

## INTRODUCTION

1. Stated in general terms, the following essay centres around similarity and its relation to our language. The subject has numerous dimensions. We are not unaware of that. However, our analysis, needless to say, does not cover all of them. Nor was it ever intended to do so. That way, the essay is clearly inexhaustive. Should we really have aspired to make it exhaustive? The essay confines itself, as it must, to a restricted area; its conclusion is mainly twofold :

- (1) that similarity is a basic and unique relation, not fully analysable in terms of its cognate, i.e. identity,
- and (2) that, further, on similarity depends the intelligibility of our language, to be precise, a most significant part of it.

These conclusions, however, do not make any claim to embody new truths discovered by us. The truths, in a general way and substantially, have already been known to philosophy. What we have tried to do is mainly to reanalyse, reemphasise and reconfirm them; and this endeavour, if we may say so, has not perhaps been altogether without any newness about it.

2. But how is all this, i.e. the projected reanalysis, re-emphasise and reconfirmation worth it? The following is the answer.

Similarity, undeniably, has a fundamental place in our thought and language. "... there is nothing more basic to our thought and language than our sense of similarity", says Quine.<sup>1</sup> Yet, unhappily, the notion is far from clear. There, indeed, is a considerable degree of obscurity about it. To quote Quine once again, "The dubiousness of this notion is itself a remarkable fact."<sup>2</sup> So, whatever analysis happens to lend any degree of clarity to the notion of similarity has an undeniable philosophical value of its own. Isn't philosophy, among other things, a relentless attempt to think clearly?

Our success in achieving the clarity as regards similarity (because of its basic character) will, in turn, tend inevitably to illuminate many other matters, we mean those which presuppose similarity or involve reference to it in some other senses.

<sup>1</sup> Vide Ontological Relativity and Other Essays, Columbia University Press, New York and London, 1969, p.116.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

Take first the basic fact of communication, that we talk about things and individuals. This would have been totally impossible without similarity. Similarity is, in fact, one of the minimum preconditions of it. "World must exhibit similarities. ... If everything were unlike anything else", says Austin, "there would be nothing to say."<sup>3</sup>

Similarity makes possible the use of a word. In fact, the very learning of it. The former presupposes phonetic similarity between the present utterance of a word and the past utterance of it; the latter requires that the different circumstances in which the same word is used must be similar.<sup>4</sup>

Also, similarity, among other things, explains induction. For, "every reasonable expectation", says Quine, "depends on resemblance of circumstances, together with our tendency to expect similar causes to have similar effects."<sup>5</sup>

In the same way, Similarity is inbuilt in number

<sup>3</sup> Vide Philosophical Papers, Oxford University Press, London, 1979, p.121.

<sup>4</sup> Vide Ontological Relativity and Other Essays. Columbia University Press, New York and London, p.117.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

of things, e.g. in the concept of measurement, in certain figurative uses of language, in the association of ideas, and so on.<sup>6</sup>

Notwithstanding all this, study of similarity, on its own account, or its relation to language as a part of that, does not appear to have occupied philosophers to the extent it should have. "The proper analysis of the concept of resemblance", as is very rightly observed by O'Conner, "is of some importance for philosophy for several reasons, but it has not received from philosophers attention proportionate to its importance."<sup>7</sup> The particular area of philosophy which, in actuality, has developed around the concept of similarity, seems really to exhibit, if one may say so, a degree of peculiar imbalance: the major part of it seems, in fact, to have been occupied by what may be called the problems relating to the explanation of similarity, i.e. the various theories about universals and those denying their existence. No one denied the philosophical importance of these theories. But, incidentally, they

<sup>6</sup> Vide "On Resemblance", Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, 1945-46, p.48.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p.47.

have, among other things, come to obscure the study of similarity as such. And this unfortunate tragedy is also not a matter to be ignored. Now, it is in this background that our analysis below assumes the value it may claim for itself.

3. My indebtedness to Mr M. Chakravarty, my teacher, from whom I have learnt whatever little I know in my subject and under whose supervision this essay has been completed, cannot be stated in language. I do not know whether this essay, in its present form, would satisfy the standard he had although been relentlessly insisting on. I am deeply indebted to Mrs Manjulika Ghosh, another teacher of mine, who, as my additional supervisor (after Mr. Chakravarty left this University to join Hyderabad Central University in October '80) has helped me by many valuable suggestions. Further I record my debt of gratitude Prof. Llewelyn for his most valuable criticisms in the light of which certain portions of this dissertation have been revised.

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