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GAMES AND FAMILY RESEMBLANCES

ANTHONY MANSER

IN HIS *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein introduces the notion of a 'family resemblance' to deal with certain problems. Talking of games and what they seem to have in common, he points out that there are no common features (or no common feature) in virtue of which we call all games 'games'. Instead there are, he claims, many different similarities and relationships; he says 'we see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail'. (§ 66.) He then goes on to add: 'I can think of no better expression to characterise these similarities than "family resemblances"; for the various resemblances between members of a family: build, features, colour of eyes, gait, temperament, etc. etc. overlap and criss-cross in the same way,—And I shall say: "games form a family".' (§ 67.) Wittgenstein also instances numbers as forming a 'family' in the same manner. This notion of a 'family resemblance' has come to be used by many philosophers to deal with a range of situations where there appears to be a difficulty in finding a single definite common property and yet there exists a desire to call some set of things by the same name. I myself have succumbed to this temptation. Perhaps the widest claim for the use of this device is that made by Mr Bambrough in an article entitled 'Universals and Family Resemblances' (*Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 1960-61, pp. 207-222). This begins with the words 'I believe that Wittgenstein solved what is known as "the problem of universals" '. (p. 207.) Bambrough makes it quite clear that the solution of the problem by Wittgenstein was due to his use of the notion of a 'family resemblance'.

In this article I am mainly concerned with the restricted puzzle of what a 'family resemblance' actually is, and whether the notion is of any general use in philosophy. It will, however, be necessary to glance at the wider problem of universals from time to time, if only because the notion with which I am concerned has been thought of as providing a 'solution' of that ancient source of dispute. But I must stress that I do not offer, nor even claim to know what it would be to offer, a solution to 'the problem of universals.'

When we are presented with a list, such as that given by Wittgenstein, of different kinds of games, it does seem true to say that there is no single thing which all of them have in common, but that they

can be arranged in a series, or in a number of series, such that there is little difference between adjacent members of one series, but a great difference between those at the opposite ends. Even without having so listed all games, we seem to be able to make comparisons of likeness, to say such things as 'Poker is more like bridge than it is like chess'. It is the possibility of making comparisons of this sort which is the ground of our confidence that lists of this type could be constructed. There are even cases where something that is usually, or sometimes, called a 'game' is too unlike the others to be so called by everybody. If someone calls for a game to liven the party, and I suggest Russian roulette, the shocked silence may indicate that I have stepped outside the boundaries of 'game', at least in this context. Russian roulette may be too serious to qualify; other suggestions might be thought too simple. A Victorian dictionary of games, purporting to give the rules for all of them, found at least one beneath its notice; on the subject of 'Pushpin' it merely said 'A very silly game'. Nevertheless, such difficulties are minor; vagueness at the boundaries of a concept does not worry us unduly nowadays. If the core itself is clear, we will use the concept without worrying. In the case of games there does seem to be enough likeness between those activities which everyone would agree to call such for us to be happy in applying the term 'games' to them. For this reason, Wittgenstein's suggestion of a 'family likeness' which exists between various games does seem a satisfactory way of describing the phenomenon.

It might be thought possible to exhibit this notion in a more formal way, and the following model would seem to serve the purpose. The total set of characteristics which belong to all games can be represented by C_n. In order for a particular activity to be a game, it clearly does not have to possess all C_n characteristics, some smaller number C_i will suffice. In other words, anything which has C_i characteristics out of the total C_n listed will be a game, though it may have a greater number, such as C_m. A smaller number, C_f for example, will be inadequate. It follows from this model that two games may have no characteristics in common, if n is large in relation to i, and that no two games need have all characteristics in common, though they may do. In this example, it is clearly impossible to give exact value to n and i, because the common concept 'game' is too vague to be expressed in such a mathematical way. But if we came to wish to classify games with the same accuracy as botanists classify plants, then the ordinary concept might be replaced with a more exact one which would work in this kind of manner. I think that in the numerical methods of taxonomy which are now being worked out in botany, numerical

values are assigned to i and n, or at least there is some mathematical relation between them. Clearly Wittgenstein did not have anything so definite in mind when he introduced the notion; he was concerned to stress that there need be no *single* characteristic possessed by all games, and this was his main purpose in constructing the example. It is worth noting that he also used, in a similar context, the image of a rope, which does not get its strength from any one fibre which runs through the whole length, but from friction between overlapping fibres.

Bambrough gives an example which seems to be closer to what Wittgenstein might have been thinking of, an actual example of a 'family resemblance', the 'Churchill face'. He says: 'It may be that there are ten features in terms of which we can describe "the family face" (high forehead, bushy eyebrows, blue eyes, Roman nose, high cheek-bones, cleft-chin, dark hair, dimpled cheeks, pointed ears and ruddy complexion). It is obvious that the unmistakable presence of the family face in every single one of the ten members of the family is compatible with the absence from each of the ten members of the family of one of the ten consistent features of the family face. It is also obvious that it does not matter if it happens that the feature which is absent from the face of each individual member of the family is present in every one of the others. The members of the family will then have no *feature* in common, and yet they will all unmistakably have *the Churchill face* in common.' (*Op. cit.*, p. 210.) In terms of the model I introduced above, $n = 10$ and $i = 9$, so that the first member of the family might have characteristics $C_{1\text{-}9}$, the second $C_{2\text{-}10}$, the third $C_{1,\,3\text{-}10}$, and so on. Bambrough admits that the example is to a certain degree artificial in that it is too precise, but he goes on to point out that the more features, or variations in features, that are added, the more plausible it becomes as an analysis of things such as games, and the easier it will be to justify the claim that two games have no features in common.

In spite of this I want to argue that the whole example, including the mathematical model that I have introduced, is wrongly conceived, and hence that the use of such a model or of anything like it will not solve the problem of universals. Indeed, in an important sense this analysis presupposes universals. The artificiality which to me vitiates the use of a model of this type is not the one which immediately springs to mind, but is connected with the use of the phrase 'having characteristics in common'. In introducing his notion, Wittgenstein said: '*Look and see* whether there is anything common in all [games].' (§ 66.) The instruction seems quite definite when given to philosophers; we all know what to do. But closer inspection reveals an important vagueness about what we are told to do. The

nature of the difficulty can perhaps be brought out by noticing that in this context the kind of example which springs to mind is one similar to that of the 'Churchill face'. We imagine ourselves faced with a photograph of the family, a group taken at a birthday or wedding, and being struck by the fact that there is a similarity between all of them, though there is also some difference between any pair taken together. But in such a case the membership of the family has already been *given* by the title under the photograph, or by the fact that the individuals possess a common name. There are, however, cases in which someone else is included in the group; his 'family likeness' may also be noticed wrongly—'No, he's just a friend of the family, no relation at all'. For we do often find likenesses between unrelated people, sometimes very striking ones. Yet we do not, for this reason, say that they *are* related, nor apply the same family name to them.

This difficulty reflects back on the appropriateness of the C_n type of model also. When we are asked the question about what is common to all games we have in mind something like the following situation: someone asks us the question, I put forward a suggested answer to which he promptly produces a counter-example of a game which would be ruled out by my 'definition'. For example, the suggested answer might have been that in all games one side wins and the other loses; my adversary promptly cites Patience, in which it is odd to talk of 'sides'. I then say that all games are for the players' pleasure, and he instances professional football. This process can be continued with a whole series of suggestions and objections. In such an example, as in the case of the Churchill family, we are already agreed on what is to count for the purpose; we have a vague intuitive notion of what a 'game' is. Though of course not as a result of a formal definition—if this existed, then the problem would not have arisen. But for one of the contestants to introduce a formal definition at this point will not help. Talk of 'family resemblances' was only introduced because it was fairly clear that no *definition* that suited the case could be produced, and yet there was general agreement on which activities were to count as members of the class. This is particularly evident in the cases in which Wittgenstein was centrally interested, language and numbers.

To put the same point in a rather different way, in deciding what characteristics are to be listed under the heading C_1 to C_n, only characteristics which are relevant to the activities *being games* must be included, not *all* the properties they happen to possess, nor any set of them. For what is supposed to have been listed is 'the set of properties C_n which apply to all games'. (There are also difficulties raised by the notion of '*all*' properties or characteristics. I do not

think that this is a problem for my negative thesis, but it may well be one for the positive thesis of Wittgenstein and Bambrough). This presupposes that games are already identified by some means or other, so that their properties or characteristics can be determined by inspection. The situation is different from that in taxonomy, for here botanists are already agreed on what kind of characteristics are to be used in classifying plants, and are in no doubt as to whether an organism is a plant. This is rather like the 'Churchill face', for we are already able to identify certain objects as faces before we start looking for extra similarities between them. We know that human beings normally have faces and also the set of features which go to make up a normal face. It is because the notion of a 'family resemblance' presupposes all this that the term and the examples of it that are given will not do for the purposes for which it was put forward, namely solving the problem of universals for Bambrough, and showing that all objects to which a single name is applied need not have any feature in common for Wittgenstein.

A passage in Bambrough's article seems to bring out well the difficulty I have just mentioned, though the author himself does not see the purport of it, regarding it as an objection to the traditional way of talking about universals. He says: 'If I ask you what these three books have in common, or what those four chairs have in common, you will look to see if the books are all on the same subject or by the same author or published by the same firm; to see if the chairs are all Chippendale or all three-legged or all marked "Not to be removed from this room". It will never occur to you to say that the books have in common that they are books or the chairs that they are chairs. And if you find after close inspection that the chairs or books do not have in common any of the features I have mentioned, and if you cannot see any other specific feature that they have in common, you will say that as far as you can see they have nothing in common. You will perhaps add that you suppose from the form of my question that I must know of something that they have in common. I may then tell you that all the books once belonged to John Locke or that all the chairs came from Ten Rillington Place. But it would be a poor sort of joke for me to say that the chairs were chairs or that the books were all books.' (*Op. cit.*, pp. 215-6.) For the game of asking what a set of things has in common does, as Bambrough says, normally imply that the questioner has an answer; Alice was rightly annoyed on finding that there was no reply to the question 'Why is a raven like a writing-desk?' The trouble is partly that if we ask the question about a set of things that are already named and classified together, it is natural to look for some additional feature beyond the fact that they are all so classified. Even if the

question is put in a different form, so that the general word does not enter into it, for example 'What have all these in common?', said pointing to a pile of books, we still feel that the answer 'They are all books' is too simple-minded to be the correct one. The game must be better than that. I do not even think we would play this kind of game in teaching a child to talk; in such a case the query would rather be 'What *are* all these things?' Our aim is to find out if the child can *identify* books, can use the word correctly, which of course does not imply being able to give a definition of 'book'. A further complication arises with games, in that we cannot set out a representative collection of games as we can do with physical objects, we have to make use of a *list* of games. The mere fact of writing down a set of names in list form makes us even more convinced that there is 'something in common' to all those included. We do make use of such lists, e.g. in intelligence tests: 'Underline the odd number of the following list —Cricket, Chess, Soccer, Poetry, Polo.' Here we are trying to find out whether the child knows what activities are games, for this is what four of the list 'have in common'. Anyone faced with a test of this kind knows what sort of thing to look for, though it is worth noting that sometimes the test is ambiguous. If the one just given had read 'Cricket, Chess, Soccer, Walking, Polo' the child might have underlined Chess as the only indoor activity of the list. Here the test is like an ambiguous figure which can be seen in different ways; we might feel that this kind of ambiguity would penalise the more intelligent taker.

These are some of the puzzles which arise when we try to take seriously Wittgenstein's instruction '*Look and see* whether there is anything in common to all'. This form of words might have been used by someone who, in the style of philosophy popular a short while ago, was seeking a *definition* of 'games'. Part of Wittgenstein's point was that there isn't any such which can easily be found, or if one were suggested it wouldn't do the job required. We can think of cases in which it might be felt necessary to look for a definition of games; a very puritan community might want to ban the playing of all games on Sundays, and in framing the law would need an exact definition of what was not to be allowed. But in this case the demand for a definition is again subsequent to a realisation that there is a class, intuitively recognised, of 'games'. We already know pretty well what is to be counted when we try to obey Wittgenstein's injunction, and it is because we do know this that we can notice the network of similarities and dissimilarities. At this point it is worth quoting Wittgenstein at length. He says: 'Look for example at board-games, with their multifarious relationships. Now pass to card-games; here you find many correspondences with the first

group, but many common features drop out, and others appear. When we pass next to ball-games, much that is common is retained, but much is lost. Are they all "amusing"? Compare chess with noughts and crosses. Or is there always winning and losing, or competition between players? Think of patience. In ball games there is winning and losing; but when a child throws his ball at the wall and catches it again, this feature has disappeared. Look at the parts played by skill and luck; and at the difference between skill in chess and skill in tennis. Think now of games like ring-a-ring-a-roses; here is the element of amusement, but how many other characteristic features have disappeared! And we can go through the many, many other groups of games in the same way; can see how similarities crop up and disappear. And the result of this examination is: we see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes several similarities, sometimes similarities of detail.' (*Op. cit.*, § 66.) As I have said, it is not altogether clear what Wittgenstein wants us to make of this example, because it already presupposes knowledge of what is to count as a game. We do not *learn* what things are to be called games by tracing out the type of likenesses that Wittgenstein indicates. We do not even *decide* whether an activity is a game by looking to see whether such likenesses can be traced. There are cases, like that of Russian roulette mentioned above, where we are doubtful whether to call something a game, but even in such cases I do not think we try to settle the question by proceeding in a quasi-legal fashion of noting points of similarity and of dissimilarity. Nevertheless there is wide general agreement on what activities are to be called 'games'.

At this point is seems appropriate to turn to some general study of games and see what the author made of these various activities; some of the things said by Huizinga in his book *Homo Ludens* seem very relevant to this discussion. He considers the matter in terms of what it is 'to play a game'. Indeed, it would not have been surprising if Wittgenstein had said: 'Don't think of games, but rather of the activity of *playing a game*'. This notion does seem to express what is 'genuinely in common' to all the examples we might list under this heading, is the source of the general agreement on what things are 'games'. The introduction of the notion of 'playing a game' helps with the problem of Russian roulette—life and death nowadays seem too serious to be included in a game as an integral part of it, though more robust ages thought differently. The Romans were not wrong in talking of their gladiatorial combats as 'games'. Huizinga gives what is virtually a definition of 'play': 'Summing up the formal characteristics of play we might call it a free activity standing quite consciously outside "ordinary" life as being "not serious", but at

the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly.' (*Op. cit.*, Beacon Press ed., p. 13.) He adds that what is played in this way is called a 'game'. He also makes an interesting linguistic point which is worth noting here: 'First of all, the connection of the verb with its predicate. Though you can "ein Spiel treiben" in German and "een Spiel doen" in Dutch and "pursue a game" in English, the proper verb is "play" itself. You "play a game", or "spielen ein Spiel". To some extent this is lost in English by the doublet *play* and *game*. Nevertheless the fact remains that in order to express the nature of the activity the idea contained in the noun must be repeated in the verb. Does this not mean that the act of playing is of such a peculiar and independent nature as to lie outside the ordinary categories of action? Playing is not "doing" in the ordinary sense; you do not "do" a game as you "do" or "go" fishing, or hunting, or Morris-dancing, or woodwork—you "play" it.' (*Op. cit.*, p. 37.)

I would like to express what I take to be Huizinga's central point in a slightly different manner which does not alter his intentions but does go a little beyond what he has said. Instead of 'a free activity standing quite consciously outside "ordinary" life as being "not serious" ', I would rather say that the area of a game is 'marked off' either literally or conceptually from the normal area of human life, that of genuine 'action' to which moral predicates apply. What is done in the course of the game is not meant to have effects in the 'real world'. In some cases the area of the game is a field, in which case the distinction between it and the real world is made physically, by a line marking off the area where the game is played. For other kinds of games, we insulate our activity from 'real' effects by the introductory formula 'Let's play . . .'. In other cases, some of which are discussed by Huizinga, there is no formal 'marking off' and yet it is obvious from the way in which the activity is carried out, the way in which it does not have effects on the rest of life, that a 'game' is in question. A formal debate among students is a game, whereas the same thing in the House of Commons is not—here much hangs on the outcome. Philosophy can be a game, as in some Medieval Disputations; Ramus' thesis 'That everything that Aristotle said is false' has something playful about it, is 'showing off' rather than serious philosophising.

The important point here is that it is not the game as such which is central, it is the idea of 'playing', of not counting what happens. There is a world of difference between the child bouncing his ball 'to amuse himself' and Galileo doing the same thing to solve a problem in the mechanics of falling bodies. Such examples help to give an insight into the possibility of the 'professional' playing of a game, which is in a sense parasitic on the ordinary way of doing it—

it is only because some people amuse themselves by placing bets that a 'professional' gambler can exist. For it is not by looking at the activity itself that we discover that a game is being played, It is by looking at the relation between this activity and the rest of human life. Two activities might appear identical to the observer and yet one be 'serious' and the other a 'game'. There are obvious difficulties in drawing a hard and fast line between 'serious' and 'playful' here, and what counts as one or the other will vary in different cultures, but for my purposes it is sufficient to indicate the type of distinction; there is a clear difference between a sword fight in the course of a battle where the death of one or other of the combatants occurs, and a fencing match in which one of the contestants is 'accidentally' killed; the outcome appears to be the same, but our reactions to the event are quite different. I think I have said enough here to show that it is not because all games have certain characteristics in common, some sub-set of a total set, that they are called 'games'; it is rather because they all have a similar role in human activity. And if this point is accepted, it is then possible to see why there are other similarities between games; human beings are basically similar to each other and so it is likely that there will be similarities in the activities which they indulge in as play. A complex set of likenesses between different games is only to be expected, particularly when it is seen that games can be classified in accordance with the area of 'real' human activities to which they are related, e.g. intellectual and physical games. The relations between members of each of these sets will be closer than across the sets. In this way the network of criss-crossing similarities can be explained. In a rather similar way it is possible to give a genetic explanation of the likenesses between different members of a family. But it is not *because* they are alike in these ways that we count them all as members of one family. Rather it is because they are all members of the same family that we expect to find certain likenesses between them. Similarly, given the fact that men are alike in certain respects, we would expect to find them amusing themselves in similar ways, to find similarities among different games. The role that they play in human life guarantees the similarities, not the other way about.

The conclusion that I think can be drawn from the argument so far is that there is a danger in using the notion of a 'family resemblance' as put forward in *Philosophical Investigations* as a solution for various philosophical difficulties. It will not solve the problem of universals nor do many of the other jobs that philosophers have called upon it to do since Wittgenstein's introduction of the notion. In saying this I am not suggesting that this is the purpose for which Wittgenstein introduced it; indeed, it seems foreign to his whole method

of philosophising to put forward methods or devices which could be used to solve or dissolve a range of problems. Rather he proceeded by giving examples which were meant to remove the attraction that a particular way of looking at an individual phenomenon had for us—one which was perhaps very natural but which led us into difficulties. The remedy was not a method for the solution of a problem, but a way of showing how we had been misled by certain analogies. It may appear possible to generalise some of his examples into methods, but I think he would have regarded this as a mistake. We might extend one of his sayings: 'The purpose of philosophy is to show the fly the way out of the fly-bottle, but it should be remembered that in philosophy every fly-bottle is different'. We tend to think of a standard fly-bottle, so that the same route will do for all flies. It seems to me that this was never Wittgenstein's belief; each problem had to be solved on its merits, and there was no reason to suspect that one solution would do for a problem different from the one it was designed to help with. Hence the fact that my arguments so far do not count against Wittgenstein's own position is quite irrelevant to the topic of this paper.

In this connection it is worth quoting the section of *Philosophical Investigations* which immediately precedes the ones I have used. 'Instead of producing something common to all that we call language, I am saying that these phenomena have no one thing in common which makes us use the same word for all,—but that they are *related* to one another in many different ways. And it is because of this relationship, or these relationships, that we call them all "language". I will try to explain this.' (*Op. cit.*, § 65.) He then goes on to introduce the notion of a 'family resemblance'. The point of the notion is to justify his refusal to give a *definition* of language, to say what its 'essence' is. Though the examples he uses and the notion he brings in may not suffice to establish the point, and that it is inadequate to do so is the burden of my argument, this has no bearing on the actual thesis that Wittgenstein wishes to maintain. One of the central parts of this is that language is not a single activity, but multifarious, comprising many different sorts of 'language-games'. Hence it is not because of a common feature that we apply the term 'language' to all these things, though this does not mean that the application of the term is in any sense arbitrary. This thesis Wittgenstein succeeds in justifying. But it is not because we find a network of similarities that we call them all 'language', and not because of a failure to find these similarities that we wish to deny the name 'language' to the system of communication used by ants. It is worth noting that linguists seldom seem in any difficulty as to whether a series of noises or of marks that they meet with in

their studies is a language, though they find the job of specifying exactly what is to count as a word or a morpheme a much more difficult task. Here again I think that the role or roles that these signs play in a human society is what makes us call them 'language', and that it is only because of that role that we are able to classify them together and hence to notice the similarities and differences between them; the notion of a 'language' is not unlike that of 'game' in this respect. It seems clear that it is not common properties or characteristics which are the important things in these cases, but something else. Indeed, the assumption that the notion of 'common property' can be applied to all cases seems part of the source of the difficulties in the notion of universals.

Hence I will devote the remainder of this paper to examining some of the difficulties which arise with the notion of 'common property', particularly as these emerge in Bambrough's paper and in his belief that he has reproduced Wittgenstein's 'solution of the problem of universals'. Part of the trouble with the question of Universals is that such a wide range of different cases falls under the general heading, from colours which are simply and correctly identified by the majority of human beings to scientific classifications which require long training to apply correctly. It is thus not surprising that a single model is inadequate to cope with the variety; if Wittgenstein had done no more than point out this fact he would have made an important contribution to the problem. Many writers, including Mr Bambrough, wish to assert that when we sort objects into classes it must be on the basis of 'objective similarities and differences', features which could be pointed to and cited as reasons for putting two things in separate piles. For example, we, as laymen, might be puzzled as to why certain plants, which to our eyes looked very different, were placed in the same category by a taxonomist. He could point out the reasons for his classification, for instance the arrangement of the flower-parts of the whole group. And this set of similarities is something that we might have discovered for ourselves if our observation had been more acute. But this need not be the only type of classification for a group of plants; there is also the division of them into useful plants and weeds, which is equally objective but which cannot be done by looking at the same aspects of the plant as the taxonomist does. The division depends rather on the end-product or on how the plants behave in gardens and so on. In these cases what is to count as an objective similarity depends on the purpose for which the division is to be made.

There is, I think, some danger in relying too much on scientific classification when discussing universals, for this is something we do at a relatively advanced level. Hence it is very natural to talk of

'common properties', 'objective similarities' and the like, for these features are closely connected with the way in which we learn to use scientific terms. At the other end of the scale come the basic words which are learnt in the nursery, such as colour words. If we have been impressed by the way the scientist goes about his work, we may be tempted to try and apply the same model here and to say that if we agree in calling all these objects 'red', it must be because they have 'redness' in common, or because they resemble one another in a particular way, in colour. And this seems to many so obvious that anyone who denies it, such as the nominalist, appears wilfully perverse. But there is an important point on his side, for in the case of colours it doesn't make sense to talk of *pointing to* the similarity (or similarities) as it does in the case of the taxonomist, who may well be drawing your attention to something that you could have seen for yourself if you had known what to look for. The same point might be made by saying that botanical, and other scientific classification, is something which is learnt formally, in lectures and out of text-books. Consequently, like most subjects which are taught in universities, it is geared to the examination question, to a demand for a verbal justification.

The situation is very different in the case of colours, for this section of language is learnt at a level too elementary for this verbal justification to be in order. Rather, children are taught to *react* in the same way to colours as adults do, and it is agreement in reactions which is evidence that the distinction has been learnt, not an examination answer. If a child fails to react in the same way as others, we say that he is colour-blind and give up the attempt to teach him this kind of distinction; he cannot be brought to react in the same way as others and there is no way to make him conform. If a budding taxonomist fails to separate two species of plant, then further instruction is in order. It is perhaps worth adding that some psychologists want to distinguish between children who are genuinely "colour-blind", who lack the appropriate visual apparatus and so cannot be brought to react in the same way, and those children who are merely "colour-dumb", who have not properly learnt to distinguish but who can be taught to do so. But the kind of teaching that they require to be brought to agree is still very different from that used in teaching taxonomists. It is in this sense that Wittgenstein suggested that one answer to the question 'Why do you call that "red"?' is 'I have learnt English'. (*Philosophical Investigations*, § 381.) The difference between the 'agreement in reactions' which lies at the basis of colour discrimination and scientific classifications is again brought out by another remark of Wittgenstein's: 'If, pointing to patches of various shades of red, you asked a man "What have these

in common that makes you call them red?" he'd be inclined to answer "Don't you see?" And this of course would not be pointing to a common element.' (*The Blue and Brown Books*, p. 131.)

There is no common *element* of 'redness' in a set of shades of red in the way in which there is a common element in a set of plants classified in one genus, for example the element that they all have the same number of petals or sepals, something which can be pointed to as a distinguishing feature. 'He pointed to the distinctive arrangement of the petals' makes perfect sense, whereas 'He pointed to the redness of the book' is peculiar. (This is not to deny that we can construct cases in which this might be a natural thing to say.) The trouble seems to lie in thinking that it is always easy to find the way in which language 'attaches to the world'. In many cases it is easy and the way in which the attachment is shown is by giving a reason for the application of the word in a particular case. The realist is a man who is haunted by this fact about our way of dealing with the world, by the 'objective similarities and dissimilarities' which are so often instanced. Wittgenstein noted that even in this area there were complications: 'There is *one* thing of which one can neither say that it is one metre long, nor that it is not one metre long, and that is the standard metre in Paris.—But this is, of course, not to ascribe any extraordinary property to it, but only to mark its peculiar role in the language-game of measuring with a metre-rule.' (*Philosophical Investigations*, § 50.) He explains this by adding: 'In this language-game it is not something that is represented, but is a means of representation'.

Now part of the trouble with colour-words is that, in normal cases, there is no standard; there may be one in the case of odd or rare shades of colour, which are named specifically for some purpose. 'Imperial Purple' would be an instance; this precise shade was the one used for emperors' costumes and can be identified by making the dye from the original formula. This will serve as a standard. Fashion designers or paint-manufacturers will also set up such standards. Even scientists may set up standards of the primary colours for their own purposes. But we did not learn our colour vocabulary by being shown standard samples of red, blue, yellow, green, brown and grey, though we may have been taught 'heliotrope' by being given a sample. One reason why samples would be of little use in the case of red and green, etc., is that these colours cover a *range*, and a range which, because of the informal way in which the words were learnt, has no precise boundaries. Nor are there any statable criteria for the application of the word. Normally we have such criteria only when the recognition of objects to which the word

applies has been formally taught; as I have said, colour-words are learnt informally at an early age and hence the process of learning is quite different from the case of scientific terms. Yet we are so commonly in a situation where criteria are relevant that we are haunted by this model of the process of recognition. Consequently we feel dissatisfied with the only possible answers to the question 'Why did you call that "red"?' Neither 'Because I have learnt English' nor 'Because it is red' seem to be satisfactory. Both seem to imply that the questioner is impugning either our competence or our honesty. And, even if the challenging aspect of the question is ignored, the answer 'Because it is red' does not seem to constitute a reason in the normal sense because it is a mere reaffirmation of the original statement, and we expect a reason to include something other than the challenged remark.

The objector may feel inclined to say at this point: 'But when I say that a red thing is red, there is at least a feeling of rightness about the use of the word'. Clearly we do have such a feeling on some occasions, as can be seen by looking at a red object and saying 'That's blue!' But it is not clear how important this fact is, for we find the same kind of feeling in the case of proper names. Try to imagine yourself called by a different name! The feeling of wrongness when a proper name is misapplied is not unlike that due to calling a red object blue. Yet proper names are not applied to people because they have certain characteristics; even if they have been so given in the first case, we do not use the name because of this characteristic, but because it is the person's name in accordance with legal or social customs. I think it is worth comparing the application of common colour words with that of proper names, rather than with those words where a formal set of criteria are involved. Too much should not be made of this suggestion; I am not putting it forward as an *explanation* of our use of the terms, but merely trying to break the hold on our thought of a particular model. There are obvious differences in the way in which children are taught colours and names, though these may not be as great as we sometimes think. But because we expect there to be general agreement in the use of colour words we are inclined to feel that their application cannot be arbitrary. However, we do expect children to get the names of their friends right, and they have been allotted arbitrarily.

The key difference between names and colour words is, it is felt, that we will be able to teach our way of using them to peoples who have a different classification of colour, as it has been suggested was the case with the Greeks. If it is possible to teach our method, then it would seem to be an objective classification. It is this that leads

Bambrough to say: 'But we can be sure that *if* it is a classification *then* it is backed by objective similarities and differences, and that if it is *not* backed by objective similarities and differences then it is merely an arbitrary system of names.' (*Op. cit.*, p. 221.) But if we take seriously the idea that some people do classify colours in a different way to ourselves, then we may find the situation is not so simple as Bambrough wishes to make out. We might try to teach a Greek, who does not know our system of colours, how to classify in our way. We find that he discriminates where we do not and fails to discriminate where we do. So, in an effort to show precisely what we are getting at, we put on the table a set of objects of which, to our eyes, only two have the same colour, a holly berry and a piece of paper of exactly the same shade of red. The Greek fails to pick them out as being of the same colour, so we point to them. He still denies that they are the same. We take a further step, and paint a piece of white paper and a white berry with the same red paint, conspicuously showing him what we are doing. Here we feel that he *must* see the similarity. If he fails to we should not know what to say, that he is (must be) colour-blind or that he has failed to grasp the *concept* of colour as we use it. (Failure to grasp the concept would presumably be a kind of 'colour-dumbness'.) It is true that in most cases we do succeed in teaching colour-words, and this is because there is a basis of 'agreement in reactions' in Wittgenstein's phrase. But this agreement is the basis of language rather than something that can be expressed *in* language. The realist, or Bambrough in the quotation I gave above, is claiming that if the issue is forced far enough, there *must* be agreement. My example of the Greek serves to show that we can at least imagine cases where this agreement did not occur. Certainly we expect to be able to communicate our system of colour classification to others not familiar with it, but it is hard to see how we could know, without the aid of some metaphysical information about the nature of the world, that we always must be able to do so. There is, as a matter of fact, a general agreement in language, in that we do normally succeed in reaching agreement; all I am concerned to point out here is that there is no way of guaranteeing that we shall reach such agreement.

It may seem that I have moved far from the topic of 'family resemblances' with which I began this paper; this is not really the case, because my concern has been to show that the notion is of little assistance in dealing with what has traditionally been known as 'the problem of universals', and, indeed, that it is of much less wide use in philosophy than has been thought by some philosophers. In conclusion I must again stress that I have not been concerned with Wittgenstein's use of 'family resemblances' in his *Philosophical*

Investigations, and that my strictures on the employment of the notion are not directed towards him.

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