

## ON THE ANALYSIS OF COMPARISON.

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The interesting paper on "Comparison," which Mr. Sully has published in *MIND* XL., suggests some fruitful lines of inquiry. And there is one point, and that one of capital importance, on which I should be glad to add a few remarks, fragmentary and, no doubt, in other ways defective. This point is the *analysis* of the comparing function.

Mr. Sully has of course not omitted this question. He has pointed out certain features in the act of Comparison; but I do not find what can be called an attempt to resolve the product into its elements. I will, however, not criticise where it is probable that I do not understand, but will pass to Mr. Sully's description of the act.

"The term Comparison may be roughly defined as that act of the mind by which it concentrates attention on two mental contents in such a way as to ascertain their relation of similarity or dissimilarity" (p. 490). "Comparison is a mode of intellectual activity involving voluntary attention" (p. 498). "But it is an act of attention of a very special kind" (p. 492). In this description there are two points which call for remark. In the first place I should doubt if *voluntary* attention is essential to comparison. This is a matter of observation, or perhaps only of wording; but the second point is one connected with principle. Comparison is called "an act of attention of a very special kind," and this at once suggests a difficulty. If the special essences of the various intellectual functions are to be referred to differences in the kind of attention, then these kinds of attention should be described and enumerated, and, if possible, developed from the simple form. But if the differences in attention come rather from the different objects we attend to, then the speciality of the various intellectual functions must be looked for in themselves, and cannot come from varieties in attention. But I should confess that on the subject of voluntary attention, and of the position it holds in mental development, I am unable to understand Mr. Sully's teaching.

I will now offer the remarks which I have to make on the analysis of Comparison. We may say that the mind acts on two data in such a way as to ascertain their similarity or dissimilarity. Well now, what is this way? The mind passes of course from one object to the other, but then *how* does it pass and *what* crosses in the passage? If we use technical terms, we may answer as follows. Comparison is the (unreflective) subsumption of one datum under the other reciprocally, or the apperception of each by the other in turn. Having data A and B, we pass from A to B with A in our minds as our leading idea, and then return to A

with B in our minds as the idea which predominates. The result is that the diversities are brought into collision and so into notice, and that the identities are both reinforced by blending and also set free by the struggle of their competing differences. The process is either general or special. We may use, that is, the whole content of A or B, or but one special feature or aspect of each.

Now what operates in the above is the suggested idea of the identity in diversity, or diversity in identity, of A and B. This idea it is which (by redintegration) causes the process which brings about its own reality. If the comparison is intentional, the idea will have been there and have led from the first. But it may arise accidentally. Having A and B before me and casually passing from one to the other, I may perceive an identity or difference. This may interest and, becoming a dominant idea, may set up the process of alternate subsumption.

Thus in Comparison proper we have two data A and B, we have an idea of their identity and diversity which interests, and an ensuing process of alternate subsumption. We may have in addition an idea of this process. But before Comparison proper is developed the process cannot be set up by the idea of its result. We have then simply an identity felt in our data, which seeks in vain (by redintegration) to particularise itself in one as it does in the other, and so causes a collision.

It will, I hope, tend to clear up this rapid sketch if I try to show how Comparison is developed. Let us suppose that a child, or some other animal, has eaten a number of lumps of sugar. The result will be that, when a hard white lump is presented to its sense, that lump will be qualified by the idea of sweetness. But the lump now presented is a piece of salt, and what follows is a shock of discrepancy and pain. The question is whether this shock will subside and pass away, or be retained and lead to an advance. Let us suppose that it is retained. The suggested idea of sweetness is so strong that again and again the whiteness of the salt leads to attempt and disgust. But in this way a new connexion of whiteness and saltiness will be formed in the mind.

Let the salt still remain, and let us offer beside it new pieces of sugar (while constantly changing the local positions), and let appetite be urgent. What will happen now may be a passage to the sugar with a certain idea of saltiness, and to the salt with a certain idea of sweetness, and in each case a failure. The identical white leads to both, and the last presentation to sense in each case fills up the idea, and the result is perplexity. I think the issue may be as follows.

We are to suppose that in the sugar is a glittering appearance which is absent from the salt. These differences may not have been perceived, or at least noticed, and may have so far remained inoperative. But as attention grows through desire and pain, let this attribute become more prominent, and let it pass into the

idea with which the animal goes from the sugar to the salt. On this a fresh collision will take place. And another discrepancy will be felt when the idea of the dull salt collides with the sensation of glittering sweetness. The two pieces now, while held together by their identical attributes, are forced apart by their differences, and in this passage between them the diversities become explicit.

This I believe to be the way in which Comparison is developed. Its result, the perception of mixed identity and diversity, becomes, as an idea, the means for setting up the process which has yielded it. The chance result of groping is what gives the source of voluntary movement.

There are doubtless objections which will be taken to this fragmentary outline, but of these most will, I think, be founded on errors. I have dealt with some of them in my *Principles of Logic*, but there is one I may point out here. It will perhaps be said that my explanation is circular, since classification and comparison exist from the first and are implied in the earliest form of recognition. But the facts, as I find them both in general and in particular, are irreconcilable with this view—a view which, I believe, rests much less on observation than on preconceived ideas. And if an objector replies, But the comparison is yet ‘latent,’ it is ‘virtual,’ it is ‘nascent,’ it is only ‘potential’—that moves me not at all. I must be allowed to say openly that such ambiguous phrases have, until they are explained, no right to exist in a scientific psychology, and that, if they were explained, their attraction would vanish. I have found that an assertion of ‘potential’ existence often stands for a ‘nascent’ perception of error; and in that sense it is welcome.

But I trust to meet with the general approval of psychologists when I say that in analysis there is still much to be done.

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