

CHAPTER VI

OUR KNOWLEDGE OF RESEMBLANCES

THIS chapter is not concerned with the problems of knowledge. Questions as to how the term "knowledge" ought to be defined; or how knowledge is to be attained; or whether knowledge is a process, or rather a state of mind, are questions that are not in view. It is assumed in this chapter, as it has been assumed in the preceding chapters, that we do in fact find or observe a resemblance here and there.

Let us suppose that within my direct visual field at the present moment, I observe an object we may call O^1 . I observe also that the colour of O^1 is Y^1 . At the same time, I observe another object O^2 , and I notice that the colour of O^2 is the same as that of O^1 ; namely Y^1 . Thus I observe Y^1 in two instances of itself: I observe an exact resemblance.

There are those who would disagree. They might urge that any hue is as particular as the object to which it belongs. Hence, in B^1 and B^2 there would be two diverse hues. We should have to say something to the effect that although the two patches of hue are diverse, nevertheless they are identical in colour. This would introduce the notion of colour as something over and above the hue Y^1, Y^2 — N . For reasons yet to be brought out in subsequent chapters, this seems to be an unreal position. Rather, it would seem to be more in accordance with what is evinced by actual perceptual experience to say that in point of hue, both objects evince Y^1 . This is to say that one and the same hue, Y^1 is in two places at the same time. The content, nature, or character of Y^1 is just the hue Y^1 . But I first knew it as a resemblance when I observed Y^1 to belong to two or more objects at the same time.

Plainly, any notion of a knowledge of resemblances by an act of abstraction from O^1 and O^2 seems hardly relevant. A man does not notice a resemblance by observing particulars and abstracting a resemblance from them. Rather, he perceives or notices a qualitative (or relational) identity in two cases of itself.

Yet we must enquire further into this knowledge of a resemblance. (1) Is it true to say that what we observe in Y^1 and Y^2 is *one and the same* colour? If so, in that case do we observe a resemblance that is an identity? (2) What sort of observation is this observation of a resemblance? Have we, in fact, as this use of "observation" assumes, a genuinely concrete experience in an observation of a resemblance?

Now, when it is said that we observe an identity, it is necessary to point out that this is an *experienced* identity. No claim whatever is made to a knowledge of a substantial identity or a "real" identity belonging to continuants or "real" physical objects. All that is being said in this connection is that two objects O^1 and O^2 are observed to have an identical colour Y^1 .

For the same reason, the objection that qualities which are indistinguishable as experienced may not be identical in reality is irrelevant. What is indistinguishable *as experienced* is identical in experience. And the identity of Y^1 as it is experienced in O^1 and O^2 is all that is being affirmed. That qualitative identity Y^1 repeated in two cases of itself, Y^1 and Y^2 , is an exact resemblance.

There are those who will object that the use of the verb "to observe" in the above context is inappropriate and misleading. For surely, they may urge, we can be properly said to observe only what is concrete. Any claim, they may say, to know a resemblance concretely surely rests upon confusion. Is not the process of coming to know a resemblance a process of abstraction? Are not ideas of resemblances abstract ideas? Surely, in claiming to *observe* a resemblance, you are contradicting yourself.

Now, it may be well to remind ourselves that the con-

traries *concrete* and *abstract* are used vaguely. It is possible (and desirable) to distinguish between three senses in which the term *abstraction* is used. With these three senses in mind, it will be easier to see that there is no contradiction in the statement that Y^1 is a concrete resemblance.

(1) The term *abstraction* is sometimes used to mean the process by which an aspect of an experienced whole is singled out by and for attention. Within a more or less undifferentiated experience, we may discriminate aspects of that experience. These aspects although *abstract* in the sense we are considering, still are *concrete* in the sense of being experienced in a particular place at a particular time; they remain aspects of concrete experience. It is simply the case that we do attend to the one or the other of these aspects, not to the whole.

(2) This first sense is to be distinguished from a second sense of *abstraction*. In this second sense, to *abstract* is to prescind, or cut off, an aspect of a whole. Thus, when we abstract from a concrete situation in this way, we cut off the aspect abstracted from any particular space or time, and attend to the aspect itself alone.

(3) In the third place, we may mean by *abstraction* an act of attention by which common characteristics of complex objects are cut off and held in an abstract complex idea.

No doubt there may be other senses of *abstraction*. But an understanding of these three senses will suffice to enable us to explain the sense in which the observation of Y^1 in two cases of itself, is a *concrete* experience. For it is plain enough that the observation of Y^1 in two cases of itself is abstract in sense (1), but not abstract in senses (2) and (3). If it be held that to attend to anything whatever is to isolate it by virtue of selective attention, then, the observation of Y^1 obviously involves abstraction. Yet the end result of the process of selective attention is not out of space—time; rather, it is quite concrete. The observing of Y^1 is as concrete an experience as is seeing that very shade of yellow now over there. Thus, in sense (1) of *abstract*, we may speak of the observation of Y^1 as abstract, while at the same

time, the perceptual experience within which Y^1 is observed is concrete; as contrasted with senses (2) and (3) of the term *abstract*.

It would seem that, *mutatis mutandis*, the foregoing statement would apply to the second one of the two basic senses of resemblance that we distinguished from each other in Chapter I.⁽¹⁾ It is clear that we may perceive three objects, O^1 , O^2 and O^3 . Let O^1 be coloured red, O^2 orange and O^3 green. Plainly in the second of our two basic senses of resemblance, O^2 resembles O^1 in point of colour more than it resembles O^3 . For orange is closer to red than green. And this is a matter of perceptual observation. That observation may be designated abstract in sense (1); but as contrasted with senses (2) and (3) that observation is concrete.

There are those who will urge that resemblance is abstract in a fourth sense of “abstract”, distinct from the three senses made out above. Thus it is pointed out that there are many and varied cases of resemblance, such as certain characteristics of two copies of the same book, or such as the hue of two postage stamps of the same issue and denomination. These two resemblances, although widely different, nevertheless are properly called by the same name; viz., “resemblance”. Since various resemblances are called by the same name, it is argued, they must have something in common. There must be a nature or form common to the resemblance of the hue of two postage stamps of the same issue and denomination, and the resemblance of the characteristics of the copies of the same book. The view that any two objects which are properly called by the same name must have something (a nature, form, or *etwas*) in common, is so well entrenched in some quarters that to question it is regarded as an unrecognized form of lunacy. Since all resemblances, no matter how diverse, are called by the same name “resemblance”, all resemblances must have something in common.

Nevertheless, it may be questioned whether or not there

⁽¹⁾ pp. 8, 9.

is or could be a common nature or form designated "resemblance". For consider, this alleged common nature could be no determinate resemblance, such as that of the hue of two sheets of burnished copper, nor could this common nature be any range of determinate resemblances, however extensive or elaborate. The common nature in question could be neither a determinate single resemblance such as that of two paper clips, nor any range of determinate resemblances such as that of any range of diverse pitches, for the reason that it is alleged to be common to *all* resemblances. Hence, and for the reason that it is asserted to be common to *all* resemblances however diverse, the common nature in question can only be distinct from any determinate resemblance whatever. As distinct from any determinate resemblance *such as* two etchings drawn from the same plate, then resemblance *as such* would be distinct both from any determined resemblance, and any range or ranges of determinate resemblances. Therefore, *resemblance as such* would be *resemblance-indeterminate*. And being-indeterminate—a being that were quite amorphous—could not be distinguished from nothing at all.

Thus, if we but acknowledge the validity of the tautology, *to be is to be determinate*, we see that *resemblance as such* is verbiage. The predicate of the tautology *to be is to be determinate*, means what is meant by *to be distinct from anything else*. If an alleged being were not distinct from something or other, it would not be distinct from anything else. Hence, "it" would be nothing at all. To be determinate is to be *this* being rather than *that* being. A being that were not *this* rather than that would be no being. That is why *to be determinate* is equivalent to *to be*.

Now since the alleged common nature that would be designated by abstract resemblance, or resemblance as such, would be common to all resemblances, no matter how diverse, the whole of that common nature could not be present in any one resemblance. No more could it be present in any range of resemblances, however vast. For were this alleged common nature wholly present in the

range of resemblances X to N, the entire nature of that common nature would be one with the resemblances X to N. In that case, this alleged common nature would be nothing more than the respective resemblances themselves. If the common nature so glibly asserted in some quarters is to be anything more than the respective resemblances X to N, it will have to be distinct from them. Yet to be distinct from all resemblances from X to N is to be distinct from all determinate resemblances. And as distinct from all determinate resemblances, this alleged common nature could only be resemblance-indeterminate.

It would seem we can only conclude that the abstract term resemblance is not the name of a common nature or form. In two cases of orpiment we have one resemblance; in two cases of C sharp another. We have asked whether or not diverse resemblances, such as that of the two cases of orpiment and that of the two cases of C sharp, have a nature or form in common. Since this common nature could be neither a determinate resemblance, nor any range of determinate resemblances whatever, it could only be a resemblance-indeterminate. And being-indeterminate is indistinguishable from nothing. The abstract term "resemblance as such" has no proper and peculiar referent.

The conclusion that "resemblance as such" has no referent proper and peculiar to it does not even tend to deny the reality of determinate resemblances. Their reality has not been questioned. Nevertheless it may help to avert misunderstanding to point it out that whenever "resemblance" is used to designate a determinate resemblance (and not the Chimera of abstract resemblance), it is not the name of a qualifying predicate. In two cases of the same hue, for example, there is nothing distinct from the two hues which could be discriminated within them and called their resemblance. In any such case, we have a single qualitative identity repeated in two cases of itself.

This means that, strictly speaking, to say that b_1 and b_2 are resembling, or the same in quality, is not to say anything *about* b_1 and b_2 . It is to say merely that b_1 is b_1 and

b_2 is b_2 . This statement " b_1 resembles b_2 " means what is meant by " b_1 and b_2 are strictly the *same in quality* or character." And that statement means what is meant by " b_1 is b_1 and b_2 is b_2 ".

This is all very well, we may be told; or would be if it weren't rankly fallacious. The entire argument to the conclusion that "resemblance" as the name of a nature or form common to diverse resemblances is the name of nothing at all begs the question. If, and only if, "resemblance-as-such" can only mean what is meant by "a *resemblance* such as this one—a determinate resemblance"—does it follow that there can be no resemblance *as such*. And so to restrict the meaning of "resemblance" is clearly to beg the question. Indeed, we shall be told, your reasoning in this regard is closely analogous to that of Berkeley's fallacious critique of abstract ideas. If you so define the term "idea" as to exclude abstract ideas by definition, obviously you beg the question of the existence of abstract ideas; and that is what Berkeley did. And *mutatis mutandis*, if you assume that "resemblance" either means a resemblance such as this one—a *determinate* resemblance—or nothing at all, you beg the question of the reality of resemblance as such. And the main fallacy in your argument is an old one. You cannot see resemblance-as-such, just as you cannot see cow-ness. Resemblance-as-such is an object of the intellect, not of the senses. For example, in the Cartesian view, extension is no case of extension such as this circle or that square; and extension is no set or range of such figures. It is their essence; distinct from, and yet common to them all.

In this connection, I have pointed out elsewhere that, "this conception of extension, as the separable essence of matter without which figure and motion could neither be nor be conceived, became the subject of one of the most extended polemics of the seventeenth century. In the philosophy of Malebranche, the essence of matter became the divine archetype of material things. In its status in the divine mind, the intelligible (as distinguished from material)

extension is indeterminate: it is common to all figures, for it is their essence, but in itself the intelligible extension is without any figure or internal limitation whatever. For that reason, among others, it should not be surprising that Malebranche, in the course of his polemic with Arnauld, failed to explain how this indeterminate object of the divine (and our own) understanding can be said to be common to all determinate figures. For, as Hegel was to point out, a being that were quite indeterminate would be indistinguishable from nothing. Extension as such would be extension-indeterminate. And the indeterminate is not thinkable; not even by a pure understanding which was held to participate in the divine logos."⁽¹⁾

Let a man's view of resemblance-as-such be as highly intellectual as he may deem it; still, that alleged object of his intellect would be indistinguishable from nothing. Resemblance-*as-such* would be resemblance-*indeterminate*. This indeterminate Chimera could not be distinguished from nothing. It is not to rely on any prejudice whatever as to the nature of experience to point it out that resemblance-*as-such* would be indeterminate; and, therefore, not thinkable. Let a man's experience be as luminously intellectual as he chooses to consider it, still, either he thinks a determinate resemblance *such as* this one, or else he attempts to think resemblance-indeterminate. His attempt here could only fail. For whatever is indeterminate is neither this nor that; it is not distinct from nothing at all.

It may be urged that "similarity" and "resemblance" are terms whose correct use entails difference; or, in other words, that we only speak of resemblances in cases where differences are present. It is indeed plain that in almost all cases of resemblance, differences also are present. The exception is that of a simple case of resemblance, such as that of the shape of two coins of the same mintage and denomination. Ordinarily, individuals will be resembling in some respects and different in other respects. It must be borne in mind that the respects in which individuals

⁽¹⁾ *An Essay on Critical Appreciation*. London, Allen and Unwin, 1938. P. 47.

resemble each other *in this sense* of "resemblance" are the respects in which those individuals are strictly the same, or, in those respects, qualitatively identical.

There are those who will object that often enough resemblances are vague; and just as often resemblances are partial. Yet, on this view of the matter, it would seem that those resemblances that are qualitative identities must always be determinate and complete. Now consider, on a logic of contradictories it is a truism that whatever is, is what it is. Once this truism is accepted, the objection in question would seem to be a failure in understanding.

An attorney in court may find the answers of a certain witness vague. He finds the answers vague with reference to certain criteria he has in mind. Yet the attorney's condemnation of the answers as vague does not even tend to suggest that the answers (as he understands and appraises them) are anything other than exactly what they are. Any one of the answers, for the attorney, is what it is, no less than a puff of smoke, or a pang of nostalgia.

A critic might well find that the very early Picassos in the collection of Miss Gertrude Stern resemble works of Toulouse Lautrec in ways he would say are explicit or even obvious. The same critic might find certain resemblances suggested as being present in certain Sumernian and certain Romanesque sculptures difficult to find, and he might call them vague. The critic is not thus assuming that there are degrees of resemblance; he is not assuming that at one level there would be determinate resemblances while, at another level resemblances would be vague, or relatively indeterminate. On a logic of contradictories, any notion of degrees of resemblance could only yield confusion worse confounded. For any "degree" of resemblance could only be the resemblance that it is; and on a logic of contradictories qualitative identity may not be a matter of degree.

A partial resemblance will be found in any case where the objects compared are the same in certain discriminated respects and different in other respects. To be sure, we

often "feel" or "sense" resemblances which we might then describe as vague or partial. But in so far as these resemblances actually are *discriminated*, they are more or less elaborately complex qualitative identities.

In the following chapter, we shall notice that more often than not we compare resemblances that are not qualitative identities distributed in at least two instances of itself, but rather in another and no less fundamental sense of the term. Nevertheless, in the present sense of "resemblance", where a resemblance is discriminated, there is then discriminated a qualitative identity, or a complex of qualitative identities. In the present sense of the term, a resemblance is any qualitative identity distributed in at least two instances of itself. Strictly taken, then, "resemblance" and "sameness" mean any qualitative identity evinced by at least two individuals or present in two complexes of characteristics. That is why to say that C_1 and C_2 are the same is to say that C_1 and C_2 are identical in quality or character. And this is simply to say that C is what it is. Now that is not to say anything *about* C ; it is not to predicate anything *of* C . Hence the conclusion that neither "sameness" nor "resemblance" are the names of qualifying predicates.

Then again, there are those who will object that since the term "resemblance" is often used in meaningful sentences it would be peculiar were the term without any proper connotation whatever, or just meaningless. One reason why the abstract term "resemblance" could have no single referent, and therefore no single connotation proper to it, has been brought out above. But to understand that "resemblance" is not a descriptive term is not to conclude that it is meaningless. The term "resemblance" is simply not the name of a qualifying predicate. Rather, it is a term verbal which derives its connotation from its context. This is to say that in any case of the use of "resemblance" it will derive its connotation from the respective connotations of the terms compared. For example, in the statement "My copy of the Rubaiyat resembles your copy in almost every respect", the connotation of the abstract term "resem-

blance" will consist of those respects in which my copy of Fitzgerald's translation resembles your copy of it. Thus, to say "this copy of the Rubaiyat resembles that one" is to use "resemblance" to refer to the qualitative identities of which that factual resemblance consists; those qualitative identities are the referent of the abstract term "resemblance" as it is used in that statement.

Thus we may see that the connotation of the abstract term "resemblance" derives from the context in which it is used. This connotation may be comparatively simple, as in the description of the resemblance of two cases of ultramarine ash. Or again the context from which the abstract term "resemblance" derives its connotation may be comparatively elaborate, as in the case of a description of the respects in which two basket capitals resemble each other. In any case of its use, the abstract term "resemblance" will derive its connotation from the context of that use.

The term "resemblance" is sometimes held to be the name of the primary relation of comparison. For without a resemblance of some sort, no comparison would be possible. Thus, taken as the name of the primary relation of comparison, "resemblance" will be the name of any qualitative identity distributed in at least two cases of itself.