# AN ANALYSIS OF RESEMBLANCE

BY

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# INTRODUCTION

THERE are two main strains of effort in the present essay. One of these is concerned to present what the essay is not about. It is not about any sense of resemblance in which that term is used by thinkers generally and widely called Hegelian Idealists. Several chapters have been devoted to bringing out that point.

The other main aim of this essay is to advance an analysis of four senses of resemblance. Two of these senses would seem to be radical—in the etymological sense of the term. The remaining two senses are derivative.

The concluding pages of this essay advance some considerations in the matter of universals and taxonomy.

R.W.C.

*Santa Barbara*
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CHAPTER I

# SOME PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

IT is not difficult to agree that one of our most frequent mental acts is that of making a comparison. Not all of the comparisons we make are voluntary or deliberate. Many, if not most of them, are habitual; so much so that any habitual comparison is an all but unconscious act.

No more is it difficult to agree that only comparable matters may be compared. If and only if experiences are similar or resembling are they comparable. Any two experiences not resembling in any respect at all would be different in every respect. No two experiences which are not resembling in at least one respect would be comparable in any respect. Experiences that were different in every respect could be contrasted with each other in every respect; but they could not be compared in any respect.

It suffices to underline the fact that comparison is of basic importance to the ways of everyday life as well as to the procedures of experimental science, to indicate one reason why it is remarkable that comparatively little attention has been given to the *sine qua non* of comparison. More than a few philosophers have insisted on the reality of universals, and that in diverse senses of the term. Yet it would seem that the least a universal could be in any sense (other than that of the concrete universal) would be a "somewhat" in respect of which instances or cases of it are resembling. "Colour", we are assured, is the name of a universal; something that is common to all colours. Yet to say of a "somewhat" that it is common to things x to n is to say that those things are resembling in respect of that something or other. Thus things that are coloured are resembling in respect of being coloured.

If two things were not resembling in being coloured,

as in the case of a scent and that of a scream, it would be false to say that they are coloured. If no experiences had anything in common, every experience would be unique. And whatever is unique is unmatched: it bears no resemblance to anything else. Were every experience unique in every respect there would be no resemblances whatever; and, for that reason alone, there could be no universals.

It may seem to labour the obvious to remind ourselves that some of us sometimes say that we compare experiences that are (it is claimed) strictly the same, as experiences. This claim is denied by all true-blue Hegelians and it is at least challenged by Pragmatists of several varieties. The denial of the Heglians is a matter of principle, and one with which we shall be concerned in a subsequent chapter. The challenge of the Pragmatists seems to rest on confusion as to what is affirmed by those who find two experiences to be strictly the same in some respect, or in some respects or other.

Thus it is sometimes pointed out that rarely if ever are two peas in a pod exactly the same. And so with apples and paintings and insects. Two apples may at first glance seem to be the same, we are reminded, but on closer examination they are found to be different in several respects. Any painting that is deservedly called great is different from any other one. Even the two *Virgin of the Rocks*, if they could be brought together and compared, probably would be found to be different from one another in several respects. And so on, from example to example.

Yet it ought to be fairly plain that a man who affirms that two Morningcloak butterflies are the same is not necessarily saying that they are the same in every respect. These two Morningcloaks are the same, he finds, in two characteristic respects; namely, the neural structure of the wings, and the shade of brown they present. In order that there may be experiences that are strictly the same in some respect or other, it is not necessary that any two experiences should be the same in all respects. Two patches of hue, for example, may be strictly the *same* in



chroma, while at the same time and in the same context they are different in saturation and intensity.

Another source of confusion in this connection derives from what may be called the argument from circumstance. A limitless amount of evidence may be adduced in support of the conclusion that circumstances alter cases. On the basis of that conclusion it is sometimes urged that no two experiences could be strictly the same. On Thursday a man looks at an etching by Picasso. On the following Monday he looks at it again. But in the meantime he has broken his collar bone and various other things have happened to him. He is not the same person. Consequently, it is said, his experience on Monday cannot possibly be the same as that on Thursday.

This conclusion may be highly probable. But it is not certain. If the conclusion in question were amended to read that it is hardly likely that the experience on Monday would be strictly the same as that of Thursday it might recommend itself on the basis of what we call common sense. The broken collar bone might have jaundiced the man's outlook.

But the proponents of the argument from circumstance do not advance it as a matter of common sense, or even of probability. They put it forward as affording proof that no two experiences can be the same in any respect. The argument in question assumes many familiar forms. Since the light from the sun (it is argued) is incessantly changing in intensity, it is impossible that anyone should see strictly the same hue at any two times during the day. As the shadows begin to fall, what was a hue of one intensity and saturation is then a hue of a different intensity and saturation.

One point, among several others, that this line of argument overlooks is simply this. The decline in the intensity of the sunlight could be compensated for by introducing into $t_2$ a hue of that much higher chromatic intensity. Thus at $t_2$ a man could perceive a hue that was strictly the same in intensity and saturation as the one he perceived at $t_1$.

It is indeed obvious, that alterations in the intensity of light will cause alterations in the hue of any perceived area. But to infer from this that at different times, or at the same time, no two hues could be the same, is to indulge in a *non sequitur*. The most that could follow is that at no two times of the day could the same perceived area exhibit the same hue. But even that much would follow if, but only if, there were no comparing factors. Imagine, for example, that you are watching the sun rise over the bay of Santa Barbara. At dawn the sea is the colour of azurite and it is very still. As the sun rises that blue shades off as the light brightens until it is of the light vivid blue of ultramarine. Then the wind comes up and, in a few minutes, the choppy sea is the colour of azurite again.

The argument from circumstances goes much too far, even in principle. It is an irrefragable fact that circumstances alter cases. Hues are altered by alterations in their contexts; the usual taste of an article of food is changed by a cold in the head, and so on. But these facts are matters of fact, not principles known *a priori*. They are facts which support an inductive generalization. The point alone that the argument from circumstances is inductive should suffice to show that it could not demonstrate that no two experiences *may* be the same in some respect or other. At best, the argument in question enunciates a useful rule of thumb.

The generalization that circumstances alter cases could be demonstrated *a priori* if and only if it were taken that every possible difference, whether spatial, temporal, or numerical made a difference to the content of whose context those differences would be aspects. This is indeed the case on Bradley's theory of relations, as on Hegel's doctrine of essence. On those views there are no experiences that are strictly the same. The appeal to an Hegelian dialectic as the ground upon which strict similarity is denied is the concern of a subsequent chapter. The argument from circumstances would seem to be an inductive version of the internality of relations. And that argument fails to prove as much as some of its proponents allege, in so far as it falls



short of committing itself to the full provisions of the theory that all relations are internal.

Presumably it is clear that no inductive generalization could demonstrate that strict similarity is impossible. For no induction could canvass all possibilities. Those who assert that no two experiences can be strictly the same do not seem to realize one of the consequences of their assertion. If no two experiences are the same in any respect, then any experience is unique in every respect. Now it is easy to slur over this consequence of the denial of strict similarity, or exact resemblance, by saying, "Oh, well, in some respects any experience will be unique." But that is not exactly the point. It is not asserted that experiences are unique in *some* respects. Rather, it is held that no two experiences may be the same in any respect. This is to say that in all experience there are not two experiences that are the same in any respect. Then all experiences are different from each other in every repect. If all experiences are different from each other in every respect, then all experiences are unique—not in some but in *all* respects.

Thus the fond husband who kissed his wife good-bye as he went off to work would be parting with her literally forever, as she would be parting with him. Returning that evening to a home that was quite different from the one he knew that morning he might presume to find someone there, though whether she could answer to the same name, or even be a woman at all would be more than doubtful in a world in which nothing were the same as anything else. In such a world there could not be two pins that were the same in any respect, or two needles. There could be only one pin and one needle. And the pin would be different in all respects from everything else, as would the needle.

It is easy to imagine that in some quarters the foregoing considerations will be dismissed as dialectic; in the academic as distinguished from the etymological sense of the term. Yet they are but a simple elucidation of one of the consequences of the categorical denial of exact resemblance or

strict similarity. Where being the same is declared impossible, no two things can be the same in any respect.

More than a few matters analogous to those considered above will be among the topics of subsequent chapters. Still, at this juncture it may be well to give a strict statement of what is being denied by the denial of exact resemblance. To say that $b_1$ resembles $b_2$ exactly is to say that $b_1$ and $b_2$ are strictly the same in quality or character. And to say that $b_1$ and $b_2$ are strictly the same in quality is to say that $b_1$ and $b_2$ are quite identical in point of quality or character. Thus exact resemblance means what is meant by strict similarity which means what is meant by qualitative identity.

Another step is requisite that the statement of exact resemblance, as so far made, may be brought out more fully. Presumably it is evident that $b_1$ is enumerably one, and that $b_2$ is enumerably one. $b_1$ and $b_2$ are two cases of b. That $b_1$ resembles $b_2$ exactly means that $b_1$ and $b_2$ are strictly the same in quality or character, and this means that $b_1$ and $b_2$ are identical in quality or character. Yet, though $b_1$ and $b_2$ are identical in point of quality or character, $b_1$ and $b_2$ are numerically different: they are two, not one.

Exact resemblance, we have noticed, means what is meant by the strict similarity of any two items that are strictly the same, which means what is meant by their being identical in quality or character. Conversely, their being identical in quality means what is meant by the strict similarity of any two items that are strictly the same, which means what is meant by their exact resemblance. Thus we may see that any exact resemblance is a qualitative identity distributed in at least two cases of itself.

At this juncture it may be well to point out that the foregoing statement of the meaning of exact resemblance says nothing at all about substantial identity, or the persisting identity of a continuant throughout changes in its qualities and relations. Only the qualities and relations of the continuant are here in question.

One of the more common complaints levelled at those



who find exact resemblances in their experiences is that they are insensitive to differences. Thus we may be assured by Professor X that whenever he looks at an area he finds therein diverse hues, and delicate gradations of those diverse hues. Upon being asked whether or not he can match a skein of wool for his wife at the knit shop, he may reply impatiently, "Yes, of course;" then, rather guardedly, " Well, of course, not quite, not quite." Far from being a mere evasion, this revision of opinion pertinaciously clings to evidence that cannot advisedly be ignored.

Consider that (for some of us, at any rate) two cases of the same kind of red are resembling or the same. This is to say that these two cases of red are the same in chroma, intensity, and saturation. Now consider that an orange hue resembles a red. Yet an orange hue is not the same as a red hue.

Thus we may notice that there are at least two distinct senses of "resemblance". There is the sense in which two cases of the same hue resemble each other in being exactly the same. And there is the sense in which two hues, such as orange and red, are resembling though diverse.

Now anyone who concentrates his attention on hues that resemble each other in this second sense of the term resemblance may easily come to feel that such resemblances alone are natural and concrete, whereas exact resemblances are factitious and abstract. And since a man's everyday experience of hues abounds in ranges of greens and blues and browns, any feeling that continuous gradations in shades is the rule is natural in that it is habitual. Any occurrence of two cases of the same hue, as in the chroma of two five-cent stamps is, if you like, the exception.

But it would be a mistake to presume that a range of apple green from dark to medium light is natural or concrete, whereas two cases of any one shade of that range of greens is factitious. Presumably any experience, whether it be a range of dark blues, or two cases of azurite of the same saturation and intensity is factitious; for both are

made or produced; they do not just happen. Ranges of hues in gradation are comparatively familiar; they are all around us, here and there; whereas to anyone not given to looking often at postage stamps of the same denomination, beetles of the same species and variety, or paintings of a single period, examples of two cases of the same hue, or repeated patterns and designs in the same hues, are exceptional, not familiar. Therefore they may strike his attention with the force of aroused curiosity, thus to seem odd and a little forced.

Any shade in any range of hues may be repeated exactly, so long as the causal conditions of that repetition are ensured. Any shade of ultramarine from high light to dark may be repeated over and over again. The life of the forger in egg-tempera would be less simple if this were not so. If no shade within the reds which we loosely call brick red could be repeated exactly, then the brick reds available would be exhausted in that range. For, *ex hypothesi*, there may not be two cases of any brick red. Let us take it that there are seven hundred and fifty brick reds. Then after each one of these had appeared once, there could not be another brick red hue.

There are those who, being impressed by the nicety of the subtlety with which nuances of shades may be deployed, stand on this as evidence that no hues resemble each other exactly. It might have been better for their cause had they put their point the other way around. In the second of our two senses of "resemblance", subtle nuances may resemble each other very closely indeed. Yet this does not even tend to demonstrate that a nuance, however, subtle, could not appear twice. The shade of auburn called "Titian" has never been closely plagiarized; but (for some of us at least) it exists in more than one of Titian's paintings. Whenever and wherever in a man's visual experience there is no difference between the hue (say) of the one border of an expanse and the hue of the other border of it, then the two hues resemble each other in being exactly the same.



So far it has been pointed out that the term resemblance is equivocal. In one of the two primary senses, resemblance is used with reference to charateristics that are exactly the same. When used in this sense, the term designates a qualitative identity that is repeated in at least two cases of itself.

Now no qualitative identity may be a matter of degree. Each quality is what it is, and is not another characteristic. To say that a qualitative identity might be itself to this degree and not itself but something else to that degree, is to fly in the face of the Law of Identity.

Yet we do compare diverse characteristics as resembling each other more or less. In all these cases, the terms of comparison may not be exact resemblances; for exact resemblances do not resemble each other more or less. We compare characteristics as resembling each other more or less as we compare an orange hue with a red. An orange hue is more like a red than a blue. A sour taste is more like a bitter one than a cloyingly sweet taste. Middle C is more like C-sharp than G. This is to say that degrees of resemblance are comprised within the second one of our two basic senses of "resemblance".

It is perhaps plain that any item in any range of resemblance may be repeated in several cases of itself. Thus a pattern of hues may present several cases of azurite of the same chroma, intensity, and saturation. The same pattern might present other and diverse blues. Thus both basic senses of the term resemblance may be illustrated by the same experience.

For reasons with which we shall be concerned at length in the course of subsequent chapters, we habitually speak and write as though there were but one red, one orange, one yellow and so on. Thus we say that the grass is green, the sky is blue, that tomatoes are red, and that the wall is grey. Although this is convenient, it is also misleading. We understand, of course, that "red" actually designates diverse shades; that there is no hue alone that is properly called "red"; and we understand as much about the other

constituents of the analogous order of hues. A colour-designation designates a range of hues of diverse chroma, saturation, and intensity. Even a colour-name such as orpiment has no unique referent. Rather, orpiment designates a range of yellows of diverse intensities and saturations. Such simple considerations as these may suffice to indicate that no colour-designation is univocal.

Thus it would be a gross blunder to presume that "red" designates a single hue repeated in may cases of itself. For "red" designates a range of hues between violet-red and red-orange. These diverse hues resemble each other, though they are not the same, as are any two cases of any red.

These two basic senses of resemblance yield two derivative senses in which the term is used. For reasons that will appear in the immediate sequel, it is essential that these derivative senses should be taken into account in this connection.

It is fairly plain that we may and do compare experiences in point of the number of respects in which they resemble each other. Thus two coins of the same issue and denomination would be found to resemble each other in more respects than some other coin of a different issue. In any such comparison of experiences as more or less resembling in point of the number of their resemblances, "more resembling" means that *numerically* more resemblances are repeated in the coins of the same issue and denomination than in either of them and the other coin. The converse of this is the meaning of "less resembling" in statements of comparisons in which experiences are compared in point of the *number* of resemblances they present.

Those resemblances would be exact resemblances. But it is no less plain that we may and do compare experiences as more or less resembling in point of the number of characteristics in the one that are more like characteristics in the other than the characteristics of some other experience. Thus a gown in five shades of yellow is more like one in three shades of orange than a gown in five shades of blue.



Exclusive preoccupation with these two derivative senses of resemblance would leave out of account the basic sense in which experiences are compared as more or less resembling. In these two derivative senses of resemblance experiences are indeed compared as resembling each other more or less. But this is to compare them in point of the *number* of resemblances available for comparison. It is to compare experiences in point of superior or inferior numbers of exact resemblances. Or it is to compare experiences in point of superior or inferior numbers of characteristics that are more or less resembling as characteristics.

Presumably it is fairly plain that the existence of exact resemblances is a necessary condition of any comparison of experiences as more or less resembling in point of superior or inferior numbers of resemblances repeated in them. And it is no less plain that the existence of characteristics that are (*as characteristics*) more or less resembling is a necessary condition of any comparison in point of numbers of such resemblances. Nevertheless, apparently it is easy to take it that comparisons in point of superior or inferior numbers of resemblances make out all there is to the matter of degrees of resemblance. Unfortunately for any of us who may prefer simplicity in analysis that is not so.

With the distinctions in mind that have been brought out so far, it may now be possible to proceed to consider relatively basic matters which may be disclosed by an investigation of those distinctions. But though possible, any such procedure would not be sensible. One's past experience has taught that the subject of resemblance is beclouded by doctrinaire and unquestioning prejudice. For that reason alone it may be well to attempt to remove misunderstanding on several scores before going on to the main subject of this essay. That will take us rather far afield, if only because we shall begin with a consideration of one of the most fruitful sources of misunderstanding in this connection; namely, the Hegelian dialectic of contraries.