

Overheard in Seville

*Bulletin of the  
Santayana  
Society*

No. 27  
Fall 2009



# *Bulletin of the George Santayana Society*

No. 27 FALL 2009

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*Overheard in Seville*, which appears annually, is formatted and composed for typesetting at the University of Waterloo and is published by Indiana University - Purdue University Indianapolis.

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## ANNOUNCEMENT

### *The George Santayana Society*

2009

#### ANNUAL MEETING

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

There will be a short business meeting at the outset to elect a new president and a new director.

#### Speakers

***Brian Garrett***

McMaster University

“Santayana on Teleology and Animism”

***Richard Rubin***

Washington University in St. Louis

“The John Searle/Daniel Dennett Debate

looked at in Light of the

George Santayana/John Dewey Controversy”

#### Chair

***Angus Kerr-Lawson***

University of Waterloo

7:00 - 10:00 P.M. 29 December  
Rooms to be assigned at the conference  
New York Marriott Marquis Hotel

# Santayana or Descartes?

## Meditations on *Scepticism and Animal Faith*

Of the terrible doubt of appearances,  
Of the uncertainty after all, that we may be deluded ...  
- Walt Whitman <sup>1</sup>

Deux excès: exclure la raison, n'admettre que la raison.  
- Pascal <sup>2</sup>

### I

If you are a seasoned museum-goer, you have probably heard of Stendhal syndrome. First described by the French novelist after whom the condition is named, this malady strikes culture-hungry souls who overdose on masterpieces housed in one spot — Florence, for instance, to which Stendhal, a fervent art-lover, repaired in 1817. Disoriented by a surfeit of beauty, victims of Stendhal syndrome are seized by a joy so intense and so terrible that it paralyzes their reason. A form of temporary insanity supervenes, as patients surrender to a feeling of dizzy panic laced with bliss.<sup>3</sup>

I mention Stendhal syndrome because I suffered from its philosophical equivalent when I first read *Scepticism and Animal Faith* (SAF). I was dazzled, vexed, shaken and stirred by turns, as I discovered a book that was philosophical without ceasing to be poetic, and conservative without ceasing to be creative. Undone by the subtlety and thematic reach of Santayana's book, as well as by its lush metaphor-laden prose, I felt then — as I feel now — unequal to the task of judging it.

Fortunately for all concerned, the task I have set for myself this evening is more modest in several respects. First, I shall refrain from criticizing Santayana, opting instead to expound and explore some of his principal doctrines. Second, instead of surveying *Scepticism and Animal Faith* in its entirety, I shall focus on only a few of its more prominent, eye-catching parts. Third, instead of viewing those parts in light of subsequent developments in epistemology, I shall examine their complex relation to philosophy's past. To be more specific, I intend to explore Santayana's fraught relationship *qua* epistemologist to Descartes, whose role in *Scepticism and Animal Faith* is both that of inspiration and of adversary. The better we understand this philosophical odd couple, the easier it is to appreciate that potent synthesis of old and new ideas which is Santayana's theory of knowledge. Such, at any rate, is my contention; and I hope I may persuade a few of you to share it.

### II

Let us begin by noting nine ways in which the epistemological project undertaken in *Scepticism and Animal Faith* resembles that undertaken in the *Meditations*.

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<sup>1</sup> "Of the Terrible Doubt of Appearances," in *Walt Whitman: Poetry and Prose*. ed. Justin Kaplan. (New York: Library of America, 1996), p. 274.

<sup>2</sup> *Pensées* (Paris: Gallimard, 2004), §172.

<sup>3</sup> This paper was read to the George Santayana Society during its annual meeting, held in conjunction with that of the American Philosophical Association, Eastern Division, in Philadelphia on December 29, 2008.

a. Observing that “a philosopher today would be ridiculous and negligible who had not strained his dogmas through the utmost rigours of scepticism” (SAF 9), Santayana follows Descartes in presenting scepticism as the starting-point of an entire system of philosophy.<sup>4</sup> Philosophy, both agree, begins not with cocksure affirmations or parlous conjectures, but with exacting self-criticism and dogma-corroding doubt. It is only after we have passed through this merciless inferno of the mind that we can investigate loftier matters — matters which souls well-schooled in scepticism have already glimpsed, as through a glass darkly.

b. While Santayana and Descartes begin with scepticism, neither is content to end there. Because of this, both *Scepticism and Animal Faith* and the *Meditations* can be read as narratives of loss and recovery. What we lose, or temporarily surrender, is what formerly passed as human knowledge; but the good news is that we get most of it back — albeit in a reinterpreted form — in the end, as our knowledge of fact is gradually restored, beginning in each case with the postulation of a self.

c. For Santayana as for Descartes, what is irremediably lost in our encounter with scepticism is not knowledge per se, then, but our epistemological naiveté or innocence. Once it dawns on us that our most basic and intuitive first-order commitments can be doubted, there is no going home again; just as nothing can bring back the hour of splendour in the grass, so no truly philosophic mind can give itself to any creed with prelapsarian spontaneity. Scepticism has driven us out of the paradise of credulity; and that paradise is lost to us forever. Yet compensations are in the offing: caution replaces complacency, incomprehension yields to insight, and dogmatism gives way to wonder. Hence if eating fruit from the Tree of the Theory of Knowledge brings about a Fall, it is at least a happy Fall — a philosophical *felix culpa* — inasmuch as it allows us to know more about knowledge and about ourselves as knowing subjects.

d. Santayana’s scepticism, like that of Descartes, is intended to be global or universal in scope. Recall Santayana’s overwhelming question: “Do I know, can I know, *anything*?” (SAF 21; emphasis mine). Far from confining themselves to the examination of particular beliefs, Santayana and Descartes are concerned first and foremost with *classes* of beliefs; and all classes, not merely some, are fair game. As everything is potentially up for grabs, nothing — no cherished belief or *idée fixe* — can be deemed safe or off-limits.

e. Santayana’s sceptical procedure is to ask, with respect to a given class of beliefs, whether doubt is always possible within this class; and, if it is, he concludes that vulgar dogmatism has suffered yet another defeat. Like Descartes, then, Santayana doubts not for the sake of doubting, but because he seeks something absolutely indubitable (as opposed to seeking something which is merely probable, plausible, or more or less credible). Both philosophers thus are engaged in versions of what John Dewey christened “the quest for certainty”.<sup>5</sup>

f. Santayana’s scepticism, like that of Descartes, begins from a first-person perspective: that of an exemplary “I” reflecting in splendid isolation from the

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<sup>4</sup> Santayana, it would seem, never abandoned this idea; decades later, he wrote: “Criticism, I think, must first be invited to do its worst: nothing is more dangerous here than timidity or convention” (PGS 18).

<sup>5</sup> John Dewey, *The Quest for Certainty: A Study of the Relation of Knowledge and Action*. (New York: Capricorn, 1960; originally published in 1929).

world and others (if such there be). Once again, recall Santayana's basic question: "Do *I* know, can *I* know, anything?" (SAF 21; emphasis mine). Since our beliefs in a world beyond the self and in other selves are fair game (as per item d), and since it is possible to doubt them (as per item e), such beliefs cannot be countenanced by a philosopher whom nothing short of certainty can satisfy.

**g.** Like Descartes, Santayana understands the concept of empirical knowledge in such a way that a form of metaphysical realism is effectively built into it. Knowledge, we are given to understand, is knowledge of *an objective or mind-independent world*; and our theories and thoughts cannot qualify as true unless they fit facts found in that world. As Santayana remarks in *The Realm of Spirit* (RS),

What presuppositions do we make in pursuing knowledge of anything? And I reply: We presuppose that there is some real object or event to be known or reported, prior or subsequent to the report that reaches us. In other words, we presuppose existent facts about which our affirmations may be true or false. About these facts our knowledge will be true, as far as it goes, if we have access to them and discount the relativity and partiality of our perceptions and theories. To assert this principle of realism is no more than honesty. Such trust in animal faith is involved in action and in the impulse to look for, to describe, or to make anything. It is the first presupposition of intelligence and sanity, and any scepticism that denies it asserts it. (RS 277; cf. SAF 8, 172)

Scepticism presupposes realism, then; but since confessing one's faith in realism is "no more than honesty", we cannot hope to evade scepticism by opting for idealism or phenomenalism. Reducing reality to representations in this way would be tantamount to admitting that the sceptic is right - that we do indeed lack "knowledge of the world", as we are accustomed to understand that solemn-sounding phrase.

**h.** Santayana and Descartes both answer scepticism by invoking the authority of something metaphysically ultimate on which we depend for our existence and in which we live and move and have our being. For Descartes, this authority belongs to a perfect, non-deceiving God; for Santayana, it belongs to Nature — at least when she speaks in the irresistible dialect of animal faith.

Though significantly different, Descartes's appeal to the veracity of God and Santayana's appeal to the primitive dogmas of animal faith can nevertheless be seen as variations on a single intriguing theme: namely, that epistemology cannot flourish or grow affirmative unless it is nourished by piety as defined in the *Life of Reason* (LR): namely, as "man's reverent attachment to the sources of his being and the steadying of his life by that attachment" (LR 258). For Descartes and Santayana, only epistemologists who are pious in this elastic sense — that is, only philosophers who remain open and true to the source of their being (*Deus sive Natura*) — can hope to transcend the negations of scepticism.<sup>6</sup>

**i.** Finally, Santayana and Descartes share Plato's conviction — dramatized in the Allegory of the Cave — that the quest for knowledge leads us beyond the realm of everyday change and flux. In the *Meditations*, this Platonic motif is given a distinctly Augustinian colouring: one's mind or soul is to be led away from the senses, so that the soul can finally know itself; and the soul, once it knows itself as such, can truly know God — that is, a necessary and eternal being, possessing all

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<sup>6</sup> I have discussed the relationship between piety and scepticism in Santayana's thought in "Platonists, Poets, and the God's-Eye View: Reading Santayana's "On the Death of a Metaphysician,"" *The Pluralist* Fall 2008 no. 3 (3), pp. 132-153.

possible perfections.<sup>7</sup> In *Scepticism and Animal Faith* a parallel tale is told: the Santayanan sceptic, who contends that nothing given exists, urges that belief in the familiar objects of perception is irrational, that we cannot prove that anything exists, and — this is crucial — that all we can be sure of are intuited essences or changeless universals which cannot be said to exist (inasmuch as all existence is allegedly contingent). Once again, the underlying progression is recognizably Platonic: from perception to intellection; from mutability to eternity; from a mode of mundane Becoming to one of rarefied, unworldly Being.

### III

Although I have identified nine commitments common to Santayana and Descartes, I would not dream of denying that much divides them. Six differences seem to me especially salient.

a. To begin with, Santayana denies that Descartes is a true or thoroughgoing sceptic. Descartes was indeed prepared to doubt facts, says Santayana; but the so-called “father of modern philosophy” was much less inclined to doubt principles. Because of this deplorable asymmetry — because, that is, Descartes “never doubted his principles of explanation” (SAF 289) — his scepticism turns out to be disappointingly limited, timid, and tame:

Descartes was the first to begin a system of philosophy with universal doubt, intended to be only provisional and methodical; but his mind was not plastic nor mystical enough to be profoundly sceptical, even histrionically. He could doubt any particular fact easily, with the shrewdness of a man of science who was also a man of the world; but this doubt was only a more penetrating use of intelligence, a sense that the alleged fact might be explained away. Descartes could not lend himself to the disintegration of reason, and never doubted his principles of explanation. For instance, in order to raise a doubt about the applicability of mathematics to existence (for their place in the realm of essence would remain the same in any case) he suggested that a malign demon might have been the adequate cause of our inability to doubt that science. He thus assumed the principle of sufficient reason, a principle for which there is no reason at all. If any idea or axiom were really *a priori* and spontaneous in the human mind, it would infinitely improbable that it should apply to the facts of nature. Every genius, in this respect, is his own malign demon. (SAF 289)

Moreover, Descartes “set accidental limits to his scepticism” (SAF 290) even in the domain of facts. According to Santayana, the Cartesian *cogito ergo sum* is either question-begging (if taken as an inference) or indefensible (if taken as a declaration). Question-begging, because its conclusion is already contained in its premise; indefensible, because a substantial ego or self cannot be posited without relying on assumptions which are far from indubitable:

“I think, therefore I am,” if taken as an inference is sound because analytical, only repeating in the conclusion, for the sake of emphasis, something assumed in the premise. If taken as an attestation of fact, as I suppose it was meant, it is honest and richly indicative, all its terms being heavy with empirical connotations. What is “thinking,” what is “I,” what is “therefore,” and what is “existence”? If there were no existence there would certainly be no persons and no thinking, and it may be doubted (as I have indicated above) that anything exists at all. That any being exists that may be called “I” so that I am not a mere essence, is a thousand times more doubtful, and is often denied by the keenest wits. The persuasion that in saying “I am” I have reached an indubitable fact, can only excite a smile in the genuine sceptic. No fact is self-evident; and what sort of fact is this “I,” and in what sense do I

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<sup>7</sup> For a recent treatment of Descartes’s appropriation of Augustinian themes, see Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1989), pp. 143-158.

“exist”? Existence does not belong to a mere datum, nor am I a datum to myself; I am a somewhat remote and extremely obscure object of belief. (SAF 290)

Because Descartes accepted much that is uncertain, he failed to practice that exacting gospel of doubt which he preached with such memorable fervour. Determined to “push scepticism as far as [he] logically can” (SAF 10), Santayana resolves to be more Cartesian in this respect than Descartes himself:

In adopting the method of Descartes, I have sought to carry it further, suspending all conventional categories as well as all conventional beliefs; so that not only the material world but all facts and all existences have lost their status, and become simply the themes or topics which intrinsically they are. (SAF 292)

Not only does Santayana doubt the existence of an external world peopled with substances, he also doubts the existence of the self; and not only does he doubt the existence of the self, he discovers that it is possible to doubt whether *anything* exists. Since only a solipsism of the present moment is compatible with an uncompromising scepticism, the consistent sceptic must confine himself to what is immediately given or intuited. And yet “existence can never be given in intuition” (SAF 48): since existence “comports external relations, variable, contingent, and not discoverable in a given being when taken alone” (SAF 37), existence “does not belong to a mere datum” (SAF 290). The implications of this are momentous:

The last step in scepticism is now before me. It will lead me to deny existence to any datum, whatever it may be; and as the datum, by hypothesis, is the whole of what solicits my attention at any moment, I shall deny the existence of everything, and abolish that category of thought altogether. If I could not do this, I should be a tyro in scepticism. (SAF 35)

It follows, says Santayana, that “[b]elief in the existence of anything, including myself, is something radically incapable of proof” (SAF 35), and that “there may be no facts at all, and perhaps nothing has ever existed” (SAF 40). In the end, then, nothing - no belief or conviction in any existence — is left standing: the beliefs in memory and change, as well as those in substance and self, sway and teeter and collapse. Next to this “ultimate scepticism” of Santayana’s (SAF 40; cf. 33-41), Cartesian scepticism does indeed seem tepid, halting, and unsure of itself.

**b.** Instead of simply rehearsing the classic Cartesian arguments for scepticism, Santayana presents us with a dilemma informed by assumptions peculiar to his system. As a would-be anti-sceptic, I am presented with a choice: either I content myself with contemplating the data immediately before me; or I go beyond said data by imposing an interpretation upon them, thereby forming a judgment that some existing thing is thus-and-so. If, however, I venture beyond the data by interpreting it - asserting, say, “Here is one hand, and here is another” — I run a serious risk of error, as there is no antecedent guarantee that my interpretation will prove correct. Hence Santayana’s verdict: “Belief in the existence of anything, including myself, is something radically incapable of proof, and rests, like all belief, on some irrational persuasion or prompting of life” (SAF 35). If, on the other hand, I cautiously confine myself to some present datum, then I am not justified in asserting or believing that anything actually exists: existence, we have already learned, “comports external relations, variable, contingent, and not discoverable in a single being when taken alone” (SAF 37; emphasis mine). And if this is so, then the old empiricist idea of immediate knowledge is a contradiction in terms: “[S]elf-evidence, or contemplative possession of a datum, collapses logically into tautology, and is not knowledge” (PGS 515).

The basic dilemma, then, is this. Either we interpret what is given (and so form beliefs about the world), or we refrain from imposing any interpretation or construction on data. In the first case, what we have is not certain knowledge, but



ungrounded conjecture; and in the second case, what we have is not knowledge at all, but intuition of essence. Sure knowledge thus eludes us, it seems, no matter what we do.

c. Although Descartes and Santayana are engaged in a quest for certainty, their quests end very differently. According to Descartes, the first fact to prove sceptic-proof is that putatively established by the *cogito*: that I — an immaterial, substantial self — exist. As we have seen, Santayana disagrees: true certainty, he contends, is to be found not in beliefs about existences, but in intuition of essences:

My scepticism at last has touched bottom, and my doubt has found honourable rest in the absolutely indubitable. Whatever essence I find and note, that essence and no other is established before me. I cannot be mistaken about it, since I now have no object of intent other than the object of intuition. (SAF 74; cf. 73, 75, 110)

Though impeccable, intuition of essence is not a species of *knowledge*. Knowledge requires belief about some existence (SAF 179); yet essences are described only when we have suspended such beliefs, and quieted the animal expectations which prompt them. Once we stop interpreting data in light of our needs and purposes, we shall no longer be tempted to see what is given in intuition as pointing beyond itself in the manner of signs or symbols. Instead, we shall be free to contemplate data disinterestedly and objectively, seeing them not for what they may *mean* but for what they eternally *are* (SAF 65):

Retrenchment has its rewards. When by a difficult suspension of judgment I have deprived a given image of all adventitious significance, when it is taken neither for the manifestation of a substance nor for an idea in the mind nor for an event in the world, but simply if a colour for that colour and if music for that music, and if a face for that face, then an immense cognitive certitude comes to compensate me for so much cognitive abstention. (SAF 74)

In this way, Santayana intimates, that wild and vital vision we impulsively call a world is tamed through the magic of unnatural doubt.

d. While Descartes and Santayana ultimately seek to transcend scepticism, as noted above, they go about it in decidedly different ways.

The contours of Descartes' disproof are familiar: we can know *a priori* that there exists a God who, being perfect, is no deceiver; yet God would be a deceiver if scepticism were true, inasmuch as my God-given faculties lead me irresistibly to believe in material things which are both the cause and object of my perceptual experiences. It follows that scepticism must be false, and that my belief in a mind-independent yet knowable world is justified. Q.E.D.

Whereas Descartes offers a straightforward refutation of scepticism, Santayana offers more of a diagnosis. The sceptic denies that knowledge of the world is possible, says Santayana, because she has "a false conception of what would be success" (SAF 101); that is, because she fundamentally misunderstands the nature of knowledge, insisting that it must be literal (as opposed to symbolic) and that our minds cannot know the world unless they copy its contents with scrupulous — even obsessive — fidelity. Only someone in the grip of a philosophical theory could understand knowledge and mind in this way, Santayana thinks; and the sooner we break the stranglehold such artificial pictures have on our thought, the sooner we can appreciate what pragmatism gets right: namely, that our knowledge of nature is not literal, but symbolic; not certain, but fallible; not absolute, but perspectival; that our minds are not supposed to mirror nature, but to interpret it fruitfully; that our ideas of things are not "fair portraits" but "political caricatures made in the human interest" (SAF 104; cf. 98,

103, 179-180); that “[t]he senses are poets” (PP 443), not scribes; and that coping, not copying, is what counts. In sum: once we see through the sceptic’s unreal conception of knowledge — once we acknowledge that “knowledge lies in thinking aptly about things, not in becoming like them” (SAF 95), cognizant that our thought is naught but “normal madness” (DL 36) — we will see traditional scepticism for what it is: a mere *ignoratio elenchi*, or philosophical red herring.

e. If Santayana and Descartes disagree about what constitutes an adequate treatment of scepticism, that is partly because they disagree about the nature of philosophy itself. For Descartes, philosophy is an *a priori* discipline, logically prior to common sense and science; for Santayana, such foundationalist pretensions are as risible as they are grandiose. Anticipating the naturalism of Quine,<sup>8</sup> Santayana flatly denies that philosophy can scrutinize our conventional conceptual scheme from an external standpoint: philosophy, he tells us, is not “prior to convention”, but “only convention made consistent and deliberate” (SAF 186-187).<sup>9</sup> Wholesale attempts to subvert entrenched categories and convictions by appealing to the deliverances of philosophic reason are therefore bootless, as are attempts to undermine our conceptual scheme by contrasting it invidiously with an unconditioned “God’s-Eye View” of things. Since “criticism can have no first principle” (SAF 255; cf. 8-9, 12), and since “any pretensions which criticism might set up to being more profound than common sense would be false convictions” (SAF 187), the sceptic must stop pretending her arguments rest on premises more credible or secure than our most familiar and banal beliefs. In the absence of absolute starting-points, philosophers must begin just as other mortals do: not from some Archimedean point outside inherited commitments and norms, but from a perspective internal to them. If this is right - and Santayana is persuaded that it is — then honest epistemologists should emulate the epic poets, who boldly “plunge *in medias res*” (SAF 1), rather than the geometers, who insist on starting with immaculate luminous axioms.

f. The Santayanan and Cartesian replies to scepticism thus diverge not only in detail, but also in type; and this typological difference reflects a more basic difference in philosophical sensibility or — to filch a helpful phrase from William James — in “intellectual temperament”.<sup>10</sup>

As a rationalist, Descartes treads the high *a priori* road alone, with a proud and martial air; as a naturalist, Santayana saunters in the valley like a civilian, surrounded by friends and fellow-travellers. Where Descartes exalts reason and rigour, Santayana esteems sincerity and common sense;<sup>11</sup> where Descartes essays apodictic proofs that are caviar to the general, Santayana spreads “a feast of what everybody knows” (SAF ix); and where Descartes needs the help of a necessary and extramundane being, Santayana finds that nature alone proves more than enough.

<sup>8</sup> Indeed, as T.L.S. Sprigge once observed, Santayana can be seen as a proponent of Quinean naturalized epistemology *avant la lettre*. See his essay, “George Santayana” in *American Philosophy*. ed. Marcus Singer. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 118.

<sup>9</sup> Replying to those who would credit the philosopher with “a vantage point outside the conceptual scheme that he takes in charge”, Quine urges that “there is no such cosmic exile” (*Word and Object*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1960), p. 275

<sup>10</sup> William James, *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking*. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1981; originally published 1907), pp. 8-9, 19-21.

<sup>11</sup> On the link between naturalism and sincerity in Santayana, see Angus Kerr-Lawson, “On the Absence of Argument in Santayana,” *Overheard in Seville: Bulletin of the Santayana Society* Fall 2004, no. 22, pp. 29-40.

What we have here, of course, is an old yet ever-vital spat. It is the quarrel between philosophers who think a necessary foundation is needed for knowledge and thought, and those who do not; between philosophers determined to escape contingency, and those who smile at its ubiquity; between philosophers whose patrons saints are Plato or Kant, and those whose idols are Nietzsche or the later Wittgenstein.<sup>12</sup> It would be impertinent of me to bestow the epithet of sheep upon one party, and that of goats upon the other; and so I shall say nothing further about this deep rift, except to note that it is with us still.

#### IV

Santayana begins *Scepticism and Animal Faith* by confessing that “my system is not mine, nor new” (SAF v). Is this false modesty? Not at all: any student of the history of ideas who peruses this “introduction to a system of philosophy” (for that is the book’s subtitle) cannot help but marvel at the assemblage of themes which its author has appropriated from diverse sources. If I have chosen to speak exclusively of Santayana’s relation to Descartes, then, that is not because I regard the latter as the sole historical influence worth recognizing. Far from it: Plato and Aristotle, Lucretius and Sextus Empiricus, Spinoza and Hume, Kant and Darwin, Schopenhauer and James — these are only some of the august shades who glide and murmur through Santayana’s golden pages. Though beholden to each, our philosopher agrees unreservedly with none; and whatever he borrows from the dead, he always makes his own. The result is a book which is a masterpiece of philosophical syncretism.

I use the word “syncretism” advisedly. Far from supposing *Scepticism and Animal Faith* a mere hodgepodge, or a chaotic conjunction of choice odds and ends, we must never lose sight of the fact that Santayana’s aim is ever to synthesize and reconcile, to balance and harmonize, so that disparate themes from philosophy’s past can co-exist peacefully, each finding its proper place in a comprehensive scheme. It is for this reason that *Scepticism and Animal Faith* may be compared to a mosaic whose tiles have been selected, re-cut and arranged by a craftsman gifted with exquisite taste and blessed with an enviable sense of proportion. The parts of this mosaic are many; they are composed of different substances; they are imported from different lands; they belong to different periods; and, though all costly and precious, they vary greatly in shape and size and colour and texture. Given such heterogeneous but splendid stuff, your enthusiastic eclectic would quickly make a misshapen mess, juxtaposing pieces haphazardly, without a proper feeling for the integrity of the whole. Santayana, in contrast, has patiently fashioned a thing of beauty: a work which is arresting enough to cause Stendhal syndrome, but whose chief motifs can be discerned by anyone who cares to look — provided, that is, she looks at it from the right perspective and in the right light. Like an obliging cicerone, all I have endeavoured to do this evening is to supply some of that perspective and some of that light.<sup>13</sup>

DOUGLAS MCDERMID

*Trent University*

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<sup>12</sup> For more about Wittgenstein and Santayana on contingency, see Michael Hodges and John Lachs, “Thinking in the Ruins: Two Overlooked Responses to Contingency,” *Overheard in Seville: Bulletin of the Santayana Society* Fall 1995, no. 13, pp. 1-7.

<sup>13</sup> Many of the themes and ideas of the present essay complement the treatment of pragmatism offered in my book *The Varieties of Pragmatism: Truth, Realism, and Knowledge from James to Rorty* (London and New York: Continuum, 2006).



# Santayana and Spinoza On Philosophic Liberty

Santayana as beatnik: “Consider now the great emptiness of America: not merely the primitive physical emptiness surviving in some regions, and the continental spacing of the chief natural features, but also the moral emptiness of a settlement where men and even houses are easily moved about, and no one, almost, lives where he was born or believes what he has been taught.”<sup>1</sup>

Santayana fascinates me because he did philosophy differently than his teachers and colleagues at Harvard. He worked for a college president who wanted even the philosophers to teach nothing but “facts.” In being out of step with his place and time, Santayana felt a kinship with Spinoza. When Charles Eliot, Harvard’s then President, suggested that he teach “facts,” Santayana recalled thinking that the only facts in philosophy are in the history of philosophy when taught mechanically. If that was what the American university wanted, that was fine with Santayana. But he was, for himself, after something quite different — a life of philosophy.

In reading Plato, Aristotle, and Spinoza, Santayana did not do the history of philosophy mechanically; he agreed with Emerson that Plato, for example, could not be read like a “catalogue.” Indeed, what makes the history of philosophy philosophical is not that philosophers say things with a sort of clear facticity — on the contrary, this history is philosophical precisely because thinkers do *not* “know” exactly what they mean or why they say what they do. They have a sense or a feel of what and why, but when asked — as we invariably see in their correspondence, they must, as would a poet or an artist, *think* about the answers; they must in effect reconstitute their thinking. *There* is the philosophy. We historians engage in the rethinking of an author’s thinking and in so doing we philosophize anew. Short of this, we become the journalists and reporters of facts that Eliot was seeking for his graduate programs at Harvard. However, in rethinking others’ thoughts, we are led to several possibilities: what they *actually* thought, what they *might* have thought, what they *could* have or *would* have thought under certain circumstances, and what they *should* have thought—and all of these in light of what *we* think.

This is only my second foray into the wilds and thickets of Santayana’s extensive writings. I am in a position to say no more perhaps than what Santayana *might* have thought. That is, as will be evident — I am no scholar of Santayana studies. I am at best an apprentice — but an apprentice fascinated by Santayana’s reflections on and practice of philosophy. My apprenticeship begins with a relinquishing of the caricature of Santayana taught to many of my generation.

Latter day pragmatists and Deweyans often mark their outlook by its resistance to “dualisms.” Ironically, they also divide philosophers on many occasions by sorting out those who deal with what Dewey called “the problems of philosophers” (we may call them theoretical philosophers) and those who deal with “the problems of men” (practical philosophers); consider in this light Richard Rorty’s more wholesale rejection of philosophy. A neat dualism for the anti-dualists. I came to know Santayana as one of the former and he was thought to be expendable for that reason.

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<sup>1</sup> Santayana, *Character and Opinion in the United States* (Garden City: Doubleday and Co., 1956), p. 172. This paper was read to the George Santayana Society during its annual meeting, held in conjunction with that of the American Philosophical Association, Eastern Division, in Philadelphia on December 29, 2008.

Fortunately, I had a built-in antidote to the caricature — I was also extremely interested in the Greeks who, for many Deweyans if not for Dewey, were in the camp of those interested in the problems of philosophers. I am convinced that neither Santayana nor Spinoza believed that philosophy — even theoretical philosophy — was not dealing with human, indeed, with personal issues. On the contrary, both seem to argue that philosophy arises *as a* uniquely human and personal enterprise. Indeed, as I hope to suggest here, a life of philosophic liberty is at least one avenue to a life of satisfaction and general freedom. Santayana, unlike some Deweyans, is on this score not a dualist.

### Santayana and Spinoza

Santayana wrote of Spinoza to Harry Wolfson in 1934: “I have often thought that he was the only *philosopher* of modern times. I now see one reason, that he was not really modern, except as we all must be in our day, but traditional and in the great highway of human speculation: which cannot be said, I think, of any other modern philosopher.”<sup>2</sup> Spinoza’s traditional-ness marks the residual philosophical strand in all human cultures. Santayana saw something in Spinoza’s life and work that was exemplary — something he believed to be at least in part absent from other thinkers of his day.

My question — and I think it was Santayana’s question for himself — is, “why did Santayana select Spinoza?” He did say that Spinoza treated well the realm of essences, but much of the rest of the *content* of Spinoza’s system is not congenial to Santayana’s outlook. In 1932, on the occasion of Spinoza’s 300<sup>th</sup> birthday, Santayana began to provide an answer:

Great as you and I may feel our debt to be to Spinoza for his philosophy of nature, there is, I think something for which we owe him an even greater debt; I mean, the magnificent example he offers us of philosophic liberty, the courage, firmness, and sincerity with which he reconciled his heart to the truth.<sup>3</sup>

Santayana suggests, and I think with adequate provocation, that philosophy in the last century has, in large part, lost its sense of commitment to truth — not just because truth itself has been called into question, but because, more and more, philosophy has become about the philosopher *not* the philosophy. As hubristic creators and manipulators of “truth” and “truths,” we have become cultists, establishing and developing international cults in the wake of Wittgenstein, Dewey, Heidegger, and the like. Especially in the U.S. we have created a new scholasticism in which each school discounts the others’ claims to being “real” philosophy. As Santayana put it, for Americans the “real philosophy is the philosophy of enterprise.”<sup>4</sup> For Santayana the world has plenty of room for a variety of philosophical visions; the ultimate question for him seems not to be the content of one’s thought, but the attitude one takes in engaging in thinking.

Philosophic liberty entails that philosophy not just deal generically with the “problems of persons,” but that it deal also with the self-cultivation of the philosopher. The philosopher’s life will inevitably have its own cultural consequences, but these are not what drive her thinking. Herein lies an important response to the pragmatic

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<sup>2</sup> Santayana, *The Letters of George Santayana, Book Five, 1933-1936*, ed. Wm. Holzberger (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003), #120.

<sup>3</sup> Santayana, *Obiter Scripta*, eds. J. Buchler and B. Schwartz (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1936), p. 280.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 218.

environment in which Santayana worked at Harvard—recall that Royce too identified himself as an “absolute pragmatist.” As pragmatism frenetically tries to address and solve contemporary cultural problems, it turns its eye from the individual “soul,” from what is human about us, and perhaps forgets what is natural in philosophizing. In *The Middle Span* Santayana made a remarkable claim about his time teaching at Harvard:

It may be conceit on my part but I think I was the only free and disinterested thinker among the Harvard philosophers. The others were looking in philosophy either for science or for religion.<sup>5</sup>

I call this remarkable for it is likely that followers of James, and James himself, would want to contest it. In general, James portrayed Santayana as what we might call today “tightly wound.” But Santayana’s claim is precisely about philosophic liberty. Two points follow. First, James and Munsterberg wanted philosophy to follow the methods of scientific inquiry — it seemed the only way to redeem such thinking in a Darwinian world. Royce and Palmer, in turn, sought to save the residual religiosity of the culture. Their philosophies were driven by prefigured aims, outcomes that foreclosed on genuine philosophical novelty. They were, so Santayana believed, mastered by their times. Second, in making philosophy a foot servant to science or religion, these thinkers forgot the special quest of and the deeply caring attitude of a love of wisdom. The hundred years since have not improved matters; we now have a “Gourmet Report” to let us know if in fact we are philosophers and if we are seeking the proper philosophic goals of clarity and technicality. Indeed, Santayana might say that one motive for narrowing both aims and methods of philosophy to logical analysis broadly construed, is that arguments are easily manipulable and can provide a false sense of security — we can do philosophy without risk to our professional standing and without bothering our everyday lives, if we just stick to manipulating arguments well. “Any clever man,” said Santayana, “may sometimes see the truth in flashes; any scientific man may put some aspect of the truth into technical words; yet all this hardly deserves the name of philosophy so long as the heart remains unabashed, and we continue to live like animals lost in the stream of our impressions, not only in the public routine and necessary cares of life, but even in our silent thoughts and affections.”<sup>6</sup>

It may be that pragmatists and other contemporary schools think we no longer have “our silent thoughts and affections.” Peirce resisted the possibility of introspection and Dewey resisted meditation and contemplation as modes of philosophical thought. But I think, from Santayana’s angle of vision, our experiences of silent thoughts and reflections are difficult to dismiss. Twentieth century thought thus tried to find ways to “thin out” these experiences, to blind us to their presence, or to explain them away through psychology. Interestingly, unlike many of his contemporaries, and not hampered by his naturalism, Santayana continued to argue that “the core of [a person’s] being has a closed, private, indomitable life. Every man has a soul of his own.”<sup>7</sup> For Santayana, then, philosophic liberty is not possible without a sense of thinking’s presence in and importance for our souls, within a realm of spirit.

Santayana offers us Spinoza as an exemplar of, not a recipe for, philosophic liberty. There is room for emendation. In what follows, let me sketch some of the markers of Santayana’s conception of philosophic liberty by way of Spinoza and by way of Santayana’s addenda to his example. The aim is not to make us Santayanans

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<sup>5</sup> Santayana, *The Middle Span* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1945), p. 155.

<sup>6</sup> Santayana, *Obiter*, p. 280.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88.

— whatever that might be — but to enjoin us to think with Santayana regarding a philosophical life and our own attempts to be philosophers. We might seek a place where “the human soul from her humble station might salute the eternal and the infinite with complete composure and with a certain vicarious pride.”<sup>8</sup>

### Philosophic Liberty

Spinoza’s philosophic liberty begins, for Santayana, with his ability to accept the life he’s been dealt and to face it openly and directly. He exhibits a courageous attitude that embraces risk and insecurity in an effort to achieve something worthwhile. In the opening to “On the Improvement of Understanding,” Spinoza identified his quest by asking “whether, in fact, there might be anything of which the discovery and attainment would enable me to enjoy continuous, supreme, and unending happiness.”<sup>9</sup> Substituting such a bold aim for the traditional aims of human life — “Riches, Fame, and the Pleasures of Sense” — Spinoza admitted his insecurity: “I seemed to be willingly losing hold on a sure good for the sake of something uncertain” and “I thus perceived that I was in a state of great peril . . . .”<sup>10</sup> Santayana admired this willingness to accept peril, but pushed the bounds of insecurity beyond the local frame of one’s life. He was, I think, interested in contesting the pragmatic/instrumentalist suggestion that we can use practical reason alone to fix the world. He was convinced that,

If we withdrew honestly into ourselves and examined our actual moral resources, we should feel that what is insecure is not merely the course of particular events but the vital presumption that there is a future coming at all, and a future pleasantly continuing out habitual experience.<sup>11</sup>

Despite our habitual failures, human pride seems to keep us blind to what we face. We know that species come and go, we know our environment is ultimately not only “global” but “universal,” and we have very little if any idea what “universal” ultimately amounts to. As Angus Kerr-Lawson points out, Santayana took evolutionary theory beyond the tychism of the pragmatists; for him, “theory of evolution, when stripped of this idealist veneer, leads to a more random kind of change, with no master plan, and without any concomitant moral improvement.”<sup>12</sup>

Spinoza, with his exemplary naturalism, began his thinking with an attitude that accepts *our* place in such a nature. Though Spinoza did not embrace contingency in the way of Santayana, he revealed the courage to not have to make the world as he wished it to be:

By overcoming all human weaknesses, even when they seemed kindly or noble, and by honouring power and truth, even if they should slay him, he entered a sanctuary of an unruffled superhuman wisdom, and declared himself supremely happy, not because the world as he conceived it was flattering to his heart, but because the gravity of his heart disdained all flatteries, and with a sacrificial poetic boldness uncovered and relished his destiny, however tragic his destiny might be.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., pp. 281-82.

<sup>9</sup> Spinoza, *The Chief Works of Benedict de Spinoza, Volume II*, trans. R. H. M. Elwes (New York: Dover Publications, 1951), p. 3.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., pp. 3-4.

<sup>11</sup> Santayana, *Obiter*, p. 283.

<sup>12</sup> Kerr-Lawson, Angus, “Review of *Mind and Philosophers*,” *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, vol. xxv, 4, 1989, p. 532.

<sup>13</sup> Santayana, *Obiter*, p. 289.



We so often regard intellectual ability as the entry-card for philosophy today that we make little room for one's moral attitude except insofar as it bears on teaching or collegiality. Santayana makes this attitude the very ground of our possibility for philosophizing — for, without it, all intellectual ability will eventually be unfree and skewed. The attitude opens us to cultural exile in any historical situation, because the lesson of Spinoza's naturalism is that the world does not come to us, nor will the gods meet us half way. We begin philosophy by turning to ourselves so that,

We may all quietly observe what we find; and whatever harmonies may then appear to subsist between our spirits and the nature of things will be free gifts to us and, so far as they go, unchallenged possessions. We shall at least be standing unpledged and naked, under the open sky.<sup>14</sup>

And so Santayana invites us to follow Spinoza's example on this count. "Let us," he said, "nerve ourselves today to imitate his example, not by simply accepting his solution, which for some of us would be easy, but by exercising his courage in the face of a somewhat different world, in which it may be even more difficult for us than it was for him to find a sure foothold and a sublime companionship."<sup>15</sup>

The sort of courage toward which Spinoza orients us requires a deep sense of humility. As much as we would like to manipulate arguments, win awards, achieve notoriety, and so forth, such motives stand between us and being philosophers in the spirit Santayana portrays: "philosophy," he maintained, "is more spiritual in her humility and abstinence than in her short-lived audacity."<sup>16</sup>

Spinoza's humility appears in his vision of reason, for we must find ourselves *in* reason. What accords with *our* reason — our opinion — is a gift of nature; what does not, we must nevertheless embrace, whatever its consequences for us. Santayana follows the spirit of Spinoza's naturalism here: "It is impossible, that man should not be a part of nature, or that he should not follow her general order ..."<sup>17</sup> Spinoza evades the "haste and pugnacity" of professional philosophers to allow reason to speak. In "Ultimate Religion," Santayana describes this reorientation. We find ourselves in nature; one's spirit, acknowledging local contingency, "has perceived ... that altogether, at every instant and in every particular, it is in the hands of some alien and inscrutable power."<sup>18</sup> He here echoes Spinoza's claim that "the human mind is part of an infinite understanding."<sup>19</sup> Unlike Spinoza, however, Santayana did not name this felt power "God." What is important for him is that to improve his "understanding," he must "stand before it [the felt power] simply receptive ..."<sup>20</sup> The philosopher's attitude must allow one to work in league with this power, to allow itself to disclose its workings in whatever ways it may to individual thinkers. "In submitting to power," he argued, "I learn its ways; it begins to enjoy one of its essential prerogatives."<sup>21</sup>

Santayana, however, parts company with Spinoza just insofar as Spinoza seems to limit our access to philosophic liberty to our ability to reason with nature. In a letter to

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 283.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 281.

<sup>16</sup> Santayana, *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1957), p. 22.

<sup>17</sup> Spinoza, *Works*, p. 237.

<sup>18</sup> Santayana, *Obiter*, p. 284.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 292.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 285.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 286.

James in 1900, Santayana expressed his basic agreement with Spinoza's valuing of reason in a receptive spirit: "I have a right to be sincere," he wrote, "to be absolutely objective and unapologetic, because it is not I that speak but human reason that speaks in me."<sup>22</sup> But he repeatedly called on Spinoza to step beyond the limits of reason:

Yes, although the dead cannot change their minds, I would respectfully beg the shade of Spinoza himself to suspend for a moment that strict rationalism, that jealous, hard-reasoning, confident piety which he shared with the Calvinists and Jansenists of his day, and to imagine — I do not say to admit — that nature may be but imperfectly formed in the bosom of chaos, and that reason in us may be imperfectly adapted to the understanding of nature.<sup>23</sup>

The request should not be surprising given Santayana's commitment to the actuality of contingency. And the emphasis on "imagining" is central — it is precisely imagination and poesy that Santayana believed Spinoza had ignored in his narrow focus on reason, or perhaps in his narrow conception of reason. In a 1938 letter to Beryl Levy, Santayana, maintained that Spinoza "doesn't sympathize with the human *imagination*" and for this reason he was "not a disciple of Spinoza in his ideal of human life ..."<sup>24</sup> For Santayana, reason — especially the "understanding" envisioned as a deductive mechanism — is inadequate to philosophizing. In repressing imagination, one tends to "dull the soul, so that even the clearest perception of truth remains without the joy and the impetuosity of conviction."<sup>25</sup> For Santayana, it is imagination that drives philosophical vision and furnishes to "religion and metaphysics those large ideas tinctured with passion, those supersensible forms shrouded in awe, in which alone a mind of great vitality can find its congenial objects."<sup>26</sup> Santayana believed that Spinoza engaged his own imagination in bringing forth his naturalistic story of the way things are. But he also believed that the "best philosophers seldom perceive the poetic merit of their systems."<sup>27</sup> Thus it is part of Santayana's own system and vision to bring philosophical poets and poetic philosophers into the fold of those living with philosophic liberty.

Santayana certainly ran against the grain of modernity, of his own pragmatic and analytic times, and of our present condition. For him, philosophy must engage the imagination and the poetic dimensions of experience. It was, he surmised, because "other masters of the spiritual life" knew "more suffering" and "more uncertainty" that they turned to the poetic dimension and, in the end, knew "a more lyrical and warmer happiness."<sup>28</sup> Reason is our "differentia," he argued, but it is not our essence. That we are happy in "contemplating the truth" does not entail that this contemplating is the only sort of happiness of which we are capable.

Santayana's addendum to Spinozistic philosophic liberty is, I think, experientially persuasive. First, I think we *all* experience in some fashion the force of imagination and poetry. The strictest technical thinkers from Aristotle to Peirce invariably engage in poetic reach — in bringing metaphor to bear on our understandings of the cosmos. Second, at the most mundane levels of our experience, we are all drawn by our poetic visions of the world whether as "normal" or abnormal madness. Pursuing Santayana's

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<sup>22</sup> Perry, Ralph Barton, *The Thought and Character of William James, Volume II* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1935), p. 321.

<sup>23</sup> Santayana, *Obiter*, pp. 282-83.

<sup>24</sup> Santayana, *Letters, Volume 6*, #s 153 and 152.

<sup>25</sup> *Interpretations*, p. 9.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 107.

<sup>28</sup> *Obiter*, p. 290.

story further in this direction is something other scholars have already done, and for me, it is work for another occasion. Having laid out the attitudinal grounds for philosophic liberty, including the courage to admit the role of imagination and poetry in philosophy, it remains to address the more practical question of what we might avoid in order to give rein to this attitude.

What, then, must we be free from to begin a philosophical adventure? We noted earlier that Spinoza intentionally shunned riches, fame, and the pleasures of sense, believing that “with these three the mind is so absorbed that it has little power to reflect on any different good.”<sup>29</sup> We also noted Santayana’s claim to more freedom than his colleagues on the basis of his not being motivated by specified aims such as the scientizing or the re-sanctifying of philosophy. The general point here is that a philosopher must not operate with a specific end-in-view, but must allow ideals to arise in the soul’s receptive, perceptual, and imaginative capacities. We must avoid being led from receptivity to an attempt to dominate thought with local cultural aims; and we must especially beware the temptations of professional philosophy. First, we must not become cult followers of other thinkers, as Santayana warned in his own remarks on Spinoza: “Too much subjection to another personality makes the expression of our own impossible ... .”<sup>30</sup> In short, it is not *that* we are influenced by other thinkers, but *how* we are influenced that is crucial.

In reflecting on his own career, Santayana also made it clear that the professionalization of philosophy in America was making philosophy itself difficult to accomplish. The professionalization had come to mean that, as he put it, “A man must have a specialty.”<sup>31</sup> But Santayana saw himself as a non-specialist—as one who had a specialty only in a peculiar and inappropriate way: “I was a kind of poet, I was alive to architecture and the other arts, I was at home in several languages: ‘aesthetics’ might be regarded as my specialty.”<sup>32</sup> And because, as he put it, “I had disregarded or defied public opinion by not becoming a specialist,” his relations with President Eliot and with the whole of his profession in the U.S. were strained at best.

Spinoza set out to avoid precisely these sorts of cultural pressures. Lens grinding, as Santayana remarked, became excellent “cover” for a philosophical mind. Spinoza’s freedom from entanglements appealed to Santayana’s sense of philosophic liberty.

I believe there is another reason also why Spinoza seems to me so pre-eminent: that in spite of being traditional, or because he was not distracted by side issues, he was an entire and majestic mind, a singularly consecrated soul. All these trite dogmas and problems lived in him and were the natural channels of his intuitions and emotions. That is what I feel to make a real *philosopher* and not, what we are condemned to be, *professors* of the philosophy of other people, or of our own opinions.<sup>33</sup>

The free philosopher may be in one sense “traditional” or conventional by using local habits as expressions of deep human feelings. Thus, we should not be surprised with Santayana’s appeals to Spinoza, to the Greeks, and to religion. On the other hand, to be *dominated* by one’s local conventions — such as the codes and pressures of professional philosophy — is the sort of conventionalism or traditionalism that forecloses on our philosophic liberty.

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<sup>29</sup> Spinoza, *Works*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>30</sup> Santayana, *Interpretations*, pp. 129-30.

<sup>31</sup> *Middle Span*, p. 156.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *Letters*, Volume 5, # 120.

We are clearly in no better position now than was Santayana when he was working at Harvard. We choose our specialties by allegiances to persons and themes. We become Wittgensteinians, Rortians, Heideggerians, and Deweyans. Or we become anti-realists, deflationists, compatibilists, eliminativists, and whatnot. In such cases, we enslave to our specialties to appease deans and colleagues. To be fair, we do have “famous” philosophers of our own day, but it has become difficult to trust their philosophical commitments in our entrepreneurial environment where the establishment of sects and followings has become a measure of one’s philosophical ability. Santayana does not question the technical abilities of our best — he wonders whether their hearts are so motivated as to achieve philosophic liberty. For his part, he was able to declare that the writing of *Character and Opinion in the United States* and several related texts “mark my emancipation from official control and professional pretensions.”<sup>34</sup>

Santayana was willing to admit that systems of philosophy or philosophical outlooks (research programs?) were important. The question for him lay in their motivation. “Systems of philosophy,” he said, “are taught by sects or by individuals setting out to be prophets and to found a new sect.”<sup>35</sup> I think here of Herbert Spencer. Nevertheless, the fact that a thinker attracts a following is not evidence of poor motivation — it only indicates that the followers are not free. “I now have a system of philosophy,” Santayana remarked later in his career, “which I hadn’t dreamt of then, although the reasons for it lay all in me; but this system is not intended to found a sect and will never do so. It aspires to be only a contribution to the humanities, the expression of a reflective, selective, and free mind.”<sup>36</sup>

Santayana did not seem to think that a philosophical life was for everyone; nor did he think that everyone was capable of achieving a philosophical life. But, as did Spinoza, I think he believed it to be one version of the good life. And he clearly saw room for many philosophical stories to be told. He took great philosophical visions to be more complementary than competitive. To attain philosophic liberty was to attain a special kind of freedom — not one that allows anything to go on, but one that allows one to see generally what is going on and not merely to be at the mercy of things. Horace Kallen pointed to this feature of Spinoza’s attitude as what appealed to Santayana: “For [a person’s] existence is a struggle to free himself from whatever obstructs him from living in freedom, and what obstructs it is the blind emotion wherewith he helplessly responds to the world acting on him, keeping him a mere effect of its causal infinitude.”<sup>37</sup>

I began by admitting my fascination with Santayana as a renegade thinker. I am no Santayanan, but I can say that his ideas have a depth and presence that are not often found in philosophical writing, least of all perhaps in our present setting. He speaks for himself and for those who would try to live philosophical lives. As he remarked on his own emancipation: “all was now a voluntary study, a satirical survey, a free reconsideration: the point of view had become at once frankly personal and speculatively transcendent.”<sup>38</sup> I don’t know that we take eternal and speculatively transcendent viewpoints seriously anymore; and if we do not, I am not sure we should take philosophy seriously at all. We might better join Rorty in its rejection. If,

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<sup>34</sup> *Middle Span*, p. 181.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 156.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Kallen, “The Laughing Philosopher,” *The Journal of Philosophy*, LXI, 1, January 1964, p. 30.

<sup>38</sup> Santayana, *Middle Span*, p. 181.

however, our imaginations have courage and strength enough to consider a vision that is both personal and speculatively transcendent, then I recommend that we turn to Santayana and Spinoza, not for the content of our beliefs but for envisioning the possibility of philosophic liberty.

Philosophic liberty is an avenue to a free life, the sort where the genuine happiness Spinoza aimed for might be sought. Not "happiness" as in narrow pleasures and lifestyle meliorism; rather, a happiness that finds satisfaction in being who one is by nature. Instead of crying to God about the hand we are dealt, we might turn to philosophy to seek a grasp through reason and imagination of just what that hand is. For Santayana there is at bottom no stark division between the problems of persons and the problems of philosophers.

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## **The *Bulletin* Website and 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)>

# Pragmatic Moralism and the Politicization of Philosophy<sup>1</sup>

Santayana's foreground-privileging critique of Dewey, David Dilworth has recently claimed, anticipated "the entire gamut of transcendentalist, phenomenological, pragmatic, and historicist styles that flourished in Dewey's day and continue to flourish in today's academy."<sup>2</sup> I think it is appropriate to term the trend Dilworth has in mind here the politicization of philosophy, especially as it developed after 1950. If Dilworth is correct, Santayana's foreground critique implicates much more than simply Dewey's pragmatism. This merits consideration; here I restrict myself to the charge as Santayana makes it against Dewey's pragmatism, and conclude with the suggestion that a contemporary strain of pragmatism can be seen to prominently display the problem. This could set up for future consideration the larger claim Dilworth puts forth.

Santayana called in his day the politicizing one finds in contemporary philosophy "moralism." He identified two forms of "moralism." The first, "moralism proper," according to Santayana, is a species of Kantianism, where "the categorical imperative of an absolute reason or duty determining right judgment and conduct" is asserted.<sup>3</sup> Kant's philosophy "conceived that duty was something absolute and not a method of securing whatever goods of all sorts are attainable by action."<sup>4</sup> The shortcomings of such absolutism of duty in the philosophy of Kant have been much discussed by a wide variety of philosophers, including Deweyan pragmatists, yet amazingly, the tendency persists among contemporary ethicists striving for exclusively "normative" moral theories. Such theorists follow the absolutism in Kant in so far as they hold out for the possibility of establishing standardized ethical norms that are capable of guiding conduct, as though conduct is so exclusively and neatly capable, or even in need of, guidance by norms.

But Santayana identifies a second form of moralism, one that implicates Deweyan pragmatists as well. He calls the second form of moralism "a principle of cosmology and religion [asserting] the actual dominance of reason or goodness over the universe at large."<sup>5</sup> It would be amusing news both to Dewey and to Deweyan pragmatists to be called moralistic cosmologists. What can Santayana mean in the charge?

Santayana suspected that Dewey protested cosmic absolutism too much, and failed to admit the commitments made in his own metaphysical appeals, including his appeal to the self-sufficing character of empirical "traits" or appearances. This is a

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<sup>1</sup> This article is a significantly revised and condensed version of a same-titled article appearing in *Limbo*, Núm. 29, 2009, pp. 21-38, ISSN: 0210-1602. The author wishes to extend his gratitude to participants, including Larry Hickman, in the "American and European Values" Dewey conference held in Opole, Poland, in June 2009. After delivering an early version of this paper the author received valuable feedback from participants in post-talk discussions.

<sup>2</sup> David Dilworth. "Santayana's Review of Dewey's *Experience and Nature*: Pivotal Expression of a Philosophy of Nature and Vivacious Spirit." *Overheard in Seville: Bulletin of the Santayana Society*, No. 21, Fall 2003:

<http://www.math.uwaterloo.ca/~kerllaws/Santayana/Bulletin/y03/dilworth.pdf>

Accessed as of 3/25/09.

<sup>3</sup> PGS, "Apologia," 502.

<sup>4</sup> George Santayana. *Egotism in German Philosophy*. Charles Scribner's Sons, 1915: 107.

<sup>5</sup> PGS, "Apologia," 502.

subtle but important aspect of Dewey's thinking that merits deeper consideration. Dewey consistently emphasized the creaturely environment, so it is one of the appropriate legacies of his thinking that it is categorized among contemporary philosophies of ecology.<sup>6</sup> Dewey's discussion of environment entailed the notion of growth, of an organism's relative desire, need, and ability to adequately adjust to its surroundings.<sup>7</sup> Growth occurs in any organic situation when a phase of equilibrium or harmony comes about, when the desire stemming from inadequate adjustment to the creaturely environment is, for the time being, sated.

But Dewey's speculation about the natural scope of the creaturely environment does not stop at the empirical ground-level of biological adjustment and growth, as he writes: "There is in nature, even below the level of life, something more than mere flux and change. Form is arrived at whenever a stable, even though moving equilibrium is reached."<sup>8</sup> Form is owed to a stage of equilibrium in nature, a temporary settlement of previously unsettled and destabilized features of organic life. It is in these modes of speculation that Santayana interpreted a hedge in Dewey's naturalism, a tendency for the erstwhile "natural facts" he spoke of to become "so strangely unseizable and perplexing."<sup>9</sup>

For to say, as Dewey consistently said, that experience reaches down and down into the depths of nature without necessarily committing individuals to any idea of its total character was for Santayana, if not disingenuous, incompatible with active animal life. Santayana tries to puzzle out the problem in his own way in a dense section of his critique where he considers Dewey's use of the term "event." He summarizes Dewey's view that events are "natural waves, pulsations of being, each of which, without any interruption in its material inheritance and fertility, forms a unit of higher order."<sup>10</sup> The view commits Dewey, Santayana claims, to the idea that mind in such instances, that is, conceived as a part of what Dewey understands to be events, "possesses a hypostatic spiritual existence." In other words, Dewey's understanding of events commits him to a view of mind that goes beyond behaviorism, one that attributes to mind a being separable from material conditions. The problem is, Santayana charges, Dewey only commits himself to this idea of mind begrudgingly, and hastens to cover it up in other parts of his thinking. The idea of a substantial mind apart from material conditions to which Dewey sometimes concedes when speaking of aesthetic contemplation is rejected, Santayana contends, when Dewey turns to what he calls "knowledge of acquaintance."<sup>11</sup>

<sup>6</sup> For example in Neil W. Brown's *The World in Which We Occur: John Dewey, Pragmatist Ecology, and American Ecological Writing in the Twentieth Century*. University of Alabama Press, 2007.

<sup>7</sup> "Every need, say hunger for fresh air or food, is a lack that denotes at least a temporary absence of adequate adjustment with surroundings. But it is also a demand, a reaching out into the environment to make good the lack and to restore adjustment by building at least a temporary equilibrium." John Dewey. *The Collected Works of John Dewey: The Early Works, The Middle Works, The Later Works*, 37 vols., Jo Ann Boydston, (ed). 1969-1991, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press. All subsequent cites will be indicated as "EW" (Early Works), "MW" (Middle Works), or "LW" (Later Works), followed by volume and page number. The citation is from *Art as Experience*, (LW 10: 19).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, 20.

<sup>9</sup> George Santayana. "Dewey's Naturalistic Metaphysics." *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. XXII, No. 25, December 3, 1925: 678. All subsequent cites will be indicated as "DNM" followed by page number.

<sup>10</sup> DNM, 677.

<sup>11</sup> Dewey discusses this most extensively in *Experience and Nature*, LW 1: 248.

What Santayana is getting at in this overlooked prelude to the foreground-privileging charge is that Dewey refuses to admit the undeniable superficiality of such things as “events and affairs.”<sup>12</sup> To so admit of course would be a reversal of Dewey’s overarching aim, which is to vindicate the notion of experience against traditional, historical slurs. For human experience to get its due, Dewey strives to show, it must not in any respect be viewed as superficial; it must be conceived, in an important respect, as irreducibly independent of other conditioning factors. But, Santayana asks here: what does insistence on the irreducibility of experience do to one’s conception of nature and consciousness? What below or beyond-the-surface character to experience is committed to that does not at the same time risk belittling those vital phenomena of philosophic import? This is the challenge Santayana presents when he suggests: “[Dewey’s understanding of] events, situations and histories hold all facts and all persons in solution.”<sup>13</sup> In fact, events and situations pass into the empyrean of remembered experience and that ephemeral character cannot (should not) be denied.

Recall Dewey’s phrase regarding form, that its emergence is due to something “in nature, even below the level of life.” Why risk in this context speculation about extra-human, natural sources of unity in experience but deny it in other contexts? The answer from Santayana’s point of view can be found in Dewey’s overzealous dismissal of cosmological speculation. Dewey’s dismissal of cosmological speculation entailed two things of relevance to Santayana’s point of view: first, it entailed the recognition of an idealistic fallacy committed by Ancient philosophers, something Santayana also recognizes, and second, it entailed Dewey’s famous philosophic fallacy which depended on a particular interpretation of the classical problem of universals. Santayana had problems with Dewey’s philosophic fallacy and it is there one finds pivotal disagreement between the two. I shall now take each of these matters in turn: the agreed-upon interpretation of the idealistic fallacy in classical thinking, and the disagreement involving Dewey’s philosophic fallacy.

Compare the following passages from the two discussing the understanding of “essence” as found in Ancient Greek philosophy:

(Dewey): “Greek thinkers...distinguished patterns...of consummatory uses of speech, and the meanings that were discovered to be indispensable to communication were treated as final and ultimate in nature itself. Essences were hypostatized into original and constitutive forms of all existence.”<sup>14</sup>

(And Santayana): “Thus [my notion of] essence, while confirming Platonic logic in the ideal status which it assigns to the terms of discourse...destroys the illusions of Platonism, because it shows that essences, being non-existent and omnimodal, can exercise no domination over matter [i.e., cannot be hypostatized], but themselves come to light in nature or in thought only as material exigencies may call them forth and select them.”<sup>15</sup>

Each thinker recognizes here the tendency of Ancient philosophers to hypostatize essences, to confuse the settled results of discourse and thought for the natural realities from which they arise. They both attribute the Ancients’ cart-before-horse mistake to an insufficient appreciation of the determinations made upon essences by realities of

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<sup>12</sup> An example that Santayana undoubtedly has in mind: “It follows that theories which identify knowledge with acquaintance, recognition, definition and classification give evidence, all the better for being wholly unintended, that we know not just events but events-with-meanings.” (LW 1: 249)

<sup>13</sup> DNM, 675.

<sup>14</sup> *Experience and Nature*, LW 1: 145.

<sup>15</sup> SAF, 78-80.



originating existential influence. Though they speak independently of one another on this issue, and in preferred modes of speech and vocabulary, their shared critique can be summarized as an identification of the idealist fallacy: a philosophic privileging of ideal over naturally existing realities.

The crucial difference on this point lies in the respective solutions proposed to the problem, and it is here that the importance of Santayana's foreground critique of Dewey looms: if Dewey's philosophy remains in the foreground it begs to be said what background it lacks. The broad answer of course involves Santayana's preference for ontology, but in the context of his engagement with Dewey the question of cosmology seems to be the central point of difference. In his critique Santayana notes of Dewey's philosophy in a single passing remark three simultaneous features: the presence of metaphysics, the absence of cosmology, and (as already mentioned) his view that "every natural fact becomes in [Dewey's] hands so strangely unseizable and perplexing."<sup>16</sup>

This combination of things in one philosophy was for Santayana contradictory. He indicated as much when he singled out as the focus of his critique Dewey's interesting phrase: "naturalistic metaphysics."<sup>17</sup> Importantly, as Dewey used the phrase, it performed the negative work of fending off Platonic or idealistic metaphysics, of avoiding in other words the idealistic fallacy just identified. Dewey characterized the appeal of traditional Platonic metaphysics as one biased by "the esthetic character of logical coherence rather than its tested coherence with fact..."<sup>18</sup> The positive side of Dewey's endorsement of a naturalistic metaphysics entailed its identification of "the generic traits of existence," which he forthrightly claimed turn out to be "evidential of the character of the world."<sup>19</sup> So Dewey's naturalistic metaphysics was an attempt to provide an account of existence that avoids the idealistic fallacy, the Platonic mistake of form-fitting existential realities with essential definitions and meanings.

But unlike Santayana, who develops an ontology to accommodate (and to a great extent, leaven) cosmology, Dewey identifies all forms of cosmological speculation as committing the idealistic fallacy. Dewey protests cosmology throughout his writings almost pathologically; he speaks of it as an outmoded artifact, an Ancient philosophic penchant for "supreme science";<sup>20</sup> cosmology is for Dewey nothing but an "animistic teleology" that has thankfully been "disintegrated" in modern times;<sup>21</sup> he associates cosmology with theology as twin enemies of the progress of science;<sup>22</sup> with the (again, outmoded Ancient) belief in the superiority of "Ideal being";<sup>23</sup> and most strikingly, in *Experience and Nature*, he proclaims the appearance of cosmology as signal of having committed "the philosophic fallacy."<sup>24</sup>

Dewey's identification of the philosophic fallacy helps one understand his rejection of cosmology. The fallacy involves a critique of the traditional problem of universals. Larry Hickman explains:

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<sup>16</sup> DNM, 678.

<sup>17</sup> LW 1: 73.

<sup>18</sup> LW 1: 72.

<sup>19</sup> LW 1: 62.

<sup>20</sup> MW 2: 192.

<sup>21</sup> MW 4: 34.

<sup>22</sup> MW 4: 36.

<sup>23</sup> MW 12: 119.

<sup>24</sup> LW 1: 51.

Dewey's novel solution of [the] traditional problem [of so-called "universals"] was to relocate generality. Realists located generality in existent things: for Platonists, those things were supernatural; for Aristotelians, they were natural. Nominalists denied generality altogether...Conceptualists located the grounds for generality in things, but maintained that the activity of the human intellect is required to construct the classes into which they are sorted on the basis of their naturally occurring essential properties...It was Dewey's radical proposal that generality has to do with productive activities undertaken in inference, not with things or events in terms of the status prior to inquiry and as existential.<sup>25</sup>

Hickman goes on to summarize that in Dewey's view, those who solve the problem of universals by appeal to "things" or "events" existing independently of or prior to inquiries undertaken, commit "the philosophic fallacy." The fallacy is multiply described by Dewey as "converting" "eventual functions into antecedent existence[s],"<sup>26</sup> a conversion that Hickman, following Dewey, claims opens the way to "gratuitous metaphysical entities and misleading hypostatizing of all sorts."<sup>27</sup>

It is this fallacious conversion of eventual functions into antecedent existences that Dewey has in mind as the error of cosmology. Any attempt, for Dewey, to give an account of the world in its alleged totality is an instance of the philosophic fallacy.<sup>28</sup> So it is here that we find the crucial departure of Santayana from Dewey, because while he shares Dewey's reservations about the idealistic fallacy involved in traditional metaphysics, he does not equate it with grandiose cosmological speculation. Santayana does not follow Dewey in equating cosmology with "gratuitous hypostatizing."

For Santayana, cosmological speculation is warranted where it aims to establish distinctions in being that parse out for understanding in lived experience an explanatory framework; not, it is important here to stress, for the purpose of guiding everyday action but of edifying the human perspective so that life as reflected upon broadly can be made more luminous and meaningful; for Santayana this is the use and function of ontology. By contrast, Dewey's pragmatism emphasizes the achievement of greater control over intelligent action, the scope of which, Santayana justifiably criticized, is always in the foreground, or just-around-the-corner of every experiential context. Santayana's ontological categories reflect an appreciation for the role of the background, for the edifying possibilities that emerge as a result of taking a longer view of things, without insisting that any single component of that longer view be taken as exhaustively explanatory of life in the foreground.

Following the leads of Santayana, and extrapolations from Dilworth, one can relate the move of Dewey in rejecting traditional metaphysics with that of transcendentalists and phenomenologists, who bracket key presumptions of animal, natural existence. In Dewey's case, the bracketing occurs as a result of his overreaching critique of the traditional problem of universals, something Santayana helps one better appreciate. The problem of universals in traditional metaphysics was, it should be remembered, an attempt to explain a very fundamental experience in

<sup>25</sup> Larry Hickman. *John Dewey's Pragmatic Technology*. Indiana University Press, 1992: 129.

<sup>26</sup> Sidney Hook's characterization at LW 12: xxi; Dewey's association and identification of "the philosophic fallacy" is at LW 1: 34.

<sup>27</sup> Hickman, 125.

<sup>28</sup> As Sidney Hook helpfully puts it in the introduction to Dewey's 1915 *Essays*: "Dewey argues that this conclusion [cosmology from the standpoint of biological evolution], which admittedly could never be established by any scientific inquiry, depends upon an unacceptable conception of metaphysics that regards the world as a whole or in its totality as a legitimate subject of inquiry." (MW 8: xi)

natural life, the ascription of sameness or likeness to different events and entities across various encounters. We forget sometimes from our positions of historical privilege that Plato would not have thought of himself as engaging in high metaphysics when in various dialectical modes he had Socrates demand of discussants a definition of a thing not reducible to the example given. To say that there must be something to the idea of “table,” “piety” or “justice” that various appeals to individual cases fail to capture is not gratuitous metaphysics. It is asking a legitimate question about the nature of language, reference, and meaning. Similarly, Aristotle would have found it confusing at best to deem gratuitously metaphysical his speculation that first philosophy must be distinguished from the “so-called special sciences” in its being a “science which investigates being as being and the attributes which belong to this in virtue of its own nature.”<sup>29</sup> Aristotle, like Plato with regard to experiential appeals, did not have as his main intent what Dewey characterizes to be an appeal to “things” or “events” existing independently of or prior to inquiries undertaken. Rather, they were interested in establishing a point at which talk of existences bottoms out, or, to put it in terms of Aristotle’s understanding of essence, becomes “unanalyzable.”<sup>30</sup>

What happened by the time of medieval scholasticism, when the problem of universals as conceived in Plato and Aristotle reached its well-known climax, is that the problem had become a sheer dialectical exercise; it had become a matter of proving or disproving the existence of divine presence. This was when the debate became “metaphysical” in the bad sense of the term to which both Santayana and Dewey object (and that William James well parodied in his squirrel anecdote at the beginning of his pragmatism lectures). By the time of scholasticism, neither realist nor nominalist could hope to win the debate save by privileging, to recall Dilworth’s apt phrase, their preferred hermeneutical circle.

This history is insufficiently acknowledged in Dewey’s, but not in Santayana’s critique of traditional metaphysics. Dewey lumps the problem of universals in his catch-all category of “bad metaphysics,” leaving its early origins unexplored. Santayana catches Dewey in this historical narrowness by calling the bluff of the philosophic fallacy; he helps one see how it has become a too-easy weapon of later generations of pragmatists against idolatries of many stripes:

The typical philosopher’s fallacy, in [Dewey’s ] eyes, has been the habit of hypostatizing the conclusions to which reflection may lead, and depicting them to be prior realities—the fallacy of dogmatism. These conclusions are in reality nothing but suggestions or, as Dewey calls them, “meanings” surrounding the passing experience in which, at some juncture, a person is immersed. They may be excellent in an instrumental capacity, if by their help instinctive action can be enlarged or adjusted more accurately to absent facts; but it would be sheer idolatry to regard them as realities or powers deeper than obvious objects, producing these objects and afterwards somehow revealing themselves, just as they are, to the thoughts of metaphysicians. Here is a rude blow dealt at dogma of every sort: God, matter, Platonic ideas, active spirits, and creative logics all seem to totter on their thrones; and if the blow could be effective, the endless battle of metaphysics would have to end for lack of combatants. (675)

Santayana acknowledges the importance of recognizing this fallacy, but as can be inferred by the word “would” in the last sentence he doubts it achieves Dewey’s ultimate aim: to overthrow traditional metaphysics. In fact, Santayana argues here, the target of Dewey’s critique is not so much metaphysics (he after all reserves room for

<sup>29</sup> *Metaphysics*, Book IV, chapter 1, lines 21-25 (translation from *The Basic Works of Aristotle* edited by Richard McKeon).

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, Book II, chapter 2, lines 17-25.

his own “naturalistic” metaphysics), but rather “dogma of every sort,” and that target, Santayana argues, is misguided.

Santayana is charging Dewey here with being overly zealous in his battles against fallacious metaphysics, because at the same time as he deftly articulates the fallacy itself, he fails to recognize his own metaphysical dogma: the unquestioned approval he displays for “the enterprise of life in all lay directions, in its technical and moral complexity...where individual initiative, although still demanded and prized, is quickly subjected to overwhelming democratic control...his inspiration is sheer fidelity to the task in hand and sympathy with the movement afoot...”<sup>31</sup>

The accusation here is severe, but I think warranted, given certain modes we find in Dewey’s writing such as the following where he is thinking about the status of present, living qualities:

“This,” whatever this may be, always implies a system of meanings focused at a point of stress, uncertainty, and need of regulation. It sums up a history, and at the same time opens a new page...a fulfillment and an opportunity...Every perception, or awareness, marks a “this,” and every “this” being a consummation involves retention, and hence contains the capacity of remembering. Every “this” is transitive, momentarily becoming a “that.” In its movement it is, therefore, conditioning of what is to come...<sup>32</sup>

Here one finds Dewey tangled in what Santayana thought of as the troubles resulting from a too-dominant preoccupation with the foreground. There is evidence here that Dewey’s “inspiration is sheer fidelity to the task in hand and sympathy with the movement afoot.” There is no “this” for Dewey, no present quality, which does not by definition dissolve into a final tradeoff between a dead past and pregnant future. The present is a “point of stress,” in “need of regulation.” The foreground for Dewey here is so present as to become incapable of presenting itself at all, prompting Santayana’s disgruntled remark that Dewey’s readers are “left with an uncomfortable suspicion that it is impossible to inspect anything for the first time.”<sup>33</sup>

What is important to Dewey about present quality is not its retention of the past; the past is, after all, retained in present quality and nothing more need be demanded of perception or awareness in regard to that aspect. Nor is the shining reality of the present as it is felt of much importance to Dewey because it is by nature inexorably transitive and incapable of being understood (as he revealingly characterizes, “whatever this may be”). What is important to Dewey rather is what present quality aids in one’s movement towards what is to come.

It was very easy for Santayana to negatively attribute such preoccupation with present movement and control of potential future outcomes with Dewey’s Americanism and theory of democracy, but I remain convinced that it is a matter of great concern to explain the politicization, after Dewey’s time, of philosophy; by this I mean the overwhelming predominance of social and political concerns in philosophic discourse, exemplified in a certain strand of post-Deweyan pragmatism.

## Conclusion

Exclusive fidelity to the forward-moving character of life takes curious forms in contemporary pragmatism, forms that sometimes reduce the entire doctrine to a political stump speech for progressive liberals. In one context Richard Shusterman accepts without appreciative analysis the characterization of pragmatism as “forward-

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<sup>31</sup> DNM, 675-676.

<sup>32</sup> *Experience and Nature*, LW 1: 264.

<sup>33</sup> DNM, 678.

looking philosophy,” and praises as a “radical” example of such philosophy the work of John J. Stuhr. Stuhr, Shusterman praises, reminds us that “Change...is inevitable, so instead of letting it happen to us passively we should actively embrace and shape it by willfully striving to change our lives and thought into directions that we determine, rather than just going with the flow of previous directions.”<sup>34</sup> The foreground here is not simply dominant: it has romantically reached a place of untouchable privilege. Philosophy, in the style of Shusterman and Stuhr, is a style of politics that is also a curious form of psychotherapy, of identifying sources of individual anxiety and suffering and awakening persons to possibilities of healing and growth. To the extent that such political psychotherapy contributes to a greater understanding of human life there is no objection, but the losses realized in the demotion of philosophy from its historical role as grand interpreter, and the cost of its diminished scope of vision must be adequately assessed.

Richard Rorty played a leading role in encouraging the moral-“therapeutic” notion of pragmatism.<sup>35</sup> He ushered in the idea of Deweyan pragmatism as departing with tradition (along with Continental philosophy) in its disavowal of “appeal[s] to commonly shared criteria [that have the] ability to decide issues of ultimate significance for our lives.”<sup>36</sup> This narrow, therapeutic account of pragmatism has had an unfortunate influence on some contemporary pragmatists. If all that the entire corpus of Dewey, Peirce, and James can offer contemporary philosophers like Shusterman and Stuhr is a disavowal of consensus about ultimate meanings and a warning to “get with the times,” to shake off the stubborn yolk of dead pasts, one wonders about the fate of the many deeper philosophic contributions made by the founding pragmatists. It is a very legitimate question, one that diagnostically leads back to Santayana’s foreground-privileging critique of Dewey: how does it come about that tired inspirational slogans like “change is inevitable” and “don’t just go with the flow” (none of which would have impressed Dewey), become the core message of pragmatism? Space limitations forbid a sufficient examination of this phenomenon, but some necessary historical points of focus are in order.

Rorty is preeminently the figure responsible both for reinvigorating, and at the same time politicizing pragmatism after Dewey. Intellectually daring in a time when philosophy had become almost exclusively an affair of logic-chopping and argument-refuting, Rorty spearheaded in the late seventies a return to pragmatism, among other philosophic orientations, as a means of bridging the growing chasm between philosophic discourse and social life. As Neil Gross accurately portrays, Rorty’s embrace of Dewey was due, biographically, to his political patriotism and his “sense that Dewey [like him]... viewed philosophy through a sociological lens.”<sup>37</sup> Rorty’s

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<sup>34</sup> Richard Shusterman. “Making Sense and Changing Lives: Directions in Contemporary Pragmatism.” *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*. Vol. 19, No. 1, 2005:67

<sup>35</sup> “I think of pragmatism as primarily therapeutic philosophy—therapy conducted on certain mind-sets created by previous philosophers. In so far as reading pragmatism frees you up from various old habits and convictions, it does it in the same way that a startling new literary text does. It makes you think, ‘Gee, I never knew you could look at it that way before!’ But therapy isn’t the same as providing criteria, or a theory.” Richard Rorty (quoted), with E.P. Ragg. “Words or Worlds Apart? The Consequences of Pragmatism for Literary Studies: An Interview with Richard Rorty.” *Philosophy and Literature*. Vol. 26, No. 2, October 2002: 373.

<sup>36</sup> Richard Rorty. *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth: Philosophical Papers, Volume I*. Cambridge University Press, 1994: 75.

<sup>37</sup> Neil Gross. “Richard Rorty’s Pragmatism: A Case Study in the Sociology of Ideas.” *Theory and Society*. Vol. 32, No. 1 (February 2003) :121.

contribution to the reinvigoration of interest in Deweyan pragmatism, it is well known, is alternatively embraced or violently resisted where he has been perceived as laying to waste time-honored dogmas persisting in academic philosophy. Rorty has, in other words, been received as a “radical” in the sense, clearly, that pragmatists such as Shusterman and Stuhr are trying to emulate.

The sad fact is that pragmatism under this influence struggles to be taken seriously as a philosophy. Rorty, uninterested in legitimating anything as a philosophy, least of all pragmatism, contented himself with playing ironically with competing vocabularies and with the idea that pragmatists believe:

...that the best hope for philosophy is not to practice Philosophy. They think it will not help to say something true to think about Truth, nor will it help to act well to think about Goodness, nor will it help to be rational to think about Rationality.<sup>38</sup>

Contemporary pragmatists such as Stuhr echo Rorty in this and think it misguided to even worry whether pragmatism ever gets taken seriously as a philosophy. To me this is a deep problem for those interested in recovering the core insights of the sort found in John Dewey’s *Experience and Nature*. It may be that, as Dilworth suggests, Santayana’s foreground critique of Dewey’s pragmatism was anticipating a trend that, as seen in the work of some contemporary philosophers, politicizes the doctrine beyond recognition.

What, after all, is to be said of the ultimate scope Santayana understands it to be the business of philosophers to establish? Very little from the standpoint of many contemporary, at least Rortian, pragmatists. Their aim is to hold in skeptical abeyance all claims of ultimate significance and meaning. But there is a cost: a tradeoff that Santayana presciently diagnosed of Dewey’s pragmatism. Not holding to significant account the general direction of modern life, viewing it as self-justifying as a basis for morality, for conceiving means as at least equal to ends, for privileging intelligent methods and processes over ideal ends and preferred outcomes; and not least, politicizing pragmatist doctrine to such a degree as to render altogether questionable its philosophic legitimacy: these are the undeniable legacies of the Rortian strand of Deweyan pragmatism. The moralism Santayana suspected of Dewey’s pragmatism may have only now made its full appearance.

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<sup>38</sup> Richard Rorty. *The Consequences of Pragmatism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982: xv

# Psyche Delivered

## *The Letters of George Santayana*

*The Letters of George Santayana,*  
*Book One, [1868]-1909; Book Two, 1910-1920;*  
*Book Three, 1921-1927; Book Four, 1928-1932;*  
*Book Five 1933-1936; Book Six, 1937-1940;*  
*Book Seven, 1941-1947; Book Eight, 1948-1952,*  
Vol. V of *The Works of George Santayana*  
Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001-2008.  
William G. Holzberger and Herman J. Saatkamp Jr., eds.

In his preface to the eighth and final book of Santayana's letters, general editor William G. Holzberger relates the story of how Santayana, during one of his final conversations, stated that what "he always yearned for was completion — that if he saw a circle half drawn, he longed to complete it" (8:xxviii). With the publication of Book VIII of *The Letters of George Santayana*, Holzberger, who first began work on a comprehensive edition of Santayana's correspondence in 1971, has completed the circle that is Volume V of the Critical Edition of *The Works of George Santayana*. It is a tremendous achievement. Several years ago I reviewed Book I of this series and noted the immense undertaking for all hands involved in locating, collating, and transcribing the 3,000-plus letters, postcards and telegrams that make up Santayana's correspondence. Now we have seven more books of the same excellent quality as the first: authoritative, easy to consult, and a pleasure to read. All who are interested in Santayana's thought owe a debt of gratitude to Holzberger, to Kris Frost, and to the other editors and assistants at The Santayana Edition. These books of letters — suddenly a fading forum for a faded way of communicating — enrich our understanding of Santayana's system of philosophy, document his life, and present us with multiple perspectives on his character.

The letters put to rest the idea that there are perhaps 'two Santayanas'. Some readers have sensed a divide between the Santayana of the earlier *Life of Reason*: humanist, pragmatist, exploring ideal forms of human perfection; and the Santayana of the later *Realms of Being*: detached, metaphysical, delineating ontological categories. However, the letters show that Santayana did not change; rather, as he put it in 1949, he 'radiated' (8:202). In December of the same year he repeats his claim, this time by appealing to his notion of the psyche.

The real agent, in mind as well as in body, is what I now call the "psyche", i.e. the life of the organism. And this organism, though modified by contact with the world, is essentially hereditary, so that its reactions will express the same bent in all different reactions it may make. In other words, we do not essentially change, but show on different occasions different sides of the same nature or will. At least, this has been the case with me. My genuine judgments as well as affections are what they always were. (8:219)

With respect to his philosophical judgments, a letter sent from Germany in 1887 provides striking confirmation of his thesis.

There are certain convictions which cannot be exiled from the mind, convictions about everyday practical matters, about history, and about the ordinary passions of men. A system starting from these universal convictions has a foothold in every mind, and can coerce that mind to accept at least some of its content. (1:64)

This early letter is remarkable for it concisely summarizes Santayana's views about philosophy and makes explicit both the origin and ground of his system. With a few changes, it might have appeared fifty years later in the introduction to *Realms of Being*. Another letter from the same year anticipates his analysis of scepticism in *Scepticism and Animal Faith*.

[Solipsism] 'cannot be disproved — what theory can? — yet I think it is not without arbitrariness. Not that it is more arbitrary than any other which does not express our mental habits; all I mean is that it has no more reasonableness than any other imagined, artificial system'. (1:48)

The idea that Santayana radiated rather than developed is further confirmed by his surprise in 1952 at 'how good the old stuff is' (8:416), meaning his 1905-1906 *Life of Reason* that he was busy editing down from five volumes to one. Santayana lived a long life in tumultuous times, but there is an undeniable constancy to his views. And so it is the same philosophy, at once naturalistic, Epicurean, and spiritual, that we find permeating page after page of his letters.

If Santayana's views only radiated, his powers as a thinker and writer became more concentrated. Despite his frequent complaints of indolence, his output was hardly slowed by age or the disruptions of war. The letters are valuable for showing us the steady, life-long labor of a great writer. He conceived his major books early and worked on them for decades. In 1911 he announced to his sister, Susan, that he is writing a new system of philosophy. He added that his book 'will not be long, but very technical' (2:37). He was half right. In the end his system of philosophy, if we include the 1923 introductory volume *Scepticism and Animal Faith*, is comprised of five books; taken together, they run over a thousand pages; and *The Realm of Spirit*, the final book in the series, was not published until 1940. His other big book of (political) philosophy, *Dominations and Powers*, published in 1951, was equally long in the making. This pattern of production also applies to his novel, *The Last Puritan*, and to his autobiography, *Persons and Places*.

One consequence of this pattern is that anyone seeking to understand Santayana's philosophy will find each of these books of letters valuable. Santayana regularly attempted to explain his views not only to professors, but also to relatives, friends, and indeed anyone else who wrote to him with questions. Quite often the explanations and analyses found in his letters rival those found in his books. Take, for instance, the term 'existence'. Is there a more vexed word in philosophy? Yet it is absolutely central to Santayana's ontology. In one of the many detailed letters to his friend and fellow philosopher, Charles Augustus Strong, he sets out his position.

The principle of existence, I think, cannot be any absolute or static being, whether pure Beings or sentience conceived as self-centered and self-existing. It must be the very fact of passage or flux, involving the establishment (by an unsynthesizable succession) of contingent or irrelevant relations between its assignable terms. It will not suffice for your point-instants to "be", each in itself: if they are to exist, they must vindicate their existence by pushing and generating one another. Existence must be enacted: it cannot be given or conceived. (3:304-305)

There are many such letters in which ideas and terms central to his system — animal faith, essence, intuition, intent, natural moments, synthesis, will, vital liberty, and so on — are discussed and elucidated.

Also running through all eight books of letters is Santayana's stimulating commentary on the history of western (and some eastern) philosophy. Santayana was a subtle interpreter and forceful critic of other systems. His letters to Richard C. Lyon are especially to be prized. As always, his characteristic powers of summation are on display. '[Berkeley and Hume],' he wrote to Lyon in March of 1952, 'never seemed to



me to belong, as the English think, to the main line of philosophy, but to a loop-line called subjectivism, and limited, in appeal, to the Protestant and romantic movements' (8:425). It must have been a thrill for the then twenty-one year old Lyon to receive these letters — the first missive sent to him begins '[you] have struck the bull's eye, as far as my heart is concerned, by saying that you especially like my Dialogues in Limbo, and the idea of "Normal Madness" ' (8:58) — and anyone who appreciates Santayana will share in a little of that excitement, especially after seeing how many correspondents before Lyon missed the target entirely.

Santayana's letters are full of philosophy, and also literary criticism, discussions of art, history, and politics. Whatever is discussed in his books is discussed in his letters. But the letters also return Santayana to what he called the human scale. They reveal an aspect of Santayana's psyche, the tropes or vital rhythms that constitute his character. Holzberger rightly states the letters are of supreme value to the biographer. However, despite having so many letters, a biographer might still wish for more. In particular, destroyed or unlocated are the letters Santayana wrote to his mother, as well as almost all of those he wrote to some of his more intriguing friends: William Fullerton, an American writer and bisexual who lived Paris amongst the literati; Baron Albert von Westenholz, described by Santayana in his biography as being one of his very best friends, exceptionally intelligent, and a 'hopeless neurotic'; and John Francis Stanley, the second Earl Russell, with whom at one time Santayana appears to have been in love. Of course, even without these letters, there is more than enough mail here to reveal Santayana's personality. Holzberger, in his excellent introduction, presents a clear and fair portrait of Santayana's complex character. Even better, thanks to Holzberger's many labors gathering these letters, each reader may try and achieve that 'synthesis of character' which Santayana regarded as being both closer to the truth and proper to the human scale.

GLENN TILLER

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## Call for Papers: Santayana in his letters

The Critical Edition of *The Letters of George Santayana* was completed in July 2008. On the occasion of this event, LIMBO. BOLETÍN INTERNACIONAL DE ESTUDIOS SOBRE SANTAYANA will publish in 2010 a special issue. To this end, LIMBO welcomes submissions of original papers dealing with any relevant aspect of the philosophy of Santayana, his age or his relations with other thinkers in connection with his letters. Papers must be written in English or Spanish, and should not exceed 10/12 pages (about 4.000 words). Notification of intent to submit including subject matter will be greatly appreciated. Deadline for submission: April the 1st, 2010.

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# Laws and Tropes

## I

The logical positivists offered an account of the structure of physical theory which is attractive and simple. It rests on a distinction between the theory itself and verifiable empirical laws which may confirm that theory.

Experimental laws in this view have a rock-bottom incorrigible status that is denied to theories. Any theory is subject to revision or replacement, but any subsequent theory, if it is to be acceptable, must be consistent with the experimental laws previously known to be true.

(1967 *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* 4-405)

When this doctrine is seen in a linguistic context, it may take the form of a distinction between empirical and theoretical terms: with the former, there is a direct interface with the outside world which brings to the theory its validity; the theoretical terms, on the other hand, are constructs worth nothing in the absence of experimental confirmation. Science, or at least physical science, deals with valid laws expressible entirely using empirical terms, and places them in a theoretical framework.

Essential to this account, which I shall call the “doctrine of laws and theories”, or just “doctrine”, is the stability and permanence of the laws, independent of whatever theory they might be thought to confirm. With this doctrine, the known laws of physics are seen as rock solid. They are stable and permanent, direct transcriptions of the actual movements of matter. If correct, this doctrine would disprove subjectivist claims that the results of physics are in fact relative to the physicist or to the society in which it arises; it offers an explanation of the remarkable accuracy and success of modern physics. Although the laws on which theory rests are reliable, theoretical constructions do not have this stability; one theory may be replaced by a second very different one if the second gives a better theoretical demonstration of the laws. With this account, one can make sense of the radical changes that sometimes take place in accepted theories, since the stable laws remain, and reflect our experimental contact with the external world, whereas theories are free constructions from the basic data that are always subject to revision.

To this well-known claim there is an equally well-known objection, which arises in a variety of different ways: it is difficult or impossible to separate the laws from the theory, and to prevent contamination by influences from the theory on the design of experiments and on the data which are gathered. Observations are theory-laden.

... perhaps all observations are theory-laden, either because our perceptions of the world are coloured by perceptual, linguistic, and cultural differences or because no attempt to distinguish sharply between observation and theory has been successful. (1995 *Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy* 797)

Data that are collected may be dependent to some extent on our assumptions and conventions. The very separation of laws from theories is questionable. Due to these and other obstacles, the doctrine of laws and theories has some time ago faded into the background. Like other theories advanced during the optimistic days of logical positivism, this is seen as lacking the complexity required. Perhaps nothing this sweeping can be expected; an investigator might better look to individual theories, which differ considerably one from the other.

I believe that we can give an account of the achievements of experimental physics and a partial but useful response to doubters through a revision of the doctrine of laws and theories. This will help to discredit claims that the theorems of physical science

are conditioned by social belief or are otherwise only relatively valid. To accomplish this, what is required is a contrast between the *actual* movements of matter on the one hand, and the laws and theories constructed by physicists on the other. Instead of juxtaposing with theory the laws that have been formulated, we should turn our attention to the regularities themselves: the important opposition is between regularities in nature which are entirely detached from our accounts of them, and various attempts to describe these through law and theory. The search for laws and their formulation, including the gathering of data, is acknowledged to be at risk of contamination by human influences. But even if our *report* of some repeatable event is laden with theoretical bias, this does not discredit our belief that the event itself exemplifies a recurring feature of the physical world. At the heart of fruitful experimentation is the discernment of kinds of events which we or others can make recur, and the expertise that has been developed in order to exhibit and study these. In a successful experiment, as is confirmed at different times in different laboratories, a physical system will behave in like fashion when the circumstances are appropriately similar. On this fact rests our confidence in physics, not on stated laws whose accuracy may be suspect. While an entire system of both laws and theories might sometimes be found inadequate and its replacement seen as revolutionary, this is not a disaster since the experimental access to a large number of regularities is not affected by the upheaval.

Thus my thesis, which I shall refer to as my proposal, is that the doctrine of laws and theories should be replaced by an account that speaks of regularities rather than laws. This serves only a limited purpose, and offers nothing like the scientific laws that are alleged to give absolutely correct quantitative statements about physical events, as promised by the doctrine of laws and theories. The regularities of which I speak are not meant to be seen in quantitative terms, having as their only purpose to give a plausible account of the remarkable accomplishments of modern physics. The exact definitions of particular regularities is not needed for them to play their part in this limited proposal, and indeed no exact definition can be given without risk of contamination by theory.

As a simple illustration, consider Boyle's Law, which states that in a closed chamber containing a gas held at a fixed temperature, volume will be inversely proportional to pressure.<sup>1</sup> Gas confined to a cylinder behaves in a certain way whether or not we make a numerical record of volume and pressure, or have any notion of Boyle's law, or even have any understanding of the variables  $p$  and  $V$  which appear in the formulae. If a weight is placed on top of the piston, it will lower the same amount each time a certain weight is added. The repetitions and the checking of similarity might easily be automated; one might arrange for the etching of a special mark on the cylinder wall for the position first taken by each of various weights, and follow with a sequence of checks by a device for recording whether or not subsequent levels correspond to the etched marks within some margin of error. Such an elaborate procedure, meant to ensure the independence of observation from the experimenter is of course not followed, but scientists are keenly aware of the dangers involved and are expert at avoiding them. Clearly there are assumptions tied to this account of the experiment: how do we know that our weights are similar and that the marks on our ruler are indeed evenly spaced? Finding answers to these questions is a part of the experimenter's task.

With the Boyle experiment, there is a regularity that can be enacted repeatedly in a manner independent of any interpretation put on it; the repetition of certain

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<sup>1</sup> That this proposal is appropriate for more complicated examples would have to be confirmed.

conditions leads to the same results. How we might formulate the *descriptions* of what is being done has no influence on the material source of this experimental result. What scientists have learned in their successful experiments is how to force material changes, and to observe them. While the record of what has been done and what has resulted is always slightly suspect, the discovery of a regularity that is open to repetition whenever conditions are the same or appropriately similar is an enduring achievement, one that is untouched by later theory change. Events do recur and form particular patterns, and well constructed experiments can make certain of these regularities accessible to researchers. They will devise formulae in terms of variables and laws to explain this; but their conviction is grounded in a successful demonstration of a repeatable event that does not depend on defined laws. How can experimenters conceive conditions which force events to be appropriately similar without thinking in theoretical terms? They cannot, of course; this is a problem that experimenters have learned to deal with. They have studied to free their experimental procedures from corruption by this knowledge. When they have managed to design and carry out a successful experiment, they and an indefinite number of other researchers are able to generate a certain repeated event, an actual regularity.

This proposal is a simple one, and perhaps is too simple to make a favourable impression on some readers. One expects more logical complexity in a claim, if it to be considered significant and taken seriously. Is it saying more than just that physicists observe nature and work out theories? I believe that it is. There appears to be no other description of experimental methodology that completely eliminates possible bias. And it brings out what is at stake in experimentation. The description of Boyle's experiment is straightforward: measurements are made of pressure and volume, followed by a numerical demonstration that the one varies inversely with the other. However, this description says nothing about why this experiment is successful; and, simple as it is, the statement that the experiment exhibits a certain regularity in a manner that can be repeated perhaps comes close to the heart of the matter.

But a more significant objection is based on an unwillingness to countenance the general notion of a regularity. Empiricists and others who are prepared to deal only with concepts that have precise definitions grounded in experience are likely to dismiss the proposal as unclear and imprecise.<sup>2</sup> Instead of a general unspecified regularity they could be expected to require some particular regularity along with its careful definition — in other words, a law. This is reasonable, and would correspond to the thinking of scientists. That is to say, it is reasonable for empirical variables; however, the regularities in question are not to be seen in quantitative terms. To demand a clear definition of such a regularity would defeat the aims of the proposal since this would bring in a possibility of corruption through theory. The proposal can succeed only on the level of general undefined regularities, and the concept of an unspecified regularity might not be acceptable to philosophers of science. These could already be reluctant to refer directly to physical things or substances, preferring to deal with them through (what Thomas Nagel calls) reductive substitutes. Those who are unprepared to refer to physical things would surely disallow unspecified regularities.

Thus I ask that all the activities and thoughts, laws and theories of the scientific community be placed on one side of a division, and on the other side are naturally occurring regularities which exist in themselves and are not at all affected by the interpretations given them by researchers. Those who see the entire philosophy of

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<sup>2</sup> I follow Santayana in dealing with the empiricist school in general terms, without necessarily singling out individual philosophers and appealing to their texts. Since the points raised here are also general ones, I believe this is acceptable.

science exclusively in terms of accumulated data, stated laws, and theories being tested, all of which I would place in the first grouping, are not in a good position to suggest reasons for the validity of science. In order to obtain a setting in which something from the doctrine of laws and theories can be rescued, it is necessary to choose a methodology more flexible than that offered by much of the traditional philosophy of science.

My proposal advocates a view of experimentation in science based on the notion of a regularity. Although 'regularity' is not usually treated as a technical philosophical term, at least one philosopher has dealt with it at length. George Santayana was not at all versed in the science of his day, but he had a good idea of the problem under consideration here and saw the need to deal with natural regularities; these he called *tropes*. It is not as surprising as it might seem that Santayana should show the way. In order to deal with this issue, it appears that knowledge of science is not as important as a conceptual framework less limited than that of the dominant empiricist tradition.

## II

A regularity can be seen as the form of an event, a form that can arise in other events at various places and times. In Santayana's terminology, it is an essence:

It is especially important at this point to dispel that confusion between essences and facts which makes a quagmire of all philosophy. I will therefore give a separate name to the essence of any event, as distinguished from the event itself, and call it a *trope*.<sup>3</sup>

For Santayana, science is the study of tropes.

A trope will be realized in the realm of matter at any time and place where events follow its defining pattern. It is a universal. As Santayana says, it is important to distinguish between a particular event and the repeatable form of that event — the trope is the latter. Another possible source of confusion, as he often points out, is the distinction between the actual form of the event and a human law formulated to describe it. The trope is that actual form, something that will always depend on some perspective, and as well might be too complex to be represented accurately in a formula. In dealing with things, whether or not one is willing to speak of the *essence* of a thing, there is a clearly understood term for making the distinction between the thing and its being or essence. With events, however, there is no such obvious term, and in defining tropes he offers one. Thus a trope is not an event itself but is the repeatable form of that event; it is not the form as identified in theory but the event's actual form. Two of Santayana's marginal headings on the same page say: "A trope is not an event" and "A trope is not a perspective" (See RB 294).

The form which events take in instances of Boyle's experiment would be an example of such a trope. What the universal laws distinguished by scientists are meant to describe are natural tropes — the forms taken on in various repeatable experiments. These tropes (about which the positivist may be unprepared to talk) are the actual forms of change and the real objects of interest for the scientist. It is not the laws but the tropes that are called for if we seek a revised version of the doctrine that separates laws from theories. It is often difficult to envisage a trope, and perhaps the best way to do so is to consider one that arises in a repeatable experiment, for instance, the trope exhibited by that of Boyle. Without the full apparatus and the law as formulated in terms of pressure and volume, it is not easy to imagine this trope; there is too much variability. But when we appeal to the known experiment, the nature of the trope

<sup>3</sup> See pages 101-102 of Santayana's *The Realm of Matter* (New York: Scribner's, 1930). The notion of trope discussed there differs from that which has recently been introduced.

involved is easier to understand. Doing this would not render the trope dependent on these ideas: it is only in carrying out the experiment, and not in designing or describing it, that we must set these ideas aside.

Although Santayana knows little of the science of his day, he does reflect on the sources of its success. Science, he says, proceeds by measuring material changes with material measuring sticks: this means that all the key parts of a successful experiment occur in the realm of matter with no contribution by thought. He understands that in science ways have been found to eliminate as far as possible all influence of human ideas and theories on experimental technique. This is what he has in mind when he says:

... both the metre and the thing measured are material and equally internal to the flux of substance. The measure is then congruous and literal. ... [with] the advantage of bridging truly external relations, and catching nature in her own net. (RB 239-240)

Other than several short passages like this, there is little in the text on this theme; but these, along with his introduction of tropes and his conviction that we are easily misled by ideas, show that he has a clear idea of the notions I am considering. However, the proposal I am making is my construction from these ideas; I believe it is faithful to his thinking, and would well have emerged had he carried his thoughts about science a little further.

Thus science thrives by measuring one quantity or change by means of some other quantity or change, where the crucial point is that there is no intervention by moral prejudice or linguistic preconception. As his readers would expect, he expresses this in terms of his ontology: the regularity under scrutiny is found in the realm of matter, with no intrusions from the realm of essence or the realm of spirit.

It is widely held that scientific theory, although it leads to remarkable predictions of the movements of matter, does not reveal a literally true description of its actual nature. This is Santayana's position, and he holds that ordinary knowledge of things and events is in the same case: it is useful and functional but cannot be assumed to be literally true. Thus all our knowledge is suspect as a true description of the way things are. Few philosophers have developed this view with such vigour and consistency. He can do this without turning his philosophy into a wasteland because of his reliance on animal faith, which leads him to posit the material world and to credit our knowledge of this world. Factual knowledge is based on faith mediated by symbols, where these symbols are essences that are always to some extent suspect. From Santayana's standpoint, following the above citation, the key to experimentation is the skilful manipulation of physical changes; ideas must of course come into play and are essential, but because facts are not known literally, these ideas may mislead us in our attempt to understand physical things and events. That the laws claimed by physicists might be theory laden is an inevitable consequence of his viewpoint.

The claim that our ideas can be misleading and treacherous is found in the pragmatism of William James, who questions the aptness of ideas that are not verified by experiment. Much of Santayana's theory of knowledge resembles that of the classical pragmatists; but the radical empiricism is not to his taste. Even though he is sceptical about the possibility of literal knowledge of our world and the things in it, he finds objectionable the empiricist reluctance to refer directly to the physical realm as given to us through primitive animal faith. Even though we have no exact knowledge of their nature, philosophical discourse ought to include reference to physical things and events (and to recognize essences and tropes).

When he introduces tropes in *The Realm of Matter*, Santayana makes little effort to counter inevitable objections from the empiricist school. This is perhaps understandable, since earlier he has gone to some length to attack the empiricist rejection of substance, and

much of what he says about substance applies no less to tropes. In his discussion of knowledge in *Scepticism and Animal Faith* he pours scorn on the empiricist (and idealist) systems of the day that deny or at least refuse to deal explicitly with the material world in which we find ourselves and the things and events in it. Instead of referring directly to existing things, the empiricist insists on dealing with some substitute, something manifest and more open to exact treatment, perhaps an idea of it or an experience of it or a proposition about it. Santayana argues that if philosophical discourse shuns explicit reference to our place in nature, distortions arise in our philosophical view of the world around us and in our ability to deal with it effectively. Empiricists may reply that their aim is to evaluate knowledge claims and are not seeking to characterize effective discourse; in the interests of precision they are shunning reference to things observed in favour of data from experimental observations. However, when they appeal to this narrow conceptual base in their discussions of issues other than epistemological ones, his complaint finds its mark.

Santayana seeks concepts and a minimal set of assumptions that allow him to explain and foster human action. His principle hypothesis is that a spatio-temporal realm of matter exists, along with the things in it; he believes it is not possible to sort out effectively questions about action in the absence of this hypothesis. If actual things and events are only dealt with at a certain remove, it is difficult to bring a naturalist position to bear on philosophical problems. In his view, a philosophical language appropriate for discussion of the full range of philosophical problems must allow reference to physical beings in the material world of which we are a part and in which we are agents, even if it is necessary to sacrifice some of the precision easily available when dealing with concrete data.

Almost certainly, Santayana would seek to justify his treatment of tropes through the same arguments that he applies to substances. If regularities play a part in serious discourse, this ought to be acknowledged in the language used. However, he should say more in his treatment of tropes, which are less tangible and less easy to envisage than things. Here is one reason for this. In dealing with the essence of some thing, Santayana does not use the term 'essence' in the classical way, since he includes *all* the properties of a thing or event in the essence. With this move he sidesteps the well-known difficulty of deciding which properties to include in the essence. (As he does so often, he selects terms that steer him away from classical puzzles. A notable example of this is his definition of spirit, which allows him to turn over to science the mind/body problem without hindrance to his account of mind.) However, with a regularity — a repeatable trope — this is not an option. He cannot take a trope, the form of some event, to be this form in its entirety, since such a form would not be repeated in a variety of quite different events. Although he is aware that the tropes he deals with are generic ones and are not the full tropes of any actual event, he says little about the problems that arise in so defining them. This and other difficulties call for further explanation on his part of his notion of a trope, but I cannot consider these at present.

### III

All agree that a major advance in science was the exclusion from theory of moral and evaluative notions. For instance, Aristotle's belief that things always moved toward an optimum position was fallacious and without scientific value. The doctrine about laws and theories might be seen as an extension of this ban; not only moral notions but the abstract concepts of theoretical physics must also be disallowed in

order to avoid human bias. At first, some believed that laws were independently valid and escaped corruption by theory; however, this is now seen to be false. Empirical laws may also be theory-laden. The present proposal carries this series of eliminations to its ultimate conclusion, leading to a revised cursory explanation for the extraordinary success of physical and other science. What gives physicists their confidence are the tropes they discover and analyse. In the experiments they generate in the material realm a repeatable event or sequence of events entirely independent of the way anybody thinks. Whether or not our measurement and representation of these events is corrupted by theory, the regularity itself is fixed and can be duplicated at different places and times, so long as the experiment is well designed. While we may think of this regularity in terms of a law that has been formulated, we are clearly aware that the regularity is something different from the law, and may indeed not be accurately described by that law. This perspective repeats his treatment of the knowledge of things. We perceive them and can be said to know them, according to his definitions, but we are never sure that the descriptions we appeal to are literal transcripts of the actual substance.

Is there some proof of this proposal about actual regularities that would disprove the claim that scientific results are subjective? There is none; even the original doctrine of laws and theories, which appeared definitive to many philosophers for a time, did not contain any proof. These are meant to be overviews of science, rather than scientific claims, with the expectation perhaps of offering some explanation for the outstanding success of science itself. The acceptance of this proposal contrasting the results and theories of physics with certain natural tropes has to rest on its plausibility. The main obstacle to this, in my opinion, is the conceptual framework that many philosophers bring to it. A philosopher open to Santayana's notion of a trope might find merit in this account of how experiments in physics derive their validity and why allegations that physics is subjective are unsound.

Since it has been conceded that there might be bias in the formulation and treatment of scientific laws, some critics allege that the whole scientific enterprise is suspect. While this argument is already flimsy and unconvincing, the above proposal removes from it any remaining vestiges of credibility. Scientists will agree that there is always a risk in taking data, formulating laws, and creating theories. However, their confidence rests at bottom on something different from all of these: they have isolated and subjected to their scrutiny actual repeatable regularities that can be exhibited without dependence on the formulation of laws. If these laws are shown to be false, other scientists will improve on them — the regularities will not change. Thus the confidence of physicists rests on their belief that they have discovered and can exhibit certain tropes that are a stable part of nature. These can be measured with great accuracy in a mechanical fashion without any interference by human thought, by juxtaposing them with further tropes. As Santayana puts it, both the thing measured and the measuring stick are parts of the realm of matter.

ANGUS KERR-LAWSON

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# Carta desde España

An international seminar on Santayana was held in Toledo, Spain at the University of Castilla-La Mancha on November 17-18, 2008

I Seminario Internacional: *La filosofía de George Santayana: Interpretaciones contemporáneas*

The main organizer was Dr. Ángel Manuel Faerna (Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha in Toledo), whose dedication and skilful arrangement of the entire conference was appreciated by all. There were two presentations during the first session; namely, *El pragmatismo abulense de George Santayana en relación con los valores y los poderes*, by Chris Skowronski (Institute of Philosophy, Opole University, Poland), and *Materiales para una utopía? Santayana más allá del espejo* by José Beltrán Llavador (Universidad de Valencia). During the evening session we could listen to Carmen García Marín (Universidad Carlos III, Madrid) and her paper entitled *What is called love. El test de Platón*.

On the second day of the conference were four presentations. Ángel Manuel Faerna presented "*Oh tiempo tus pirámides*". *Sobre el Prefacio a El reino de la verdad*. Ramón del Castillo (Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia, UNED, Madrid) presented a paper *Naturaleza y experiencia: Santayana y James, una vez más*. María Aurelia di Berardino (Universidad Nacional de La Plata/CONICET, Argentina), presented *Un diálogo en el limbo: Santayana y el pragmatismo sobre la verdad*. Finally, Daniel Moreno Moreno (IES "Miguel Servet", Zaragoza) presented *Santayana sobre el materialismo: últimos desarrollos*.

The seminar was concluded by a meeting during which there was a preliminary discussion on the shape and character of III International Conference on George Santayana, to be held in November, in Valencia, Spain. The whole event shows a growing interest in Santayana in Spain's academic world. There are more and more new translations of Santayana's texts and more and more works devoted to him. Also, *Limbo*, the journal devoted to Santayana, has grown enormously in providing us comprehensive studies. Last, but not least, there are interesting conferences. Here are two examples:

Seminario de Filosofía "Visiones del ser humano: Unamuno, Santayana, Ortega, Zubiri, Aranguren y Zambrano." See:

<http://www.unirioja.es/apnoticias/servlet/Noticias?codnot=1251&accion=detnot>

Seminario Internacional Complutense: Pensamiento Anglonorteamericano. See:

<http://www.ucm.es/info/FInglesa/pensamiento.htm>

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# BIBLIOGRAPHICAL CHECKLIST

## TWENTY-FIFTH 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.

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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>