

Attacks on the notion of analyticity by Quine, Putnam and others have been almost entirely attacks on the empiricist assimilation of all predicate meaning to the case of stipulated predicate meaning. For instance, if many predicates in fact express law-cluster concepts, they will not have internalizable definitions which enable someone to enjoy the epistemological privileges just mentioned. Recent attacks on the empiricists' philosophy of language have not been attacks on the more limited doctrine I am calling empiricist conventionalism, the doctrine that stipulative definition can, in principle, enable language-users to have a priori and incorrigible knowledge of the extramental world at a very cheap price. It is thus no surprise to find a close analogue of empiricist conventionalism emerging in recent work on the philosophy of language by Kripke, Donnellan and others. The new doctrine concerns the stipulation of referents for names and other singular terms, rather than meanings of predicates. But it is the same old doctrine nonetheless, or so I shall argue. I shall also argue that the new conventionalist doctrine is false. I believe very similar arguments would show the empiricist conventionalist doctrine false in the case of stipulated predicate meaning as well, but I shall not give those arguments here.

II

Saul Kripke will be my star example of a new conventionalist. But before discussing Kripke's views I want to lay some of the groundwork for my reply by switching to an idea due to Gerald Massey. Massey characterizes some predicates as "preceptive."

Preceptive predicates are a class of predicates whose reference is determined in a way rather like what goes on with proper names or demonstratives, but which, arguably, have an ordinary "intensional" component of meaning invariant through changes in reference-fixing policy. There are many examples of such predicates, e.g., "illegal," "x-rated," "married," "out" or "safe." What is illegal and what is not will vary from occasion to occasion according to the lawmaking activity of legislators, and who is out or safe will vary from occasion to occasion according to the calls of umpires. But 'illegal' unlike 'John' or 'this' has a fixed meaning. Such predicates are particularly important