Kripke's alternative picture of reference (91-97)

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We began this discussion by noting several arguments in favor of the classical theory of names. One of these which seemed particularly powerful was that it gives a story about how the reference of names is determined. Kripke reiterates this argument on p. 80.

Recall that the puzzle was to explain how our words get linked up with referents: how we manage to connect symbols with the things they refer to. The descriptivist answer was that names are connected with their referents via a process of association: speakers associate the names with certain properties (in the form of a description), and the name refers to whatever object in the world has those properties. This is an elegant picture, but we have already seen that it has several important defects. Recall the semantic argument in its different forms: no object, many objects, wrong object.

So how does the reference of a name get fixed? Kripke discusses the example of how a the reference of a speaker's use of the name 'Richard Feynman' might get fixed:

> 'Someone, let's say a baby, is born; his parents call him by a certain name. They talk about him to their friends. Other people meet him. Through various sorts of talk the name is spread from link to link as if by a chain. A speaker who is on the far end of this chain, who has heard about, say Richard Feynman in the market place or somewhere, may be referring to Richard Feynman [through his use of name 'Richard Feynman'] even though he can't remember from whom he first heard of Feynman or from whom he ever heard of Feynman. ...A certain passage of communication reaching ultimately to the man himself does reach the speaker. He then is referring to Feynman even though he can't identify him uniquely. He doesn't know what a Feynman diagram is ...Not only that: he'd have trouble distinguishing between Feynman and Gell-Mann. So he doesn't have to know these things, but, instead, a chain of communication going back to Feynman himself has been established, by virtue of his membership in a community which passed the name on from link to link, not by

a ceremony that he makes in private in his study: 'By 'Feynman' I shall mean the man who did such and such and such and such'.' (91-2)

He returns to the view a few pages later:

> 'A rough statement of a theory might be the following: An initial 'baptism' takes place. Here the object may be named by ostension, or the reference of the name may be fixed by a description. When the name is 'passed from link to link', the receiver of the name must, I think, intend when he learns it to use it with the same reference as the man from whom he heard it. If I hear the name 'Napoleon' and decide it would be a nice name for my pet aardvark, I do not satisfy this condition ...' (97)

This effectively divides the theory of reference into two parts: questions about initial fixation of reference, and questions about maintenance of reference.

A difference in kind between Kripke's explanation of reference and that of the descriptivist: one is given in terms of social facts about linguistic communities, and one in terms of facts about the psychologies of individual language users. This seems to show that what you mean by your words is determined by facts external to you. This seems also to apply to your thoughts. Is this puzzling?

Note that we can do the same thing with predicates. The examples of 'arthritis' and 'tharthritis.'