

Overheard in Seville

*Bulletin of the  
Santayana  
Society*

No. 26  
Fall 2008



# *Bulletin of the George Santayana Society*

No. 26 FALL 2008

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## ANNOUNCEMENT

### *The George Santayana Society*

2008

#### ANNUAL MEETING

The Society's annual meeting will be held in conjunction with the December meetings of the American Philosophical Association (Eastern Division) in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

#### Speakers

***Douglas McDermid***

Trent University

"Santayana and Scepticism"

***Douglass Anderson***

Southern Illinois University - Carbondale

"Santayana and Spinoza:  
Living Philosophic Liberty"

#### Chair

***Angus Kerr-Lawson***

University of Waterloo

7:00 - 10:00 P.M. 29 December  
Rooms to be assigned at the conference  
Marriott Hotel, Philadelphia

# Counting Categories with Peirce and Santayana

Peirce, Santayana, and the Large Facts

Nearly thirty years ago John Lachs delivered a Presidential Address entitled 'Peirce, Santayana, and the Large Facts' to the Society for the Advancement of American Philosophy.<sup>1</sup> By the 'large facts' Lachs refers to the moral truths of the world or what Santayana calls 'the relation of man and his spirit to the universe'.<sup>2</sup> As Lachs showed, there is little agreement between Peirce and Santayana over the large facts of life. Peirce's view of the universe is essentially optimistic or as Lachs neatly puts it 'upward bound'.<sup>3</sup> Peirce believed in the reality of a world-creative God that manifests the force of love in a universe that is evolving into 'an absolutely perfect, rational, and symmetrical system, in which mind is at last crystallized in the infinitely distant future.'<sup>4</sup> This optimistic view of the large facts stands in stark contrast to the view grimly expressed in the opening lines of one of Santayana's soliloquies composed during the carnage of World War I.

This war will kill the belief in progress, and it was high time. Progress is often a fact: granted a definite end to be achieved, we may sometimes observe a continuous approach towards achieving it, as for instance towards cutting off a leg neatly when it has been smashed; and such progress is to be desired in all human arts. But belief in progress, like belief in the number three, is sheer superstition, a mad notion that because some idea — here the idea of continuous change for the better — has been realized somewhere, that idea was a power which realized itself there fatally, and which must be secretly realizing itself everywhere else, even where the facts contradict it.<sup>5</sup>

As this passage suggests, Santayana's view of the large facts is not optimistic or upward bound; but nor is it altogether downward bound. For Santayana the universe is not malign but rather non-rational, largely chaotic, and Godless.<sup>6</sup> The material

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<sup>1</sup> The Address by Lachs was later published in *The Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, Vol. XVI, 1980: 3-13. This paper was read to the George Santayana Society during its annual meeting, held in conjunction with that of the American Philosophical Association, in Baltimore on December 29, 2007. My thanks to Paul Forster and Angus Kerr-Lawson for their many comments and suggestions that helped shape this paper. I also extend my sincere thanks to John Lachs for delivering what for me turned out to be a very inspiring Presidential Address to the *Society for the Advancement of American Philosophy*. Lastly, I am grateful to all those who attended the meeting of the George Santayana Society in Baltimore on December 29<sup>th</sup>, 2007, and participated in a lively, memorable discussion. It is an honor that Peter Hare, who passed away a few days after the meeting, was a leading voice in that discussion.

<sup>2</sup> *Scepticism and Animal Faith* (New York: Dover Publications, 1955), p. viii. (Hereafter cited as SAF followed by page number.) Quoted in Lachs p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> Lachs p. 6

<sup>4</sup> CP 6.33. *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, vols.1-6 ed. C. Hartshorne and P. Weiss, vols. 7-8 ed. A. Burks. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press. References are of the form "CP n.m" - to volume n, paragraph m. Also quoted in Lachs p. 6.

<sup>5</sup> *Soliloquies In England and Later Soliloquies* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, [1922] 1967), pp. 2-7-208.

<sup>6</sup> A distinction must be made here. For Santayana the universe is in once sense inherently chaotic since matter is in constant flux. Yet he is also careful to note that 'chaos must have a formal order

harmonies that allow us to flourish and that raise reason and values to the level of spirit are not manifestations of a larger, sympathetic natural order. Rather they are contingent, ephemeral, and localized material conditions soon to lapse without a trace.

Lachs finds the difference between Peirce and Santayana over the large facts surprising since the two philosophers ‘agree on so many important philosophical matters and on so many details.’ He writes that ‘one must be struck by the similarity of their technical philosophical premises and the divergence of their human conclusions.’<sup>7</sup> Lachs lists what he considers to be seven points of contact between Peirce and Santayana. In brief they are: (1) realism or the belief in a mind-independent reality; (2) naturalism or the belief in a unified cosmos governed by its own laws; (3) the centrality of action for philosophical theory; (4) an account of cognition based on signs; (5) a commitment to universals; (6) the rejection of methodological scepticism and the foundationalist picture of knowledge; and (7) the ‘persuasive similarities between Peirce’s and Santayana’s fundamental categories.’<sup>8</sup> Of course Lachs does not hold that there are no important differences between Peirce and Santayana on these seven points of contact. But he does think the similarities are both sufficient to show that Peirce and Santayana ‘hail from the same family’<sup>9</sup> and make surprising their divergence over the large facts.

Each of these seven points invites discussion; and one might reasonably debate whether Peirce, whose philosophical roots are found in Kant and Hegel, and Santayana, whose roots lie with Spinoza, Lucretius, and Democritus, really do hail from the same family. But tonight my concern will be with what is surely both the most intriguing and daunting of the seven points: the purported similarities between Peirce’s and Santayana’s ontological categories. I wish to show that despite the appeal a comparison offers, Peirce’s and Santayana’s categories are so different in form and function that we might be little surprised the two philosophers diverge over the large facts. Further, if this is correct, then any attempt to decide which is the ‘right’ list of categories will likely be futile not only because of the high level of abstraction that talk of ‘fundamental categories’ involves but also because Peirce and Santayana intend different things by their categorial schemes.

### Comparing Categories

It is tempting to look for similarities and differences in Peirce’s and Santayana’s systems. One way the temptation might arise is by seeing their conceptual schemes as indicative of a larger, shared philosophical project. After all, Peirce saw himself, aided by developments in logic, as revising and improving Kant’s list of categories. Perhaps Santayana, albeit with a different approach, is doing something similar with his realms of being.

We might continue this line of thought by noting that it is doubtful that Santayana, who like Peirce was steeped in the history of philosophy, would disagree with Peirce’s statement that ‘the word *Category* bears substantially the same meaning with all philosophers. For Aristotle, for Kant, and for Hegel, a category is an element

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of its own’. This produces another sense of ‘chaos’; specifically, as a term ‘for any order that produces confusion in our minds.’ *Dominations and Powers* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1951), p. 44. Hereafter cited as DP followed by page number.

<sup>7</sup> Lachs 161-162

<sup>8</sup> Lachs 160

<sup>9</sup> Lachs 157

of phenomena of the first rank of generality.’<sup>10</sup> Santayana, who was influenced by Aristotle, writes that his realms of being are ‘kinds or categories of things which I find conspicuously different and worth distinguishing, at least in my own thoughts’. Santayana adds that far from being hard to fathom his system of categories is ‘justified, and has been justified in all ages and countries, by the facts before every man’s eyes’ since they discerned with only ‘clear eyes and honest reflection.’<sup>11</sup> This claim resonates with Peirce’s notion of phenomenology, one of the methods he advocates for deriving his categories. For Peirce phenomenology involves opening our ‘mental eyes’ and carefully observing whatever presents itself to us. We then attempt to ‘draw up a catalogue of categories and prove its sufficiency and freedom from redundancies, to make out the characteristics of each category, and to show the relations of each.’<sup>12</sup> Taken as is, this last statement sounds like a near perfect description of what Santayana does throughout *Realms of Being*.

Finally, as Lachs suggests, given that Peirce and Santayana were part of the Harvard scene and friends with both James and Royce, it is possible they shared philosophical ideas discussed at the time. In his biography on Peirce, Joseph Brent provides a reason for thinking that the purported similarities of Peirce’s and Santayana’s categories might be more than coincidence. Brent notes that the two philosophers crossed paths when Peirce gave his 1903 Harvard lectures on pragmatism. Describing the response, Brent writes that ‘most of [Peirce’s] hearers, including James but with the surprising exception of George Santayana (Royce was away), found the lectures obscure, if not unintelligible, because they were so deeply embedded in his largely unpublished theory of categories.’<sup>13</sup> If Brent is right about Santayana attending and appreciating Peirce’s lectures, then we have some additional evidence — thin though it is — that their categorial projects are related. One committed to finding connections might even point to the suspicious fact that it was only shortly after Peirce’s lectures that Santayana got the idea, as he put it in a letter, to write a book on ‘a brand new system of philosophy to be called “*Three realms of Being*”’.<sup>14</sup>

## The Categories Compared

Assuming we have reason to think Peirce and Santayana are engaged in the same project, how do their categories line up? At the outset it must be said that trying to align Peirce’s omnipresent categories of Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness with Santayana’s realms of Essence, Matter, Truth, and Spirit is a dizzying prospect. Almost immediately one is filled with a queasy feeling of philosophical intoxication,

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<sup>10</sup> CP 5.41-43

<sup>11</sup> SAF vi-x

<sup>12</sup> CP 5.41-43

<sup>13</sup> Joseph Brent, *Charles Sanders Peirce: A Life* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), p.291.

<sup>14</sup> *The Letters of George Santayana*, Volumes 1-VIII, ed. William G. Holzberger (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2001-2008), vol.2, p.37 (emphasis added). Hereafter cited as ‘*Letters* n:m’, referring to volume n, page m. In fact it is doubtful that Peirce influenced Santayana. In 1937 in a letter to Justus Buchler he wrote ‘My knowledge of Pierce [sic] is chiefly at second hand and from quotations, but I heard one of his Harvard lectures.’ *Letters* 6:80. In an earlier letter to Charles Hartshorne he wrote ‘There is little that I can say about Charles Peirce of any importance. He hasn’t had any direct influence on me.’ *Letters* 4:59

as if one had mixed two drinks together in order to see what qualities they have in common. To find our footing we can follow Lachs's plausible summary analysis. Along the way we'll consider some alternative readings.

Lachs writes that 'a close study reveals that what Peirce calls firstness is almost precisely what Santayana dubs spirit: the stress on self-contained feeling makes the connection unmistakable.'<sup>15</sup> This is a fair comparison since Peirce frequently identifies firstness with feeling and for Santayana a moment of spirit might involve some sort of feeling. However there are considerations that complicate the issue. One such consideration is that Santayana does not limit spirit or consciousness to feeling. He writes that:

Pure awareness or consciousness suffices to exemplify spirit; and there may be cold spirits somewhere that have merely that function; but it is not the only function that only spirits could perform; and the human spirit, having intent, expectation, belief, and eagerness, runs much thicker than that.<sup>16</sup>

Given these functions, spirit would seem to be a broader category than firstness. Another complicating factor is that Peirce does not always equate firstness with feeling. He does assert that the 'quality of feeling is the true *psychical representative* of the first category of the immediate.'<sup>17</sup> However he also describes a first as 'that whose being is simply in itself, not referring to anything nor lying behind anything'<sup>18</sup> and 'the mode of being which consists in its subject being positively such as it is regardless of aught else.'<sup>19</sup> These descriptions suggest that, as with Santayana's category of essence, it is the principle of identity that logically defines firstness.'<sup>20</sup> Another key feature of an essence is eternity: the being essence is independent of material embodiment. At one point Peirce seems to suggest something similar when he writes that a first or 'quality is eternal, independent of time any of any realization.'<sup>21</sup> In sum, Peirce's category of firstness appears more closely aligned with Santayana's category of essence than spirit.<sup>22</sup>

Next in Lachs's analysis is secondness and matter. He writes that 'Secondness is what Santayana and Peirce both call matter, the realm of force and brute interaction.'<sup>23</sup> This too is plausible since for Santayana matter is what exists and Peirce and Santayana characterize 'existence' in strikingly similar ways. Santayana writes that the primitive sense of existence is found in 'brute experience, or shock', and he maintains that existence is constituted by 'external relations' between things.<sup>24</sup> This sounds much like Peirce's descriptions of secondness or the category of 'reaction' to

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<sup>15</sup> Lachs 6

<sup>16</sup> SAF 275

<sup>17</sup> CP 5.44 (italics added)

<sup>18</sup> CP 1.356

<sup>19</sup> CP 1.25

<sup>20</sup> 'The principle of essence ... is identity: the being of each essence is entirely exhausted by its definition: I do not mean its definition in words, but the character which distinguishes it from any other essence.' *Realms of Being* (one volume edition which contains Santayana's four books: *The Realm of Essence* (1927); *The Realm of Matter* (1930); *The Realm of Truth* (1938); and *The Realm of Spirit* (1940)) (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1942), p.18. Hereafter cited as "RB" followed by the page number.

<sup>21</sup> CP 1.420

<sup>22</sup> This seems to have been Buchler's suggestion. See Letters 6:80-81.

<sup>23</sup> Lachs 6

<sup>24</sup> SAF 141 and 42.

which 'the conceptions of existence and fact chiefly belong'. Peirce describes our experience of secondness as an 'irrational insistency' that makes 'brutal inroads' on our thoughts 'from without'.<sup>25</sup>

Although secondness and matter seem like clear correlates, once again the issue quickly gets complicated. Just as spirit is a broader category than firstness, matter would seem to be a broader category than secondness. In his reply to his critics Santayana asserts that 'the first of all distinctions is that between what is always identical with itself and immutable and what, on the contrary, is in flux and identifiable. This is the precise distinction I would make between existence and essence.'<sup>26</sup> Now matter is certainly what exists for Santayana. However this does not mean that for him 'existence' and 'matter' are synonymous. Matter is a specific kind or type of substance; it has a set of what he lists as 'indispensable' and 'presumable' properties, and these go well beyond Peirce's minimalist descriptions of secondness. Take, for instance, one of Santayana's descriptions of the flux of existence from *The Realm of Matter*:

Doubtless ... when the world changes in any particular its total essence is renewed, since its balance becomes another; yet the new total essence is — and must be, if the world is to be consecutive — largely similar to the old one; and this is not by a groundless accident or magic law, but because the matter of the earlier phase is inherited by the later. This matter, which alone renders either phase a fact and not merely an essence, carries with it its quantity, its energy, and a progressive redistribution of its parts; so that the very principle of genesis, in lending to each moment of the flux its physical existence, determines the essence which it shall exemplify, and determines it in virtue of the continuity and heredity which must bind moments together materially if they are to be successive chronologically.<sup>27</sup>

If we take this passage in conjunction with Santayana's claims about the most basic features of matter, we see that the realm of matter has a richness that his depictions of mere (or sheer) existence lacks; the implication being that matter is a broader category than secondness. In short, matter has the existential punch of secondness, but it possesses much else besides.

This leaves us with thirdness, which Lachs correlates with the realm of truth. He writes that for Santayana 'Truth encompasses both matter and mind, for it consists of all those orderly tropes which gain actualization in any medium. And by "trope" Santayana means the complex essence of a process, a notion closely akin to Peirce's general idea or law.'<sup>28</sup> Once again the connection is plausible but there are problems. Most obviously, Santayana's realm of truth is inert; it is a segment of the realm of essence and so lacks the existential punch that, along with firstness, is an essential component of thirdness. Further, if what has been said about spirit and matter is correct, then each of these categories would seem to manifest thirdness. We might say that spirit manifests thirdness since its many modes include the kind of psychological states, such as judgment and intent, that Peirce refers to as prime examples of thirdness. And we might say that matter manifests thirdness since it has existence, essence, and a dynamism that possess 'continuity and heredity'. Indeed we might even see a faint version of Peirce's notion of a 'general law' in Santayana's statement that 'anywhere [matter] can fall into a trope or rhythm that can be maintained, it maintains

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<sup>25</sup> *The Essential Peirce*, vol. II, ed. The Peirce Edition Project. (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998), p.166; and CP 1.321 and 7.569.

<sup>26</sup> *The Philosophy of George Santayana*, ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp, (Illinois: Open Court, [1940] 1991), pp. 497 and 544.

<sup>27</sup> RB 272-273

<sup>28</sup> Lachs 7

it, as we see in the solar system.<sup>29</sup> While this is definitely an interpretive reach, it does suggest that Peirce's category of thirdness is more closely aligned with Santayana's realm of matter than truth.

### The Aims of Ontology

There are other major differences between Peirce's and Santayana's categorial schemes that make the search for deep connections look unpromising. One of them, only gestured at thus far, is the fact that Peirce's firstness, secondness, and thirdness are logically intertwined and all pervasive in a way that Santayana's realms of being are not. There is also the issue of the kind of grounding Peirce and Santayana offered for their categories. Although it would be un-Peircean to suggest that two individuals starting out from very different backgrounds and premises can never arrive at the same conclusion, the differences in starting points and justification are major and full of implications. By way of conclusion, I note some of these differences and offer some comments on what Peirce and what Santayana took the aim of ontology to be.

Peirce's clearly had something ambitious in mind when in the 1860s he set about revising Kant's list of categories. He wanted to find a *universal* set of categories: categories that apply to all possible phenomena. Peirce's categories are 'calculated to account for everything in the universe except pure originality itself.'<sup>30</sup> One part of this categorial project is a cosmology that is upward bound since genuine thirdness — or as Peirce calls it, 'reason objectified' — is operative in nature.<sup>31</sup> In sum, Peirce's categorial scheme is presented as a hypothesis that is true of the universe. That it is a novel and bold hypothesis — a guess at the riddle — he readily admits, just as he admits that he does not write for readers looking to justify their preconceived opinions.

While it would be a mistake to say Santayana wrote for preconceived *opinion*, in the opening pages of *Scepticism and Animal Faith* he makes it clear that he is appealing to the reader's '*convictions* in the depths of his soul, beneath all his overt parrot beliefs'.<sup>32</sup> He insists that he is not creating a new system of philosophy; rather he is uncovering 'ancient philosophy, very ancient philosophy.'<sup>33</sup> He does not intend for his realms of being to be a guess at which elements are present in all phenomena. Instead he takes his ontology to be 'ordinary reflection systematized'; and holds that essence, matter, spirit, and truth are the categories that might be distinguished, not by pure reason, but 'by an *animal mind* in the presence of nature.'<sup>34</sup> He allows that there may be other realms to which he has no access; and he admits that, being 'no scientific man, no mathematician, no historian', he has not wandered 'beyond the rudiments' of the categories he presents (RB xxxix). It is thus no surprise that Santayana, unlike Peirce, has no cosmology or theory of the universe. His system of categories is an exercise in philosophical meditation; it is not part of a larger scientific investigation.

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<sup>29</sup> DP 9

<sup>30</sup> EP I p. 244

<sup>31</sup> EP I p. 255

<sup>32</sup> SAF v (emphasis added).

<sup>33</sup> RB xxxviii

<sup>34</sup> RB 827; RB xxv-xxvi (emphasis added).

## Conclusion

Given the different statuses Peirce and Santayana assign to their categories, it may come as no surprise that they part ways over the large facts of life. For Peirce, the large facts are intricately connected to subtle yet profound ontological truths derived via logic and phenomenology. For Santayana, something like the reverse is the case. His categories are set forth, as he writes, 'in the full light of human experience and history' (RB xxviii). And this history inevitably casts a tragic, if not pessimistic, shadow over his materialism, and over the plight of spirit that is born and then brought down by an indifferent universe.

GLENN TILLER

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## **New *Bulletin* Website: Other Santayana Sites**

Martin Coleman at the *Santayana Edition* has kindly agreed to take on the maintenance of the website devoted to the archives of *Overheard in Seville: Bulletin of the Santayana Society*. It becomes a part of the extensive Edition website, and will continue to contain the texts of current articles printed each year. As well, the earliest *Bulletins* have been scanned and will also be a part of the archive. The site is:

<<http://www.iupui.edu/~santedit/santayanatodaysociety.html>>

Since all the archives will be verbatim scans of each *Bulletin* number, it is necessary to abandon the previous practice of occasionally posting papers that are somewhat longer than the original *Bulletin* version. There are two already posted papers of this type: David Dilworth's 2005 "The Life of the Spirit in Santayana, Stevens, and Williams," and Chris Skowronski's 2006 paper "C. A. Strong and G. Santayana in Light of Archive Material." These longer versions can still be found on the current webpage:

<<http://www.math.uwaterloo.ca/~kerrlaws/Santayana/Bulletin/seville.html>>

This site is no longer being maintained.

The website for the *Santayana Edition*, dealing with all aspects of the project is:

<<http://www.iupui.edu/~santedit/>>.

Tom Davis maintains a site dedicated, among other things, to Santayana citations and exchanges of opinion on various issues:

<<http://members.aol.com/santayana>>

Herman Saatkamp has prepared a site in the Stanford University philosophy series:

<<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/santayana/>>

As mentioned again below, the Spanish journal LIMBO maintains the site:

<[www.hiperlimbo.com](http://www.hiperlimbo.com)>

# What Grounds the Categories? Peirce and Santayana<sup>1</sup>

As for me, in stretching my canvas and taking up my palette and brush, I am not vexed that masters should have painted before me in styles which I have no power and no occasion to imitate; nor do I expect future generations to be satisfied with always repainting my pictures. Agreement is sweet, being a form of friendship; it is also a stimulus to insight, and helpful, as contradiction is not; and I certainly hope to find agreement in some quarters. Yet I am not much concerned about the number of those who may be my friends in the spirit, nor do I care about their chronological distribution, being as much pleased to discover one intellectual kinsman in the past as to imagine two in the future. That in the world at large alien natures should prevail, innumerable and perhaps infinitely various, does not disturb me. On the contrary, I hope fate may manifest to them such objects as they need and can love; and although my sympathy with them cannot be so vivid as with men of my own mind, and in some cases may pass into antipathy, I do not conceive that they are wrong or inferior for being different from me, or from one another ... [i]f somehow, in their chosen terms, they have balanced their accounts with nature, they are to be heartily congratulated on their moral diversity. — George Santayana (RB xvi-xvii).<sup>2</sup>

To erect an edifice that shall outlast the vicissitudes of time, my care must be, not so much to set each brick with nicest accuracy, as to lay the foundations deep and massive. Aristotle builded upon a few deliberately chosen concepts—such as matter and form, act and power—very broad, and in their outlines vague and rough, but solid, unshakable, and not easily undermined...The undertaking which this volume inaugurates is to make a philosophy like that of Aristotle, that is to say, to outline a theory so comprehensive that, for a long time to come, the entire work of human reason, in philosophy of every school and kind, in mathematics, in psychology, in physical science, in history, in sociology, and in whatever other department there may be, shall appear as filling up of its details. The first step towards this is to find simple concepts applicable to every subject. — Charles S. Peirce (1.1, c1897).<sup>3</sup>

Peirce's admiration of Kant's philosophy is roughly matched by Santayana's antipathy towards it. Whereas Peirce is out to invigorate Kant's thought in light of the latest innovations in logic, Santayana sees Kant's philosophy as wrong-headed (and would surely view its assumption of Aristotelian logic as among the least of its failings). Their disagreement about Kant's legacy is reflected in their disagreement about what a doctrine of ontological categories is for and how it is to be defended. I discuss their views on these questions and suggest that with respect to their search for a doctrine of categories Peirce and Santayana can be said to be engaged in a common project in only a superficial sense. Their divergence, I claim, is

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful for the careful criticism of Andrew Lugg, Glenn Tiller and those present at the annual meeting of the George Santayana Society (held in conjunction with that of the American Philosophical Association) in Baltimore on December 29<sup>th</sup>, 2007 where this paper was read. I dedicate this paper to the memory of Peter Hare who, in conversation afterward, was characteristically insightful and supportive.

<sup>2</sup> References of this form are to Santayana's *Realms of Being* (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, Inc., 1972).

<sup>3</sup> References of this form are to *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, 8 vols, C. Hartshorne and P. Weiss (eds) (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960) and cite the volume and paragraph number followed by the year the passage was written.

sufficiently deep as to render comparisons of their philosophies complicated (to say the very least) and adjudication exceedingly intricate, if not altogether nonsensical.

Santayana views the realms of “essence”, “matter”, “truth” and “spirit” as ontologically fundamental. In distinguishing these realms he thinks he is articulating the “dumb human philosophy, incomplete but solid, prevalent among all civilized people” (RB v), a set of ideas that underlies the various philosophical systems proposed down the ages — systems “which have professed but failed to be universal” (RB v). He argues that these “realms of being” are presupposed by all who claim to understand the world, even those who profess to deny them, that they form “the minimum beliefs and radical presuppositions implied in facing a world at all or professing to know anything” (RB xxviii).<sup>4</sup>

Santayana’s list of fundamental categories is uncovered through what he calls “transcendental criticism”.<sup>5</sup> In using the term “transcendental” to characterize his approach he is not suggesting that philosophers can assume a standpoint on knowledge or reality outside science or common sense. To the contrary, he denies there are critical faculties or principles with authority derived from a source independent of our broader theory of the world. He says “I stand in philosophy exactly where I stand in daily life; I should not be honest otherwise” (SAF vi). He thinks “[a] philosopher is compelled to follow the maxim of epic poets and to plunge *in medias res*” (SAF 1). On his view, the transcendental critic merely exploits some of his beliefs to interrogate the grounds of others in an effort to “disentangle and formulate [the] subjective principles of interpretation” at work in knowledge (SAF 4).<sup>6</sup> Transcendental criticism reveals that knowledge presupposes “principles of interpretation ... tendencies to feign ... habits of inference” (SAF 4) and these elements of knowledge are neither justified by the compulsion of empirical fact nor groundable a priori. It discloses that the categories necessary to knowledge are without foundation, their adoption an act of “animal faith”, and thus confirms — what Santayana thinks empirical science also shows — that knowledge is a sum of the vectors of worldly influence and human need and that beliefs inevitably reflect as much about the sort of creatures we are as the sort of surroundings we find ourselves in.<sup>7</sup> As he explains:

Possession of the absolute truth is not merely by accident beyond the range of particular minds; it is incompatible with being alive, because it excludes any particular station, organ, interest, or date of survey: the absolute truth is undiscoverable just because it is not a

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<sup>4</sup> Santayana claims to “recover the natural and inevitable beliefs of a human being living untutored in this world, but having a reflective mind” (RB xxvi) and says “[m]y philosophy is justified, and has been justified in all ages and countries, by the facts before every man’s eyes; and no great wit is requisite to discover it, only (what is rarer than wit) candour and courage” (*Scepticism and Animal Faith* [hereafter SAF] [New York: Scribner’s and Sons, 1929] x).

<sup>5</sup> He says his “investigation [into the categories] is not anthropological, but critical and analytic and made in the full light of human experience and history” (RB xxviii).

<sup>6</sup> For Santayana, “[t]he only critical function of transcendentalism is to drive empiricism home, and challenge it to produce any knowledge of fact whatsoever” (SAF 4).

<sup>7</sup> He says, for example, that “[w]hat renders knowledge true is fidelity to the object; but in the conduct and fancy of an animal this fidelity can be only rough, summary, dramatic ... The realm of matter can never be disclosed either to hypothesis or to sensation in its presumable inmost structure and ultimate extent: the garment of appearance must always fit it loosely and drape it in alien folds, because appearance is essentially an adaptation of facts to the scale and faculty of the observer” (RB xii). He further notes that “scientific psychology confirms the criticism of knowledge and the experience of life which proclaim that the immediate objects of intuition are mere appearances and that nothing given exists as it is given” (SAF 66).

perspective. Perspectives are essential to animal apprehension; an observer, himself part of the world he observes, must have a particular station in it; he cannot be equally near to everything, nor internal to anything but himself; of the rest he can only take views, abstracted according to his sensibility and fore-shortened according to his interests. . . . Mind was not created for the sake of discovering the absolute truth. The absolute truth has its own intangible reality, and scorns to be known. (RB xiii)<sup>8</sup>

Santayana denies that knowledge claims are literally true. They are couched in symbols and symbols, he claims, “unify the diffuse processes of nature in adventitious human terms that have an entirely different aspect from the facts they stand for” (LSK 436). In operating with symbols “thought works in a conventional medium” (LSK 436) and there is no reason to think that the conventions essential to the functioning of symbols reflect the nature of the objects symbolized. As he sees it, symbols emphasize certain aspects of the world to the exclusion of others and yield insight into reality by simplifying it. This is not an obstacle to knowledge, on his view, but rather a condition of it. As he explains:

Were the representation a complete reproduction—did the statue breathe, walk, and think—it would no longer represent anything: it would be no symbol, but simply one more thing, intransitive, unmeaning, like everything not made to be interpreted. (LSK 437)

Indeed, he thinks it is precisely because of its partiality and abstractness that symbolic knowledge is of use to animal minds living in an intricate and indifferent world.<sup>9</sup>

While Santayana thinks there is no escaping the epistemological limitations of symbolic knowledge, he does not think that our claims to know the world are outright false. Knowledge does reveal something of reality — namely the way it is for creatures constructed as we are. Predictions are fulfilled and events brought under control and thus in reporting the state of things “on that human scale on which we need to measure them” we still “may report them correctly” (RB xiv).<sup>10</sup> “Even when our

<sup>8</sup> He also says that “[t]he control which the environment exercises over the structure and conduct of animals is decidedly loose” (RB viii-ix) and a “liberal mind must live on its own terms, and think in them” (RB xii). Moreover, he asks, “is it credible that the absolute truth should descend into the thoughts of a mortal creature, equipped with a few special senses and with a biased intellect, a man lost amidst millions of his fellows and a prey to the epidemic delusions of the race?” (RB xiii) and answers that it is not. For him, “[s]cience is... as much an instinctive product, as much a stepping forth of human courage in the dark, as is any inevitable dream or impulsive action” (*Little Essays* [Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, Inc, 1967] 32-33). See also, “Literal and Symbolic Knowledge” [hereafter LSK], *The Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods*, vol. XV, No. 16, August 1, 1918: 421 and 435.

<sup>9</sup> On Santayana’s view “[d]iscourse is a language, not a mirror” (SAF 179) and “[w]e can not do without symbols, because the entire and intrinsic nature of real objects is not open to apprehension nor manageable in discourse” (LSK 442). “A symbol,” he says, “has a transitive function which its object, being an ultimate fact, has not; the symbol may therefore very properly or even necessarily have a substance, status, and form different from those of its object” (LSK 437). “We read the data of sense like a book; we know they are symbols, and we are perfectly aware that these indications leave us ill informed about the complete reality; though probably we show a healthy indifference to what the rest of the reality may be” (LSK 441).

<sup>10</sup> He says that “astronomy,” for example, “is not at all like the stars, being human discourse; but it tells us about them truths most penetrating and certain; and in its calculations and hypotheses there need be nothing false” (LSK 437). “[I]f a given animal with special organs and a special form of imagination can progressively master the world, the fact proves that the world is con-natural with him. I do not mean that it favours his endeavours, much less that it is composed as his fancy pictures it; I mean only that his endeavours express one of the formations which nature has fallen into, for the time in equilibrium with the surrounding formations; and that his ideas too are in correspondence with the sphere of his motions, and express his real relations. The

conceptions are childish or false,” he insists, “it is almost certain that in the direction where we affirm our object to lie there is something that, at least partially and relatively, has the character we assign to it” (LSK 434). For him, knowledge remains “true belief grounded in experience”, that is, belief “controlled by outer facts” (SAF 180). “It is not true by accident; it is not shot into the air on the chance that there may be something it may hit.” Rather it is the product of interactions between the organism and its impinging environment that yield “an appropriate correspondence ... between ... objects and the beliefs generated under their influence” (SAF 180).<sup>11</sup>

One might be tempted to object that if absolute truth is unattainable and plays no role in the explanation and evaluation of knowledge claims, it is a dispensable or even meaningless notion. In Santayana’s view, however, this is a grave mistake. The relativity of symbolic knowledge to perspective does not “imply there is no absolute truth” (RB xv):

On the contrary, if there were no absolute truth, all-inclusive and eternal, the desultory views taken from time to time by individuals would themselves be absolute. They would be irrelevant to one another, and incomparable in point of truth, each being without any object but the essence which appeared in it. If views can be more or less correct, and perhaps complementary to one another, it is because they refer to the same system of nature, the complete description of which, covering the whole past and the whole future, would be the absolute truth. (RB xv)

Still, recognition of the limits of symbolic knowledge tempers our claims to know and Santayana’s doctrine of ontological categories is no exception. Thus while he says “[t]he deepest presuppositions, for a naturalist, are the most trustworthy, since they express the primary adjustment of the psyche to the world”, he nevertheless holds that “for a critic looking for demonstration the deepest presuppositions are the most arbitrary” (PGS 517).<sup>12</sup> What animal knowers must rely on in order to have knowledge at all proves, through transcendental criticism, to be baseless.<sup>13</sup>

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possibility of such correspondence and such equilibrium proves that nature exists, and that the creature that sustains them is a part of nature” (SAF 238-239). “So in physical chemistry we may safely operate with abstract terms to which no clear image corresponds in our fancy, the scale of the object being no longer the scale of our senses; but only the most shameless egotism would infer from that fact that the natural processes so expressed contain nothing but those abstract terms. That would be as if a general, poring over his maps at headquarters, quietly informed you that, for military science, a man was simply 1/200 of a company; that to be 1/200 was his whole essence; and that to suppose he possessed other qualities, unknown to military science, or existed at all when his company was disbanded, was a baseless superstition. It is in this spirit, and with this truth, that idealists talk about the constituents of nature” (LSK 430-431).

<sup>11</sup> Santayana sees no incoherence in appealing to knowledge of the human epistemic condition uncovered in science to defend his view that this very knowledge is not literally true. This is because he thinks science, while relative, still reveals something of the nature of reality.

<sup>12</sup> References of this form cite *The Philosophy of George Santayana*, P.A. Schilpp (ed) (New York: Tudor Publishing Company, 1951). Santayana also says that “[m]y matured conclusion has been that no system is to be trusted, not even that of science in any literal or pictorial sense; but all systems may be used and, up to a certain point, trusted as symbols. Science expresses in human terms our dynamic relation to surrounding reality. Philosophies and religions, where they do not misrepresent these same dynamic relations and do not contradict science, express destiny in moral dimensions, in obviously mythical and poetical images” (PGS 8).

<sup>13</sup> While Santayana describes his categories as “beliefs and presuppositions that it is impossible for me to deny honestly” (RB xxviii), thinks it “reasonable to suppose that the beliefs that prove inevitable for me, after absolutely disinterested criticism, would prove inevitable also to most human beings” (RB xxix) and claims they “respect the orthodoxy which ... laymen maintain everywhere” (SAF v), he does so knowing full well that his philosophy is only “a sketch of the

The picture of knowledge I have sketched underlies Santayana's criticism of Kant — criticism I think he would be only too eager to direct at Peirce. Santayana thinks that far from securing the claims of human knowers, Kant ends up denying the possibility of knowledge altogether. He recognizes that Kant talks of things in themselves independent of our knowledge but argues that by Kant's own lights such talk is nonsensical. Things in themselves lie outside the scope of space, time and the categories and as such are not merely unknown but inconceivable. For this reason, Santayana thinks, Kant is forced in the end to jettison the notion of reality as it is apart from how it is understood by creatures like us and to assume (conceitedly, Santayana believes) that objects must conform to our conceptions of them.<sup>14</sup>

As Santayana sees it, Kant's Copernican revolution is rooted in scepticism. He thinks it is only after supposing that human knowledge is incapable of answering to things in themselves that Kant concludes that it need not try to answer to them. This conclusion leads Kant in turn to obliterate the distinction between the world as conceived symbolically and the world as it is apart from symbols.<sup>15</sup> In the end, Santayana insists, Kant:

denies that we are created beings owing reverence to immense forces beyond ourselves, which endow us with our limited faculties and powers, govern our fortunes, and shape our very loves without our permission. (EGP 151-152)<sup>16</sup>

Kant's method, in effect if not intent, is "[t]o take what views we will of things, if things will barely suffer us to take them, and then to declare that the things are mere

terms in the views we take of them" (EGP 31):<sup>17</sup>

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logical and moral economy that has imposed itself on [his] free thoughts" that "can be neither complete nor exclusive" and "other animal minds may come to clearness differently" (RB xxvi). He thinks that to the extent that the needs which inspire theories vary from person to person or species to species, so does the authority and persuasiveness of those theories. Thus, he writes: "I do not ask any one to think in my terms if he prefers others. Let him clean better, if he can, the windows of his soul that the variety and beauty of the prospect may spread more brightly before him (SAF vi-vii)".

<sup>14</sup> Santayana also thinks advocates of Kant's transcendentalism cannot account for the view of the world we have: "[o]n the one hand, phenomena cannot be produced by an agency prior to them, for his [the transcendentalist's] first principle is that all existence is phenomenal and exists only in being posited or discovered. Will, Life, Duty, or whatever he calls this transcendental agency, by which the illusions of nature and history are summoned from the vasty deep, cannot be a fact, since all facts are created by its incantations. On the other hand phenomena cannot be substantial on their own account, for then they would not be phenomena but things, and no transcendental magician, himself non-existent and non-phenomenal, would be needed to produce them" (SAF 302). See also Santayana's *Egotism in German Philosophy* [hereafter EGP], (Haskell House Publishers, Ltd., 1971) 42f.

<sup>15</sup> Santayana says that "the pure doctrine of Kant was that knowledge is impossible. Anything I could perceive or think was *ipso facto* a creature of my sense or thought. Nature, history, God and the other world, even a man's outspread experience, could be things imagined only. Thought— for it was still assumed that there was thought—was a bubble, self-inflated at every moment, in an infinite void. All else was imaginary; no world could be anything but the iridescence of that empty sphere" (SAF 301).

<sup>16</sup> In this passage Santayana is speaking, not of Kant specifically, but of "egotism", the view that "the source of one's being and power lies in oneself, that will and logic are by right omnipotent, and that nothing should control the mind or the conscience except the mind or the conscience itself" (EGP 151). However, he thinks that "it is from Kant, directly or indirectly, that the German egotists draw the conviction which is their most tragic error" (EGP 51).

Among transcendental principles he [Kant] placed space, time, and causality; so that, if he had been consistent, he would have had to regard all multiple and successive existence as imagined only. Everything conceivable would have collapsed into the act of conceiving it, and this act itself would have lost its terms and its purpose, and evaporated into nothing. (SAF 300)<sup>18</sup>

Santayana is cognizant of Kant's efforts to square empirical realism (i.e. belief in the independence of mind and world) with transcendental idealism (i.e. the belief that matter abstracted from the conditions of knowing is nothing). It is just that for all its complexity, Santayana thinks, Kant's view leaves us unable ultimately to distinguish between the way things are and the way they are symbolically represented by creatures like us. As he sees it, in taking transcendental principles (i.e. the categories of the understanding and the principles of reason) to be constitutive of reality — that is, to determine the nature of the real — rather than as constitutive only of our means of understanding reality Kant uncritically takes “principles of local perspective” forming the “grammar of fancy of this or that natural being quickened to imagination” (SAF 301) to be built into the order of things. This view, which Santayana dubs “egotism”, is no more than “subjectivism become proud of itself and proclaiming itself absolute” (EGP 152).<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Santayana rehearses this theme repeatedly in EGP. For example, he writes: “[t]he just and humble side of German philosophy ... is that it accepts the total relativity of the human mind and luxuriates in it, much as we might expect spiders or porpoises to luxuriate in their special sensibility, making no vain effort to peep through the bars of their psychological prison. This sort of agnosticism in a minor key is conspicuous in the *Critique of Pure Reason* ... The more profound [the thinkers between Kant and Nietzsche] are, the more content and even delighted they are to consider nothing but their own creations. Their theory of knowledge proclaims that knowledge is impossible. You know only your so-called knowledge, which itself knows nothing; and you are limited to the autobiography of your illusions” (EGP 4). He also says that German idealism “puts behind experience a background of concepts, and not of matter; a ghostly framework of laws, categories, moral or logical principles to be the stiffening and skeleton of sensible experience, and to lend it some substance and meaning” (EGP 5) and “[a]ll transcendentalism takes the point of view of what it calls knowledge; whenever it mentions anything—matter, God, oneself—it means not that thing but the idea of it. By knowledge it understands the image or belief, the fact of cognition. Whatever is thought of exists, or can exist, in this philosophy, only for thought; yet this thought is called not illusion but knowledge, because knowledge is what the thought feels that it is” (EGP 27-28). Finally, he says, “[d]ominated as this [German] philosophy is by transcendental method, it regards views, and the history and logic of views, as more primitive and important than the objects which these views have in common” (EGP 30).

<sup>18</sup> In this connection Santayana urges that “[y]ou cannot maintain that the natural world is the product of the human mind without changing the meaning of the word mind and of the word human” (EGP 7) and, for the German idealist, “imagination that is sustained is called knowledge, illusion that is coherent is called truth, and will that is systematic is called virtue” (EGP 19).

<sup>19</sup> It is worth noting that Santayana thinks Kant's view would collapse into solipsism were it not for the claim that human knowers are bound to construct the world using universal, necessary principles. However, he thinks this assumption unwarranted. As he sees it, Kant simply assumed that “tendencies to feign must be the same in everybody, that the notions of nature, history, or mind which they led people to adopt were the right or standard notions on these subjects, and that it was glorious, rather than ignominious or sophistical, to build on these principles an encyclopaedia of false science and to call it knowledge” (SAF 4). He also writes: “But Kant, assuming that mind everywhere must have a single grammar, investigated very ingeniously what he conceived to be its recondite categories, and schemata, and forms of intuition: all pompous titles for what Hume had satirically called tendencies to feign ... in dishonouring the intellect, [he] at least studied it devotedly ... and he gave it so elaborate an articulation, and imposed it so

Santayana would not hesitate to apply his criticisms of Kant to Peirce. He would surely be suspicious of Peirce's claim that Kant's notion of a noumenal world — the notion of a realm of things in themselves beyond the limits of (actual and potential) cognition underlying the phenomenal world of experience — is nonsensical. What is more, he would reject the argument Peirce gives for this claim when he writes:

[a]ll our conceptions are obtained by abstraction and combinations of cognitions first occurring in judgements of experience. Accordingly, there can be no conception of the absolutely incognizable, since nothing of that sort occurs in experience. But the meaning of a term is the conception which it conveys. Hence, a term can have no such meaning... Over against any cognition, there is an unknown but knowable reality; but over against all possible cognition, there is only the self-contradictory. In short, *cognizability* (in its widest sense) and *being* are not merely metaphysically the same, but are synonymous terms. (W2 208, 1868)<sup>20</sup>

In this passage Peirce seems to promote the very errors Santayana attributes to Kant. Besides deriving the nature of reality from an account of the symbols by means of which it is understood, Peirce seems also to identify the real world with the world as cognized from some point of view (however idealized it may be).<sup>21</sup> He even acknowledges his view is a form of idealism inasmuch as it implies that the characteristics an object must have in order to be cognizable are essential to its being an object — to its very objecthood.<sup>22</sup>

Santayana would no doubt further object that Peirce's method for deriving categories wrongly assumes that the conditions necessary for knowledge or experience determine the nature of reality. In what is known as his logical derivation of the categories, Peirce attempts to show that "firstness", "secondness," and "thirdness" are intrinsic to reality since necessarily presupposed in all signs with truth values (i.e. all cognitive signs, the signs he classifies as "symbols") and the notion of a reality that cannot be symbolized is unintelligible.<sup>23</sup> In what is known as his phenomenological derivation of the categories, Peirce attempts to show that firstness, secondness, and thirdness are presupposed in whatever appears before the mind — whether true or

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rigorously on all men for ever, that people supposed he was establishing the sciences on a solid foundation rather than prescribing for all men a gratuitous uniformity in error" (SAF 300).

<sup>20</sup> References of this form are to *Writings of Charles Sanders Peirce: A Chronological Edition*, Peirce Edition Project (ed) (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1982-2000) and cite the volume, page number and the year the text was written. It bears noting that the relevant criterion of synonymy referred to in this passage is Peirce's pragmatic maxim, the canonical statement of which occurs at (W3: 266, 1878).

<sup>21</sup> Famously, Peirce says "[t]he opinion which is fated to be ultimately agreed to by all who investigate, is what we mean by the truth, and the object represented in this opinion is the real. That is the way I would explain reality" (W3: 273, 1878).

<sup>22</sup> He writes: "[t]he principle now brought under discussion is directly idealistic; for, since the meaning of a word is the conception it conveys, the absolutely incognizable has no meaning because no conception attaches to it. It is, therefore, a meaningless word; and, consequently, whatever is meant by any term as 'the real' is cognizable in some degree, and so is of the nature of a cognition, in the objective sense of that term" (W2: 238, 1868).

<sup>23</sup> Peirce endorses Kant's method of deriving categories in logic at (W5: 223 and 236-7, 1885). He also follows Kant in viewing his categories as "elements of phenomena of the first rank of generality" (5.43, 1903). For him, categories are ultimate classes of classes of things. They are universal since they are elements of anything that has being of any sort. They are also necessary to the being of anything that is. Finally, the categories are irreducible — no category can be defined in terms of the other two — and exhaustive of the elements of being.

false, perceived or imagined, cognitive or non-cognitive.<sup>24</sup> In both cases Santayana would surely insist that Peirce goes wrong in thinking that the nature of reality is determined by the way we experience it or represent it to be.

From Santayana's point of view, then, Peirce's philosophy is no improvement on Kant's. However much more sophisticated Peirce's derivation of the categories may be than Kant's, so far as Santayana is concerned, it still wrongly takes features essential to our symbolic representation of the world to explain the nature of the world and hence denies there is a reality sufficiently independent and indifferent to human experience and knowledge.

For his part, Peirce would dismiss the suggestion that he fails to distinguish between the way the world is and the way human knowers conceive it to be. He would insist that in his criticism Santayana fails to appreciate that it is one thing to say that the order of events in the world has the form it does because human thought determines it to be that way, quite another to say that thought and the reality represented in thought have a common logical form. Peirce agrees that the notion that reality is determined by human thought is anathema and puts the subjective cart before the objective horse. While he bases his theory of reality on his theory of symbols, he does not do this because he thinks human thought (or experience) shapes or determines the objects thought of (or experienced). He derives the nature of reality from the nature of symbols because he thinks the laws governing symbols — what he calls the laws of logic — are ontologically, and not just epistemologically, fundamental. For him, logical laws not only explain why human thought takes the form it does in rational inquiry but also why events in nature are ordered as they are. He recognizes that some symbols are mental (e.g. thoughts and beliefs) and others are physical (e.g. fossils and tree rings) but insists that symbols of all kinds are governed by the same logical laws — laws which are not determined by facts of human psychology or facts of the natural world.<sup>25</sup> On his view, symbols are neither essentially mental nor physical. They are entities of a third kind and *sui generis*.

To better appreciate why Peirce would be unmoved by Santayana's criticisms, consider the following example. Suppose it is concluded from the fact that "Socrates is human" that "Socrates is mortal". According to Peirce, this inference involves taking Socrates' humanity to be a sign of his mortality and this is justified by the general rule that "All humans are mortal". He insists the logical form of this inference does not depend for its validity on any facts of human psychology (or facts about nature generally) (W1 165, 1865), it depends only on the logical relations of the symbols involved. Human beings may or may not think logically but to the extent

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<sup>24</sup> Phenomenologically construed, the categories are "elements of appearance that present themselves to us every hour and every minute whether we are pursuing earnest investigations, or are undergoing the strangest vicissitudes of experience, or are dreamily listening to the tales of Scheherazade" (*The Essential Peirce*, vol. 1, Nathan Houser and Christian Kloesel (eds) [hereafter EP1] (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992) 147). They characterize what is before the mind when anything is before the mind at all. In what follows I focus on Peirce's discussion of the categories as elements of reality, rather than as elements of appearance.

<sup>25</sup> He says, for example, "I however would limit the term [representation] neither to that which is mediate, nor to that which is mental, but would use it in its broad, usual, and etymological sense for anything which is supposed to stand for another and which might express that other to a mind which truly could understand it. Thus our whole world—that which we comprehend—is a world of representations" (W1: 257, 1865). He also says "[f]or a Kantian, [logical] form is less an affair of the mind than is commonly supposed or than he [Kant] himself would have admitted. When the form is considered apart from the mind Geometry and Algebra show that an enquiry is liable to no entanglements in psychological questions" (W1: 307, 1865). See also (W1; 163-167, 1865).

they do so think, he insists, it is the laws governing symbols that determine and explain the way their thoughts unfold, not the other way around. Even symbols that operate by virtue of human conventions (e.g. verbal symbols or road signs) are subject to laws that are anything but conventional. For Peirce, the laws of symbols are as independent of the nature of human thought as the laws of gravity or thermodynamics and to suppose otherwise is to conflate the laws of logic with the laws of thought (i.e. the laws of psychology). For this reason, he would dismiss Santayana's charge that in taking the laws of symbols to provide a foundation for metaphysics, he is merely projecting "principles of local perspective" (SAF 301) into the world.<sup>26</sup>

Peirce would further argue that Santayana is wrong to think that basing a theory of reality on the logical laws of symbols presupposes that the world is shaped or determined by human thought. As Peirce sees it, the logical relation that holds between the premises and the conclusion of the inference concerning Socrates' mortality not only holds among the thoughts of those who draw the inference but also among the facts those thoughts represent. In other words, for him, there is an objective logical structure among things in the world, one that is there whether anyone knows it or not. On his view, the truth of "All humans are mortal" implies that there is a law operating in nature that precludes the possibility of an immortal human. This law applies to Socrates by virtue of his humanity and thus explains his mortality. Since the logical structure of this inference is common to all cases in which laws operate in nature, Peirce thinks it is ontologically fundamental. Nature has a logical form, he thinks, not because human beings are designed to interpret it that way but rather because logical laws—those laws in virtue of which one thing or quality functions as a symbol of another—govern the order of things and events (as we animal inquirers have discovered).<sup>27</sup>

In short, contrary to what Santayana's criticism suggests, Peirce does not take the study of symbols to provide a foundation for the theory of reality because he thinks human thought determines the world. He relies on the study of symbols in developing a theory of reality because, to his way of thinking, there could not be rational minds without elements of consciousness structured logically and, moreover, there could not be a lawful natural order unless objects and events were structured in such a way that the existence of some kinds of objects or events portends the existence of others. It is this objective logical structure — the structure that is common to the order of thought and the order of things — that Peirce's doctrine of ontological categories is intended to capture.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> He says "efforts to ascertain precisely how the intellect works in thinking,—that is to say investigation of internal characteristics—is no more to the purpose which logical writers as such, however vaguely have in view, than would be the investigation of external characteristics" (W1:169, 1865). "How we think ...", he insists, "is utterly irrelevant to logical inquiry" (2.56, 1902).

<sup>27</sup> From Peirce's perspective, Santayana's claim that symbolic forms are imposed on reality smacks of nominalism — a view Peirce deems "the most blinding of all systems" (5.499, c1905), a "disgraceful habitude" (6.175, 1906), a "philistine line of thought" (1.383, c1890) and "deadly poison to any living reasoning" (NEM 3: 201, 1911). See also 5.99f, 1903.

<sup>28</sup> This is one reason why Peirce stresses that logic (the science of signs) is prior to both psychology (the science of the human mind) and physics (the science of matter). It is also worth pointing out that given the pervasiveness of the structures Peirce takes to be fundamental, we should expect to find them in every science (as Peirce argues in his *Guess at the Riddle* [1.373-1.416, c1890]), in the science of logic (as Peirce argues in "On a New List of Categories" [W2: 49-59, 1868]) and in the examination of phenomenological consciousness (as he argues in "On

As for Santayana's complaint that Peirce, like Kant, conflates the way the world is and the way it is ideally conceived, Peirce would argue that it is ultimately confused. He would urge that the hypothesis of a reality utterly opaque to reason either involves an attempt to render the nature of things intelligible by positing a world that by its very nature violates the conditions of intelligibility or assumes knowledge of reality that is possible only if symbols are capable of revealing how things really are. In the former case, Santayana's hypothesis is nonsensical and unscientific, in the latter case it is self-contradictory.<sup>29</sup>

It is crucial to note that the dispute I have been describing is independent of the details of Peirce's theory of symbols and their basic components. Santayana need not, and likely would not, quarrel with Peirce's claim that symbols communicate something about an object to an interpreting symbol. Nor is it likely he would resist Peirce's view that symbols have a cognitive function as conveyors of truth and that they come in a wide variety of kinds. He can grant that Peirce is right in all this and still insist that rather than revealing an inherent order in things, the laws of symbols Peirce uncovers are nothing more than "tendencies to feign", that is, habits determined by animal needs and cognitive endowments that evolution has produced in us and to which the nature of things in the world is largely indifferent. Peirce, meanwhile, can maintain that inasmuch as his account of the laws of symbols is independent of any claims about psychology or the natural world, it is not made true by virtue of our animal nature but rather grounded in an objective logical structure that is prior to both mind and matter. What from Santayana's perspective is a case of "subjectivism become proud of itself and proclaiming itself absolute" (EGP 151-152), is, from Peirce's point of view, robust realism concerning the fundamental laws of being. Their disagreement, in short, is less about any particular analysis of the elements of symbols than it is about what an analysis of symbols reveals about the nature of reality.

The disagreement between Santayana and Peirce over how to understand the metaphysical import of the theory of symbols, I suggest, forms part of a larger and more complex dispute about the nature of philosophy. Santayana's claim that the study of symbols does not uncover a structure inherent in the nature of reality is part and parcel of his view that "the life of reason is no fair reproduction of the universe but the expression of man alone" (LE 30) and "the study of transcendental logic... nothing but sympathetic poetry and insight into the hang and rhythm of various thoughts ... the finer part of literary psychology" (SAF 302). This view rests on his reconstruction of what common sense and natural science say about the human animal and its epistemological condition, a reconstruction he undertakes with relatively little concern for the sort of results in mathematics and symbolic logic that Peirce takes to provide the starting point in his philosophy. On the other hand, Peirce's defence of the objectivity of the logic of symbols rests on his claim that metaphysics must be grounded on principles that are prior to, and independent of, of contingent facts of psychology and the natural world — the very sort of facts that Santayana thinks philosophers have to begin from. As Peirce sees it, it is only by resting philosophy on a mathematical and logical analysis of symbols that metaphysicians can hope to

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Phenomenology" [EP2: 145-160, 1903] and "The Basis of Pragmaticism in Phaneroscopy" [EP2: 360-370, 1905]).

<sup>29</sup> Peirce thinks inquiry is pointless if there no hope of success and positing phenomena beyond the scope or reach of inquiry is unscientific since it blocks the way of inquiry (1.135-1.140, 1898 and 7.80, 1898).

uncover principles concerning the nature of reality that are true no matter what else happens to be the case in the actual world.<sup>30</sup>

While it would be far too hasty to conclude from my discussion that the disagreements between Santayana and Peirce concerning the ontology of symbols and the philosophical import of the theory of symbols is impossible to resolve (and of no help at all to attribute them to differences in temperament), it is by no means easy to see what such a resolution would involve. Santayana and Peirce broach the question about the ontological status of symbols from contrary methodological points of view and their methodologies are informed by their views of the nature of symbolic knowledge. It is because I have no clear notion of what it would mean to broach these methodological disagreements in a neutral or impartial way that I said at the outset that I consider their disagreement sufficiently deep as to render comparison of their philosophies complicated (to say the very least) and the question of impartial adjudication exceedingly intricate, perhaps even nonsensical.

PAUL FORSTER

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### **Peter Hewitt Hare**

Paul Foster has dedicated his paper to Peter Hare, whose sudden death occurred just a few days after he read it at the annual meeting of the George Santayana Society. A like tribute to Peter appears in the previous paper of Glenn Tiller, who felt honoured to have Peter's participation in the session. It was Peter who published papers, including mine, on Santayana and other American thinkers, which would have been difficult to publish elsewhere. Indeed, everyone working in American Philosophy knows the immense contribution that Peter made to all aspects of that field. His tragic death, so soon after the active part he played at the meeting, left all of us shocked and bereaved.

Angus Kerr-Lawson

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<sup>30</sup> "The only rational way [to do metaphysics] would be to settle first the principles of reasoning, and, that done, to base one's metaphysics on those principles. Modern notions of metaphysics are not rationally entitled to any respect, because they have not been determined in that way..." (2.166, 1902). "[M]etaphysics ought to be founded on logic. To found logic on metaphysics is a crazy scheme" (2.168, 1902).

## Three Stages of Spirituality

The idea of salvation derives from animal life.<sup>1</sup> Flowers, vegetables, and trees live without anxiety since they have no conception of themselves or the powers that surround them; and pure spirits, assuming they could exist, would be redeemed already: they would be perfectly free and careless since their lives would be unconditioned, and knowing neither harm nor benefit they would esteem all objects equally. But in human beings as in most animals consciousness not only depends on physical conditions but anticipates the action of ambient forces on the organism it serves. The contingency of existence makes life treacherous for everything that breathes: fair weather prevailing now may be gone in a matter of hours, and life in an ideal climate would be no less threatened by diseases. Yet if death was neither anticipated nor remembered it would have no victory and no sting; so the first desires for salvation must have arisen in animals for whom the terror of death, the horror of loss, the feeling of being in mortal danger had become objects of consciousness.

One traditional idea of salvation is that of deliverance from undesirable conditions. In the Old Testament the Israelites were slaves of the Egyptians, but God saved the Chosen People by bringing them out of Egypt to the Promised Land. When Jonah cried to God from within the fish, the Lord rescued him by causing the monster to vomit. Christians seem to have the same idea of salvation in mind when they pray for deliverance from evil at the end of the Lord's Prayer.

The appeal of salvation in this traditional sense is easy to appreciate. Good fortune may conceal the hard edges of existence so the world seems made for our enjoyment. Vitality often blesses young people with feelings of omnipotence, and lovers may relish the idea of death if it heightens the drama of their passion. Yet the delicate physical harmonies that make happiness possible are disrupted easily. Disappointment in love may spoil the bravado of youth, and vitality is reduced to corruption by the mere passage of time. Freedom from the conditions of suffering naturally seems like salvation in the eyes of an afflicted creature, so that when Jesus restored sight to the blind or cast out demons the beneficiaries of these miracles went away feeling they had been saved.

Yet by itself deliverance would not be salvation. Liberation from the conditions of suffering is a temporary solution to a particular problem: nothing could prevent the same conditions from arising again or guarantee that different conditions would not produce more serious problems. As physical bodies we remain vulnerable no matter how many precautions we take, and our desires for companionship or professional success may go unsatisfied despite our best efforts. When Lazarus opened his eyes after four days in the tomb he must have been overwhelmed with happiness at being alive, and Mary and Martha must have rejoiced also. Yet satisfying as it must have been for Lazarus and for those who loved him, this miracle which revealed the glory of God was merely an exceptional piece of good fortune: it did not abolish the natural world or abrogate the conditions of existence. Lazarus would live longer and those additional hours of life might be especially sweet, but eventually he would die a second time and his sisters would mourn him again.

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was read to the George Santayana Society during its annual meeting, held in conjunction with that of the American Philosophical Association, in Baltimore on December 29, 2007.

A more plausible idea of salvation is implied in the Gospels if we are inclined to understand them literally. The satisfaction of a few extremely urgent desires would not be salvation since the conditions of existence that created them would continue to obtain, so that more desires would almost certainly arise and these would be more or less urgent. Yet the Gospels seem to predict the advent of a perfect world in which the conditions of life are never at odds with human happiness. Rewards would be distributed in proportion to virtue, suffering and death would never occur, and everyone who lived there would be supremely happy since their desires would be immediately satisfied. Presumably this is what many Christians have in mind when they imagine life in heaven or in the Kingdom of God established on earth.

We may dream of life in paradise where every desire would be satisfied immediately, but such an existence would not be recognizably human. Our celestial muscles would quickly atrophy since the slightest effort would be unnecessary. Perfect knowledge would be imparted instantaneously without learning, so that intelligence as we know it would disappear completely. Even the most advanced problems in mathematics would be solved before they were posed. The will itself could not survive the transformation of this world into God's Kingdom since there would be no striving in heaven or any ideals to strive for: satisfactions would be reached automatically before we could posit them as goals, much less pursue them. Such lives would be human inasmuch as they were continuations of our mundane lives, but there the resemblance would end.

In what sense entry into such an alleged paradise would constitute salvation is far from clear. Arguably life with no goals to achieve and no achievements to remember would be utterly miserable, resembling death more closely than life.

Yet if such an unfamiliar existence would be desirable, the details of a life of happiness without effort would remain obscure to our current minds. Presumably we could not live happily forever in ordinary bodies since they would be exposed to illness from within and to assault from without. Yet the idea of possessing invulnerable bodies is unintelligible, assuming they would exist in space and time. Astral bodies would live side by side with other existing beings no less than ordinary bodies on earth, so that nothing could prevent these separate lives from colliding and interfering with each other. A body that filled all space would be invulnerable to external pressure but could fall apart from the inside. Perhaps existence in the afterlife would be governed by divine laws, but accidents might seem to happen, and it would always be difficult to explain the role of some apparently untoward event in God's plan.

Deliverance from undesirable circumstances would not be salvation since it would be impermanent, and life in a paradise of instant satisfactions is essentially incompatible with existence as we know it. Yet if we interpret them symbolically, the Gospels seem to hint at a subtler salvation, one that without altering the conditions of existence might bless the spirit in us with moments of perfect tranquility. As physical organisms we live by the temporary grace of independent realities, so that misfortune is always impending. Yet by looking away from the worries of existence and focusing on immediate objects we may find peace for a little while. In the midst of the most oppressive physical circumstances nothing prevents the heavens from being torn open and the spirit from descending like a dove.

For Santayana "spirit" means consciousness as distinct from its physical sources in living animals. Born of the flesh and attached to it for life, spirit suffers with its host. Yet the intrinsic perfection of spirit is to see beyond the fortunes of the physical organism it supervenes on, transcending human values to appreciate immediate objects for themselves. To an undisciplined spirit responding to ulterior interests, these

objects seem like physical powers to be welcomed or evaded; but immediate objects would signify nothing to a mind detached from human preferences and viewing the vicissitudes of existence as if from above. Spirit's objects would be mere appearances from that reflective height, and all would be equally satisfying to observe.

Human beings are so concerned with ultimate objects that we rarely distinguish them from objects of perception which are immediate. Ultimate objects are physical events as distinguished from the immaterial forms those events wear to our senses. Our interest in ultimate objects is vital because we might use them to accomplish our goals such as eating and making love, or treasure them like a favorite pair of boots as extensions of ourselves. These things are worthy of being pursued since they might improve our lives materially, but loving them is treacherous because they exist in time and space and existence is transient and contingent essentially. The more we prize existing objects the more grieved we are likely to be when by chance or by the flow of time we are deprived of them.

Immediate objects are ideal, so they have no existence in time and space; their being is that of a quality of the organism in which they appear. The eternity of immediate objects renders them immune to the corrosive effects of existence, and this immunity makes appearances more satisfying for spirit to contemplate than the physical realities they announce and by which the animal organ of spirit may hope to profit. If they could be directly observed, physical objects would reveal no specific character since they exist in the act of becoming something else. Appearances, on the other hand, remain exactly the forms they are; there is no time in them, so that if material circumstances cooperated, spirit might view any of those pictures repeatedly or survey the same one indefinitely. By continually transforming itself existence eventually ruins everything we love. Yet inasmuch as we have loved only the images of existing things and not those things themselves spirit may continue to have them as eternal objects beyond the span of their careers in space and time.

The experience of time is a translation of human preferences into the feeling of passage. A short visit to the dentist may seem endless while a day of sailing in perfect weather appears to have passed the moment the sails went up. Life is fast or slow in relation to the activities we love and the ordeals we hope to avoid. The pace of things is frequently agonizing because happiness could never last long enough to satisfy our appetite for it, and even brief suffering may seem horribly protracted because it separates us from the happiness we crave. Yet if we can forget the fortunes of existing things, including the physical organism sustaining our attention, and focus exclusively on appearances, we may free spirit in us from the anxiety of experiencing time and find peace in contemplative union with eternal objects.

Together this liberation and this union may seem like spiritual salvation. Yet physical existence crawls forward beneath spirit's peace, so that unless we are willing to die we are bound to be distracted by the cares of life. If spiritual salvation means nothing more than contemplative absorption in immediate objects then it seems to repeat the imperfection of its Old Testament counterpart. Spiritual deliverance would not be physical but psychological since it would mean shifting attention from temporal to eternal objects; but our new focus would eventually lapse and we would lose all the ground we had gained, just as in the Old Testament deliverance from the conditions of suffering would not establish existence without conditions, leaving open the potential for new problems to arise.

The word "salvation" suggests a permanent solution to the problems of living, but although immediate objects of consciousness are eternal, in one sense spirituality is as impermanent as the physical organism that makes it possible. The conditions of our current life make conceiving the details of salvation as a permanent condition either of

human beings or of spirit in them almost impossible, and life in radically different circumstances is exceedingly difficult to imagine. If “permanence” means existing for infinite time then salvation is probably out of reach for spirit as well as for its organ.

Yet Eastern sages and Western mystics have sometimes described the serenity of salvation without insisting on its everlastingness. Existence is never serene because it never rests from its labors, and animal life is essentially anxious because animals flourish by anticipating the future. Yet spirit in being absorbed for a moment in eternal objects leaves the worries of life behind by forgetting existence altogether: what does it matter for the purposes of clear seeing whether the stars and the moon exist? Moments of spirituality are not permanent on the physical side, but the difference between and transience and permanence drops out in the experience of those moments. The distinction which from the outside seemed to separate death from life is irrelevant from within and if noticed makes a fascinating image for spirit to survey.

Spirituality is not permanent the way a physical object or a heavenly kingdom would be if it endured for all time; but its objects are changeless, and the idea of permanence may be an appropriate symbol of the triumph of awareness that happens when spirit converts the anxiety of existence into an amusing show by forgetting the significance of its objects. From the standpoint of an observer this transition would be one more incident in spirit’s mundane life and destined to last only so long. Yet in its own eyes spirit would have been redeemed from the worries of living: pain would be as interesting as bliss, and the duration of anything would be unimportant, as if life were an enchanting story. As long as it lasted, this perfect union of consciousness with immediate objects would be salvation for spirit. Yet animal life militates against spirituality by commanding spirit to consider the importance of its objects and the outcome of physical events, so that some training and considerable discipline are required before spirit in us can be saved.

In *Platonism and the Spiritual Life* Santayana concerned himself with distinguishing spirituality from values, and in *The Realm of Spirit* his goal was to render the idea of spirit intelligible in the familiar terms of the history of philosophy and world religions. Santayana must have been keenly interested in spirituality to have written so extensively on the topic, and he lived in relative isolation as an older person. Yet he was neither a monk nor a mystic, he never lived as a hermit, and he wrote that he preferred the life of a rational animal to that of a pure spirit. Had he wished to organize his life around spirituality, Santayana might have written more about spiritual growth, perhaps in the tradition of St. Augustine, or he might have written nothing at all. But what he did write shows an awareness of at least three stages of spiritual development of which only the earliest is described in detail. In the interest of identifying specific practices that might lead to spiritual salvation, it may be helpful to imagine the details of the second and third stages as Santayana might have conceived them and to relate them explicitly to the first.

For most of us, spirituality begins spontaneously. Our desires may propel us to overlook appearances and to worry about the physical realities they represent since ultimate objects are alone useful and they are the only things we have reason to fear. But life under favorable conditions is often more than frenetic striving: now and then when desire subsides we can appreciate the way things appear without thinking about their dangers or their uses. This happens readily when appearances are beautiful or exciting. Colorful hot air balloons filling the sky or the sound of Beethoven’s quartet in F major tend to draw attention, and in the absence of pressing concerns spirit may forget its physical circumstances altogether, disappearing completely into its objects.

As the music swells or the balloons rise we attend to those forms for their own sakes with no extrinsic interest in them.<sup>2</sup>

In the right physical conditions, spirituality is purely an enhancement of life, adding an ideal dimension to physical events that for the moment were benign enough to go unnoticed or favorable to the point of provoking enjoyment. Yet sooner or later good luck is likely to run out. The conditions of life may decline, and we may face ugly or hateful objects. Here salvation may be wished for, and distinguishing between spirit and the physical organism from which it springs could make the difference between coping effectively in a crisis and surrendering to powerful feelings like fear. The machines and the instruments of an emergency room may be terrifying in their existence, but if we could view them from the standpoint of spirit as pure images or dreams we might find them less intimidating. Spirit may flourish in the worst conditions, so that even the most repulsive object seems intriguing, but this requires deliberate effort: we must try hard to focus on immediate objects alone as if the world consisted of nothing more.

We can train our minds to focus on appearances by practicing mental exercises designed to defeat our desires. If we see a beautiful young person we can imagine how she will look in 50 or 100 years and then try to appreciate the image in some way. A corpse is not beautiful by comparison with an attractive person in the prime of life, but perhaps a bare skeleton is beautiful in its own way, as part of the larger patterns of life, or because it displays a peculiar shade of white. As we sit in the dentist's chair we can make believe the instruments of our discomfort have no existence and no significance and try to appreciate the sound of the drill for its precise timbre, pitch, and loudness. Objects are ugly insofar as they repel our desires, and they are frightening only inasmuch as they exist in space and time in the same plane of action as our bodies. From the standpoint of spirit which has no desires of its own, objects are sheer forms, incapable of action by themselves and equally satisfying to behold.

Spirituality is contemplative union with immediate objects, but spiritual discipline may require careful attention to objects not immediately present. One way of training our minds to appreciate all objects equally including those we find repellant is to practice imagining alternatives to immediate objects. If the sights, smells, and tastes of a good meal attract attention we can imagine how the food will appear 24 hours after we dine; likewise if the idea of growing old without a partner disturbs the mind we can think of how many people live in satisfying relationships for many years. These exercises may help dislodge spirit from the prejudices of its local source and encourage the mind to range freely over an infinite landscape of possible objects, viewing each one with an attitude of detached curiosity. Spirit's ability to extend its dominion beyond what appears now marks the second stage of its growth in which spirit considers what is not immediate for the sake of improving the quality of its union with all immediate objects.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> A memorable description of this everyday spirituality appears in Chapter One of Santayana's *The Realm of Essence*: "As I was jogging to market in my village cart, beauty has burst upon me and the reins have dropped from my hands. I am transported, in a certain measure, into a state of trance. I see with extraordinary clearness, yet what I see seems strange and wonderful, because I no longer look in order to understand, but only in order to see."

<sup>3</sup> Santayana describes what I am calling the second stage of spiritual growth in Chapter XXIII of *Platonism and the Spiritual Life*: "...the eye of spirit, in its virtual omniscience, sees the visible in its true setting of the invisible; it is fixed instinctively on the countless moments that are not this moment, on the joys that are not this sorrow and the sorrows that are not this joy, on the thousand opinions that are not this opinion and the beauties that are not this beauty...".

Spirit in us may become highly adept at viewing its objects under the aspect of eternity, but human preferences are likely to remain in the background and to assert themselves periodically. If spirituality is sometimes good for us this is only because as physical beings our lives may be so troubled that we long for peace above all. The experience of perfect contemplative union with appearances may have no values in it since the union would be imperfect if spirit was at all distracted by the cares of existence; yet in wishing for such perfect union and for the peace that might flow from it, we assign a value to the experience as a goal we hope to reach.

Santayana loved to speculate about the lives of spirits altogether liberated from physical conditions. In their omniscience as in their universal charity he supposed they would be like God. But for Santayana living beings could not exist physically without desires or preferences. Nevertheless, he suggests, perhaps a few Indian sages have approached a third stage of spiritual development, one marked by years if not by lifetimes of total indifference to the affairs of existence; and I wonder whether a few Christian saints have not managed this as well.

Assuming such proficients exist, what must their lives be like? Spirituality is always an ideal completion of life and sometimes it may serve as compensation for the suffering we endure as physical organisms; but as a way of life spirituality would destroy itself because it disregards the needs of the organ on which its existence depends. When Buddhist masters like Chagdud Tulku Rinpoche propose thinking of life as a mirage or an illusion they are teaching students how to progress towards moral perfection by distinguishing between true and false goods. In much of Buddhism, spirituality is regarded as a means to an end or as a means which is also an end.

Yet the odd individual might practice spirituality not only as an end in itself but as the only end worth achieving. Presumably such a person would not be swayed from her indifference by getting acquainted with someone sexy, but even platonic friendship seems to require some partiality. What could motivate such an adept to rise in the morning if getting up and moving around seemed no better than lying still? This rare sage would care nothing for food, but would this entail eating any edible substance or refusing to eat anything?

But a life of perfect indifference is not an option for most of us and probably would not be desirable if it were, so that most people are bound to suffer for the sake of the objects they desire. That suffering is inevitable for conscious animals may seem unfair and cruel, and much of Eastern religion and philosophy suggests consciousness is the source of all our problems. Maple trees, sunflowers, and broccoli seem to exist without suffering as we do, and perhaps a world inhabited by plants alone would be superior to this one because it would not include suffering.

Yet if spirit had never awakened, life would be neither bad nor good; and in the final analysis when the earth is destroyed and life here is extinct what will have mattered is not that life existed but that spirit hated or loved it. If consciousness is the source of all suffering it may also hold the key to salvation. Spirit's life is mortal and potentially tragic; but spirit is essentially buoyant and capable of floating above the conditions that oppress its career by understanding them as facts and by appreciating them as if they were pure images. When this happens, spirit's essence redeems its existence so that, like the poet Whitman, it may see all things clearly and count them all to the good.

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# Santayana and America

*Santayana and America: Values, Liberty, Responsibility*

By Krzysztof Piotr Skowronski

Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2007

**S***antayana and America* makes a strong case for the contemporary relevance of George Santayana as a cultural critic. The strength of Krzysztof Skowronski's argument will surprise the many who, when they think of Santayana at all, associate him with a narrowly aristocratic outlook rendered thoroughly outmoded by the world wars of the first half of the twentieth century, the end of the colonial empires in the second half, and the terrorism (and the response to terrorism) of the twenty-first. Santayana's polished, elegant, style and non-technical vocabulary have not always worked in his favor, either. The author of "The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy" has been too often dismissed as himself representative of a genteel tradition of literary attitudinizing now hopelessly out-of-date.

Professor Skowronski, however, suggests that Santayana's point of view is characterized by "in-betweenness," a perspective that allowed him to view American culture without committing himself to either a wholesale endorsement or—more common among European intellectuals—blanket condemnation. Santayana's writings provide an example of a non-American able to appreciate the positive aspects of American culture without losing touch with his or her "own distinct traditions and cultural specificity" (27). In a world permeated by American culture, the ability to maintain a measured critical perspective, to analyze without demonizing, is no mean achievement, and Skowronski persuasively argues that Santayana's example of calm, intellectually serious criticism is more relevant than ever.

Santayana himself, despite having living in the United States for thirty years, always retained a distinctive point of view that was in most ways at odds with the dominant currents in American culture, a point Skowronski rightly and repeatedly emphasizes. If Santayana did not condemn democracy as a form of government, he nevertheless did not celebrate it as "an end in itself, but rather a means to an end, to the full realization of vital liberties" (113). Though Santayana acknowledged that all members of all religions were legally free to practice their faith in the United States, he noted that American culture had no room "for those religions that want to keep their orthodox vital liberties, their original traditions, and their incommensurable customs" (118). Santayana was skeptical about the supposed progress resulting from on "the unlimited exploration of nature's resources for the benefit of man," suggesting instead that people of any place or time could find the sort of happiness available to human beings by achieving "*wisdom* about the world and about one's role in it" (96). All the more significant, then, that, Santayana's criticisms of American society are balanced judgments rather than denunciations. Rejecting the claims that the United States had achieved some sort of unique national moral purity, Santayana nevertheless concluded that, in Skowronski's words, "American democracy is not an imperialistic system that indiscriminately crushes other countries, like innumerable regimes of the past" (112). If the philosopher saw a gap between the legal freedoms available to Americans and the homogeneity of their culture, Skowronski notes that he "never referred to any other modern country in which there was *more* room for vital liberties" (122-3).

In surveying and summarizing Santayana's thought, Skowronski has chosen to focus on themes rather than on the analysis of particular works. In doing so he

demonstrates an impressive mastery of Santayana's extensive *oeuvre* but inevitably makes claims whose validity depends to some extent on which text of Santayana is taken as authoritative. The difficulties of this approach may be illustrated by two examples. Professor Skowronski argues that for Santayana the genteel tradition's "essence consisted of, first, a deep sense of sin and of agonized conscience, and, second, a systematic subjective conviction of moral rightness, notable especially in its hypersensitivity to evil and the fight against it" (82). The passage is followed by a quotation from *The Genteel Tradition at Bay* (1931) supporting Professor Skowronski's point: "Moral integrity and its shadow, moral absolutism, were always a chief part of the genteel tradition in America." On the other hand, the notion that the genteel tradition's "essence" included "a deep sense of sin and of agonized conscience" seems less convincing if one turns to "The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy" (1911), where the "agonized conscience" is identified with Calvinism rather than with the genteel tradition itself, which is defined as an unstable union of Calvinism with transcendentalism. Under the influence of Emersonian transcendentalism and, more importantly, American social and economic success, Santayana observes in the earlier work, "the sense of sin totally evaporated," and the typical American of the genteel tradition, far from suffering from an agonized conscience, became "convinced that he always has been, and always will be, victorious and blameless."<sup>1</sup> The issue is not that one characterization of the genteel tradition is right and the other wrong but rather that Santayana's use of such concepts could be expansive, requiring commentators to indicate the specific works relevant to the particular usage under discussion.

In Professor Skowronski's concluding chapter he asks rhetorically why was it that Santayana failed to "appreciate ... eminent representatives of poetic imagination in America, such as Emily Dickinson, Wallace Stevens, Henry James, and many others?" (198). But Santayana certainly did appreciate Henry James at least, though he did not dedicate an essay or chapter to him, as he did to his brother in *Character and Opinion in the United States*. In "The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy," however, Santayana paid what was for him surely the highest compliment possible by asserting that Henry James had accomplished in his fiction what Santayana was accomplishing through philosophical reflection in that very essay. Henry James, Santayana declared "has overcome the genteel tradition in the classic way, by understanding it," or, in other words, "by turning the genteel American tradition, as he turns everything else, into a subject-matter for analysis."<sup>2</sup>

Of course, it is impossible for to characterize the ideas of a complex thinker over a long and prolific career without making disputable claims. What is most significant about Professor Skowronski's book is his indisputable success in offering a fresh interpretation of Santayana, one that makes a persuasive case for Santayana's relevance in the twenty-first century far beyond the boundaries of academic philosophy in Great Britain and the United States.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy* (Berkeley: The University Press, 1911), 7.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

## Santayana on Nietzsche

Reactions to Nietzsche's philosophical writings are mixed. Although often ignored in the English-speaking philosophical world, he is from time to time denounced there. The pronouncements he makes are too irresponsible, when he advocates slaves for the masters to dominate, or describes the degrees in which women might be possessed by men, or when he favours strife and warfare over peace and harmony. Such assertions are too reckless and unthinking to be recommended to the young. On the other hand, Nietzsche has his devoted followers, especially in continental Europe, in part because the virtues he describes and the things he admires are deemed preferable to the dreary life offered by the socialist, or the degrading motivations of democratic capitalism. Not many both appreciate Nietzsche's virtues and at the same time are uncompromising about his excesses. One such is George Santayana, who devotes three chapters to Nietzsche in his sweeping attack on German philosophy in his First World War monograph *Egotism in German Philosophy*.<sup>1</sup> Many have treated this book as a wartime manifesto written in anger, a cheap shot against the Germans and their philosophical tradition. While he concedes his strong engagement on the allied side at the time, Santayana himself considers it a serious philosophical work whose main themes continue his general assault on transcendental idealism.

About Nietzsche, Santayana makes two statements which, in the face of it, appear to contradict each other. On the one hand, he praises Nietzsche for his sharply defined and clearly expressed preferences, something Santayana holds essential to morality:

The courage to cling to what his soul loved — and this courage is the essence of morality — was conspicuous in him. He was a poet, a critic, a lover of form and of distinctions. Few persons have ever given such fierce importance to their personal taste. What he disliked to think of, say democracy, he condemned with the fulminations of a god; what he liked to think of, power, he seriously commanded man and nature to pursue for their single object.

On the other hand, in seeking to understand what Nietzsche meant by strength when lauding the will to power, Santayana says:

By strength, then, he could not mean the power to survive, by being as flexible as circumstances may require. He did not refer to the strength of majorities, nor to the strength of vermin. At the same time he did not refer to moral strength, for of moral strength he had no idea.

Although he had the courage to maintain his preferences, which is essential to morality, he was lacking in moral strength; although the essence of morality was conspicuous in him, he had no idea of something that must also be critical to morality. We can get closer to the heart of Santayana's critique, perhaps, if we sort out the connection between these two statements.

Nietzsche's "strong and sane side, his lien on the future", according to Santayana, was his feeling "that life must be accepted as it is or may become, and false beliefs, hollow demands, and hypocritical, forced virtues must be abandoned" (EGP 139). Goethe had also felt and practiced this "new wisdom". However, Nietzsche was mistaken to believe that his account of morality or new and that it discredited received ethical ideas.

What Nietzsche disparaged, then, under the name of morality was not all morality, for he had an enthusiastic master-morality of his own to impose. He was thinking only of the Christian virtues and especially of a certain Protestant and Kantian moralism with which perhaps he had been surfeited. This moralism conceived that duty was something absolute

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<sup>1</sup> On the cover page of the French translation of the book, the editor inserted the motto: *Je suis; donc tu n'es pas*.

and not a method of securing whatever goods of all sorts are attainable by action. The latter is the common and the sound opinion, maintained, for instance, by Aristotle; but Nietzsche, who was not humble enough to learn very much by study, thought he was propounding a revolutionary doctrine when he put goods and evils beyond and above right and wrong; for this is all that his *Jenseits von Gut und Böse* amounts to. Whatever seemed to him admirable, beautiful, eligible, whatever was good in the sense opposed not to *böse* but to *schlecht*, Nietzsche loved with jealous affection. Hence his hatred of moralism, which in raising duty to the irresponsible throne of the absolute had superstitiously sacrificed half the goods of life. Nietzsche, then, far from transcending ethics, re-established it on its true foundations, which is not to say that the sketchy edifice which he planned to raise on these foundations was in a beautiful style of architecture or could stand at all. (EGP 124-5)

Not everybody is willing to say that morality must be based, in the end, upon preference. Those who do so are often led to consider as basic to their ethics a search through reason for a harmony among their wishes and requirements and for a further harmony among those of society. Such is the teaching of the Greeks, as adopted by Santayana. Nietzsche based his morality on real preferences, certainly, but was little concerned to work out through reason a favourable balance of these. Santayana commended him for the former, but condemned him for his anti-rational sentiments.

One would have expected Nietzsche's superior man to draw on Greek models. Had he not been a professor of Classics in his younger days, and do we not find an exceptional range of noble persons, masters of life, in the classical period? As Santayana puts it, "how life can be fulfilled and made beautiful was never better shown than by the Greeks, both by precept and by example" (EGP 139). But on the whole he finds it remarkable that Nietzsche had learned so little from the Greek example, and makes his point with a telling list of praiseworthy qualities he missed: "no modesty or reverence, no joy in order and in loveliness, no sense for friendship, none for the sanctity of places and institutions" (EGP 140).

Of course, Nietzsche was perfectly correct to point to darker aspects in Greek paganism. He saw, as Santayana observes, "how false was that white-washed notion of the Greek mind which young ladies derived from sketching a plaster cast of the Apollo Belvedere" (EGP 140). In reaction to this notion, Nietzsche gave a new prominence to what he called the Dionysian tendency in ancient Greek culture:

He saw that a demonic force, as the generation of Goethe called it, underlay everything; what he did not see was that this demonic force was under control, which is the secret of the whole matter. The point had been thoroughly elucidated by Plato, in the contrast he drew between inspiration and art. But Plato was rather ironical about inspiration, and had a high opinion of art; and Nietzsche, with his contrary instinct, rushes away without understanding the mind of the master or the truth of the situation. He thinks he alone has discovered the divinity of Dionysus and of the Muses, which Plato took as a matter of course, but would not venerate superstitiously. Inspiration, like will, is a force without which reason can do nothing. Inspiration must be presupposed; but in itself it can do nothing good unless it is in harmony with reason, or is brought into harmony with it. This two-edged wisdom, which makes impulse the stuff of life and reason its criterion, is, of course, lost on Nietzsche, and with it the whole marvel of Greek genius. (EGP 140-42)

A superior man, for Nietzsche, must have strong emotions and perform mighty deeds. True, declares Santayana, but it not enough to have powerful emotions if they are not brought under control. He goes on:

There is nothing exceptional in being alive and impulsive; any savage can run wild and be frenzied and enact histrionic passions: the virtue of the Greeks lay in the exquisite firmness with which they banked their fires without extinguishing them, so that their life remained human (indeed, remained infra-human, like that of Nietzsche's superman) and yet became

beautiful: they were severe and fond of maxims, on a basis of universal tolerance; they governed themselves rationally, with a careful freedom, while well aware that nature and their own bosoms were full of gods, all of whom must be revered. (EGP 140-42)

This "two-edged wisdom" sounds like Nietzsche's own thesis about the fusing in Greek tragedy of the Apollonian and the Dionysian; and one might ask whether the above point is not covered in Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*. A more careful look shows otherwise. His Apollonian represented artistic impulse and the love of form, but not reason. In Nietzsche's account, the Socratic probing for self-knowledge and appeal to reason came after the exemplary tragedies of Aeschylus, and was a sign of decadence.<sup>2</sup>

In common with many other commentators, Santayana can see little of clarity or virtue in the superman of Nietzsche:

In the helter-skelter of his irritable genius, Nietzsche jumbled together the ferocity of solitary beasts, the indifference and *hauteur* of patricians, and the antics of revellers, and out of that mixture he hoped to evoke the rulers of the coming age. (EGP 138)

What does this superman seek? not truth, which he disdains; not accomplishment; not peace and harmony. Santayana concludes that Nietzsche was a belated romantic:

The phrases in which Nietzsche condensed and felt his thought were brilliant, but they were seldom just. We may perhaps see the principle of his ethics better if we forget for a moment the will to be powerful and consider this: that he knew no sort of good except the beautiful, and no sort of beauty except romantic stress. He was a belated prophet of romanticism. He wrote its epitaph, in which he praised it more extravagantly than anybody, when it was alive, had had the courage to do. (EGP 127-8)

This superman or *übermensch*, in Santayana's estimation, does not just stand opposed to ordinary folk (*mensch*), but in fact excludes the sort of people from past civilizations who have led praiseworthy, superior lives. These have in all cases managed to *transcend* life, by being engaged in a pursuit which took them outside themselves in a direction entirely opposite from the egoism recommended by Nietzsche:

To transcend humanity is no new ambition; that has always been the effort of Indian and Christian religious discipline and of Stoic philosophy. But this spiritual superiority, like that of artists and poets, has come of abstraction; a superiority to life, in that these minds were engrossed in the picture or lesson of life rather than in living; and if they powerfully affected the world, as they sometimes did, it was by bringing down into it something supermundane, the arresting touch of an ulterior wisdom. (EGP 137)

The superman envisaged by Nietzsche does not project any ideal which would permit him to transcend life; rather the superman exemplifies and Nietzsche praises a mere magnification of the intensity of life itself, with little guiding purpose to that life:

Nietzsche, on the contrary, even more than most modern philosophers, loved mere life with the pathetic intensity of the wounded beast; his superman must not rise above our common condition by his purely spiritual resources, or by laying up his treasure in any sort of heaven. He must be not a superior man but a kind of physiological superman, a griffin in soul, if not in body, who instead of labouring hands and religious faith should have eagle's wings and the claws of a lion. (EGP 138)

Much as Santayana admired those who pursue and achieve spirituality in one of its forms, he never saw this as a proper objective for all. Most are unsuited, by their nature, to a life of spirit, so that a spiritual regimen would in fact hinder their search to realize their potentiality. Can there not be, one must ask, some excellence to which these might aspire?

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<sup>2</sup> In his opinion, the Socratic elements in the plays of Euripides were signs of the deterioration of Greek tragedy.

Can he not for example bestow merit on an excellent leader? Santayana does not often consider this, but certainly in his eyes successful leaders do not resemble Nietzsche's preposterous superman: they would inspire rather than dominate, and would appeal to reason to achieve their ends.<sup>3</sup>

The Jews, the Christians, and the Moslems had all attributed their superiority over heathenism to their possession of a holy book, a sacred history along with a compilation of the rules of proper living. Santayana proposes to apply the term 'heathen' to those not possessing a written tradition, something which "enabled them to perceive the laws of sweet and profitable conduct in the world" (EGP 145). In this sense, the Greeks had their oral and written traditions, and were "the least heathen of men" (EGP 145). Heathenism, he says, "is the religion of will, the faith which life has in itself because it is life, and in its aims because it is pursuing them" (EGP 149). Is not this exactly Nietzsche's doctrine? He becomes a philosophical heathen, in Santayana's sense, when he overthrows not just Christianity, but any notion of a controlled arrangement of society in terms of restraints and balance, with happiness as its aim and an accepted tradition describing how to achieve it.

A salient feature of the heathenism Santayana is attacking is its complete rejection of the natural ideal of happiness, found in religion and in classical philosophy:

Judaism and Christianity, like Greek philosophy, were singly inspired by the pursuit of happiness, in whatever form it might be really attainable. ... But heathenism ignores happiness, despises it, or thinks it impossible. The regimen and philosophy of Germany are inspired by this contempt for happiness, for one's own happiness as well as for other people's. Happiness seems to the German moralists something unheroic, an abdication before external things, a victory of the senses over the will. They think the pursuit of happiness low, materialistic, and selfish. They wish everybody to sacrifice or rather to forget happiness, and to do 'deeds'. (EGP 151-2)

Perhaps he overstates his case; and we must bear in mind that, at the outset, he has said that by German philosophy he does not mean all German philosophers, but only the school of transcendental idealists. However, we can see here not just a critique of these transcendentalists, but hints of a larger attack on some Protestant sects and on modernity in general.

The following paragraph on happiness is one of Santayana's better known quotations; a part of it appears on the wall in the dining hall of Toronto's Massey College.<sup>4</sup>

It is of the nature of things that those who are incapable of happiness should have no idea of it. Happiness is not for wild animals, who can only oscillate between apathy and passion. To be happy, even to conceive happiness, you must be reasonable or (if Nietzsche prefers the word) you must be tamed. You must have taken the measure of your powers, tasted the fruits of your passions and learned your place in the world and what things in it can really serve you. To be happy you must be wise. This happiness is sometimes found instinctively, and then the rudest fanatic can hardly fail to see how lovely it is; but sometimes it comes of having learned something by experience (which empirical people never do) and involves some chastening and renunciation; but it is not less sweet for having this touch of holiness about it, and the spirit of it is healthy and beneficent. The nature of happiness, therefore,

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<sup>3</sup> One might also ask whether such a person, a successful leader, does not violate Santayana's claim that, ultimately, what is good is the intuition of essence. However, he argues that, even for those who achieve some difficult practical end, it is the contemplation of this in its entirety afterwards (as it is in the realm of truth) that brings pure undisturbed happiness.

<sup>4</sup> The headmaster of the college, Robertson Davies, merged part of this passage with part of another from *Reason in Science* to form a statement about happiness that he placed around the upper wall of the college's great hall. See my "To be happy, you must be wise" in *Overheard in Seville: Bulletin of the Santayana Society*, 1996 p 35.

dawns upon philosophers when their wisdom begins to report the lessons of experience: an *a priori* philosophy can have no inkling of it. (EGP 152-3)

In his vigorous attack on German transcendentalism, Santayana adds the term 'egotism' to the terms 'romantic' and 'heathen'. By egotism, in brief, he means "subjectivity in thought and wilfulness in morals" (EGP 6). It is not usually seen as a philosophical term, and indeed philosophers occasionally repeat the common mistake of treating 'egotism' as a synonym of 'egoism'.

Egotism is a bastard word meant to designate something spurious and artificial, not to be confused with the natural egoism or self-assertion proper to every living creature. To condemn the latter would be to condemn life, which could not go on without it; but like every normal faculty, self-assertion has degrees, and passes insensibly from the happy mean to the opposite vices of excess and defect. Egotism, on the contrary, though more or less pronounced, is always a vice because it is founded on a mistake. It assumes, if it does not assert, that the source of one's being and power lies in oneself, that will and logic are by right omnipotent, and that nothing should control the mind or the conscience except the mind or the conscience itself. ... it denies that we are created beings owing reverence to immense forces beyond ourselves, which endow us with our limited faculties and powers, govern our fortunes, and shape our very loves without our permission. Egotism is subjectivism become proud of itself and proclaiming itself absolute. There is therefore something diabolical in its courage, something satanic in its loftiness; it puffs up poor natural selfishness in the child or enterprise in the young man into a deliberate romantic madness.<sup>5</sup>

Thus he assigns three derogatory labels to Nietzsche: a romantic, a heathen in the philosophical sense, and an egotist. There is a significant overlap in the senses of the three, a common part which characterizes the ailment which Santayana is attributing to Nietzsche and to much of transcendental philosophy. All three involve a renouncing of reasonability — an unwillingness to learn from experience, to set viable goals in the light of real possibilities, and to work toward a harmony of these goals. The romantic who seeks all experience is unprepared to learn from any of them; the heathen refuses to benefit from the previous wisdom accumulated by his race and society; the egotist, by discounting the nature and reality of external things which might be beneficial or inimical, is left to formulate ideals and plans which are unsound and doomed to failure.

Despite this common part to the three damaging characteristics, one may of course have one without the others. Schopenhauer, for instance, was a romantic but not an egotist. In him, "the leaven of romanticism was at work", and forbade him to recognize a natural order, with which a vital harmony might be established, with happiness as the goal. This meant that the only alternative to theism in his mind was not naturalism, as Santayana recommends, but anarchy and a "romantic travesty of life." This was inherited by Nietzsche and "regarded by him as the last word of philosophy" (EGP 112-13). On the other hand, Schopenhauer was no egotist, as were Fichte, Hegel, and Nietzsche. For instance, he taught that music was a true transcript of the tormented will to live:

How simple it would have been for him, if he had been an egotist, to enjoy the spectacle of that tormented will as much as the music which was its faithful image! But no; such aesthetic cruelty, which was Nietzsche's delight, would have revolted Schopenhauer. He thought tragedy beautiful because it detached us from a troubled world and did not think a troubled world good, as those unspeakable optimists did, because it made such a fine tragedy. (EGP 119)

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<sup>5</sup> This passage is from an essay Santayana wrote entitled "The nature of egotism and of the moral conflicts that disturb the world." It is included as a postscript in a later publication of EGP (New York: Haskell House, 1971) 151-2, hereafter EGP2.

“It is pleasant”, he adds in unusually dated phrasing, “to find that among all these philosophers one at least was a gentleman” (EGP 119).

Santayana saw Nietzsche as an “irritable genius”, disorganized and immature. His romanticism prevented him from learning from the great minds of the past, and from shaping into sound ideals his discerning insights about virtue and nobility. But his heart was in the right place. Even in his much condemned call for unmercifulness, says Santayana, “there is a sort of love of mankind, a jealous love of what man might be” (EGP 131). Despite this failing, he saw that Nietzsche’s inflammatory writings were likely to be influential, not because of their wise assessment of the human condition, but due to his sheer earnestness and sincerity:

... these explosions are symptomatic; there stirs behind them unmistakably an elemental force. That an attitude is foolish, incoherent, disastrous, proves nothing against the depth of the instinct that inspires it. ... Nietzsche ... betrays the shifting of great subterranean forces. What he said may be nothing, but the fact that he said it is all-important. Out of such wild intuitions, because the heart of the child was in them, the man of the future may have to build his philosophy. We should forgive Nietzsche his boyish blasphemies. He hated with clearness, if he did not know what to love. (EGP 135)

What then did Santayana intend, in asserting that Nietzsche lacked moral strength? This is not entirely clear, but I believe he was referring to a lack of self-discipline and an unwillingness to sacrifice some goods in favour of other preferable ones. For Santayana, this is the nature of reason. He does not use the term “moral strength” much elsewhere, if at all, but he does refer to spiritual discipline frequently, and this is perhaps what he had in mind. Sacrifice is required, not just in the religious sense, but for anybody who has a purpose in life and who must relinquish many attractive options in favour of a chosen path. Such a person must have the strength to forego the secondary options in favour of the preferred path. Only the romantic, whose goal is any and every intense experience, would have a purpose which did not demand discipline and sacrifice; but this was exactly where Nietzsche stood. For him any form of sacrifice, any notion of renouncing some good, was anathema. It is not so much a failing in strength that is at issue, so that Santayana might better have said that it was spiritual discipline, rather than moral strength, of which Nietzsche had no idea.

If Santayana’s *Egotism in German Philosophy* has been condemned as an intemperate wartime attack on Germany, it is not for attaching these three pejorative labels to Nietzsche. But Santayana traces the origins of egotism to German idealism in general and to Kant in particular, and this does provoke a strong negative reaction. How, indeed, can one call Kant an egotist? In fact, Santayana does no such thing, and affirms in the chapter entitled “Seeds of Egotism in Kant” that Kant himself was not in the least egotistical. He was:

a pacifist and humanitarian who so revered the moral sense according to Shaftesbury and Adam Smith that, after having abolished earth and heaven, he was entirely comforted by the sublime truth that nevertheless it remained wrong to tell a lie—such a figure has nothing in it of the officious egotist or the superman. (EGP 55)

While this comment about Kant is unsympathetic, it makes the forthright assertion that he was no egotist. What Santayana claims is that some aspects of Kant’s position encouraged egotism in later followers. On the one hand is Kant’s account of knowledge, which for Santayana is completely sceptical and at bottom subjective. There is no counterweight to scepticism such as he himself introduces in *SAF* in order to moderate his own sceptical theory. But along with this sceptical bent is a second prominent feature, the utter

separation of duty from natural goods. It is the combination of these two that is claimed to encourage egotism.

... his scruples about knowledge, misled by the psychological fallacy that nothing can be an object of knowledge except some idea in the mind, led him in the end to subjectivism; while his rigid conscience, left standing in that unnatural void, led him to attribute absoluteness to what he called the categorical imperative. But this void outside and this absolute oracle within are germs of egotism, and germs of the most virulent species. (EGP 55)

Although Santayana's remarks about Kant are clothed in unsympathetic phrases, what he says on this issue, I think, is spot on. He saw Kant's moral thought as an abstraction and an elaboration of Calvinism. While Kant's personal morality was exemplary, a theory that discredits natural goods and spontaneous virtues is less so.

In Kant, who in this matter followed Calvin, the independence between the movement of nature, both within and without the soul, and the ideal of right was exaggerated into an opposition. The categorical imperative was always authoritative, but perhaps never obeyed. ... Human nature was totally depraved and incapable of the least merit, nor had it any power of itself to become righteous. Its amiable spontaneous virtues, having but a natural motive, were splendid vices. Moral worth began only when the will, transformed at the touch of unmerited grace, surrendered every impulse in overwhelming reverence for the divine law. (EGP 57)

The trouble with the categorical imperative in morals, says Santayana, is that it is migratory:

If today you are right in obeying your private conscience against all considerations of prudence or kindness (even though you are prudent and kind by nature, so that this loyalty to a ruthless duty is a sacrifice for you), to-morrow you may be right in obeying the categorical imperative of your soul in another phase, and to carry out no matter what irresponsible enterprise, though your heart may bleed at the victims you are making. (EGP 63)

Although its object has migrated, the imperative itself remains categorical, and remains shielded against any protest coming from common sense, or from an enlightened self-interest. These protests are seen not only as ignoble, but:

they come from a deluded mind, since the world they regard is a creature of the imagination, whereas the categorical imperative, revealed to the inner man, is a principle prior to all worlds and, therefore, not to be corrected by any suasion which this particular world, now imagined by us, might try to exercise on our free minds. (EGP 63-4)

It is clear that, for Santayana, an important antidote to egotism is the forthright acceptance of the natural world and of our dependence on it. Kant himself assumed that perceptions were symbols of something real existing beyond. He never accepted that "amazing principle of dogmatic egotism that nothing is able to exist unless I am able to know it" (EGP 55). Later German thinkers, the full-fledged transcendentalists, dropped the assumption of an independent reality, and were led to "romantic pride and the belief in self-sufficiency" often found in egotism (EGP 55). This is not found in Kant. However, the Kantian thing-in-itself does not represent the material world and the compelling desires and needs that go with it; there is little room for a morality grounded in natural goods.

At play in Santayana's argument is his condemnation of dogmatic morality. Much as they might want to say that some acts are wicked without qualification, naturalists have to admit that no deed is absolutely evil and no duty absolutely binding. They must accept the relativity of morals, meaning by this not the complete arbitrariness that critics sometimes understand, but a relativity to each person's nature and situation. It might seem that the naturalist position is at a disadvantage in the face of patently obvious evils. However, Santayana offers a counter-argument. The naturalist position, based as it is on people's real interests rather than abstract principles, offers a reasoned response to any dogmatic position

and the possibility of attacking entrenched authority: if a dogmatic position fails to take into account the real interests of those people involved, then it loses its validity and is open to censure. But the Kantian position undercuts criticism based on people's real interests, since it holds that what is right is not determined by natural goods.

Both Nietzsche and Santayana saw modern Western society as decadent. Indeed, they both held that civilization began its downward slide with Socrates, although their reasons for this surprising view were vastly different. Nietzsche believed that the great men of the ancient world, like all great men, were acting through instinct and not through reason. It was wrong of Socrates to challenge everybody to give reasons for their actions; the move towards self-knowledge and reason has subdued the creative energies of mankind ever since.

Nietzsche assumed that reason is in conflict with the emotions. However Santayana saw reason as merely an arbiter, which seeks to harmonize all of one's impulses and desires. Reason is powerless to stifle an impulse, which can be overcome only if another impulse arises to dominate it. The task of reason is to govern the various impulses so as to maximize the benefits to an individual. We must see reason itself as promoted by a special impulse, which will be more strong in some than in others; but in general this impulse to be reasonable is not overly strong, and can for instance be overcome by an appeal to subjectivity such as Nietzsche made, when this latter is deep-seated. Nevertheless, it is through reason that one can hope to thrive, live in harmony, and perhaps even attain the intensity sought by Nietzsche.

Consequently Santayana was entirely sympathetic to the call by Socrates for self-knowledge, and to an ethics based upon harmony and self-knowledge. His complaint was rather that Socrates dismissed all philosophy save moral and political philosophy, leading to a regrettable turn away from naturalism that is evident in the Platonic idea of the good as a force and in Aristotelian final causes. Santayana did not feel that morals and spirituality were inherently secondary, far from it, but he felt that they must be grounded in a sound and honest acceptance of our place in a material world. Although contemporary science has discredited this Socratic prejudice, Santayana believes that many modern philosophers (with the notable exception of Spinoza) have not fully shaken off these ideas, so as to achieve a just description of the human situation in nature, and to give to that nature its full independence from any idealist bias.

In Santayana's view, modern Western philosophy suffers from subjectivism and a dominance of psychology. According to some of his more speculative ideas, spirit (which for him is just consciousness) arises through a sort of evolutionary need for an objective view of one's situation in the world. This helps to counter the natural subjective bias of animal life and to facilitate intelligent action. As well, with spirit comes what he calls pure spirit, in which the objectivity leads to a recognition of and appreciation for the feelings and ideals of others, which also have their validity. As masters of the nature and function of spirit, Santayana looks to the classical Indians in their religious writings; these advocate a spiritual life that has been freed through detachment from worldly cares and obsessions. Any such detachment, of course, is repugnant to Nietzsche and to the transcendentalist school.

Santayana concedes that the same transcendental spirit as is found in Indian philosophy, has reappeared in Western philosophy, as led by Germany. But with the German transcendental idealists, this has led to a very different, subjective conclusion:

The Indians think that if the spirit in them is divine it behoves them to clear it of all shackles unworthy of divinity; of all partiality, of all ignorance, of all anxiety, division, or change. The Germans, on the contrary, think that if the spirit in them is divine, it lends its supreme

sanction to all their desires, shares their ambitions, and ensures the fulfilment of their hopes. (EGP2 156)

Santayana was in accord with Nietzsche's observations about the decadence of Western society. He had little sympathy for many of the liberal reforms that had taken place, however well-meaning they had been, for he felt that they often inflicted damage to valuable institutions and sometimes did more harm than good. These reforms tended to be haphazard and not founded on any reasoned ideal. Only a positive new ideal could be expected to regenerate fresh health and significant achievements. Nietzsche also felt the need for a positive ideal. As a young man, he saw in German musical genius the seeds of a liberating rebirth, one that would exploit Dionysian creative energies and counter the dominance of the Apollonian. It would supplant the Socratic mania for reasonableness. In his later years, his forced optimism led him to predict that a race of supermen was forthcoming, an argument lacking even the slim plausibility of that earlier conception. These ideas were basically unsound; they were invented without sufficient consideration of the nature of human beings or the character of their material setting.

Here is Santayana's final comment on Nietzsche:

No, neither the philosophy inherited by Nietzsche nor his wayward imagination was fit to suggest to him a nobler race of men. On the contrary, they shut him off from comprehension of the best men that have existed. Like the Utopias or ideals of many other satirists and minor philosophers, the superman is not a possibility, it is only a protest. Our society is outworn, but hard to renew; the emancipated individual needs to master himself. In what spirit or to what end he will do so, we do not know, and Nietzsche cannot tell us. ... His mind is undisciplined, and his tongue outrageous, but he is at bottom the friend of our conscience, and full of shrewd wit and tender wisps of intuition. Behind his 'gay wisdom' and trivial rhymes lies a great anguish. His intellect is lost in a chaos. His heart denies itself the relief of tears and can vent itself only in forced laughter and mock hopes that gladden nobody, least of all himself. (EGP 124-125)

In his brilliant critical writings grounded in sharply defined preferences, Nietzsche is able to trash hypocrisy and pomposity in others, and to point to excellence in many forms. He saw that his contemporaries lacked the passion and intensity of earlier more aristocratic and violent times; and he demanded an increase in the general level of challenge and stress, without at the same time offering any credible goals which would elicit the additional intensity and make it worth while. From his unruly thoughts, he failed to work out any viable alternative ideal that might enhance people's lives.

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# BIBLIOGRAPHICAL CHECKLIST

## TWENTY-FOURTH UPDATE

The items below will supplement the references given in *George Santayana: A Bibliographical Checklist, 1880–1980* (Bowling Green: Philosophy Documentation Center, 1982) prepared by Herman J. Saatkamp Jr. and John Jones. These references are divided into primary and secondary sources. Except for the book reviews, the following articles and books are classified according to their years of publication. Readers with additions or corrections are invited to send these to Kristine Frost, Santayana Edition, School of Liberal Arts, IUPUI, INDIANAPOLIS IN 46202–5157.

### CHRONOLOGICAL LISTING OF PRIMARY SOURCES

#### 2008

*La razón en el arte y otros escritos de estética*. Edited by Ricardo Miguel Alfonso. Madrid: Verbum, 2008, 188p. The volume includes a “Preliminary Study” (xv–lx), an “Epilogue” (“Concepto y estética en George Santayana” by Fernando Savater), and the following book and essays:

*La razón en el arte* (*Reason in Art*, [Scribner’s, 1905]), translated by Ricardo Miguel Alfonso.

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*The Letters of George Santayana: Book Eight, 1948–1952*. Edited and with an Introduction by William G. Holzberger. Vol. 5 of *The Works of George Santayana*. Cambridge, Mass. and London: The MIT Press, 2008, lxxxi, 645.

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## Timothy Sprigge, Philosopher

In a philosopher, a kernel of sincerity is worth more than a harvest of conventionalities. When he made this assertion, George Santayana surely meant by sincerity in part that the philosopher should seek the truth rather than try to win debating points, and should honestly search for a philosophy to live by. In talking with Timothy Sprigge or in reading his works, one always knew that he was seeking the truth with absolute sincerity. He exhibited this property and more, and must be seen as a philosopher in the exacting classical sense given to the term by Santayana. Although he was adept at criticizing others' arguments and bolstering his own, his aim was never to put someone else down. He sought to clarify and enhance his own position, and perhaps win others over to that position. Along with this sincerity, he added a measure of courage; for the absolute idealism that he espoused was decidedly not fashionable, and he was aware that critics would dismiss his position as foolish and untenable. But this was where his reasoning led him, and he sincerely believed in it, so this was the position he advanced. Of course, something similar was true earlier when he wrote one of the finest appreciative studies of Santayana's philosophy, his *Santayana: an Examination of his Philosophy*; this was out of favour too.

Mind was for Timothy of the utmost importance, and he was dismayed at the various theories that concentrated solely on its cognitive aspects while completely ignoring its conscious side. But for Santayana, spirit is consciousness and consciousness alone; the awareness proper to mind cannot be manipulated out of consideration in a study of spirit. He sees spirit as an impotent by-product of life; agency arises through the psyche, not through a spirit that is inefficacious. Among various theories of mind on offer at the time, he felt that Santayana's epiphenomenalism was superior, since it brought home "the *true* dignity and worth of consciousness which does not consist in the work it accomplishes but in the moral significance it gives to what otherwise would be meaningless happenings." This benefit is not to be found, he says, in any conceivable form of behaviourism or physicalism. If advances in cognitive science lead philosophers to embrace a mechanistic theory of mind, which seemed likely to him, then this view alone granted to consciousness its proper place. Sprigge makes this same point in several places. If mankind is at one level explicable mechanistically, he says, then epiphenomenalism must be true, and certainly Santayana's position is preferable to the identity theory, "which simply seeks to purge us of any conception of what it is which really matters about human beings."

But this claim is a conditional one, and merely held that Santayana's view was preferable to various main alternatives being considered in British and American philosophy. In fact, he was never able to come to terms with the epiphenomenalist position, which he eventually saw as untenable. On a couple of occasions a long time ago, Timothy asked me if I could accept Santayana's epiphenomenalist doctrine. I could give a more confident and informed response now, but I don't think that this would have swayed him. Materialism was not natural for him. He questioned whether Santayana could explain, within his system, how individual moments of spirit are tied to the psyches of individual people. I was puzzled by the question then, and would now say that this must be assumed as a part of the hypothesis of naturalism or materialism. It is not proved, any more than is the existence of other minds proved.

It is a remarkable leap to move from favouring a materialist thinker to espousing transcendental idealism, but one can perhaps see how Sprigge made the shift, in light of the above. A primary consideration for him was a robust account of mind, which is

a prerequisite for all moral considerations. But in the chief options being considered in the English-speaking world, conscious mind was ignored or downplayed. The merit he found in Santayana was that, while he accepted scientific advances, he did not ignore or eliminate spirit, the conscious part of mind. With his rejection of epiphenomenalism, then, he was left with few options, and found himself thrust in the direction of idealism. And in any case there was always a leaning in this direction, how much I cannot say.

In July of 2007, sadly, Timothy was taken away from his wife Giglia and family, his friends and colleagues, and the philosophical community. The following Christmas I received from Giglia this “prayer” written by him; I print it without comment.

*Prayer for Today*

O mysterious but glorious universe of matter and of spirit,  
of which each of us is but a tiny fragment  
May the goodness,  
which we trust is somehow at the heart of things,  
increasingly prevail over evil on our little earth.  
May we learn to organize our life on earth  
so that the necessities and worth-while pleasures  
of human existence are more equally shared  
and be ready to make what sacrifices this requires from us.  
And may we be tolerant of others  
and love them, when we can,  
as we hope to be tolerated  
and sometimes loved ourselves.  
So let us seek our own happiness  
in ways which help rather than hinder others  
in seeking their happiness  
and be the happier ourselves for this,  
but let us not repine too much at our own inadequacies  
but make the best of ourselves as we are,  
neither envying nor despising others.  
And let the human species flourish  
without excessive exploitation of other species  
and in a world in which we can still be refreshed  
by communion with the non-human.  
And let us not fret too much about time  
realizing that everything is eternally there in its own particular place in  
the eternal consciousness of the universe.

Written by Timothy L. S. Sprigge

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## Carta desde España

On March 4, 2008 in Valencia, Spain, took place a conference entitled “George Santayana: La lucidez de la razon (The Lucidity of Reason)”, co-organized by The Museum of Illustration and Modernity in Valencia (MUVIM), directed by Román de la Calle; LIMBO, Boletín de estudios internacionales sobre Santayana, directed by Manuel Garrido; and the University of Valencia. A special role in organizing of the event had Jose (Pepe) Beltran Llavador (University of Valencia), and two more Spanish experts of Santayana, that is Manuel Garrido (University Complutense of Madrid) and Daniel Moreno Moreno (Limbo) as well as the Italian Santayana scholar, Giuseppe Patella (University “Tor Vergata” Rome, Italy) were prominent figures during the meeting. Its general aim was to present Santayana as a thinker and a poet, especially in the context of the relation between philosophy and literature.

In the first part of this extraordinary event, there were presentations given (all in the Spanish language) by Daniel Moreno Moreno (*Philosophy as a Way of Life*), Chris Skowronski (*Ontological Aspects of the Literary Work of Art in Santayana. An Introductory Outline*), and Cayetano Estebanez Estebanez (*Life of the Words*) whose presentation was accompanied by the recitation of Santayana’s poetry.

Later on, there was a round table discussion (*Actuality of Santayana*) with the panelists: Manuel Garrido, Angel Faerna (University of Castilla-La Mancha, Toledo), Giuseppe Patella, Jose Beltran, and Chris Skowronski.

This interesting meeting was concluded in the evening by an extraordinary presentation of music by a classical band La Capella Saetabis; the music was so selected as to fit to the texts of Santayana that were read out between the pieces of music. The selection of the texts and the commentaries were by Ramon del Castillo (UNED, Madrid).

The general impression out of this meeting was splendid. The hospitality of the Spanish organizers, the appreciative audience (some 150 students, professors, and town people), and the space provided by the Museum — all this made a wonderful atmosphere of the whole event.

Next day, at the University of Valencia, there was a meeting during which the preliminary discussion over the preparation of the **III International Congress on George Santayana** took place. The event is planned to take place in Valencia (November 16-18, 2009). Professors Pedro García, who organized the First International Conference in Ávila (Spain) in 1992 and K. P. Skowronski, organizer of the Second International Conference in Opole (Poland) in 2006, have confirmed their presence. Professor Herman J. Saatkamp, and other expert and highly reputed scholars from America, the United States, Europe and Spain will also participate in the Conference. More information will be provided by Jose Beltran and Daniel Moreno in LIMBO and in the web page [www.hiperlimbo.com](http://www.hiperlimbo.com).

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### **Some Abbreviations for Santayana's Works**

Page numbers given with no further information on the edition will refer to a volume in the critical Santayana Edition, where this exists, or to the Scribner's edition in most other cases.

AFSL	<i>Animal Faith and Spiritual Life</i> , ed. John Lachs	OS	<i>Obiter Scripta</i>
BR	<i>Birth of Reason and Other Essays</i>	PGS	<i>The Philosophy of George Santayana</i> , ed. P. A. Schilpp
COUS	<i>Character and Opinion in the United States</i>	POML	<i>Physical Order and Spiritual Liberty</i> ed. John and Shirley Lachs
CP	<i>Complete Poems</i>	PP	<i>Persons and Places: Fragments of Autobiography</i>
DL	<i>Dialogues in Limbo</i>	PSL	<i>Platonism and the Spiritual Life</i>
DP	<i>Dominations and Powers</i>	RB	<i>Realms of Being</i> (One volume edition)
EGP	<i>Egotism in German Philosophy</i>	RE	<i>The Realm of Essence</i> . RB Bk. I
ICG	<i>The Idea of Christ in the Gospels</i>	RM	<i>The Realm of Matter</i> . RB Bk II
IPR	<i>Interpretations of Poetry and Religion</i>	RT	<i>The Realm of Truth</i> . RB Bk III
LP	<i>The Last Puritan</i>	RS	<i>The Realm of Spirit</i> . RB Bk IV
LR	<i>The Life of Reason, or The Phases of Human Progress</i>	SAF	<i>Scepticism and Animal Faith</i>
LR1	Vol. 1. <i>Reason in Common Sense</i>	SB	<i>The Sense of Beauty</i>
LR2	Vol. 2. <i>Reason in Society</i>	SE	<i>Soliloquies in England and Later Soliloquies</i>
LR3	Vol. 3. <i>Reason in Religion</i>	TTMP	<i>Some Turns of Thought in Modern Philosophy</i>
LR4	Vol. 4. <i>Reason in Art</i>	TPP	<i>Three Philosophical Poets</i>
LR5	Vol. 5. <i>Reason in Science</i>	WD	<i>Winds of Doctrine</i>