

Overheard in Seville

*Bulletin of the
Santayana
Society*

No. 28
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ANNOUNCEMENT

The George Santayana Society

2010
ANNUAL MEETING

The Society's annual meeting will be held in conjunction with the December meetings of the American Philosophical Association (Eastern Division) in Boston. There will be a short business meeting at the outset to approve a constitution. A draft will be sent out to members by email in the fall.

Speakers

Jude P. Dougherty

Catholic University of America

“The Amphibolous Character of Existence:
Matter and its Negation in the Thought of George Santayana”

Krzysztof Piotr Skowronski

Opole University, Poland

“Santayana and the Avant-garde”

Robert Dawidoff

Claremont Graduate University

“George Santayana: Genius of the Closet”

Chair

Glenn Tiller

Texas A&M University at Corpus Christi

7:00 - 10:00 P.M. 29 December
Rooms to be assigned at the conference
Boston Marriott/ Westin-Copley Hotel

Santayana's Treatment of Teleology

1. Teleology and Early Modern Philosophy

The fate of teleology in a philosopher's system is one measure of his respect for matter.¹ When teleology reigns supreme matter becomes passive, dumb, quiet and immobile. When teleology begins to fade or becomes derivative upon matter, the powers of matter are enhanced and matter becomes pregnant with form, is active and restless, constantly in motion, producing marvelous organisms and the appearances of design.

Descartes refused to speak teleologically, hoping that matter could somehow create the machines of nature. His philosophy was committed to the elimination of wonder through mechanistic explanation. But without this wonder we have little ground for the teleological attribution of purposive principles to the explanation of physical change.² Descartes, however, lacked any plausible mechanism in matter, conceived so passively for his physics, for the production of nature's machines. His ardent follower, Nicolai Malebranche was unable to deny the evidence of his senses, as was the ever doubtful, yet pious Robert Boyle. Final causes cannot not be denied if the testimony of the senses is to be trusted. Malebranche recognized that Cartesian matter was unable to organize, so the seeds of organisms must be pre-existent and pre-organized. But having peered through his microscope he set forth, nevertheless, on an a priori calculation of their size.³ Boyle couldn't resist William Harvey's testimony to the usefulness of the teleological assumption that all the parts of the body had functions,⁴ and he couldn't deny the evidence of his senses either: the eye seems well suited for sight. Descartes' denial had none of the success that his denial of secondary qualities had, for there was no clue regarding the mechanism of construction that was clearly so intelligent and marvelous. Descartes' matter was too dumb to account for goal-directed phenomena. Teleological phenomena remained puzzling, arguably, until the discovery of the double helix.

Teleological commitments are the commitments of the empirically minded, for the purposes in things are visibly apprehensible. Signatures abound. Teleological experience is often accompanied with wonder: wonder at how such a thing could possibly do that — move on its own towards ends that are clearly beneficial. It would be an exaggeration to say Malebranche's microscope had got the best of him, however, it did support his realization that the laws of passive matter, the laws of mechanical

¹ A version of this paper was read to the Santayana society at the annual meeting of the American Philosophical Association, Eastern Division, in New York City in December 2009. Many thanks to the audience for helpful suggestions, and to Angus Kerr-Lawson and Glenn Tiller for comments on a previous draft.

² Wonder is the appropriate reaction to that which cannot be mechanistically explained; the presence of our wonder is a motivation for a teleological attribution. See Descartes *Passions*, and Brian Jonathan Garrett "Wonder Among the Cartesians and Natural Magicians" *Topics in Early Modern Philosophy of Mind*, edited by Jon Miller, Springer Publications, pp. 39-57, 2009.

³ Nicolas Malebranche *Dialogues on Metaphysics and on Religion*, edited by N. Jolly and D. Scott. Cambridge University Press.

⁴ Robert Boyle *A Disquisition about the final causes of Natural things*, printed by H.C. for John Taylor, St Paul's Churchyard. [1688] p. 49.

motion, were insufficient to explain the structures of living bodies. Experience couldn't be denied: the purposive structure of organisms was clear. There is little conscious inference in our knowing that the claw is for scratching, the teeth for devouring, even if we admit that there are cases in which "ocular demonstration" leaves the exact functional ascription uncertain.

Both these themes: the interdependence of our concept of matter with that of teleology, and the empirical, experiential credibility of teleological phenomena, help us with understanding Santayana's thought. Santayana's discussion of teleology is quite important to understanding his ideas, but his distinction between teleology and final causes is crucial to his thought.

Although teleology is relegated to the status of a mere trope of material substance, Santayana's critique of final causes is much broader than it might first appear and is a constant theme of his criticism.⁵ Santayana's critique of final causes is part and parcel with his denial of the causal efficacy of spirit and it defines his naturalism. It is also essential, I shall argue, to his critique of causation. Santayana's concept of causation (or "genesis") is essentially mysterious, having rejected both rationalist and empiricist accounts.⁶ Since material substance in Santayana's thought is conceived as eternal spontaneous flux and generation, it must remain forever mysterious and unknowable due to the mystery of causation, contributing to what Anthony Woodward calls Santayana's irrationalism. As Angus Kerr-Lawson reminds us, *Realms of Being* lacks any detailed discussion of causation. Since there is nothing one could say, by way of analysis, about it, Santayana remained silent, invoking the power of matter for his vision. The great mystery is no longer the power and wisdom of the eternal unchanging, necessary and constant God, but genesis: the "causal" power and spontaneity of contingent, ultimately inconstant material substance.⁷

My discussion focuses mostly on Santayana's mature philosophy. In section two I turn to William Montague's materialist account of teleology to set the stage for Santayana's own analysis. In section three I examine the distinction Santayana draws between final causes and teleology and in section four his reasons for rejecting final causes. In section five I investigate what his rejection of final causes implies for his concept of causation and his philosophy in general.

2. William Montague "Variation, Heredity and Consciousness"

In 1921 Santayana wrote to Strong regarding William Montague's essay "Variation, Heredity and Consciousness" published in the *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*. "Have you seen ... Montague's paper ... ?" Santayana wrote of his former student:

I admire it immensely, without of course swallowing all its tenets: but I think he has expressed perfectly the way novelty and persistence are related ... Montague ... has them [nature and mind] as it seems to me, in their place, where they belong: although his desire to

⁵ *George Santayana* by George Howgate p. 35-6 notes that Santayana's dissertation was concerned with Lotze's teleology. See Santayana "Lotze's Moral idealism" *Mind* Vol. 15, no. 58, 1890 pp. 191-212 and *Lotze's System of Philosophy*, edited by Paul Grimley Kuntz, Indiana University press, Bloomington 1971.

⁶ The empiricist concept of causation is the nomological theory of causation familiar from Hume and many of the positivists. In this I disagree with T.L.S. Sprigge's [1974, 1994: 110] view that Santayana holds to a nomological requirement on causation. He is very explicit in the letter to Ducasse below that he prefers a particularist account. Curiously, Sprigge refers to this letter but doesn't take it seriously.

⁷ Anthony Woodward *Living in the Eternal; A Study of George Santayana*, Vanderbilt University press, Nashville 1988 p. 8.

make mind a hypostasis of potential energy, rather than of the actual movements or conation of the body, leads him to extravagant conclusions: as that we are never so much alive as when we are dead. His “vectors” are capital; like the “endeavour” of Hobbes; because it is events, movements, that subtend the mind, not instants. (3.15)

Montague’s paper is interesting for how he sets up the problem of teleology in its relationship to matter and mind. Montague writes:

... we are confronted at the present time with a situation in which the teleological and psychical characters of living beings remain as aliens in the country of science. The mechanists would have us forcibly deport these dangerous foreigners and then ignore, so far as possible, their very existence. In other words, they would reduce teleology to an illusion and consciousness to an epiphenomenon. On the other hand, the vitalists would permit teleological processes and psychic agencies to run amuck throughout the whole domain of science, introducing destruction and paralysis, and generally disorganizing the peaceful industry of producing a material cause for every material effect. Each of these plans is dangerous, and in the end fruitless. The real remedy is to assimilate or naturalize the alien entities of teleology and consciousness and give them citizenship in the society of the mechanistic sciences. (p. 15)

Montague assumes that consciousness is a teleological phenomenon rising and falling with the fate of teleology. Thus the fate of teleology implies the fate of consciousness; if teleology is eliminated then consciousness disappears too. Thus either we are eliminativists regarding teleological phenomena leaving consciousness, at best, epiphenomenal, or we struggle to admit an unscientific postulate by admitting Bergsonian or Dreischian vitalist forces to account for goal-directed behavior. Montague takes reductionism to be the better path: it is better to assume that teleological phenomena are physical and consciousness too, than to assume either vitalism or eliminativism. But consciousness, as a teleological phenomenon, must require a more broad teleology in the organs of consciousness:

It is so natural for us to consider the teleological phase of mental activity in which purposes are deliberately realized in conduct or in art, that we are apt to forget that earlier and more spontaneous telogenetic phase in which the ideal or purpose originates. Yet this earlier telogenesis is at least as important as the later teleology; and it is most certainly its necessary condition. Before an ideal can be actualized it must have originated. (p. 19-20)

Montague appears to implicitly assume that “like must come from like” for he holds, without argument, that if consciousness is teleological it must be based on something else that also reveals teleological characters. Although neither Santayana nor Montague appear aware of the issue, Montague’s requirement that consciousness requires further telogenetic properties threatens his reductionism, via a regress. Something must be brutally teleological it seems, or we must continue to posit such features to explain the last. However, Montague clearly wants to go further, identifying his superforces and vectors as possible explanations of the origin of teleology.

Now all this is of course merely descriptive and not explanatory. But in view of the general theory I am arguing for, I have thought, it worth while to indicate how the distinctively vital processes of growth and reproduction can all be regarded as the different manifestations of a single principle- the principle in accordance with which living substance imposes its characteristic form or nature upon new matter. And it is here that the concept of each cell as a complex of super-forces appears to me to be helpful. We know that it is a characteristic of a system of forces or potential energies not only to pass into motion and to result from motion, but also to superimpose its form upon its environment. Every stress implies a counterstress of the same character as itself. (p. 33)

His reductionism is in contrast with Santayana’s nonreductive materialism and his

main concern is to avoid the epiphenomenalism that Santayana holds. Nevertheless, as a reductionist view, it is also somewhat revisionist about matter, not being content with an atomist account of materialism.

Nature is not stone blind like the atoms of the older materialism, nor, on the other hand, is she as depicted in the older theism, a moral agent endowed with prevision and engaged in the realization of pre-existent plans. She is an artist who works as she goes, giving spontaneous inspiration rather than deliberate edification and beauty rather than goodness.
p.33

Santayana could well share the sentiment of this passage; but it reaffirms the suspicion that “like comes from like”. It is not feasible to think that blind atoms could bring about telegenetic properties, but since nature does bring about such properties we cannot think of physical nature as blind. But no omniscient foresight can be attributed either, leaving us with the ambiguous and evocative Aristotelian image of nature as an artist, or craftsman, spontaneously creating and imposing form upon matter, but lacking the rational omniscient oversight of the deity.

Montague ends his paper with a comment on Santayana:

Consciousness is not, as Santayana puts it, “a lyric cry”; nor is it an otiose and epiphenomenal spectator of bodily doings. Our minds are imbedded in the matter of our brains and they play a real part in the economy of nature. p. 50⁸

Santayana’s approach, as found in *Realms of Being* later in the decade, is likely influenced by Montague’s paper, which is not to deny that Montague was influenced by his former teacher. He affirms that teleological phenomena are real, and that consciousness is teleological, but reiterates, contrary to Montague, that such phenomena are epiphenomenal and cannot be used to offer genuine explanations of nature, or of mind. But Santayana also appears to hold to the overall vision of nature as a spontaneous artist that Montague puts forth.

3. Teleology and Final causes.

Santayana distinguishes between teleology and final causes. Teleological phenomena are conceived broadly, as a harmony, adaptation or excellence of a thing in its surroundings. Teleology becomes an appearance without solid foundation; a mere trope of material nature, yet obvious and visible, an implication of the natural interrelatedness of all things found in experience, in animal faith. The phenomenon exists but is not itself something from which we could offer genuine explanations of nature.⁹ Teleology, Santayana writes, is “is a patent and prevalent fact in nature” (*Realms of Being*, p. 310). But explanations invoking teleology will not be genuine:

Now a different form of mock explanation appear in what is called teleology, when the ground of things is sought in their excellence, in their harmony with their surroundings, or in the adaptation of organs to their functions and of actions to their intentions.

Such correspondences exist: teleology, if it be only a name for them, is a patent and prevalent fact in nature. (*Realms of Being* p. 310)

⁸ Montague is referring to Santayana’s essay “The Efficacy of Thought” *Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 3 no. 15, 1906, pp. 410-412.

⁹ Howgate p. 111 writes that “teleology withers beside the evidence of natural science” apparently attributing this view to Santayana’s early work, but it sits uncomfortably with Santayana’s acceptance of teleology as patent and prevalent fact of nature. Writing in 1938, Howgate appears more sympathetic to those who attempt to retain some teleological concepts in their philosophy p.253. His perspective reveals the temper of the time and how materialism was still not a popular position among philosophers.

As tropes, these harmonies are abstract contingent patterns that describe material substance, but in virtue of that, they cannot be invoked to explain the flux and transformation of material substance. Teleology is the curiously shaped foam on the wave crashing against the shore. Santayana writes:

The tropes which mark the obvious metres of nature tell nothing of the inspiration, the secret labour, or the mechanism which brings them forth. (*Realms of Being* p. 318)

Sometimes Santayana writes as if mechanism and teleology can simply be identified, at least when the end product is interesting to someone.¹⁰ This identity is psychological, a feature really of being familiar with a trope and hence seeing the first moment as portent of the last, of which we value or take particular concern. In a postcard to C.J. Ducasse of 1925 he remarks:

I agree with the thesis of the [essay] on Teleology; a movement culminating in some interesting phase must be either a result of various automatisms or an instance of automatism. Mechanism, *if we value the issue*, [emphasis added] may always be called teleology. The teleology that is impossible is only that which represents the result as a cause. (3:245)

He repeats this point in his unpublished essay on causation writing:

Eventual values are called final causes: and the name of cause is not misused, although the cause here precedes its effect in time, if by that word we understand ... any principle of explanation, any circumstance that may help the human mind to find its quietus in the presence of facts. Value is such a circumstance. An initial failure to understand the relation of values to natural existence has led mankind into two by-paths without issue: one the attribution of final causes, by which nature is explained by the supposed power of the good; the other the problem of evil, in which, seeing that the good does not prevail, an explanation is sought for that fact on the principle that, somehow, the good prevails notwithstanding (POML p. 26)

Admitting the existence of such correspondences and adaptation, therefore, is not to admit them as genuine causes of change. The idea that the excellence or end of things could be their cause is a moralistic notion that Santayana is adamantly opposed to. Thus, although teleological phenomena evidently exist — organisms are adapted to their environments, action is adapted to intention and thought — there are no *final causes*.

In a word the teleology present in the world must be distinguished from final causes. The latter are mythical and created by a sort of literary illusion. The germination, definition, and prevalence of any good must be grounded in nature herself, not in human eloquence. (*Realms of Being* p. 323)

A final cause explanation, were one possible, would require that we believed in:

a miraculous pre-established harmony between the commands or wishes of the spirit and events in the world. It would mean the exercise of divine power, which a well-advised human being could never attribute to himself, but only to the grace of God, perhaps passing through him. (*Realms of Being* p. 316)

It is important to remember just what Santayana includes in the category of teleological phenomena. Final causation is moral causation and includes adaptation of organism to environment, organ to function, and of action to intention. To reject final causation means rejecting causes that are goals and rejecting excellence as a cause. If we think of thought and desire as teleological, goal-directed activities, then Santayana's rejection of final causes implies the rejection of thought as a cause. The rejection of final causes thus implies the epiphenomenalism of spirit.

¹⁰ See T.L.S Sprigge *Santayana*, Routledge, London, 1974, reprinted 1994, p. 105.

The rejection of final causes is also important for Santayana as he sees it as a criterion for his early naturalism. In *Three Philosophical Poets* [1910] he identifies this rejection with naturalism:

There are two maxims¹¹ in Lucretius that suffice, even to this day, to distinguish a thinker who is a naturalist from one who is not. "Nothing," he says, "arises in the body in order that we may use it, but what arises brings forth its use". This is that discarding of final causes on which all progress in science depends.¹²

Santayana's claim that successful science depended on the rejection of final causes is rather controversial and is not clearly born out by late twentieth century history of science. To pick a famous case, scholars recognize that Georges Cuvier, the famous 19th century comparative anatomist claimed, like William Harvey before him, that his teleological assumptions were essential to his success and to the study of living organisms.¹³ Nevertheless, Santayana's opinion was common among historians of science of the early twentieth century such as E.A. Burt.¹⁴

4. Santayana's Rejection of Final causality

Beginning with the most evident of final causes, the human will, Santayana notes that even this cannot be counted as a genuine cause of the goals that they may indeed bring about. Human wishes and desires — the will — are materially conditioned:

Surely if anything ever had a cause and was evidently secondary, it is human will and fancy; to take them for absolute beings, or original powers, would be to allow theoretical sophistries to blind us to the plainest facts. If I want water, it is because my throat is parched; if I dream of love, it is because sex is ripening within me. ... Conscious will is a symptom, not a cause; its roots as well as its consequence are invisible to it, material, and often incongruous and astonishing. (*Realms of Being* p. 313)

Even if we, like Cartesian dualists, made such immaterial events of will and desire into causes of our bodily events, it would still not count as genuine final causality as described above. Rather, making immaterial desire a cause would not be the same as making it a cause in virtue of its content — its goal — and it would not make the goal itself efficacious.

But this amphibious psycho-physics, even if we admitted it, would not be teleological. Each mental event would transmit existence and energy to its successor in proportion to its own intensity and quality, just as if it were a form of matter. It would not thereby exercise magical moral control over its consequences. (*Realms of Being* p. 316)

A genuine final cause would be both a cause and an ideal. Thus, even if the vehicle of finality, desire, were in fact a cause; its causality would not be moral causality. It would not thereby establish the harmony between desire and nature on the grounds that such harmonies are good or noble.

The teleological virtue of wishes and ideas is accordingly something quite distinct from their alleged physical influence; indeed, it is only when we disregard this incongruous mechanical efficacy attributed to them that we begin to understand what their teleological virtue would

¹¹ The second is that "nature is her own standard; and if she seems to us unnatural, there is no hope for our minds". *Three Philosophical Poets*, Triton Edition p. 20.

¹² *Three Philosophical poets*, Triton edition p. 19. Compare with *Realms of Being* "Organs must arise before they can exercise what we call their function" p. 322. See Woodward, 1988 p. 36.

¹³ See Georges Cuvier *le Regne Animal distribué d'après son organisation*, 3rd edition 1836, Introduction. Elibron Classics reprint.

¹⁴ E.A. Burt *The Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Science* 1925, reprint Doubleday, New York, 1954.

mean: it would mean a miraculous pre-established harmony between the commands or wishes of the spirit and events in the world. (*Realms of Being* p. 316)

Santayana's argument here is aimed to establish the conditioned nature of desire. But it is not quite clear why the conditioned nature of desire is sufficient to deny genuine final causality unless we hold some form of exclusion principle: if X is the cause of Y then no other X* is the cause of Y. Since the direction and causation of desire is allegedly explained by the underlying physical causes, through the psyche, we have no reason to posit a further teleological cause. Unfortunately, I doubt that Santayana would find plausible such an a priori and "Occamist" sounding principle. Nevertheless, Santayana clearly thinks final *causes* are incomprehensible.

Moral tropes, on the other hand, have their place in the human domain of action and could therefore, in Santayana's terminology, be admitted as "final causes", but they are indeed conditioned by a mechanical impulse and are not themselves really *causes*. Virtue and vice are moral qualities of a natural being, dependent on physical life "a fact which takes nothing away from their beauty or horror"; (*Realms of Being* p. 320) but they're not causes of a being's behavior, or of its existence.

Now, before I turn to Santayana's discussion of causation, it is worth asking how he accounts for teleology emerging from the "crawling processes of nature" (p. 316). But here, however, we realize that Santayana has only literary expressions for us, only metaphors and undying optimism for the power of material substance. He does not attempt what we might recognize as a mechanist's reduction of teleology, utilizing, for example Darwin's natural selection, or Montague's fanciful superforces. Instead, he simply reiterates the power and potentiality of matter, retreating from explanation that has any serious content.

Nature is full of coiled springs and predestined rhythms of mechanisms so wound up that, as soon as circumstances permit, they unroll themselves through a definite series of phases. A seed ... will grow into one particular sort of plant, and into no other ... examination of a seed would probably never disclose in it a perfect model of the future flower, any more than examination of a young man's passions, or his body would disclose there the poems which these passions might ultimately inspire ... sometimes, as in a seed, the imputed burden is genuine, and potentiality is pregnancy.¹⁵ A true beginning and sufficient cause of what ensues is really found there; but this initial reality need not at all resemble that which it will become. (*Realms of Being* p. 317)

Like Montague he affirms:

Prodigious complexity is something to which nature is not averse, like a human artist, but on the contrary is positively prone. (*Realms of Being* p. 318)

What is remarkable in these passages is the decapitated Aristotelian argument and a subtle point about causation. Aristotle utilized the point that seeds grow into particular kinds of plants and "no other" to postulate the teleological principle as the best explanation for growth and species-hood.¹⁶ Santayana leaves us hanging — how could matter be so specifically directed then, if there is no immaterial causative form? Whence all this form and how? The second point, about causation, is that we cannot expect that the cause and effect to resemble one another.

Santayana does offer one consideration that is not merely a repetition of matter's potentiality for adaptation:

¹⁵ Often the "potentiality" is unreal, due to the teleological inclinations we put into tropes of nature. The beginning moment of a pattern is often seen as having the pattern within it, although that may merely be the illusion of human expectation and familiarity with the pattern or trope.

¹⁶ See Aristotle *Physics*, Book II.

Indeed the adaptation of things to one another is involved in their co-existence: a thing can arise only by finding and taking its place where other things make room for it. Everything in the moving equilibrium of nature is necessarily co-operative. (*Realms of Being* p. 311)

He returns to this to reiterate the point that things do not have any preconceived or preordained use, but that the use of things derives from the circumstances they find themselves in.

Thus the precision of adjustment between organs and functions, far from being a miracle, is in one sense a logical necessity or tautology; since nothing has any functions but those which it has come to have, when plasticity here with stimulus and opportunity there have conspired to establish them. (*Realms of Being* p. 321)

This comment is unlikely to impress the theologically inclined teleologist. The adaptation allegedly found in nature is not mere co-habitation, but of mutual support and adjustment for what looks like the common good. It is simply mysterious to attribute such features, in the absence of some other mechanism, such as natural selection, to the conspiracy of stimulus and opportunity. The theologically inclined teleologist, such as Robert Boyle or William Paley would point to the conspiracy itself as evidence of a preconceived plan. However, Santayana does not share such a Panglossian description of nature.

5. Final Causes, Causation and Genesis.

Thus, with the death of final causes comes the epiphenomenalism of will and spirit. The teleology present in the world is an inevitable consequence of things existing together, sharing a world, yet this is all consequence, not explanation. Organs gain their uses once born, but are otherwise born useless.

What is interesting in Santayana's discussion of final causes is how it penetrates his discussions of causality, (when indeed we can catch him writing of causality at all.) As Angus Kerr-Lawson reminds us, *Realms of Being* barely touches upon the subject of causation; his most extensive discussions were left in his notebooks and unpublished essays under the broader concept of generation.¹⁷

Santayana hints that the concept of causation itself is infected with finality, with a miraculous harmony between cause and effect. Santayana read C.J. Ducasse's book *Causation and Types of Necessity* (1924) and was happy to find a non-nomological, particularist account of causation, consistent with his own criticisms of laws as mock explanations. He wrote to Ducasse in April of that year

... when you enumerate the senses in which one may ask "why" effect follows on cause, you do not mention what I suspect was their problem, namely, what internal relevance there was between cause and effect, to be the reason for their sequence. People expect to have an insight into this connexion, such as they have in action, or in an answer to prayer, or obedience to an order given, or the execution of a plan. In such cases an image of the consequent is a part of the antecedent, and seems to announce and usher it in; in deduction also the consequence follows because it is contained in the premises. On this ground too identity of substance binds the material and the product in nature more closely together than if they were unsubstantial disjointed perceptions. The change of forms remains unexplained, which you rightly say is all that requires a cause; yet the continuity of substance, which needs no explanations, partly reconciles the observer to that change ... and so gives him a feeling that causation is intelligible, or ought to be so, beneath its actual working. People, in a word, desiderate a dialectical or moral unity in natural sequences, and it was the absence of

¹⁷ See Angus Kerr-Lawson "Santayana on Causation" *Bulletin of the George Santayana Society*, no. 3, 2005, pp. 28-33.

this desideratum that Hume and Mill pointed out. (Letter to Ducasse, 19th April, 1924. 3:197)

In this fascinating letter Santayana makes a number of points. His criticism of rationalist accounts of causation, which he takes Hume to agree with, is that we expect the effect to be prefigured in the cause in a manner that is teleological. The cause indicates, in itself, somehow, the effect as if there were a kind of harmony between the two, or some kind of “prefiguring”. If the effect can be deduced from the cause, this merely reinforces that teleological impression that there is a prefiguring of cause with effect. By noting this teleological feature of causation Santayana is reminding us that cause and effect need not resemble one another. Importantly, Santayana seems quite clear that he dismisses people’s expectations “that causation is intelligible ... beneath its actual working”. In his unpublished essay on causation Santayana comments on dualist interactionism:

People who might not say that snow can be melted by a feeling of relief say with conviction that a feeling of pain will draw the hand away from the fire. Why this diverse appreciation of cases perfectly similar materially? Simply because they are not similar morally. By the operation of the mind, ever since Anaxagoras and Socrates, people have understood a moral or useful direction impressed obviously though miraculously on things ... the power of reason, the obedience of nature to the excellences it should produce is what impresses them.¹⁸

However as we have seen in some of the material quoted above, Santayana thinks that there is no reason to believe that cause and effect will resemble one another. The rationalist account of causation, although not necessarily a nomological conception of causality, appears mythical. But the empiricist conception of causality conceived as a Humean regularity or nomological view is equally unsatisfying. Whether two particular events are causally related or not seems to have little to do with how *other* events are related. Nor is constant conjunction between tokens of the type sufficient for these particular events to be causally related:

It is mere superstition to attribute one event to the magic influence of another, however constant the conjunction may be reputed to be between them. Were such a coincidence established by ten thousand instances, it would remain a conjunction of appearances, to be explained by some continuous flux of substance beneath. The breaking of innumerable waves in a similar fashion one after another does not establish a causal influence of each upon the next.¹⁹

Law-like constant conjunction is not sufficient for causation, but even more problematic is the unjustified assumption that Santayana throws doubt upon, that there are, indeed, universal constant conjunctions available to the Humean.²⁰ Tropes may fall as easily as they arise; nature does not offer any guarantee that it will remain regular and constant, hence the Humean theory falls with the fall of universal laws an constancy.

6. Conclusion

Santayana’s critique of final causes is essential to understanding his views. It figures into his reasons for holding to the epiphenomenalism of spirit. Second, his rejection of final causes defines the concept of naturalism. Third, it is part of his critique of the

¹⁸ In “Causation” POML p. 25.

¹⁹ See POML 24.

²⁰ See “Genesis” POML p. 48.

rationalist concept of causation and hence one horn of his critique of causation generally. It is time now to sum up and offer a broader perspective. As scholars have noted, causation is a vexed concept in Santayana's thought. On the one hand, he is willing to pay lip service to science uncovering and even calculating the path of matter — but on the other, this story is often seen as merely one embedded in and involving merely contingent tropes of nature — the appearances (even if scientifically construed). Deep down, the spontaneous causation of the phenomena of scientific research must be accepted with little analysis. Causation, or genesis, resists analysis: both rationalist and empiricist concepts are mythological, really. Thus the causal power of material substance is deeply mysterious — and Santayana likely remained silent about causation in *Realms of Being* because he had argued himself out of any possible analysis of the concept. Instead of the eternal unchanging mystery of God's power, guided and grounding all things in His wisdom and goodness, Santayana posits the eternally ever-changing mystery of spontaneous material causation, undirected by anything recognizably human or wise.

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The *Bulletin* Website and Other Santayana Sites

Martin Coleman at the *Santayana Edition* maintains a website containing the full archive of *Overheard in Seville: Bulletin of the Santayana Society*. The site is:

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

It is a part of the *Santayana Edition* website, to be found at:

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

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 original *Bulletin* webpage, which is still accessible but is no longer maintained:

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

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 philosophy series:

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

The Spanish journal LIMBO maintains the site:

www.hiperlimbo.com

How John Dewey and George Santayana help us look at John Searle and Daniel Dennett

For more than thirty years, John Searle and Daniel Dennett have been two of the most active promoters of philosophy to the general population.¹ They have both written a number of books in clear, engaging prose aimed not just at professional philosophers, but at a generally educated audience. They have appeared in a variety of media, including documentaries, interviews, and YouTube clips, where they convey both the excitement of ideas and the conviction that the issues they wrestle with matter a great deal. Professor Dennett has been among the latest of Darwin's bulldogs, championing the cause of evolution as the explanation of many things biological and human. More generally he has been an outspoken advocate of scientific understanding that may undermine naïve explanations of common phenomena. Professor Searle has been the undaunted champion of common sense, repeatedly challenging philosophical sophistications that deny the obvious. Dennett and Searle have from time to time appeared together in public forums (often with a variety of others) where, like G. Gordon Liddy and Timothy Leary, they could be counted upon to disagree.

In the first half of the twentieth century, John Dewey and George Santayana — at the time the philosophers most widely read in the United States — had an even longer engagement. It developed gradually, but as their differences became apparent, it also became clear that the differences had much to do with what they thought was important in life. Their disputes over metaphysics, art, religion, and philosophy were expressions of moral and political differences.

Like the Santayana-Dewey debate, the Searle-Dennett debate consists of two opposing naturalists: one who emphasizes the distinctive features of consciousness and the other who emphasizes the continuum formed by the mind and the natural world. Searle and Dennett, like Santayana and Dewey, agree that there is a natural world, that things and events in it can exist and occur independently of human observation, that there is no supernatural realm apart from or guiding physical existence, that consciousness occurs in animal organisms, and that conscious animals evolved in accordance with a process roughly described by Darwin in *The Origin of Species*. These beliefs form the common ground of much contemporary Western philosophic discourse. Within the setting of these beliefs, there is a wide range of divergent emphases.

The Santayana-Dewey engagement sheds light on the Searle-Dennett controversy in two ways. First, as with Santayana and Dewey, the verbal tangles that confront a reader of Searle and Dennett can be best unraveled by examining the different agenda — the different goals — that each philosopher has. Second, Santayana and Dewey had much disagreement on topics similar to those that divide Searle and Dennett.

¹ This article is a substantially reworked version of a presentation given to the George Santayana Society at its annual meeting, held in conjunction with that of the American Philosophical Association, Eastern Division, in New York on December 29, 2009. The author wishes to thank Angus Kerr-Lawson for his very helpful suggestions about revision and also Henry Shapiro and Linda Eastman for their meticulous corrections of various drafts and their many suggestions about phrasing and content. Any remaining errors are the author's alone.

Therefore, a comparison of all four writers on a common topic, such as the human mind, illuminates the choices made not only by Santayana and Dewey, but also by Searle and Dennett.

The Chinese room

The most notorious of the disputes between Dennett and Searle concerns what has come to be known as the Chinese room. Searle's Chinese room argument is an indirect reply to a 1950 article by mathematician and computer scientist Alan Turing. Turing argued that the question "Can machines think?" is pointless. It doesn't matter what they do as long as you cannot tell whether a human being or a computer is performing some activity, such as responding to some questions.² Searle's original article focused on the assertion that a computer simulating human linguistic behavior actually understands the content of its input and output. In the article, he performed a short thought experiment. Suppose a person who understands English but not Chinese, like me, sits in a windowless room that has a set of cards with Chinese ideograms on them. Through a slot in the wall, someone who does understand Chinese passes in other cards with Chinese writing. The person in the room follows instructions written in English that tell which card to pass back through the slot in response to the card coming in. The person outside the room thinks the person inside understands Chinese, but no, it is just me following instructions in English.

The point is that simply following instructions, as a computer program does, is not the same as understanding. Understanding a language, as opposed to mindless symbol manipulation, involves recognizing what the words and grammar of a language mean. Language works by communal agreement that these words used in this way mean this. So when you understand someone else, you do that by believing that he-or-she intended the words — which would otherwise be incomprehensible — to have the meaning you get from them.

So many people instinctively choose one side or the other of the Chinese room debate that it is as if it has become a fifth antinomy of pure reason. After Professor Searle introduced it about thirty years ago, the Chinese room soon supplanted Nelson Goodman's grue and bleen as the foremost generator of philosophic nonsense in the English language.³ The arguments for and against the Chinese room have been labeled, dissected, and twisted in almost every way imaginable, providing yet another example of an application of Boyle's law once made by the British comedy and music duo Flanders and Swann: the greater the external pressure the greater the volume of hot air.

Dennett's objections

Professor Dennett has been one of many serious critics of the Chinese room and certainly one of the most vocal. Dennett has had many objections to Searle's argument. Just two of the many are the homunculus objection and the system objection. Dennett argues that Searle is misrepresenting what the mind is and how it works. There is no little man — no intelligent homunculus, analogous to the person in

² Turing (October 1950).

³ Goodman illustrated a difficulty in the theory of induction by asking what makes the assertion "all emeralds are green" have any more warrant than "all emeralds are grue." 'Grue' is a term Goodman invented to mean green before the year 2000 and blue thereafter. Its counterpart, 'bleen', means the opposite.

the Chinese room — inside our heads. To Dennett, the mind is a co-operation of many parts, no one of which is conscious. Consciousness is the result of the collective operation of the parts. That the mind is a set of collaborative networks brings the system objection into play: Searle's man in the room doesn't understand Chinese because he is just one part of the process. It is the room as whole that understands Chinese.

The homunculus argument is the same argument that Jean-Paul Sartre used against Freud's censor: if one part of the mind decides what another sees or thinks about, then it is as if there is a little man making decisions about what choices the ego (in this case) confronts. In *Consciousness Explained*, Dennett also uses this argument against Freud's censor. Could Searle not turn this around and accuse Dennett of having not just one, but many little men inside? It turns out that Dennett had already acknowledged the multitude of tiny agents even before Searle published the Chinese room. In *Brainstorms* (1978), he wrote that the different functional parts of an AI program "are homunculi with a vengeance" and that "each homunculus in turn is analyzed into smaller homunculi, but, more important, into less clever homunculi."⁴ Searle takes this assertion as a confession that the homunculus issue has not been eliminated. Just because the homunculi are stupid doesn't make them unconscious. As for the system objection — the room being the conscious entity — Searle replies that that idea misrepresents what it means to understand something.

What's at stake here? Is Searle saying that consciousness has a non-physical origin — an immaterial foundation? Of course not. The material basis of consciousness is part of the common ground that Dennett, Searle, Santayana and Dewey, all agree upon. Does Dennett mean to deny that there is a center of conscious activity that unifies disparate perceptions, thoughts, emotions, and actions so that they become the experience of a single person? Well, in some ways Dennett does appear ready to throw out Kant's synthetic unity of apperception: the idea that potential self-awareness underlies everything represented in the mind because there must be a subject to whom experiences occur. Nevertheless, Dennett refers to himself and to others as independent subjective, self-identical persons and he does so with neither embarrassment nor ambiguity. In a similar vein, David Hume, the eighteenth century Scottish philosopher, wrote an essay called "My Own Life," despite having denied that the self, including his own, exists as an independent entity.

Searle and Dennett on consciousness

In spite of their agreement on the biological basis of consciousness, Searle and Dennett have radically different ways of describing the mind and consciousness. Searle's position can be summarized as follows: "Consciousness is an inner, subjective, first-person, qualitative phenomenon."⁵ It is inner not only in that a person's mental states occur within a single brain, but also because mental states are internally connected and occur within the context of a system of interrelated states. It is qualitative because each conscious state has a characteristic feeling. It is subjective because a conscious state must be experienced by someone. This subjectivity is what Searle means when he says consciousness has "first person ontology." Although consciousness is a biological phenomenon, caused by "lower level" processes in the brain, a purely third-person description leaves out its essential character.

⁴ Dennett, *Brainstorms*, p. 80.

⁵ Searle, *Mind, Language and Society*, p. 50.

Dennett explicitly disputes the notion that a third-person perspective leaves out the essential character of consciousness. In *Consciousness Explained*, he discusses the case of a fictional color scientist who has never seen color. Nevertheless, she learns “all the physical information” one can obtain about color perception. When she is suddenly able to see color, the question is: Will her ability to perceive color add anything to her knowledge? The designer of this thought experiment says yes. She will see a red rose and say, “So that’s what red looks like!” Dennett says this is the wrong conclusion, because the rules of the experiment say she has “all the physical information.” According to Dennett, “all” is a lot more than “lots and lots.” If she has all the information, then actually seeing color would add nothing. She would be able to tell that a banana dyed blue was blue and not yellow right off the bat without coaching.⁶ In Dennett’s view, our ordinary common sense beliefs cause us to fall into traps. *Consciousness Explained* is full of accounts of perceptual illusions that show that what we might readily think turns out to be false. In general, he thinks that ordinary beliefs about the mind — folk psychology — distort and misrepresent the way the brain works. You can appreciate the full richness of human experience without resorting to such mythical notions as a theatre in the head, qualities that are unapproachable by objective science (like colors, sounds, and flavors, which he calls ‘qualia’), or a center in the brain where all experience comes together.

Santayana and Searle distinguish mind from non-conscious matter

Searle and Santayana have very different attitudes toward consciousness and spiritual life, but on the issue of discriminating consciousness from other products of nature their differences are minor compared to the approaches of Dennett and Dewey. Both Searle and Dennett oppose what they call “dualism,” the theory that mind and matter are separate. Yet each criticizes dualism in different way. Searle, unlike Dennett, argues that consciousness has features, like innerness and subjectivity, that make it a different sort of thing from everything else found in the world. Dennett regards this insistence on a first-person, private perspective a form of dualism. Searle is thus closer to Santayana and Dennett closer to Dewey. Santayana uses the term ‘spirit’ for consciousness, which he regards as a different form of existence from matter. Spirit consists of perceptions, thoughts, and feelings, which are not found in material existence. Matter has no interests, no views, no understanding, no imagination, no desires, and no will. He uses the term ‘psyche’ for whatever material structures and processes produce conscious life. But Santayana’s realm of spirit is not a realm of disembodied ghosts. The difference between psyche and spirit is one of description. Santayana often characterizes it by saying it is the same distinction Aristotle makes in *De Anima* between anger regarded physiologically as a boiling of the blood and regarded dialectically as a desire for revenge.⁷ Searle is very close to this position

⁶ Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, pp. 398-400.

⁷ It is not clear whether Searle would regard Santayana as what he calls a “property dualist” — one who holds that consciousness, although dependent on matter is “metaphysically different.” The problem with such labels is that the definitions offered are often ambiguous. What does ‘metaphysically different’ mean? Dewey, following Josiah Royce, criticized Santayana for his rigid separation of existence and essence. In 1940, Santayana wrote, “I do not separate them, I distinguish them” (“Apologia pro Mente Sua,” p. 525). The same is true of matter and spirit. The difference, as with Searle, is one of description, not fact. Searle would say that will, imagination, desire, etc. are biological features described from a first person perspective. Santayana would say that they are not biological but that they have biological counterparts. These two formulations are quite close, especially when compared to what Dewey and Dennett say.

when he says, “The fact that something is mental does not imply that it is not physical; the fact that a feature is physical does not imply that it is not mental.”⁸

Dewey and Dennett bring mind and matter together

Dewey, like Dennett, is troubled by the “separation of the mind and the body.” Dewey called Santayana’s naturalism “broken-backed”⁹ because of its sharp split of matter and spirit into separate “realms of Being.” Dewey’s objection to theories that change multiple “modes of action” into a single “independent entity” (i.e., a mind)¹⁰ is quite close to Dennett’s objection to the idea that there is a center in the brain where conscious experience all comes together — an objection that amounts to saying that neither the mind nor the self is a single independent thing. Dennett would surely be sympathetic to Dewey’s notion that “mind is primarily a verb.” It is fundamentally a complex of activity, a web of interrelated processes. But the way Dennett undoes the mind-body split is quite different from the way Dewey undoes it.

For Dewey the mind-body separation leads to a separation of mind from practice. This separation can be used to relegate practice to an inferior position. But, for Dewey, all forms of experience have practical aspects, as well as cognitive and emotional ones. Mind is a constant interplay of doing and undergoing. It is at once activity that is “intellectual” (attending, noting, remembering), “affectional” (caring and liking), and “practical” (having a purpose and willing). Practice, instead of being subordinate to the mental, is an integral part of it.¹¹

Dewey, unlike Dennett, does not question the idea that we have inner experience, as well as outward expression. It an assumption built into the aspect of experience in which we “undergo” as opposed to “do.” Dennett’s problem with the separation of mind and body is not, as with Dewey, that it deprecates practice, but that it leads to many of the false beliefs of folk psychology that interfere with an accurate understanding of how the mind works. In a noteworthy example, Dennett criticizes the neuroscientist Gerald Edelman for saying, “One of the most striking things about consciousness is its continuity.” Dennett says:

This is wrong. One of the most striking things about consciousness is its *discontinuity* — as revealed in the blindspot [a normal gap in the retina of each eye], and saccadic gaps [the normal jumping around of the eyes, which we do not usually notice], to take the simplest examples. The discontinuity of consciousness is striking because of the *apparent* continuity of consciousness.¹²

This passage shows how radically different Dennett’s use of the term ‘consciousness’ is not only from Dewey, but also from Searle and Santayana. It is easy to speculate what Dewey would say about this passage: saccadic gaps and blindspots are not inherent features of consciousness. They are discovered only when concentrated psychological experiments bring them to our attention. When Searle says that consciousness is subjective, but caused by objective biological processes, he means that saccadic gaps and blindspots are not aspects of consciousness itself: they are part of the mechanism that brings it about, but only part. For Searle, a biological explanation would not be complete without an explanation of what makes consciousness *appear* to be continuous. Whether the process that enables us ordinarily

⁸ Searle, *The Rediscovery of Mind*, pp. 14-15.

⁹ Dewey, “Half-Hearted Naturalism,” p. 58.

¹⁰ Dewey, *Art as Experience*, p. 263.

¹¹ Dewey, *Art as Experience*, p. 263.

¹² Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, p. 356.

not to notice blindspots and saccadic gaps (and whatever else does not come to the center of our attention) is some key feature of the brain or is distributed throughout the brain is an empirical question, but what to count as consciousness is not.

Dennett's consciousness is Santayana's psyche

Of the three other philosophers under consideration, Santayana is the farthest from Dennett on the question of the content of consciousness. For Santayana, each moment of consciousness consists of the entertainment of what he calls an essence — a unit of meaning. The essences we perceive are not usually simple ideas, like colors and sounds — an analysis that derives from John Locke. Like Dewey, Santayana would object to a psychology that studied visual perception by first looking at light, shadow, color, and shape. Such an analysis might be used by a painter, either implicitly or explicitly, in depicting images and events. But the contents of consciousness — the essences that appear to us — are for the most part people, things, and situations. Of course, perceptions contain colors, but ordinarily we notice them as accompaniments to what we are focused on. In Dennett's description of the mind, various simultaneous brain processes compete for attention. In *Scepticism and Animal Faith*, Santayana carries skepticism as far he can take it. Denying not only everything in the world, but his own past and future, he arrives at his skepticism's penultimate stage, which he called "solipsism of the present moment": the vision of his own past and future, the world in which they occur, and the situation currently before him all regarded as the product of his imagination. This vision is an instance of what Santayana calls an essence. He then takes his skepticism one step further, doubts his own existence, and is left only with the essence before him. If Dennett were to follow the same path, he could take the skepticism yet another step beyond Santayana and say there is no single essence appearing to the mind.

A central notion of Dennett's approach to the mind is that there is no theatre in the head. With a cavalier nod to the history of philosophy, Dennett calls this the "Cartesian theatre." (It was Hume, not Descartes, who compared the mind to a theatre.) It is not clear whether Dennett is denying that anything appears to the mind at all (his discussion of qualia suggests that) or if, on the other hand, he is saying that rather than being single theatre, the mind is a cinema multiplex in which various potential appearances emerge at the same time and that focus is drawn from one to the other by circumstances in the brain, in our muscles, and in the world. Under either interpretation, Dennett's description of consciousness, which eschews unscientific accounts of private experience, is a remarkably revealing elaboration of what Santayana calls "the psyche."

Santayana's psyche — the physical aspect of mental life — shows that while Santayana and Dennett are at opposite extremes in defining consciousness, there is a degree of to which Dennett supplements Santayana. It also brings to the fore some of the choices Searle and Dewey have made. The psyche is not limited to structures and processes in the brain. It is any aspect of bodily life that influences consciousness.¹³ Like John Searle, Santayana regards the analysis of the physical correlates of consciousness as a matter of scientific investigation. Santayana is willing to remain ignorant and let others pursue that investigation. (Searle endeavors to keep informed

¹³ The psyche is a difficult notion to grasp if you are intent on pinning down the exact nature of the relationship of the mind to the body. Santayana scholars disagree about it. Angus Kerr-Lawson has pointed out that the psyche is a deliberately vague notion. Santayana solves issues of the mind and body largely by ignoring them as unimportant. (See Kerr-Lawson, pp. 28-34.)

of the latest neuroscientific research, but in the end, like Santayana, says that consciousness is produced by whatever neuroscientists will eventually discover.) Santayana's notion of the psyche is an acknowledgment that the sources of consciousness are often found deep within us (and may be hard to fathom), but at the same time it restricts rather tightly what counts as consciousness. For Santayana, consciousness (or spirit) consists solely of those moments when something is present to the mind — a thought, feeling, or an image — Dennett's dreaded theatre in the skull. Much of what Searle and Dewey would consider aspects of mental life, and all of what Dennett would consider, are assigned by Santayana to the psyche. For example, Santayana tells us the psyche is the "agent in politics."¹⁴ It is whatever in the body holds the effects of geography, culture, and the individual's past. The psyche is the keeper of memory and source of desire. Only when memories are retrieved and present to consciousness are they moments of spirit. The psyche is affected by perceptions and responds by generating ideas and emotions, which when thought or felt are also instances of spirit. Thus there is continuous interaction between the body and perception (so much so that Dewey thought the distinction between them artificial). Santayana did not devote much attention to this interaction. Dennett, who acknowledges that it would be a big mistake "to define all salient mental differences in terms of biological functions,"¹⁵ often takes this interplay into consideration. But his emphasis is on scientific understanding. His focus on saccadic gaps, the multiple crisscrossings and undercurrents of thought, the tricks and illusions that reveal the underlying process, and the way parts of the brain may respond to sensory perception is a focus on Santayana's psyche — a focus that helps illustrate Santayana's distinction between the physical psyche and the conscious spirit.

Essences, qualia, and memes

What penetrates the psyche is not just the obvious. In an essay written in 1908, before he formulated his later terminology of 'essence', 'spirit', and 'psyche', Santayana wrote, "Even without giving attention, we are subject to ambient influences from every quarter." In what he would later call the psyche, forms (or essences) perceived lay down their residue and affect other perceptions and memories:

The constant radiation of forms is often imperceptible, like the light of stars by day; yet it works on even then and modifies the stronger forces by which it is obscured.¹⁶

This "radiation of forms" is a process that underlies what Dennett calls the cultural evolution of memes. "Meme" is a term Dennett adopted from Richard Dawkins to refer to a meaningful unit of experience. A meme is basically what Santayana meant by an 'essence'. As customarily used, 'meme' can be characterized in Santayana's vocabulary as those essences that serve as units of culture and get bandied about among various psyches so that, over the course of history, some remain actively attended to while others fall aside. The memes that stick around are the ones that penetrate deep into a multitude of psyches. From Santayana's perspective, it is surprising that Dennett is so hard on qualia and so exuberant about memes, for qualia are essences, just as memes are.

¹⁴ Santayana, *Dominations and Powers*, pp. 14-17.

¹⁵ Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, p. 460.

¹⁶ Santayana, "Sculpture," p. 106.

Dennett and Santayana on knowing – verification vs literary psychology

If Dennett is close to Santayana in his use of memes, their epistemological theories show how far apart they are. For Dennett, something can be knowable only if the knowledge of it can be verified by observation. In a revealing passage Dennett says mental images are real only if by ‘mental images’ you mean data structures in the brain. He then revisits the notion he introduced in the case of the color scientist who had never seen color and says that qualia are “functionally definable” only in the sense that

if you really understood everything about the functioning of the nervous system, you’d understand everything about the properties people are actually talking about when they claim to be talking about qualia.¹⁷

Santayana would partly agree with Dennett: data structures in the brain are real and mental images regarded as essences are not real, because, as Santayana defined them, essences don’t exist. But, to Santayana, mental images regarded as moments of spirit are real. Furthermore, Santayana believed that knowledge requires the imaginative interpretation of symbols (those symbols being the essences given to consciousness). He discerned two different approaches to understanding the mind. Scientific psychology learns by external observation and measurement. What Santayana called “literary psychology” employs an imaginative reconstruction of what another person (or you yourself at an earlier time) thinks and feels. Literary psychology is the process we use everyday in conversation or reading. It makes possible poetry, theatre, novels, and cinema. Literary psychology when correct – when I understand what my friend is saying, for example — is the most accurate form of knowledge we can have, because the symbols used to represent the thoughts of a genetically and culturally similar person are the same symbols that constituted the original event (the other person’s thoughts). Such identity of symbol and object is not the case when we apprehend inanimate objects. Although Santayana is careful to note that in science the “aesthetic nature” of essences is “trivial” and “forgotten in the curious knowledge” acquired there and that literary psychology should be applied to the material world only when scientific investigation has been exhausted, he also holds that it takes “sympathetic imagination” to fuse the observations and measurements of experiments into a revealing picture of the way things are.¹⁸ Dennett’s concentration on the “third-person perspective” would seem to leave no room for imaginative reconstruction as a means of obtaining knowledge. Yet Dennett uses literary psychology with abandon, making allusion upon allusion to cultural ideas. He *knows*, for example, that Sir Arthur Sullivan’s march from the *Mikado* could not be used for weddings and graduations because too many people associate the music with the title WS Gilbert gave it: “Behold the Lord High Executioner.”¹⁹ Dennett’s approach is one that deliberately endeavors to “do justice to the most private and ineffable subjective experiences, while never abandoning the methodological scruples of science.”²⁰ Santayana and Dennett start from opposite poles — subjective experience and scientific objectivity. The epistemological difference may seem secondary as they both acknowledge the importance of the other pole, but the difference poses a serious obstacle in that Dennett finds it difficult to explain the meaning of imaginative works, whether they be literary or religious. Dennett has been relentless in his criticism of religious beliefs, whereas

¹⁷ Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, pp. 459-460.

¹⁸ Santayana, *Scepticism and Animal Faith*, p. 106.

¹⁹ Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, p. 207.

²⁰ Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, p. 72.

Santayana was equally industrious in explaining the nuances and value of religious ideas interpreted from a naturalistic perspective.

Santayana and Searle

Searle says little about the epistemological role of the imagination, but he is much closer to Santayana than to Dennett. Searle and Santayana share some strongly held ideas. Both are unremitting realists. They believe all reality is found in or arises from the physical world, not from ideas. Furthermore, they take this belief to be a fundamental pre-philosophic, pre-linguistic supposition. Other shared ideas include:

- The natural sciences are the place where the processes that operate in the world are discovered and studied.
- Truth is the correspondence of ideas to reality.
- The supernatural, if it exists, extends and would be part of the natural.
- Consciousness is fundamentally different in quality from unconscious material.
- Consciousness is produced by biological operations.

The similarity extends to examples. Santayana wrote that philosophers who deny intentions are like the Eleatics, who denied motion. In both cases philosophers end up denying something that everyone knows exists. Searle has made the exact same comparison.

Despite these similarities, Searle and Santayana differ in important ways. Santayana denies any causality to mental life. In his dialogue in limbo “The Secret of Aristotle”, the four Aristotelian causes are reduced to one: the efficient cause of everything, namely matter. Searle is sure that not only does the brain cause consciousness, but also that consciousness has causal effects on the material world, because part of the explanation of why people do things is the purpose, the reason, the final cause of their actions. Searle disagrees with Santayana’s view, which he calls ‘epiphenomenalism’ — the view that consciousness is “just a kind of vaporous residue cast off by the brain, but is unable to do anything on its own.”²¹ (Santayana was uncomfortable with the term ‘epiphenomenal’ for etymological reasons. He thought the brain a real thing, not a mere phenomenon, that is, an appearance.) Santayana could be brought closer to Searle by arguing that the efficacy Searle seeks in consciousness is found in Santayana’s psyche, but, in denying efficacy to spirit, Santayana had a purpose larger than simply locating the efficient cause of consciousness. In the first place, he saw spirit as rising above the fray of everyday concerns. That would make it not a “residue” of matter, but a consummation. Furthermore, Santayana was highly skeptical of the ability of intelligence to improve human life. During World War I, he wrote to Bertrand Russell:

People are not intelligent. It is very unreasonable to expect them to be so, and that is a fate my philosophy reconciled me to long ago. How else could I have lived for forty years in America?²²

²¹ Searle, *Mind, Language and Society*, p. 58

²² Santayana Letters, December 1917: GS to Bertrand Russell.

Santayana and Dewey – what is important in life

Central to Dewey's philosophic and educational program — in sharp contrast to Santayana — was the cultivation of intelligence as a regular habit. In general, Santayana and Dewey both knew that it was a fundamental disagreement about what is important in life that underlay most of their disputes. For Dewey, it is engagement with the ideas and circumstances of your time and place to promote the common good, and thereby leave the world better than you found it; whereas, for Santayana, it is reflection on the circumstances of your life so you can learn how to live in harmony with what the world offers you. It is the cultivation of spiritual, contemplative life free from the distractions of “care.” Santayana's hard distinction between spirit and matter fosters the idea that spirit has interests that go beyond everyday practical concerns. He wrote that the terms and categories he employed were those that enabled him to clear his “mind of cant and free it from the cramp of artificial traditions.” He then added:

I do not ask any one to think in my terms if he prefers others. Let him clean better, if he can, the windows of his soul, that the variety and beauty of the prospect may spread more brightly before him.²³

As with Santayana and Dewey, the differences between Searle and Dennett become clearer by looking at not just at the content of their writings, but at the character. Both focus on cognitive issues that are meant to guide neuroscientists as they close in on the biology of consciousness. Nevertheless, it is possible to look for large overriding themes in each philosopher's works.

Searle's mission

Searle does have what might be called a moral mission in the philosophic sphere. He begins *Freedom and Neurobiology* by saying that “There is exactly one overriding question in contemporary philosophy ... How do we fit in?”²⁴ The way Searle means it, the question is primarily metaphysical not moral: Where does humanity with its freedom fit into the natural order? Yet Searle is on a campaign. Like Santayana, he wants to free the mind from the “cramp of artificial traditions.” The artificial traditions in this case are a large portion of what other philosophers have produced. In *Mind, Language and Society* he writes:

Almost everything I say should sound pretty much obviously true, so obvious indeed that the philosophically innocent reader ... will sometimes wonder: Why is he bothering to tell us this? The answer is that every claim I make, even the most obvious, will be, and typically has been for centuries, a subject of controversy and rage.²⁵

Searle then describes what he calls “default positions” — taken-for-granted presuppositions about the world and our relationship to it. An example is the belief that the world exists independently of us and that we have access to it through our senses. (Santayana regarded such fundamental assumptions as products of “animal faith” — the beliefs we need to survive and reproduce.) These default beliefs are part of what Searle calls the “Background” of assumptions and faculties (like reason) that are necessary for us to interpret perceptions, form other beliefs, and understand language. The default positions constitute a primary metaphysics.

Metaphysical analysis is at the heart of Searle's program. He has been a leader in what might be called the “metaphysical turn” that started at the end of the 20th century

²³ Santayana, *Scepticism and Animal Faith*, pp. vi-vii.

²⁴ Searle, *Freedom and Neurobiology*, p. 4.

²⁵ Searle, *Mind, Language and Society*, p. 8.

American philosophy — a turn away from the centrality of language. The linguistic turn was a late 19th-early 20th century movement away from Kant's "Copernican revolution," which shifted the focus of philosophy from the metaphysical investigation of things to the mind and human experience. Searle has returned to talking about things. To him, language and the mind are biological and social phenomena. So, to understand language we must first analyze the ontology of language itself and of social constructs. To understand politics we must first understand the ontology of human institutions. Unlike many of his predecessors, Searle does not adopt a narrow focus. He endeavors to devise solid theoretical foundation that supports many areas of human inquiry.

Searle's great aide in bringing metaphysics to the fore has been the advance of science, especially the detailed atomic theory of matter and evolutionary biology. We know enough now to be confident of many metaphysical assertions that once appeared philosophically problematic. At the same time science must not ignore what our instincts tell us: that experience is first-person, inner, and qualitative.

Searle wants to help the ordinary guy wade through unnecessary sophistications. Just as left wing writers defend absurd propositions in the name of cultural relativism, just as technocrats in Washington impose regulations on people who supposedly don't know better, so philosophers construct convoluted theoretical systems that ignore what everybody already knows. This appeal to everyman is distinctly American in character. Searle, who studied at Oxford (as did Dennett), bears none the snobbishness one might associate with an elite British University. Searle is stalwart, solid. His feet are on the ground. His examples include cheeseburgers, his property in Berkeley, and whom he might have voted for.

Dennett: give up what you think you know

Dennett, like Searle, is on a campaign to clear the mind of nonsense and to free it from artificial traditions – in this case, the false beliefs that impede social and scientific progress. The nonsense Dennett enthusiastically attacks is that of anti-evolution creationism, dogmatic religious beliefs that taken literally are absurd, and of a host of philosophic straw men and defenders of folk psychology who take the Chinese room to illustrate the difference between an algorithmic process and true understanding and who thereby distort what is really going on in the mind.

Dennett sends exactly the opposite message of Searle. The overall import of Dennett's philosophy is: free up your mind, don't be hung up on what you think you know, even about yourself and your own experience. Remember that natural selection can explain many, many things, not just biological evolution, which it does, not just the mammalian immune system (Gerald Edelman won a Nobel prize for showing it does), but also the evolution of human culture.(through the survival of memes) and even the way our minds work. Although Dennett is a committed naturalist, like the other three philosophers under consideration, there is something in his presentation that cultivates the arcane. His avuncular countenance and his soothing ridicule of the superstitious have a this-science-stuff-is-wonderful appeal. But only those who get it — the adept who can see the falsehoods of folk psychology and the truth of natural selection (like those who can see the three-dimensional images hidden in magic-eye drawings) — can appreciate the beauty revealed by neuroscience and philosophy. Santayana and Dewey each accused the other of being a mystic. Santayana thought Dewey was an "ethical and social mystic" whose concern for practical affairs and

social progress turn his naturalism into “a moral attitude or a lay religion.”²⁶ Dewey thought Santayana overly influenced by East Indian philosophy and that his “naturalism is inarticulate, a kneeling before the unknowable and an adjuration of all that is human.”²⁷ Looked at from either of these caricaturing perspectives, Dennett might also appear to be a mystic of his own sort — an evolutionary, cognitive science mystic. A tenet of Hinduism is that the individual self is an illusion and that we are all part of the universal spirit. If we adopt Santayana’s interpretation of deities and world-souls as figurative representations of forces in the realm of matter, then Dennett’s notion that the self is a virtual construct is no more than the emergence of the atman out of the Brahman and conveys the sense that consciousness and the self arise mysteriously from the incessant undulations of the central nervous system like mist from the waves of the sea.

What Searle and Dennett leave out

Professors Searle and Dennett, for all their genuine effort to break free from the “cramp of artificial traditions,” remain under the sway of a philosophic tradition that places its own artificial emphasis on logical precision. The result is that they both have difficulty in reading the works of the imagination other than literally.

There is something noble about Searle’s undaunted insistence on metaphysical stability and rational thought, tempered by what we take for granted and guided by scientific investigation. But nobility sometimes wears the face of Don Quixote. Professor Searle reports he was surprised to find that the Dalai Lama holds beliefs that are a form of Western dualism.

I lectured at a symposium in Bombay, on the same platform as the Dalai Lama. ‘Each of us both a mind and a body’, he began his speech.²⁸

In spite of his long defense of the obvious, Professor Searle’s surprise shows an obvious cross-cultural misunderstanding. Buddhist practice often emphasizes various placements of the body so to meet different spiritual needs. Such practices indicate that Buddhism integrates the mind and the body in a way Christianity does not. Furthermore, the Dalai Lama is an educated man, acquainted with physics and biology. Were he and Professor Searle to have a long enough conversation, Professor Searle might find that the Dalai Lama does not separate the mind and the body in the way Professor Searle thinks he does. For all his efforts to break free from the constraints of philosophic professionalism, Professor Searle is still bound by them.

Searle holds to a correspondence theory of truth — the notion that our beliefs are true if they conform to the way the world is. But I wonder if he could extend that theory, as Santayana did, to include moral and dramatic truth — truth about the human soul and its desires. Dewey in his own way understood this, even though his conception of truth was quite different from Santayana’s. He understood that works of art convey something, not just emotion or ideas or practical information, but experience itself — experience which has intellectual, practical, and emotional aspects.

Searle has written that he would like to add aesthetics to his repertoire of philosophic topics. But Dewey and Santayana knew the imagination and emotion, both central to aesthetics, are not added topics like the geography of the moon, but things that pervade all thought and experience. Searle does recognize that experience is qualitative “in the sense that for each conscious state there is a certain way that it

²⁶ Santayana, “Dewey’s Naturalistic Metaphysics”, p. 257.

²⁷ Dewey, “Half-Hearted Naturalism,” p.58

²⁸ Searle, *Mind, Language and Society*, pp. 48-49.

feels”²⁹ and he has said, “There is an aesthetic dimension to all conscious experience. Why do we not have a satisfactory theoretical account of this?”³⁰ But Dewey’s account of experience is such an account. The term ‘conscious state’ shows that Searle is caught up in a vocabulary that suggests that the mind is a sequence of static conditions. For Dewey, each of us has both a continuum of experience and moments that coalesce out of that continuum to form individual experiences (not states). What creates a memorable moment — what binds the flux of experience into a unit — is a complex, pervasive emotional quality. It is this quality that works of art embed in some physical medium and that makes art, not science, the primary resource for understanding the nature of experience.

Professor Dennett shows great appreciation for the range (though perhaps not the depth) of human experience. He makes gestures toward the humanities and the arts, but never goes all the way. In *Consciousness Explained* he writes:

In some regards, my theory identifies conscious experiences with information-bearing events in the brain — since that’s all that’s really going on.³¹

All that’s really going on is information-bearing events! Why not emotion-bearing events? Why not calculation-bearing events? Why not decision-making events? Why not imagination-bearing events? Professor Dennett has shown love of the imagination in his own style of writing and presenting. If he could take that one step further, he might, as Santayana did in *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion* and *The Idea of Christ in the Gospels*, read religious works not just for their obvious scientific falsehoods, but for what they express of the culture they came out of and for the truths they tell of the human heart.

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²⁹ Searle, *Mind, Language and Society*, p. 42.

³⁰ Searle, *Freedom and Neurobiology*, p. 14.

³¹ Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, p. 459.

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Help from George Santayana for John Searle against Richard Rorty

I should be ashamed to countenance opinions which, when not arguing, I did not believe. It would seem to me dishonest and cowardly to militate under other colours than those under which I live. (Santayana SAF 305)

John R. Searle is a champion of common sense, and stands ready to condemn philosophers who advance theories that they clearly do not accept in everyday life. I consider here his insistence that we belong to a cosmos in which facts are independent of our description of them: the recent theory of Social Constructivism is seriously at fault for denying this evident truth. He argues the point in his review “Why should you Believe it?”¹ of Paul Boghossian’s recent book *Fear of Knowledge*². The book is an attack on relativism, and in particular on social constructivism, and the review is no less an attack on relativism about knowledge and truth than is the book itself. Searle endorses most of the conclusions obtained by Boghossian, and the two give similar arguments in refutation of the theory. Boghossian’s efforts to crush social constructivism, says Searle, is a public service containing “relentless exposures of confusion, falsehood, and incoherence” (92). According to this theory, facts are not independent of humans and their society but are “obtained through the contingent actions of a social group” (88). This does not merely mean that through our actions we generate facts; it makes the radical claim that all the facts about the natural world commonly seen as mind-independent actually come into being through social conventions and decisions. In Searle’s description, “The social constructivist is anxious to expose construction where none has been suspected, where something that is in fact essentially social has come to masquerade as part of the natural world” (88).

Searle’s allegiance to common sense is exemplary and all-too-scarce; but I think that his response to typical sceptical arguments about knowledge is inadequate. The question arises: does anyone who accepts the commonsense view so well illustrated by Searle have an adequate response to sceptical arguments? The work of George Santayana, who does claim to effect such a reconciliation, reveals some of the far-reaching philosophical modifications that this appears to require. He embraces common sense in his system, and at the same time he accepts the full force of powerful sceptical considerations. Santayana is every bit as dogged as Searle about retaining in his philosophy the insights and practices of common sense. As he says, he would be ashamed to do otherwise. (See above citation.) We cannot claim to be philosophers acting with insight and intelligence if we seriously deny a world of things and events independent of our thinking about them. But at the same time he perceives more clearly than does Searle the authority of sceptical arguments, and in fact holds that there can be no definitive refutation of well constructed sceptical arguments.

Santayana holds that our claim to know our natural surroundings is relative and contextual, not in the egotistical sense that the facts originate in us, but in the sense that our descriptions of these must reflect a bias arising from our personal perceptual apparatus and the peculiarities of our limited conceptual competence. However, he is not led to deny the existence of the cosmos in which we have our seat, or to repudiate

¹ John R. Searle. “Why Should You Believe It”, *The New York Review of Books*: September 24, 2009, pp. 88-92. Page numbers given alone are references to this paper.

² Paul A. Boghossian. *Fear of Knowledge: Against Relativism and Constructivism* (Oxford University: Clarendon Press, 2006).

the independence of the facts about this cosmos. He is sceptical and relativist about the exactness of our knowledge of the world, but not about the existence and independent nature of that world. The sharp distinction between a knowledge that is relative but adequate for efficient action on the one hand, and an absolute truth on the other, is a key part of Santayana's thought; but it is not found in Richard Rorty, who vigorously asserts that he can get along without a category of truth. In his critique of Rorty, John Searle is somewhere in between. He insists on the independence of facts, but does not press the breach with empiricist tradition arising from a sharp distinction between insecure knowledge and absolute truth. For Santayana, the independent existence of a cosmos cannot be proved but is and must be assumed by us in our daily activities; this assumption is the foundation of our common sense insights. Since we cannot prove the existence of the realm of matter, and since in intelligent action animal faith dictates belief in it, we assume it, as justified by the effectiveness of action grounded in its assumption. I do not review Santayana's case for his kind of limited scepticism; my concern is to show how this version of scepticism might be rendered compatible with common sense.

In Santayana's opinion, some sceptics construct negative arguments that cannot be refuted. These lead us to question the literal truth of our statements about the things around us; more than this, they can lead us to question whether these things and their world exist at all. Doubts of this second kind must be abandoned, even though we have no logical refutation of them, since their acceptance would nullify all intelligent action. We must assume the existence of the things and the world. However, we can manage very well without reversing the first doubts; our interactions with things can be fruitful even if our knowledge of them is symbolic and non-literal.

Thus the knowledge we have of our physical surroundings, although it is sound and pragmatically useful, can never be confirmed as the literal truth. But our admission that factual knowledge is relative is counterbalanced by the reassuring presence of an assumed realm of matter, and by the pragmatic adequacy of our symbolic knowledge of mind-independent facts about this realm, as expected by common sense. None of this can be proved, but it should be assumed; a mind-independent physical realm can be assumed without philosophical dishonour.

Searle's arguments are meant to refute fact-relativism, but I question them insofar as they repudiate the relativism of knowledge. Fact-relativism is false but it is not shown to be false by claims that our knowledge is perfect. In general, says Santayana, sceptical arguments cannot be proven false. No demonstration can be given of the existence of the world and of sentient beings within that world; but there is adequate justification for *assuming* this, and for circumventing these paralyzing arguments. However, this does not negate sceptical claims that our knowledge of the facts and events in this world will fail to be literally true. Through the above assumption, common sense discourse is restored.

Searle's Critique of Social Constructivism

As described by Searle, the basic idea of Social Constructivism is that "claims to objective truth and knowledge ... are in fact only valid relative to a set of cultural attitudes, or to some other subjective way of perceiving the world" (88). In their attacks on this position, he and Boghossian are expressing the voice of common sense. Searle points to the utter implausibility of such an account. Here are two of their favourite examples, as drawn from the literature, which illustrate the excesses to which the theory has led (88).

One example pits the scientific claim that American natives arrived on this continent from Siberia by crossing the Bering Strait, against the Zuni traditional claim that they descended from the Buffalo and came from inside the earth. Some relativists have asserted that the two theories are “equally valid”; but this is patently false, as say both philosophers on our behalf. The former theory but not the latter has considerable scientific evidence in its favour. More egregious still is a second example: scientific evidence suggests that the pharaoh Ramses II died of tuberculosis, but some relativists actually claim that this is impossible since tuberculosis had not been discovered in his day.

Something is surely amiss when examples like these are taken seriously. Searle believes that any philosophy which fails to reject these as faulty has strayed too far from common sense to be credible. In order for their system of thought to be of some help in their leading a fruitful life, philosophers must acknowledge their place as agents in a natural world of independent facts.³

Searle has little sympathy for the sceptical turn of mind, as is shown by his explanations for sceptical positions. As does Boghossian, he feels that political correctness is an important factor for the constructivists. As well, he suggests that these may prefer their theory because they find it liberating: “If we do not like a fact that others have constructed, we can construct another that we prefer” (88). Searle argues further that the relativists are driven by a deceptive vision that prevents them from accepting the force of these and other refuting arguments. The adherents of Social Constructivism “typically have a deep metaphysical vision and detailed refutations do not address this vision” (89). He appears to be saying that this vision is compelling and prevents a person from coming to evident rational conclusions on the subject.

It is a vision according to which all of our knowledge claims are radically contingent because of their historical and social circumstances. According to this vision, all of us think within particular sets of assumptions, and we always represent the world from a point of view, and this makes objective truth impossible. (92)

For anyone who makes a careful distinction between knowledge and truth, as the constructivists have not, this last phrase about truth is painful to read and its alleged inference from what precedes it unreasonable; and to this extent I agree with Searle’s condemnation of this relativist vision. However, if these last six words are dropped and the spurious inference eliminated, the remainder is less bothersome. For my part, I question whether philosophers can make a legitimate claim that their knowledge goes beyond constraints of this kind, even in the case of scientific knowledge. We have no license to claim that our pronouncements about the world around us are necessary and absolutely true; twentieth century physics has supported doubts of this kind.⁴ My main point here is that knowledge is one thing and truth is another, that the social constructivists have blurred the distinction, and that Searle is not as clear about it as he might be.

The notion that our knowledge claims and even scientific statements are suspect may conflict somewhat with common sense — but this might be accepted through argument. What in this passage is unalterably offensive to a common sense philosopher is the phrase “makes objective truth impossible”. Is it not evident that no philosophical argument can render truth impossible? For Santayana, truth should be

³ Searle is no more prepared to abandon the notion of independent facts than he is to abandon the category of consciousness. Excellent.

⁴ At the end of the paper I shall sketch an account of how the success of physical theory might be explained, despite this handicap.

seen as a common sense category, despite the fact that it encompasses the claim that each truth is absolute. It is difficult to define the proper carriers of truth — some say propositions, and he says only that truth is an “ideal record”. Nevertheless, truth as Santayana sees it is not some remote metaphysical assumption; the philosophical concept of an absolute truth is obtained as a clarification of the common sense one. The status of truth is determined when one assumes the existence of the physical cosmos. It is merely the ideal record of the events that take place in that cosmos; once a cosmos of physical things and events in which we find ourselves is accepted in common sense, the truth about it can be accepted as a part of common sense discourse without making any further existential assumptions. The notion that in making knowledge claims we are “constructing” these facts, as maintained by this school of relativists, is a false notion, since the facts and the truth do not in any way depend on what we think there is. How do we know all this? It must be assumed, and is justified by the fruits of actions made under its assumption. A rescue for the common sense approach favoured by Searle lies in making an explicit naturalistic assumption; I don’t believe that his strategy of trying to refute the relativists on their own terms is viable.

Rorty’s sceptical arguments

Rorty’s arguments and their reliance on language-games are illustrated by his treatment of one of the major obstacles to the theory of social constructivism — the existence of facts and objects that existed before society came into being. How can a later society carry out the construction of these earlier facts? To common sense, it is obvious that facts from the past are independent of human construction, whatever might be the case with current facts; but for Rorty our beliefs are only reflections of the language-games we have adopted. When seen from within a game that embraces common sense, the independent existence of the past will be evident; but there are other different games that we might adopt for which this is not obvious:

Given that it pays to talk about mountains, as it certainly does, one of the obvious truths about mountains is that they were here before we talked about them. If you do not believe that, you probably do not know how to play the usual language-games which employ the word “mountain.” But the utility of those language-games has nothing to do with the question of whether Reality as It Is In Itself, apart from the way it is handy for human beings to describe it, has mountains in it. (Rorty as cited on 89)

Rorty pays scant attention here to common sense belief that this or any society has a temporal setting within a natural world, thinking to circumvent this consideration by entrenching himself in some language game.

Actually, Rorty offers a weakened version of the doctrine of social constructivism. He does not deny the causal independence of things; what he does deny is their “representational” independence (See Boghossian 43). For him, the key point is the impossibility of proper discourse about things or events prior to our formulating a language for speaking about them. He is an “antirepresentationalist”, who insists “that there is no description-independent way the world is, no way it is under no description” (*ibid.* 42). His claim to “relativize the facts” rests firmly on the language-game played by the society in which he finds himself. He rebels against the phrase “quite apart from how we describe them”, and refuses to consider facts or situations until they have received descriptions — that is to say until they are relativized and a start is made on some appropriate language-game. His official position is that it makes no sense to speak of things until they are properly situated in a language-game.

There are in Santayana's writings good reasons for questioning Rorty's position. I look at these below, but first consider the shortcomings of the two main arguments Searle gives in refutation of Rorty's relativist position. For each of these, I point to counter-arguments that one might expect from Santayana, who believes that we can give no final refutation of the sceptic. I only give clues from Santayana's writings that could lead to a refutation, and do not develop an argument based on these principles. Both are quite general. The first is from Boghossian and is endorsed by Searle. It falls into the wide-ranging class of arguments asserting that the sceptic contradicts himself. The Social Constructivist, Boghossian says, is making a comprehensive global claim that *all* his assertions are relative; and this sweeping claim leads the constructivist to inconsistency. I find this argument shaky, because I don't find Rorty making explicit global assertions about *all* his claims. As far as I can see, we can portray Rorty as responding "I doubt that" to certain knowledge claims, without himself making positive claims. For those who rely on language games, everything is conditional and no fully positive claims can arise. If this correctly describes Rorty's position, then the refutation fails. For Santayana, a carefully formulated sceptical position is proof against arguments of this kind.

The sceptic is not committed to the implications of other men's language; nor can he be convicted out of his own mouth by the names he is obliged to bestow on the details of his momentary vision (SAF 15).

This claim has its justification in the pages of SAF; and when Boghossian and Searle argue that Rorty is making a global claim about all his assertions, I believe they are putting words into his mouth.

Searle also offers a second criticism of Rorty which for him reveals the chief defect in the constructivist theory: "The deep objection to relativizing is that the original claims have been abandoned and the subject has been changed" (90). We make the factual claim that native Americans arrived by crossing the Bering Strait, and we are prepared to defend this claim; but the relativist imposes a radical shift on the discussion, without any authority to do so, and launches a wholly different examination of the question whether we hold or do not hold some psychological theory of interpretation. Searle concedes that every statement or assertion is made "from a point of view and typically within certain sorts of ways of thinking". But the constructivist wants to make this point of view the chief issue in place of the actual question in dispute. He strongly objects: "the statements and assertions do not thereby become about the points of view or the ways of thinking. If you treat them as being about the point of view and way of thinking you get a different statement altogether" (90). His point is that there are established ways of settling the claim as originally stated, but that this unjustified shift casts aside the accumulated wisdom that bears on the real issue in question. I agree that sceptical arguments may indeed impose such a shift; however, the sceptical arguments may be legitimate ones, in which case Searle's objections to this shift would be ill-founded.

It may help here to appeal to some terminology of Santayana. Searle feels that he has legitimate instruments at his disposal in solving his problem, and he is open to criticisms based on these instruments, so long as nobody changes the subject. He is prepared to follow what Santayana calls *empirical criticism of knowledge* in the justification of his claims.

In the tangle of human beliefs, as conventionally expressed in talk and in literature, it is easy to distinguish a compulsory factor called facts or things from a more optional and argumentative factor called suggestion or interpretation ... in the direction of fact we come much sooner to a stand, and feel that we are safe from criticism. To reduce conventional

beliefs to the facts they rest on ... is to clear our intellectual conscience of voluntary or avoidable delusion. ... To reduce conventional belief to the recognition of matters of fact is empirical criticism of knowledge. (SAF 3)

Criticism of the empirical kind describes, very roughly, the level on which Searle wishes to evaluate a claim to knowledge. He is keenly aware of the compulsory nature of fact in human belief and is prepared for criticism of his claims to empirical knowledge. But surely, he holds, there are well-known reliable techniques for settling the issues that arise. He might refuse to give up his belief in an independent realm of facts, on the grounds that among philosophical arguments none are sufficiently trustworthy to dislodge this belief. He might ask: how could we function in this world if we seriously doubt that it consists of compulsory facts? He is not a critic in any radical sense — rather he is the voice of common sense, unwilling to forfeit the traditional place that science and philosophy have in guiding us through a realm of facts whose independence from him he cannot doubt. We might say, loosely speaking, that he argues at the level of a common sense empirical criticism without sceptical overtones.

However, our empirical knowledge *is* open to cogent sceptical criticism. Unless he can demonstrate that empirical methods do lead to a sure representation of the truth, he must respond to a more radical questioning of his position; this Santayana calls *transcendental criticism of knowledge*.

The more drastic this criticism is, and the more revolutionary the view to which it reduces me, the clearer will be the contrast between what I find I know and what I thought I knew. But if these plain facts were all I had to go on, how did I reach those strange conclusions? What principles of interpretation, what tendencies to feign, what habit of inference were at work in me? For if nothing in the facts justified my beliefs, something in me must have suggested them. To disentangle and formulate these subjective principles of interpretation is transcendental criticism of knowledge. (SAF 4)

These sceptical arguments do indeed bring a change in the questions that are examined, and are meant specifically to undermine our allegiance to solid fact. While Searle does not tangle with arguments of this kind, Rorty thrives on a brand of transcendental criticism, since it is surely right to see his appeal to language-games in this light.

On the logical side, Santayana is unambiguous: there is no valid defence against transcendental criticism, nothing that might stop or impede its devastating inroads on every claim to knowledge. If the critic is resolute, the end result will be the extreme form of scepticism he calls “solipsism of the present moment”. The function of transcendental criticism, he says, is to challenge the empirical critic to produce any knowledge of fact whatsoever:

And empirical criticism will not be able to do so.... Thus transcendental criticism, used by a thorough sceptic, may compel empirical criticism to show its hand. It had mistaken its cards, and was bluffing without knowing it. (SAF 4-5)

Critics who are casting doubt on a common sense claims to knowledge, then, do indeed turn away from the original claim and the established way of settling this claim. In this way, doubt is shed on those original claims, doubts that are not resolved by an appeal back to those established methods. Searle is right to notice this change of topic, but the change does not disqualify critics’ arguments, and indeed is the source of their plausibility. Searle’s two main arguments, then, are open to doubts.

I return to Rorty’s blunt assertion above (from 89), that if we do not believe that mountains were here before we talked about them, this merely means that we do not know how to play the usual language-game. With some disgust, Searle comments:

Let us agree that we have the word “mountain” because it pays to have such a word. Why does it pay? Because there really are such things, and they existed before we had the word and they will continue to exist long after we have all died. To state the facts you have to have a vocabulary. But the facts you state with that vocabulary are not dependent on the existence or usefulness of the vocabulary. The existence of mountains has nothing whatever to do with whether or not it “pays to talk about mountains.” And it does not help Rorty’s case to sneer at the existence of mountains as “Reality as It Is In Itself,” because insofar as that expression is meaningful at all, it is obvious that Reality as It Is In Itself contains mountains. (89)

Why does it pay to have the word ‘mountain’ and to believe in the existence of mountains? because, says Searle, there are really are such things. As it stands, this is ineffectual as argument, but it comes close to being a stronger one than either of the two discussed above. It would not require much of a change for this to become an argument to the best explanation. What better reason for this belief could there be than the existence of the mountains? I note that an argument to the best explanation can be replaced by a very similar argument based on hypothesis, and this is the approach of Santayana.

I note two other things about this passage. Searle complains that, although the issue at hand is whether or not there existed mountains in the past, the critic turns to another issue that “has nothing to do with” it. This exemplifies his second main objection to Rorty’s ideas: he finds unacceptable this change of topic. I note also that in this passage Searle rejects the notion of the thing-in-itself, or at least indicates that he is wary about using the concept. I turn to this notion in the next section. So long as it is seen as a common sense concept and not a metaphysical monstrosity, it could bolster his position. Some consider this notion, along with truth and other concepts lacking empirical definitions, to be unsuitable for serious philosophy. However, there is no reason for common sense philosophers without scientific leanings to accept this constraint, and to exclude from consideration concepts that cannot be defined precisely in terms of immediate experience according to scientific standards. Without such concepts, as it seems to me, it becomes difficult to give a common sense account of how things are.

Reality as It Is In Itself

On numerous occasions, Santayana makes a brief statement of his naturalistic assumptions; this one is from *Dominations and Powers*:

THAT mankind is a race of animals living in a material world is the first presupposition of this whole inquiry. I should be false to myself and to the reader if I did not assume it. (DP 6)

I shall refer to this simple, basic, common sense, naturalistic model as NAT. Although he places himself within this model, it is expressed entirely in the third-person. When he speaks in general terms of things and events in the realm of matter, he is not referring to remote and obscure metaphysical entities, but is merely speaking in a common sense way about existing things. He intends to refer to reality as it is in itself without claiming to have exact knowledge of it.

Santayana argues that this common sense model is supported, legitimately supported, by something other than rational argument — animal faith. Were there a valid philosophical demonstration supporting it, this would of course have absolute priority; but, as he argues at length, no such logical proof can be expected. We must assume as rational agents what we already believe through animal faith, that we are participants in an existing physical cosmos. Although we have no direct justification, this assumption is amply confirmed by the fruits of action that is taken under its

guidance. Without our belief that we are interacting with things and events in a physical cosmos, intelligent action would be unachievable, and this is justification enough for the hypothesis.

In the second half of *Scepticism and Animal Faith* and at the beginning of *The Realm of Matter*, Santayana offers reconstructive arguments that give a fuller idea of the consequences of assuming NAT; so it is useful to give a quick summary of these. In his analysis of natural knowledge in SAF, Santayana reasons that anyone making a knowledge claim is assuming an existing substance of some kind. In various systems, this can be many things — for instance a God or the Absolute or the physical cosmos. According to Santayana’s lights, impartial argument leads to the latter, and in RM he makes his case that substance is matter.

Santayana reconstructs our common sense beliefs according to the principle that we must *assume* just those things and properties as are required by us for fruitful agency, as prompted by animal faith. No principle could be more favourable to common sense. We must make minimal assumptions that will serve as the background for our actions, and in our discourse these are taken to be the intrinsic properties of the real physical world. He is led to draw this conclusion: “A world in which action is to occur must be external, spatial, and temporal, possessing variety and unity” (RB 202).

The assumption NAT might be said to establish a language-game, if Rorty would prefer this; but it would be the dominant language-game seen by Santayana as the ever-present foundational principle of his natural philosophy, less easily dropped than the typical language game. The statement NAT is given in language that is less than scientifically precise, but it can be helpful in thinking of reality in a general way. I believe it would lose its function if one were to formalize it; such a cursory mode of discourse is widely used and indeed it is hard to avoid some appeal to this kind of imaginative picture. It is unsurprising that we find Searle speaking in this manner, for instance when he speaks of a vision controlling the thinking of relativists. However, it is more of a shock to find Rorty appealing to this kind of discourse.

Rorty treats with scorn the notion of things in themselves, and he mocks the idea of “Reality as It Is In Itself” on the grounds that we cannot speak of such indefinite existences coherently. He insists that it is only after we choose some well-defined language-game to work in that our discourse makes sense. However, this insistence betrays a certain failure in self-understanding, since he actually comprehends this kind of discourse very well and on occasion appeals to it in his own arguments. Consider this one instance of two sentences from a long passage cited by Boghossian in which Rorty speaks of his “antirepresentationalist” position on page 43 of *Fear of Knowledge*.

... none of us antirepresentationalists have ever doubted that most things in the universe are causally independent of us. What we question is whether they are representationally independent of us.

Perhaps Rorty sees these two sentences as offhand and informal and separate from his more weighty sceptical propositions. However, what I see in these is some sanity; these remarks are at exactly the imprecise level of Santayana’s own assumptions of naturalism and an external cosmos. There is a universe with things in it and with causal relations among them. It is hard to see these as other than basic to his position — they are surely more than casual remarks. The statements are clear and make good sense despite their unspecified reference to causally related things and to an unexplained universe. I believe that the passage conflicts with his claim that it is incoherent to speak of reality as it is in itself. As is Santayana, he is prepared to talk in these terms and to use them to clarify the basic setting for his discussion.

In this passage, although he doesn't quite say so, it appears that Rorty is ready to *assume* a universe of causally related things; this is at least suggested by his statement that he has never doubted causal independence and by the fact that he makes no effort to justify the two sentences. It would clarify his text if he were to follow Santayana's lead and say explicitly that there is no logical justification for this belief in universe, things, and causality; they must be assumed. However, such a clarification would clash with his conceit that one can probe no deeper in comprehending our human predicament than the level of socially constructed language games.

Rorty might say that with the two sentences he is merely launching a fresh language-game. All well and good, but this would not change the fact that he is embracing as coherent the language of things in themselves in a common sense interpretation. And it is within this setting of the causally independent things in the universe that Rorty places the chief sceptical problem. If we take him at his word, he is committed to a universe of things — in fact a universe of things-in-themselves, although he would surely deny this; but how might we begin to speak coherently of these in the absence of true representations of them? How might we deal with these things in discourse without knowing at least some of their intrinsic properties? It is exactly here that he locates his scepticism. Even if I am incorrect in the critique I have just given of Rorty, the problem he is raising still remains and still calls for a solution.

Santayana recognizes the problem and offers his own solution in *Scepticism and Animal Faith*. He has found it necessary to assume a universe of facts, things, and events. But if these are given to us in a vague statement like NAT, there is missing some transition from this to more precise language. Things must be given some properties before anyone can single them out, refer to them, and deal with them sensibly. They must be picked out from the chaotic flux, and this for Rorty is a major obstacle. Santayana answers that these are picked out by "animal presumption". He gives as an example a small child gazing at the moon. The object of the child's attention is unmistakable: "The attitude of his body in pointing to the moon ... *identifies the object* of his desire and knowledge *in the physical world*."⁵ As with knowledge claims in general for him, an object is hit upon by animal faith, and it is only afterwards that we give the object some preliminary description, and perhaps strive to improve on this description.

Reference to things, as defined by animal presumption, will not lead to literal truth about well-defined objects; nor does it need to do so. Seen from Santayana's perspective, claims to natural knowledge can never count as assured literal truths. They can claim only to be more or less accurate accounts of that truth. Searle's attempts to invalidate sceptical arguments hold little promise, and I think he might better *assume* an independent universe of which we are a part, a universe that is not relative in any sense, as the background for knowledge claims which are symbolically adequate rather than literally true.

On the validity of physics

The doctrine of social constructivism has arisen in the context of the social sciences. However a special question arises about the physical sciences, which can boast such extraordinary success in their predictions and theories. Is there not some explanation for these accurate predictions? Animal faith is ill-suited to serve this purpose. However, I think that Santayana's special ontology and willingness to speak of things

⁵ See SAF 173. The charming example is given in SAF 172ff, and is a good illustration of his pragmatic view of knowledge.

as they are in themselves would permit him to revive, plausibly, a promising idea from the past that was abandoned by empiricist philosophers of science.⁶ The proposal I have in mind is based on the opposition in science between laws and theories. On many occasions in the past, well-established theories have been found wanting and were supplanted by radically different new conceptions. Experience with earlier theories leads us to question today's theories; perhaps they rest on concepts and definitions that fail to describe the true nature of things. These theories are so amazingly successful that it is hard not to see them as absolutely true, but we are nevertheless led to demote them to the level of problematic human constructions. However, physical laws, or so it seems at first, do not have this inherent instability. We now have a radically different notion of gravitation today than we did earlier with Newton's theory. Still, the experimentally confirmed gravitational attraction has remained the same (apart from changes that went beyond the scope of experiment in Newton's day). Surely we have procedures that give us sound results that are unaffected by theoretical changes. Alas, this proposal was abandoned, since the apparent stability of these laws might be corrupted by the fact that they are stated in the terms of the theory; if the theory is unreliable then so must be the laws.

Had Santayana addressed the problem of theory change as posed in the philosophy of science, he might have answered this objection and breathed life back into the proposal by pointing to the proper opposition. Against empiricist dogma, he has argued that we can indeed refer directly to physical things and do so even in the absence of exact definitions of these. In the same way, we must be able to refer directly to physical regularities; and it is these, the "regularities-in-themselves", that must be opposed to theory and not the stated laws. When these regularities are formulated into laws, this will inevitably bring in suspect theoretical concepts; but the actual repeatable physical experiment and its actual physical results are quite independent of theory. These results are events that can be repeated indefinitely often, so long as the experiments are carried out under the same conditions. A genuine physical regularity is brought to light in these results. In an empiricist setting, it is difficult or impossible to make the required distinction between a natural regularity and the stated law that purports to represent this regularity; but in the broader context of Santayana's conceptual scheme this is entirely natural. Once this wholly legitimate (although difficult) distinction is made, the proposal is restored; there reappears a plausible account of theory change and indeed an account of the validity of physics.

Physical theory may be capricious, but physical regularities as put on display in repeatable experiments are stable and unchanging; and these latter can be fruitfully opposed to unstable theory (where the laws are seen as a part of the theory). This revised proposal is expressed in the same kind of imprecise language as the statement of NAT above; and it is a good example of an important statement whose function is destroyed under any attempt to make it more precise, for such an attempt would necessitate the formulation of regularities into laws, and this would bring in suspect theory.

Thus discourse about unspecified regularities helps to explain the supremacy of experimental physics, just as discourse about unspecified things and events permits a general statement of naturalism in which a proper contrast can be drawn between relative knowledge and absolute truth.

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⁶ See my paper, "Laws and Tropes" in the 2009 number of this *Bulletin*.

The Genteel Tradition Revisited

“The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy” and *Character and Opinion in the United States*

Edited by James Seaton, with reprints of Santayana’s texts and four essays
New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009

This volume takes two pieces by Santayana — the essay “The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy” and the book *Character and Opinion in the United States* — and surrounds them, with a careful introduction on the one side, and a collection of high-spirited commentaries on the other. The result is a new edition of Santayana’s classic critiques of American life and culture with insightful commentary that is frank and accessible, but also deep enough to engage serious readers of Santayana.

Those who know Santayana well could be excused for skipping the introduction and proceeding straightaway to the pleasures of Santayana’s elegant prose and apt criticism — in these respects, ‘The Genteel Tradition’ and *Character and Opinion* are exemplars of his inimitable style. But this would be a mistake. While it is true that James Seaton begins with a series of facts aimed at the novice, his “Introduction” proceeds speedily to something of greater substance; namely, a historical overview of the place of Santayana in American intellectual history and the place of these particular works within his oeuvre. Seaton is right to remind us of the unusual emphasis on aesthetic concerns that pervades Santayana’s works, since it is as a thinker with this predilection that Santayana offers his criticism of both liberalism and American culture. For those more familiar with Santayana’s straightforwardly philosophical works, such as the *Realms of Being*, identifying the aesthetic concern as a unifying strand helps to bring the works in this volume into a kind of union with those more abstract works — providing a glimpse at a systematicity in Santayana’s opus that often goes unnoticed.

The reader new to Santayana will be well-primed for ‘The Genteel Tradition’ by Seaton’s introduction. Presented here in its essay form, ‘The Genteel Tradition’ was a lecture given at the University of California at Berkeley in August of 1911, when the still-young Santayana had already decided to leave Harvard — and America — behind. As nearly all the contributors here note, Santayana remained an outsider despite having immigrated to Boston at a tender age. The distance he deliberately maintained between himself and his academic homeland is certainly one of the reasons that Santayana is able to offer a nearly clinical assessment of American life, which he presents as a tale of ism’s and their interplay in the collective consciousness of a nation still developing its identity. En route to his identification of the central tension in American thought, Santayana considers philosophical Calvinism, transcendentalism, romanticism, and idealism each in its own right, as well as components of the genteel tradition.

Despite his detachment, Santayana is rarely harsh. As Seaton points out in his essay, ‘The Genteel Tradition’ is not a wholesale condemnation, nor is it about gentility as such. Roger Kimball echoes this point, remarking that it is by its role, rather than its substance, that we identify the genteel tradition. ‘The indispensable thing’, Kimball says, ‘turns out to be the moralizing pressure towards conformity, not the substance of the governing strictures’ (179).¹ In Santayana’s America, the

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all references refer to the volume under review.

substance of the genteel tradition is an unsteady marriage of transcendentalism and Calvinism that has been kept alive by the academy, 'for want of anything equally academic to take its place' (18). Transcendentalism had been rendered false in this formula by being treated as the foundation of a system, rather than a method; and the attitude of 'agonized conscience' that had buttressed philosophical Calvinism had been eroded by the optimism of life in the New World. Hence, this 'hereditary philosophy ha[d] grown stale', and was being steadily undermined by the 'expression of the instincts, practice, and discoveries of the younger generations' (4). This struggle between tradition and innovation is the struggle that Santayana places at the centre of American life.

Santayana ends 'The Genteel Tradition' in typical fashion, by praising nature and extolling the life of the mind. By being open to nature, he suggests, his audience might find themselves freed from 'the yoke of this genteel tradition', freed 'to play and to worship, to take yourselves simply, humbly, for what you are, and to salute the wild, indifferent, non-censorious infinity of nature' (19). Although Santayana acknowledges that there will always be a genteel tradition — it 'cannot be dislodged', only discovered — he maintains that by revealing the tradition as it is, we create the possibility of choosing otherwise, of traversing the intellectual world in a different direction (17). In his address to young philosophers in California, Santayana is sounding the death knell of the genteel tradition of early America.

He was prepared to sound the knell elsewhere too, as the reader will discover in the longer of the two works included in this volume, *Character and Opinion in the United States*. *Character and Opinion* also began as a series of lectures, this time given to audiences in Britain in the aftermath of the first World War. Upon its publication as a book, Santayana added the following disclaimer:

I have no axe to grind, only my thoughts to burnish, in the hope that some part of the truth of things may be reflected there; and I am confident of not giving serious offence to the judicious, because they will feel that it is affection for the American people that makes me wish that what is best and most beautiful should not be absent from their lives. (23)

As Kimball puts the point, Santayana serves up both affection and admonition (178), which stays true to the brand of cultural criticism offered in 'The Genteel Tradition'. This is no accident; many of the ideas introduced in the earlier work are reconsidered here, often in greater depth. So Seaton offers good advice when he suggests that the two should be read together (161).

The first chapter of *Character and Opinion* situates the reader in the America of Santayana's recollections, where Calvinism has lost its hold on the hearts and minds of the people but idealism remains nonetheless orthodox, and where the occasional instinctual materialist is failing to make any significant headway (34). Against this background of the larger intellectual culture of the day, Santayana goes on to consider the department of philosophy at Harvard in the decades immediately surrounding the turn of the century. Santayana got on extremely poorly with the President of Harvard during his own tenure there, and this along with his tone towards the 'atmosphere ... of duty' present at the university in those days gives us some indication of why early retirement beckoned to Santayana in the prime of his intellectual life (48).

Still, Santayana seems not to have let his general disdain for the 'incomplete transformation' of Harvard into a place for genuine learning spill over onto his colleagues: his intellectual portraits of William James and Josiah Royce are elegantly crafted reminiscences of two brilliant men who were the shining stars in Harvard's philosophical firmament. Santayana's chapter on James is especially compelling, not least because it contains moments of serious philosophical criticism. Santayana remarks that James' popularity as a philosopher 'does not rest on his best

achievements', but rather on 'somewhat incidental books' (53). Santayana opines that James' most famous essay, 'The Will to Believe', is one such incidental work. He rebuffs its content as follows: 'Believe, certainly; we cannot help believing; but believe rationally, holding what seems certain for certain, what seems probable for probable, what seems desirable for desirable, and what seems false for false' (60). He takes one of James' famous examples as his target — a man being able to jump a chasm because he forms the belief that he can do so — and declares it 'a thought typical of James at his worst' (60). Santayana's point here is a sharp one against a philosopher who takes pride in empiricism: he thinks that James' observation is just false. The man's belief that he could jump the chasm is not the *cause* of his being able to do so, but a *symptom* of that ability. As Santayana puts it, it is 'a rapid and just appreciation of [ability] that has given you your confidence, or at least made it reasonable'. In the end, Santayana dismisses James' voluntarist strategy altogether, declaring that 'Assurance is fatal and contemptible unless it is self-knowledge', and that though it takes courage 'to stick to scientific insights' alone, that is what we ought to do (61). This critique is not limited to the chapter on James, but spills over into Santayana's 'Later Speculations', where he says that although there is a 'genuine application' of the pragmatist theory of truth, that theory 'has been entangled with ... hazardous views ... such as that an idea is true so long as it is believed to be true, or that it is true if it is good and useful' (89). Santayana sees to the problematic heart of James' theory of truth, but does not hesitate to name him America's 'prophet' (63). The final chapter and its central concept, 'English Liberty in America', are much discussed in the commentaries that follow.

After emerging from the grip of Santayana's prose, the reader will find himself facing four essays by way of commentary, each of which is well worth his time. Wilfred M. McClay's 'The Unclaimed Legacy of George Santayana' and Roger Kimball's 'Mental Hygiene and Good Manners: The Contribution of George Santayana' are superficially similar: both authors offer a bit of biography, contrast Santayana with other critics of American intellectual culture, and suggest that his loss of stature in academia and elsewhere is on its way to being remedied. But this is where the similarity ends. McClay's essay takes up the difficulty of approaching an author with Santayana's style and searches out possible reasons for Santayana's neglect since his death. These include Santayana's attempts to write for the lay folk at a time when philosophy was becoming highly institutionalized, and the self-professed 'un-American' content of his work.²

By contrast, Kimball's contribution celebrates Santayana's style, rather than considering the problems it presents. His assessment of 'The Genteel Tradition' is clear and helpful, and Kimball also offers his take on Santayana's philosophical relation to other figures, including William James and Friedrich Nietzsche. With respect to the former, Kimball helpfully disambiguates an oft quoted remark by James (a quote which the reader may note is used by McClay) that paints Santayana's work as the 'perfection of rotteness' (181).

James Seaton's essay, 'The Genteel Tradition and English Liberty', continues the thoughtful analysis begun in his introduction. An interesting point Seaton makes is that we, too, have a genteel tradition, an academic point of view deeply out of step

² Glenn Tiller has suggested that another likely reason is that because Santayana left the academy early, he did not have the same opportunity to influence year after year of students – students who might later have protected the legacy of his thought. See Tiller, 'George Santayana: ordinary reflection systematized', in *The Oxford Handbook of American Philosophy*, ed. Cheryl Misak, Oxford University Press.

with the way the lay person thinks today. In his view, our genteel tradition is postmodernism, which is marked by the same kind of tension present in the academic idealism of Santayana's day; this time, the tension is between radical skepticism about knowledge and an apparently foundationless moral certitude (164). Seaton also contrasts English liberty, which requires compromise and a certain basis of shared commitments, with absolute liberty. In *Character and Opinion*, Santayana claimed that English liberty dug its roots deep into the American soil, and Seaton explores the reasons why this view of freedom, which makes adaptation possible in a way that the conception of freedom attached to absolute liberty cannot, is so well-suited to American life — and, in Santayana's view, worthy of emulation elsewhere (168).

The most intriguing essay in the volume is John Lachs' 'Understanding America', which is less biographical, less effusive, and more challenging (although Lachs, too, affirms the importance of Santayana's legacy as philosopher and cultural critic). Like Seaton, Lachs takes up the strands of Santayana's critique that are tied up with American life today. His project is at least twofold. First, Lachs looks for causal explanations for the phenomenon that immigration from the Old World to the New frequently serves to diffuse old conflicts. In his assessment, the explanation that seems most likely is that the process of immigration involves a shift in one's view of freedom that allows for, or even demands, cooperation. Many new Americans come from cultures where absolute liberty is prized, while — as Santayana argues in *Character and Opinion* — the view of liberty firmly entrenched in the cultural context of the United States is that of English liberty (155 ff). And second, Lachs offers a critique of Santayana's Stoic view that a life of contemplation and the attainment of wisdom should be the aims of every human being.³ Lachs thinks that the demand that a person's life can be valuable only if she chooses to 'think deep thoughts' is 'elitist foolishness' — and so implicitly rejects any attempt to generalize the closing of 'The Genteel Tradition', where Santayana abjures us to be 'frankly human' by being 'content to live in the mind' (159; 20).

All four commentators share the goal of showcasing Santayana's tremendous aptitude for cultural criticism and philosophical thought to a new generation of readers. In this respect, their essays mark a superior addition to the contemporary secondary literature on a thinker whose rediscovery promises to be a source of pleasure to many.

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³ One might object that Santayana's view can't be considered properly Stoic since he places such great emphasis on pleasure (though the pleasures he recommends are of the supposed 'higher' sort available to the wise), or that in practice he is actually closer to Aristotle's view of the good life than to that of the Stoics. After all, Santayana saw the need to attain financial security before leaving Harvard, indicating that he found a certain amount of material good necessary to pursue a life of contemplation.

John McCormick: 1918-2010

John Owen McCormick, Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Comparative Literature at Rutgers University, died 1 April 2010 in York, England. He was born in Thief River Fall, Minnesota, 20 September 1918. Because the Great Depression had brought economic ruin to his family, he left home to seek work at the age of 14. He rode the rails finding jobs where he could and after arriving in New Orleans took work aboard a ship. This latter position involved him in the delivery of weapons to Loyalist forces in the Spanish Civil War. By 1941 he had returned to his home state and earned a Bachelor's degree from the University of Minnesota.

With the United States' entry into World War II, McCormick volunteered to serve in the Navy. His college degree and previous seagoing experience resulted in an officer's commission and then command of an anti-submarine boat.

After the war, the GI Bill allowed McCormick to attend Harvard University where he studied with Perry Miller and earned a PhD in comparative literature in 1951. He then taught American studies in Salzburg, where he met his second wife, the English poet Mairi MacInnes. He soon moved to Berlin where he became the director from 1954 to 1959 of the American Institute of the Free University. He returned to the United States to become Professor of Comparative Literature at Rutgers University in New Jersey.

In 1961, McCormick was a Smith-Mundt Fellow at the National University of Mexico, and he took the opportunity to learn bullfighting. In 1967 he published *The Complete Aficionado*, a book about bullfighting based on his experiences (republished as *Bullfighting: Art, Technique, and Spanish Society*, Transaction Publishers, 1998). Other published works include *Catastrophe and Imagination* (1957), *The Middle Distance: A Comparative Study of American Imaginative Literature, 1919-32* (1971), *Fiction as Knowledge: The Modern Post-Romantic Novel* (1975).

In 1987, McCormick published his well-known work *George Santayana: A Biography* (Knopf; reissued by Transaction Publishers, 2003). This book has introduced many people to Santayana's life and thought and thereby has made an important contribution to the growing appreciation of Santayana's philosophy. But the author's stated motives in writing the book were not missionary ones, rather they "were delight in [Santayana's] character and in his eloquence, agreement with his naturalist philosophy, and joy at the prospect of a man of his stature who refused to puff himself" (xiv).

The same year his Santayana biography appeared, McCormick retired from teaching at Rutgers after twenty-eight years. The next year he moved to England with his wife and worked on, among other projects, compiling Santayana's marginalia (the first of two books, which comprise Volume VI of *The Works of George Santayana*, is due to be published by MIT Press in 2011). In 2001 he published *Seagoing: A Memoir*, and in 2008 *Another Music: Polemics and Pleasures*.

McCormick is survived by his wife, Mairi, and their children, Peter, Antoinette, and Fergus, and by Jonathan, his son from his first marriage.

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Carta desde España

Third International Conference on George Santayana

This conference took place in Valencia, Spain, on 16-18 November, 2009. Three days of talks and discussions in English and Spanish brought together Santayana scholars from the United States, Spain, Italy, Switzerland, Argentina, and Poland. The topics of the presentations covered all aspects of Santayana's work. The main organizers of this event were José Beltrán Llavador (Valencia) and Daniel Moreno Moreno (Zaragoza), as well as Romà de La Calle, the director of MUVIM (Museo de Ilustración y Modernidad in Valencia), where the conference sessions took place, and Vicent Flor; also Sergio Sevilla (Valencia University) and Manuel Garrido (Editor of *Limbo. Boletín Internacional de estudios sobre Santayana*) should be mentioned as academic organizers, along with José Beltrán, of the whole event.

The three main aims of the conference have all been achieved. First, this is a continuation of international conferences on George Santayana which began in Avila, Spain in the year 1992; then came a second in Opole, Poland in 2006; it is to be hoped, that this 2009 conference in Valencia will be followed by a fourth one in the near future. Additionally, the conference has contributed to further cooperation between scholars on both sides of the Atlantic as regards Santayana scholarship and, more generally, to strengthen the philosophical and cultural ties. The second aim, that is the promotion of Santayana's thought has also been achieved; the wonderful and spacious location at MUVIM attracted many students and other listeners coming from the city so that the conference transcended the area of university life and became something more than just an academic event. Finally, the conference attracted many new scholars, mainly from Spain; a strong interest in Santayana by young Spanish scholars was seen and I have a feeling that as regards Santayana scholarship, there is a tendency to shift the balance from works by American scholars in English into works of Spanish speaking scholars writing their works in their native tongue; the growing abundance of interesting works in Spanish has started to be an issue for Santayana scholars who do not read this language. Let me add, that the preparation for the publication of the conference papers is under way.

KRZYSZTOF (CHRIS) PIOTR SKOWRONSKI

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BIBLIOGRAPHICAL CHECKLIST TWENTY-SIXTH 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 Johanna Resler, Santayana Edition, School of Liberal Arts, IUPUI, INDIANAPOLIS IN 46202–5157.

CHRONOLOGICAL LISTING OF PRIMARY SOURCES

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Some Abbreviations for Santayana's Works

Page numbers refer to the critical Santayana Edition, where this exists, or to the Scribner/Constable 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. J. and S. Lachs
POEMS	<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
LETTERS	<i>Santayana Edition</i> Vol. V	RS	<i>The Realm of Spirit</i> . RB Bk IV
LP	<i>The Last Puritan</i>	SAF	<i>Scepticism and Animal Faith</i>
LR	<i>The Life of Reason, or The Phases of Human Progress</i>	SB	<i>The Sense of Beauty</i>
LR1	Vol. 1. <i>Reason in Common Sense</i>	SE	<i>Soliloquies in England and Later Soliloquies</i>
LR2	Vol. 2. <i>Reason in Society</i>	TTMP	<i>Some Turns of Thought in Modern Philosophy</i>
LR3	Vol. 3. <i>Reason in Religion</i>	TPP	<i>Three Philosophical Poets</i>
LR4	Vol. 4. <i>Reason in Art</i>	WD	<i>Winds of Doctrine</i>
LR5	Vol. 5. <i>Reason in Science</i>		