THE ORIGINAL DATUM OF SPACE-CONSCIOUSNESS.

Messrs. Ward and James have maintained that the only original element in our space-perceptions is "massiveness" or "extensity" and that distance and position arise from a subsequent elaboration of this primitive material, either as in Mr. Ward's opinion through its connexion with motor experiences, or as Mr. James seems to say simply through the mental processes of "discrimination, association, addition, multiplication and division, blending into generic images, substitution of similars, selective emphasis, and abstraction from uninteresting details".

The question which I have to propound is this: how much does the conception of extensity involve? It would appear that "extensity" means quantity of sensation: that this quantity or quality of more or less is due to the number of distinct sensations received by the various nerve-endings simultaneously excited, and consists of partial presentations differing not in visual or tactual quality, as the case may be, but in "local sign". And the presence of this variety of local signs gives a sensation the character of extensity or *merged plurality*. If I understand the theory aright extensity is not, as the language used by its exponents occasionally suggests, a new and special character of "sensation," but simply implies the *coexistence* of individually distinct sensations *identical* in sensuous quality. But a serious difficulty arises when we examine into the nature of those "local signs". It appears to us that whatever interpretation be given to the term they are utterly inadequate to furnish a foundation for the perception of position. Is the local sign continuum a system of mutual relations or simply a mass of unrelated¹ sensations or feelings?

Mr. Ward tells us in one place (*Encyc. Britannica*, art. "Psychology") that the "local signs" consist in the different relations of the parts of a massive presentation to the whole. If this is so, the local sign involves a relation of position more or less vaguely apprehended between the several parts. For since the whole is the sum of its parts the relation of each part to the whole gives us at once the relation of each part to each. Surely a theory which assumes thus much has not a very difficult task before it. And even granting that the local sign is such a relation we may well ask how it comes that the physiological peculiarities of nerve-endings can possibly give rise to the consciousness of a relation (other than that of likeness or difference).

But we do not think that Mr. Ward means this: indeed he repeatedly describes the local sign as merely *qualitative* and sometimes refers to it as "local colour". Mr. James too is quite clear on this point: he emphatically states over and over again

¹ That is except in the way of similarity and difference.

that the local sign is not a relation but a sensation which becomes the sign of a relation.

Good. The local sign is not a relation: but shall we fare any better if it is a quality of sensation? If the local sign continuum is a mass or multiplicity of coexistent sensations, surely nothing in the way of space-relation can be got out of these, manipulate them as you will. Mr. Ward himself admits this when he says: "The longer we reflect the more clearly we see that no combination or association of sensations varying only in intensity and quality, not even if motor presentations be added, will account for the space-element in our perceptions". If then the basis of this "extensity" which Mr. Ward invokes to help him on is only a further difference of quality (local quality this time), of what avail is this auxiliary?

So we see that if the "local sign" is a relation it includes all that is to be deduced; if it is a sensation the theory breaks down.

Perhaps however these objections will not directly dispose of the theory in the special form in which it is maintained by Prof. James. According to him the only original space relation is that of magnitude or extensity. The relation of position or distance is a feeling, viz., the feeling of the line connecting two points. The two positions owe their duality to distinctness of local sign and their position to the "extensity" and local peculiarity of the feeling which connects them. "The feeling is the relation." I do not believe that Mr. Ward would acquiesce in this statement of the theory, but it is certainly a correct statement of Prof. James's account of space relation. But surely the question arises: "If the line is a feeling, what is the relation between this feeling and the two points which it connects?" Our reply of course would be: that of "besideness," of local contact, which we consider must be postulated as a primary datum. We do not see what answer would be open to Mr. James. We put forward in brief the following dilemma. The local sign is either given as a relation or as a quality. If the former, the relation of position must be original and the development theory is superfluous. If the latter, the theory fails.

It should be added that Mr. James himself appears to have been aware of the difficulty here raised. We do not understand his answer: he seems to be rather disposed to treat the difficulty after the manner of a certain great thinker who has preceded him, and throw it over as a final inexplicability. But he does say this much: "Even if position be not an intrinsic character of any one of those sensations we have called local signs, we must still admit that there is something about every one of them that stands for the potentiality of position and is the ground why the local sign when it gets placed at all gets placed here rather than there". (*Principles of Psychology*, vol. ii. p. 164 note.) I cannot, however, see that this is an answer to our objections.

E. FORD.