

Law of Association

1893 [c.] | The Connection between Mind and Matter | CP 6.277

Now, in obedience to the principle, or maxim, of continuity, that we ought to assume things to be continuous as far as we can, it has been urged that we ought to suppose a continuity between the characters of mind and matter, so that matter would be nothing but mind that had such indurated habits as to cause it to act with a peculiarly high degree of mechanical regularity, or routine. Supposing this to be the case, the reaction between mind and matter would be of no essentially different kind from the action between parts of mind that are in continuous union, and would thus come directly under the great law of mental association, just as the theory last mentioned makes sensation to do. This hypothesis might be called materialistic, since it attributes to mind one of the recognized properties of matter, extension, and attributes to all matter a certain excessively low degree of feeling, together with a certain power of taking habits. But it differs essentially from materialism, in that, instead of supposing mind to be governed by blind mechanical law, it supposes the one original law to be the recognized law of mind, the law of association, of which the laws of matter are regarded as mere special results. This theory has been ridiculed by theologians as the merest whimsey while philosophers have pronounced it to be absurd upon metaphysical grounds; but students of physical and natural science are somewhat more favorable to it. Its advocates maintain that it is a perfectly consistent and legitimate working hypothesis, that it unmistakably commits itself to certain predictions and predesignations, that its truth or falsity ought to be judged exclusively from the comparison of these consequences of it with observation, and that, as far as it has been carried, this comparison has been quite favorable to the theory.

1893 [c.] | Grand Logic: Book I. Of Reasoning in General. Introduction. The Association of Ideas | CP 7.444

All inferences are really performed under the influence of the law of association. But all psychical actions divide into two great classes, those which are performed under the *uncontrolled* governance of association and those in which by the “agency” of consciousness, – whatever that may mean, – the actions come under self-criticism and self-control. The latter class of actions may be pronounced good or bad; the former could not be otherwise than they were.

1898 | Cambridge Lectures on Reasoning and the Logic of Things: Habit | RLT 241; CP 7.515

...the generalizing tendency is the great law of mind, the law of association, the law of habit taking. We also find in all active protoplasm a tendency to take habits. Hence I was led to the hypothesis that the laws of the universe have been formed under a universal tendency of all things toward generalization and habit-taking.

1902 | Minute Logic: Chapter II. Prelogical Notions. Section I. Classification of the Sciences (Logic II) | CP 7.375

Nomological Psychology will treat of laws of mind subordinate to the general principles of final causation. I recognize in it but two Families, of which the one is devoted to the study of the great law of Association (including, of course, Fusion) or that of the mutual attraction of all ideas, the analogue of Gravitation in the Physical world, while the other analyzes the laws of the connection of body and mind.

1902 | Minute Logic: Chapter II. Prelogical Notions. Section I. Classification of the Sciences (Logic II) | CP 1.269-270

...the being governed by a purpose or other final cause is the very essence of the psychical phenomenon, in general. There ought, therefore, one would think, to be under the order of psychonomy, or nomological psychognosy, a suborder which should seek to formulate with exactitude the law of final causation and show how its workings are to be traced out.

But under this universal law of mind, there are other laws, it may be equally ubiquitous yet not so abstract. There is, first of all, the great law of association (including fusion), a principle strikingly analogous to gravitation, since it is an attraction between ideas. There are, besides, other general phenomena of mind not explicable by association.