

Overheard in Seville

*Bulletin of the  
Santayana  
Society*

No. 30  
Fall 2012





# *Bulletin of the George Santayana Society*

No. 30 FALL 2012

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*Overheard in Seville*, which appears annually, is formatted and composed for typesetting by the Santayana Edition and is published by Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis.

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# ANNOUNCEMENT

## *The George Santayana Society*

2012

### ANNUAL MEETING

The Society's annual meeting will be held in conjunction with the December meetings of the American Philosophical Association (Eastern Division) at the Marriott Atlanta Marquis in Atlanta, Georgia.

#### Topic

#### *Philosophical Expression and Literary Form*

#### Speakers

##### *Vincent Colapietro*

Pennsylvania State University

"Literary Forms, Heuristic Functions, and Philosophical Fixations:  
Santayana's Emancipatory Example"

##### *John J. Stuhr*

Emory University

"Philosophy, Literature, and Dogma:  
Santayana and the View from Somewhere"

##### *Jessica Wahman*

Dickinson College

"Literary Psychology and Philosophical Method"

#### Chair

##### *Glenn Tiller*

Texas A&M University at Corpus Christi

9:00 A.M. – 12 noon, Saturday, December 29th

# George Santayana Society

## News and Activities

December 2012 will mark two years since the George Santayana Society ratified its constitution and elected a President, Vice-President and Secretary-Treasurer. As stated in the constitution, each of these offices shall be held for two years, renewable. The GSS will therefore hold a vote at its annual meeting to elect new officers or renew these positions. Elections will be determined by a majority of members present and voting. All who are able to attend the annual meeting are encouraged to participate. News of the election results will be announced via email and on the Society's website at the start of the new year.

Apart from the annual meeting of the GSS held this December in conjunction with the eastern division meeting of the American Philosophical Association, the GSS is pleased to announce its participation in several other notable events. On October 30–31 the members of the GSS will participate in the IV International Congress on George Santayana in Rome at Università di Roma Tor Vergata. Information on this event can be found at this website: <http://irca.uniroma2.it/first-page/santayana/>.

Next year marks the 150th anniversary of Santayana's birth. In honor of this event, a special panel discussion on recent Santayana scholarship will take place at the Society for the Advancement of American Philosophy's 2013 annual meeting this coming March 7–9 in Galloway, New Jersey. In addition to the panel discussion, Herman Saatkamp will talk about the establishment of the Santayana Edition, the Santayana Society, and *Overheard in Seville: The Bulletin of the Santayana Society*, which he founded and edited with Angus Kerr-Lawson. Details of this meeting will be posted on the GSS website in the new year. Last, but certainly not least, the 23rd World Congress of Philosophy is scheduled for next August 4–10 in Athens, Greece. Although all the details are not yet finalized, plans are underway for the GSS to have a Society Meeting and present a number of papers. More information on the World Congress of Philosophy can be found at <http://www.wcp2013.gr/>.

Whether or not you are already a member of the George Santayana Society, and whether you are a professor, a student, or simply curious about philosophy, we hope to see you at one or more of the above events. All are welcome to join us in discovering the writings and discussing the philosophy of George Santayana.

GLENN TILLER

# Santayana on Value: Expressivism, Self-knowledge and Happiness<sup>1</sup>

It is widely agreed that Santayana's position in metaethics falls into the non-cognitivist camp.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the textual support for this claim is nigh indisputable:

The cry, *How beautiful!* or *How Good!* may be sincere, and it may be applauded, but it is never true. (RB 479)

In . . . *moral* judgment . . . it is hard to see how there could be any truth. The only truth concerned would be that such a judgment was passed, that it was more or less general and lasting, and more or less passionate. But there would seem to be no conceivable object or reality in reference to which any type of morality could be called *true*. (RB 474).

It has been further suggested that Santayana is best read as an expressivist.<sup>3</sup> Again, the textual evidence is strong:

The word *true* in such a [moral] case is unmeaning, except perhaps as a vague term of praise, a reiteration of some automatic impulse, as if we cried Amen. (RB 474)

Moral terms are caresses or insults and describe nothing. (DL 38–39)

I think that the obvious interpretation here is the right one. But once we accept that interpretation, we must ask Santayana for his response to the problem that faces all expressivist views: how to account for our practice of using moral language as if it is truly propositional, as if it has just the sort of meaning or reference the expressivist would deny it.

I understand this problem as posing two challenges:

- (1) An explanatory challenge: to explain why our moral language takes the form it does; and
- (2) A normative challenge: to offer a verdict regarding whether our use of such language is legitimate.

Santayana's writings offer a detailed response to the explanatory challenge and an explicit, albeit brief, response to the normative challenge. My task in this paper is to set out the first and develop the second; in doing so, I aim to show that Santayana's version of expressivism is capable of responding not only to the challenges posed by our everyday use of moral discourse, but also to more pointed criticisms of expressivism as a whole. Although I do not endorse Santayana's moral theory, I suggest that the contemporary expressivist stands to learn something from Santayana.

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<sup>1</sup>This paper was presented at the 2011 meeting of the George Santayana Society in Washington, DC. I have since revised the text for clarity, and added a number of footnotes to capture the most salient expansions called for by session participants. Thanks also to Ken Boyd, Cheryl Misak, and Hasko von Kriegstein for their thoughtful commentaries on an earlier version of the paper.

<sup>2</sup>See Lachs (1967 [1964]); Sprigge (1995 [1974]); and Tiller (1998) and (2000).

<sup>3</sup>See especially Tiller (1998) and (2000).

## I. Background: Santayana's Affirmation of Expressivism

Before we can understand the solution Santayana offers for the problem of explaining moral discourse, it will be helpful to remind ourselves just what the expressivist is committed to. Expressivism is a species of non-cognitivism, the general view that moral beliefs are not intentional and that moral judgments are not truth-functional. The expressivist version of non-cognitivism further claims that although our form of moral language suggests that moral beliefs and judgments do track matters of fact, our moral talk is really just a way of dressing up our preferences as judgments about the world. We can put the expressivist thesis about moral judgments this way:

Moral judgments are not truth-functional; they may express sincerely held attitudes or preferences but do not have any truth-value, as they do not describe the world but merely express our emotive states.<sup>4</sup>

Clearly, Santayana's remark that the cry, "How good!" may be sincere suggests that moral talk is not utterly vapid; something is expressed in our declaration of moral judgments. It is simply not what we might naively infer it to be based on the propositional form of such utterances — that is, it is not a fact about the world that is captured by our exclamation.

In addition to falling under the umbrella of non-cognitivism, expressivism is often affirmed alongside naturalism, here understood as the view that whatever explanations are on offer for the phenomena in question must appeal to natural (as contrasted with supernatural) facts. It makes sense for these positions to be closely allied: non-cognitivists often appeal to facts of biology or psychology to explain why morality cannot be all that it seems. The problem for expressivism is precisely to say why, given that morality is not all that it seems, not a realm of facts or entities, we talk about it as if it were. Like other non-cognitivists, expressivists tend to appeal to facts about the physical world or about human nature to solve the explanatory challenge presented by our linguistic practices.

We will see that Santayana does just that. Despite the superficially metaphysical bent of his take on everyday experience — he analyses our experience as having elements of four realms of being: essence, matter, truth and spirit — he is a resolute naturalist, and a materialist all the way down. Indeed, Santayana explicitly disclaims speculative metaphysics *qua* 'dialectical physics' in his affirmation of materialism when he says that "I do not profess to know what matter is in itself. . . . But whatever matter may be, I call it matter boldly, as I call my acquaintances Smith and Jones without knowing their secrets" (SAF vii–viii). He describes his "Realms of Being" as "only kinds or categories of things which I find conspicuously different and worth distinguishing" (SAF vi). Thus, it is fair to say that Santayana is no more a metaphysician than the kitchen maid is, for "if belief in the existence of hidden parts and movements in nature be metaphysics, then the kitchen-maid is a metaphysician whenever she peels a potato" (SAF viii).

In conjoining non-cognitivism and naturalism in his view of morality, Santayana offers a metaethical position that fits comfortably into the contemporary rubric. But as we shall see, his solution to the challenges posed by the problem of everyday

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<sup>4</sup>There is a parallel expressivist thesis with respect to belief: moral beliefs are not intentional states about the world, but expressions of our own felt intuitions.

moral discourse suggests a form of expressivism quite different from much of what is on offer today — in large part because, unlike many materialists, Santayana utterly resists the reduction of the other realms of being to that of matter, though they must supervene upon it.<sup>5</sup> With this admittedly swift sketch of some of Santayana’s general commitments in place, let us now consider the resources he offers for the resolution of the problem for expressivism posed by the form of moral discourse.

## II. A Solution to the Explanatory Challenge

Although Santayana really only provides us with the skeleton of a metaethical position, he does offer an explicit response to the explanatory challenge in the posthumously published piece, “The Projection of Values.” A close reading of this text, supplemented by forays into selected other works, gives us an account of why we speak of moral essences as if they were material entities or forces.

The first paragraph of “The Projection of Values” gets straight to the point:

In primitive or poetic thought it is natural that moral essences should be treated as if they had a personal unity and material subsistence (things incompatible at bottom, but loosely projected together into the same object, as into a man). (AFSL 350)

Further:

[M]oral essences are doubly secondary: not only are they mere appearances, like all essences given in intuition, but they are appearances supported by a mass of facts with none of which they have any affinity of essence. (AFSL 350)

This rich paragraph gives us, in an incredibly condensed expression, an indication of what the real basis of moral judgment is and why we are inclined to treat it as something which it is not.

First, it tells us that what we experience directly in moral life are essences, which for Santayana are a distinct form of non-material, non-existent being. Such essences are “mere appearances” precisely because they do not have any physical instantiation. So what does it mean to say that good and evil are mere appearances? They are valuations made by the agent regarding some object, event, or state of affairs; they are our felt responses about how such things stand with respect to our preferences. Because Santayana is not a reductionist, he maintains a separate realm of being for these essences, each of which is “perfectly individual,” “perfectly self-contained and real only by virtue of its intrinsic character” (RB 18).

Next, it tells us that it is “natural” for us to confusedly hypostatize moral essences — to treat them as if they had “material subsistence,” though essences do not. In this passage, Santayana suggests that it is natural because the essences we mistakenly reify in the statement of moral judgments come as part of a package deal (along with matter, truth, and spirit). He makes the same point in his early work, *The Sense of Beauty*, where he also gives an additional reason for our habit of hypostatization:

Man has a prejudice against himself: anything which is a product of his mind seems to him to be unreal or comparatively insignificant. We are satisfied only when we fancy ourselves surrounded by objects and laws independent of our nature. (SB 4)

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<sup>5</sup>This important point resurfaces in the next section.

Because the moral essences impact us so forcefully, we are reluctant to recognize them as products of our own thought, so we tend to hypostatize them. It is natural for us to treat good and evil as if they were caused by things outside of ourselves — but valuation is a human practice, and intuitions of value belong to the realm of essences. They are not material entities, nor do they derive their force from direct correspondence with such entities. Thus, it is a mistaken attribution to project the unified essences we encounter in moral experience onto objects.

Finally, Santayana points out that there is a mass of facts in the vicinity of the essences expressed in moral judgments. This contributes to the confusion by tempting us to suppose that the truths regarding those facts somehow confer objectivity on our moral judgments. The facts in question are facts regarding the material elements involved in the situation leading to the moral judgment, but those facts about the constitution of things are not the central or characteristic element of moral judgments — they belong to a different realm of being, that of matter. Moral judgments respond to facts in the realm of essence, where “the nerve of moral judgment is preference” (RB 473), and all preference is arational (SB 13). Judgments of value, including moral judgments, are characterized by having a “trace of passionate reprobation or of sensible delight,” by having a basis in sensibility (SB 14). Moral judgments navigate us through what Santayana calls “the sad business of life”: “to escape certain dreadful evils to which our nature exposes us, — death, hunger, disease, weariness, isolation, and contempt” (SB 17). This view of the business of life, combined with Santayana’s position that there is no value apart from the appreciation of value and no good apart from the preference for a thing over its opposite or absence, gives us an account of the origin of moral judgments.

Santayana locates that origin in the preferences of an animal vulnerable to certain ills, aware of those ills, and desiring to avoid them, but it is not mere consciousness that creates the possibility of worth. To have value also requires will: “for the existence of good in any form it is not merely consciousness but emotional consciousness that is needed” (SB 13). Thus, the experience of the moral essence evil is had at the level of consciousness in an organism, but is prompted by a disharmony between the animal and its environment. Indeed, internal harmony is all that morality can require, “and if we still abhor the thought of a possible being who should be happy without love, or knowledge, or beauty, the aversion we feel is not moral but instinctive, not rational but human” (SB 134).<sup>6</sup> What we dub “evil” is that which disrupts our physical substratum or impedes the satisfaction of our preferences, preferences also dictated by brute facts about our constitution. This is Santayana’s response to the explanatory portion of the problem presented by the form of moral discourse: we hypostatize the essences of good and evil that we

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<sup>6</sup>This passage points to what I take to be the most serious possible criticism of Santayana’s moral philosophy: it appears to sanction a very radical form of relativism, where what is “moral” is utterly individual, as all that morality can require of the individual is that she pursue her own internal harmony. If there is a response to be made on Santayana’s behalf, it must involve giving our “instinctive” or “human” responses to harmonies of others that jar with our own some normative clout. This will not be an easy task and I make only the briefest gestures in this direction here. It may be, of course, that the most faithful reading of Santayana supports reading him as a radical relativist.

directly experience in response to satisfaction or dissatisfaction of our preferences; in doing so, we cloak moral essences in the language of objectivity.<sup>7</sup>

### III. A Solution to the Normative Challenge

Once armed with an explanation for the propositional structure of moral discourse, the expressivist is faced with another question: so now what? What ought we to do, given what we now know about the basis of our moral intuitions? Two obvious responses to the so-what question suggest themselves. One can:

- (1) Be a moral discourse apologist; or
- (2) Be an eliminative materialist with respect to moral language.

Santayana clearly rejects both of these options. In their place, he offers — but doesn't explicitly develop — a third option:

- (3) Be a poet.<sup>8</sup>

Before developing the third option, which I see as Santayana's suggestive response to the normative challenge, I take a brief look at his reasons for rejecting (1) and (2), which should be of special interest to the contemporary expressivist.

To be a moral discourse apologist would be to offer reasons why, despite affirming the expressivist thesis, we should continue to speak of moral essences as if they were entities. I see Santayana as rejecting this option for at least three key reasons. First, he repeatedly refers to the use of thing-language in moral judgments as "primitive" and "superstitious," and even goes so far as to call "verbal and mechanical proposition[s], that [pass] for judgment[s] of worth . . . the great cloak of ineptitude" (SB 14). Second, to continue to treat elements of the realm of essence as if they belonged to the realm of matter once one has realized the mistake is to fail to appreciate the richness of our experience, and to let the lure of parsimony offered by reductionism obscure the realm of essence entirely. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Santayana stresses that moralists who cling to the notion of absolute moral truth dedicate "all their zeal" to "phrases and maxims that run in their heads and desiccate the rest of their spirit" (RB 482). As a great lover of the life of the spirit, it is highly implausible that Santayana would advocate for any course which would so surely steer people away from that life and towards moral fanaticism.

Despite this robust criticism of our everyday, non-reflective use of moral language, Santayana also rejects (2). He doesn't defend our everyday practice of expressing our preferences in the form of moral judgments, but he doesn't go to

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<sup>7</sup>This is a point at which contemporary expressivists may be inclined to push back against Santayana's account: he insists that essences are not reducible to matter, as the two are categories of experience conspicuous and worth distinguishing. Yet our experience of the moral essences is based on our preferences, which are determined by our animal constitution — so although the reduction of essence to matter may not be straightforward, it is still possible. Santayana's response, I suspect, would be to emphasize the phenomenological difference between encountering an essence vs. encountering matter. Within the expressivist camp, the question then becomes an empirical one: are the aspects of experience Santayana picks out as realms of being conspicuous and worth distinguishing, or not?

<sup>8</sup>For the suggestion, see the "Preface" to *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion*, where Santayana remarks that poetry has a "moral function" (IPR 3).

the extreme of suggesting we abandon the practice altogether, for he allows that “Verbal judgments are often useful instruments of thought” even though it is “not by them that worth can ultimately be determined” (SB 14). Santayana also remarks that “insight into the basis of our preferences . . . would not fail to have a good and purifying influence upon them” (SB 6). The key is to not remain ignorant about what is projected in moral judgments. Once we recognize them as the expression of preferences, moral judgments can become a helpful diagnostic tool. When we resist the reification of good and evil, we learn something about ourselves: about our preferences, and which objects, events, and states of affairs satisfy them.<sup>9</sup>

This brings me to what I suggest is Santayana’s solution to the normative challenge to expressivism, which is option (iii): be a poet. For Santayana’s suggestion as to how we should react practically to our awareness that moral discourse, despite its propositional form, ultimately expresses arational preferences based on our animal nature, I return to the specific wording used in “The Projection of Values.” In the opening passage previously quoted we find the kernel of a response to the normative challenge:

In primitive or poetic thought it is natural that moral essences should be treated as if they had a personal unity and material subsistence. . . . (AFSL 350)

And:

In essence [moral intuitions] are irrelevant to their basis in nature, and for contemplation do not suggest it: which is the reason why primitive and poetic fancy hypostatizes them into existences on their own account. . . . (AFSL 351)

I suggest that in the first of these passages, “primitive or poetic” may also be read as “primitive and poetic,” as the pairing is put in the second passage, and which suggests not two names for a single category of thought or fancy, but two distinct categories. We have already seen that Santayana would not advocate simply sticking with “primitive” thought about morality once we’ve lifted the curtain, but this leaves the category of “poetic” thought as one where we might find that the hypostatization of moral essences in language alone, free of metaphysical freightage, is a useful exercise. And if we take seriously the idea that the poetic use of moral language is an alternative to the primitive use of such language, or simple abandonment of that language, we can bring together two parts of Santayana’s philosophy in a new and interesting way.

To see that appropriately reflective use of the language of moral judgments might constitute poetry, we can consult Santayana’s writing on that topic, “The

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<sup>9</sup>One might protest that we would be learning very mundane things about ourselves: “I like spicy food”; “Being late makes me feel anxious.” Certainly, such truths about our physical constitutions don’t sound particularly important — but if the aim is harmony, small factors as well as large must be balanced. There is also the possibility of learning rather more central things, such as the truth about one’s sexual orientation, which can dramatically alter one’s expectations about what things in life provide pleasure. In my view, the complaint against Santayana here that the elements that need to be brought into harmony aren’t significant enough stems from a more basic complaint: the complaint that achieving internal harmony is not what we really think being moral is about. And the worry about relativism lurks just beneath the surface here, as it seems Santayana may have little to say to someone whose internal harmony strikes us as monstrous, save to express our experience of their harmony as an evil one.

Elements and Function of Poetry.” There, he contrasts prose with poetry. Prose is more transparent, closer to the ground, what we might call the workaday use of language. By contrast, poetry is the use of language freed from the immediate press of practical involvement. He declares that the “great function” of poetry is “to repair . . . the material of experience, seizing hold of the reality of sensation and fancy beneath the surface of conventional ideas” (IPR 270). Since it is precisely the sensation, the impact, of moral essences that we tend to reify, the material of moral experience is in need of repair: once we see the truth of the expressivist thesis, Santayana could say, we gain access to the truth about the impact of moral essences upon us. The conventional idea that they correspond to objective moral entities or forces falls away and we can seize hold of the individual preferences that truly ground our powerful responses to those things which are good to us, or evil to us. Here, I follow Vincent Colapietro, who gives this interpretation of how poetry can confer a new level of meaning on our experience:

When experience is concretely imagined through a work of art to be a *destiny* . . . as poetic experience must be when envisioned by rational imagination, it becomes nothing less than a task of reconciling ourselves with the conditions of our existence. (2009, 563)

Focusing now on our moral experience, our perception of moral essences, I further add that in enabling this reconciliation, poetry can serve what Santayana took to be the imperative of morality, since “All that morality can require is the inward harmony of each life” (SB 134).<sup>10</sup>

Santayana identifies four distinctive elements of poetry that enable it to serve the function of renovating our experience: euphony, euphuism, experiential immediacy, and rational imagination. Each of these elements can be at play in our expression of moral judgments, and their contributions go some way towards explaining the forcefulness of intuitions expressed as moral judgments in tones of blame or approbation.

Euphony, which Santayana defines as the sensuous beauty of words, may be observed in the language used to express the intuitions behind moral judgments. Particularly with children in the process of learning the preferences of others, we can observe strong reactions to the very words that convey praise or blame, shame or appreciation. Words like “bad” or “no” carry a weight of their own in moral judgment; such utterances may evoke a sensible reaction as well as drawing attention to the nature of the object or event so described.

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<sup>10</sup>One other way to take this point is as suggesting that our internal harmony can only be bought by a certain amount of acceptance of the way things are, by reconciling ourselves to the world as it is. This is where one might begin to make a response to the charge of relativism on Santayana’s behalf: achieving internal harmony must involve achieving some degree of reconciliation with our context, and that context includes the conceptions of good and evil held by others like us. As I suggested earlier, fleshing out this interpretation will be a challenge. An alternate possibility, of course, is to accept that Santayana cannot be interpreted in any way except as a relativist, but that his system might support a different metaethical position than the one he has chosen. A foothold into that position is the following quote, from IPR: “Poetry is arrested in its development if it remains an unmeaning play of fancy without relevance to the ideals and purposes of life” (IPR vi). The ideals and purposes of others clearly play a role in our prospects for internal harmony.

Euphuism, the choice of “coloured” words or of rare or elliptical phrases, allows us to replace or reconfigure the conventional uses of words. In doing so, it makes poetry a mechanism for disrupting or undermining superficial understanding. This element, which leads to Colapietro’s comparison of poetry to alchemy, is what enables us to use poetry to redescribe our experience in novel or unusual ways. With respect to moral experience, the attempt to replace unreflective use of the everyday language of moral judgment with less typical terms of expression may force us to consider more carefully what it is that we are trying to express, what our preferences really are. When we describe an object or event as not plainly good or evil, but strive to find more exact or more evocative words, we may find the act of redescription changes our perception of the essences involved, or at least temporarily puts us at a distance from our primitive descriptions — a distance that provokes reflection.

The third element of poetry Santayana describes is experiential immediacy. Poetry is the product of an agent situated in a certain context, and attempts to make a particular experience had by that agent available — to herself, to relive the experience, but also to others. In doing so, it enables us to return to an object or event that provoked strong, pleasant, or disturbing intuitions, and engage with them anew. Perhaps more importantly, it allows us to try to engage with the intuitions of others as expressed in their poetry. In the case of poetry that is self-consciously about the experiences that lead to the expression of moral judgments<sup>11</sup> — we may find ourselves led to question orthodoxy, an outcome Santayana would endorse, despite his genial support of common-sense philosophy.<sup>12</sup>

Experiential immediacy is closely tied to the fourth element of poetry, rational imagination. The poet develops a work to give a particular articulation of an experience in the work itself, one which tries to be adequate to the world, to history, to lived experience. When poetry strives to tether our intuitive responses appropriately by capturing the structure of our experience, it demands of its audience or interpreter that she do justice to the author’s intent. This is perhaps the most compelling element of poetic expression of the language of moral judgments, for to have the rational imagination required to approach a poem in search of the articulation of experience intended by the author is to deliberately adopt an empathetic stance towards the poet’s experience.<sup>13</sup> In the case of experience of moral essences, that empathetic stance is the tonic to moral fanaticism.

As a piece of evidence that Santayana himself might support the resolution to the normative challenge for expressivism that I have begun to develop on his behalf here, I submit the following passage from “The Elements and Function of Poetry”:

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<sup>11</sup> An example is Wilfred Owen’s “*Dulce et Decorum est (Pro Patria Mori)*.”

<sup>12</sup> Consider Santayana’s comparison of established orthodoxies with vegetation: right in the sense that they are right for their climate, their context, but destined to conflict with one another eventually (SAF 7–8).

<sup>13</sup> Angus Kerr-Lawson has captured beautifully what taking the artist seriously may offer us: “novel ways of seeing things, ways which may be aesthetically pleasing, or revelatory of particular emotions, or lead to some new ideal” (1999, 36). Again, the notion that we can access and be moved by one another’s ideals, even if those ideals are ultimately based on individual preferences, gives some plausibility to a modification of Santayana’s metaethics into an expressivism without relativism.

“if we . . . think of poetry as that subtle fire and inward light which seems at times to shine through the world and to touch images in our minds with ineffable beauty, then poetry is a momentary harmony of the soul” (IPR 289). That internal harmony, on his account, is all that morality can require of us. Poetry can help us to achieve it.

#### IV. Expressivism, Self-Knowledge, Happiness

Santayana offers the kernel of a solution to the normative challenge regarding the expressivist’s use of moral language that elevates the acknowledgment of the truth of the expressivist thesis to the position of an avenue to self-knowledge. In order to fully grasp the value of the poetic use of moral language, we must remind ourselves that Santayana’s theory of mind (or spirit) is epiphenomenalist: though the mind occupies its own realm of being, only matter is causally efficacious. This means that the conscious mind faces endless potential for frustration. At various points in his writings, Santayana offers two courses one can take to escape this frustration: one can overcome the frustration of being a finite being with infinite aspirations by living the spiritual life, free of attachments, absolved of the pain of having preferences; or one can get wise to one’s particular constitution and take enjoyment in the things that suit one best. I agree with John Lachs’ closing remarks about the spiritual life in “Santayana’s Moral Philosophy”: it is not clear whether Santayana thought the spiritual life could really be lived at all; if it could, for how long; or, indeed, whether anyone would really want to live much of her life as a spiritual life anyway (1967 [1964], 349). Thus, I suggest we take Santayana’s other suggestion seriously: we pursue happiness in the form of the self-knowledge that leads to wisdom.

Following the Stoics, Santayana sees happiness as the purview of the wise:

Happiness is impossible and even inconceivable to a mind without scope and without pause, a mind driven by craving, pleasure, and fear. (LR5 252)

To be happy. . . . You must have taken the measure of your powers, tasted the fruits of your passions and learned your place in the world and what things in it can really serve you. To be happy you must be wise. (EGP 152)

He also remarks that “Wisdom comes by disillusion” (LR1 202). Grasping the truth of the expressivist thesis certainly involves disillusionment, but it is a disillusion that puts us on the path to self-knowledge: once we admit that what we express in moral judgment is merely our own preferences, we gain a more intimate knowledge of those preferences as well as of what things in the world satisfy them.

Crispin Wright has suggested that the affirmation of expressivism amounts to a “grotesque lapse of rationality” (1996, 4). In Santayana’s subtle system, this is not so. Rather, expressivism opens an avenue to authenticity, to taking ownership of one’s animal nature and doing one’s best to reconcile spirit and the matter in which it is embodied, to harmony. Not only does Santayana provide us with the resources to resolve the explanatory and normative challenges posed by the form of moral discourse, his affirmation of expressivism is offered from within a system where human dignity is not preserved by a realm of objective moral facts or forces, but by realizing, and making peace with, our place in the world.

DIANA HENEY

*University of Toronto*

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# The Importance of God as an Idea

The conflict between religion and science is receiving new attention from thinkers on both sides. According to a view now widely held, the future of religion hinges on the debate between scientists and creationists over the origin of human life, and the outcome of that depends on the existence of God. If God does not exist, then he could not have created the world and humans; believers are wrong and should give up their claims. On the other hand, if God does exist, scientists should admit their mistake and stand aside, allowing religion to play the leading role in explaining the world and human life.

This simplified account serves the needs of critics who reasonably connect some of the violence in the world to the influence of religious beliefs supported by little or no hard evidence. But these critics tend to see religion as engaged in the work of science, searching for truth in the narrow sense of attempting to describe what exists. This approach may have a place in certain debates, but it degrades religion by forcing it to deal with unvarnished facts. Instead of expressing our highest ideals, religion is reduced to competing with science in a race that, to the satisfaction of its opponents, religion is ill-equipped to win. At the same time, human life is greatly impoverished by the loss of religion as a reflection of its meanings and values.

The Spanish/American philosopher George Santayana suggests a promising way of addressing this problem by reminding us that religion is a kind of poetry. “Religion and poetry”, Santayana writes, “are identical in essence, and differ merely in the way in which they are attached to practical affairs. Poetry is called religion when it intervenes in life, and religion, when it merely supervenes on life, is seen to be nothing but poetry.”<sup>1</sup> Santayana concludes that religion is better off as poetry that does not attempt to deal with matters of fact. “For the dignity of religion, like that of poetry . . . lies precisely in its ideal adequacy, in its fit rendering of the meanings and values of life, in its anticipation of perfection; so that the excellence of religion is due to an idealization of experience which, while making religion noble if treated as poetry, makes it necessarily false if treated as science.”<sup>2</sup>

Religion that is “nothing but poetry” will seem profoundly unsatisfying to those for whom all that is important in religion hangs on proving the existence of God. Religious dogmatists and the scientists who oppose them agree that religion attempts to describe existence. The conflict between them arises only because the dogmatist thinks the attempts successful, while the scientist sees them as unsuccessful. Thus, the notion of religion as “nothing but poetry” will seem tantamount to retreat and failure to the dogmatist. He is understandably worried that religion as poetry cannot provide the same or equivalent comforts as dogmatic religion. At the same time, living in an age of science, he is bombarded by its findings, many of which all but refute his dogmas.

If Santayana is right that religion is really a form of poetry and that it is better off making no claims about matters of fact, scientists must pay for their “victory” over religion by admitting they did not know enough about their enemy to aim their

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<sup>1</sup>George Santayana, *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion* (New York: Scribner’s, 1900), v.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., v–vi.

arrows at its heart; their best shots merely grazed the outer edges of their target. The outcome is better for religious dogmatists and better still for religious persons who are put off by dogma, a population that seems to be growing. Religion as an expression of the meanings and ideals of human life can provide comfort in the hour of need. Its symbols and ideas make life more significant, more beautiful, and more satisfying. This is especially true of the idea of God as a being of infinite compassion and understanding. The fruitless conflict that has arisen between science and dogmatic religion would not arise if religion were understood as poetry. Religion would be free to be outwardly what it really is at heart: a sheer enhancement of our lives.

The question of the existence of God has vexed philosophers through the ages. St. Anselm reasoned from the concept of God — that of the most perfect being imaginable — to the necessity of his existence.<sup>3</sup> Anselm thought existence a perfection, from which it seemed to him to follow that God would not be the most perfect being if he did not exist. Accordingly, Anselm concluded that God necessarily exists.

In a famous criticism of Anselm's argument, Kant claimed existence is not really a predicate.<sup>4</sup> It makes sense to say God is omnipotent or omniscient, because "omnipotent" and "omniscient" are predicates; but "existence" adds nothing to the character of an object, which either exists or does not exist as itself.

St. Thomas offered a version of the cosmological proof of God's existence.<sup>5</sup> He reasoned that every existing event must have a cause, and its cause a cause, and so on. Since an infinite series of causes is unthinkable, a cause that is not itself caused is posited, and this uncaused cause, it is assumed, is God. But nothing that exists is the cause of its own existence, so St. Thomas's uncaused cause cannot exist.

The design argument for God's existence is the most popular today. It hangs on an analogy between human artifacts and natural organisms and processes. The intricate structure of a microprocessor immediately suggests an intelligent designer with a specific purpose in mind, and so — arguably — does the human eye, the woodpecker's beak, and the pollination of flowers by insects. But analogy is one of the weaker forms of logical argument, and even if we could find conclusive evidence of design in nature, it would be reasonable to credit many designers with the work, and these beings might not be immortal or even compassionate; they might be more interested in fleas or electrons than in humans.

Unfortunately for some, none of these arguments succeeds in establishing the existence of God. But the failure of the arguments just described did not lead to the "death of God" crisis that erupted during the second half of the nineteenth century and continued well into the twentieth. What happened is that science matured. Newton was a devout Christian, to the point of conceiving absolute time and space as the mind of God; and Newton's physics, which makes of nature an intricate

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<sup>3</sup> St. Anselm of Canterbury, *Proslogion*, in *Classics of Western Philosophy*, ed. Steven M. Cahn (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2006), 415.

<sup>4</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (Boston: St. Martin's Press, 2003), 500–6.

<sup>5</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, in *Classics of Western Philosophy*, ed. Steven M. Cahn (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2006), 452–53.

machine, seemed to require a creator, if only in the form of a first cause. But a God whose primary role is to wind up a clockwork universe has little religious value, and later developments in celestial mechanics, not to mention the arrival of Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection, reduced the notion of a creator or first cause to an unnecessary hypothesis.

The failure of traditional arguments for God's existence and the results of current science seem to support Santayana's view that religion is better off as poetry that makes no claims about facts. What would religion look like if it made no such claims? In a way, it is easier to imagine what religion would be like if it did not make claims about facts than it is to understand the claims of dogmatic religion. The incarnation, the resurrection, and the trinity remain inscrutable mysteries, but the ideals they express are relatively clear and deeply familiar. Jesus was both fully divine and fully human. He experienced the pains and sorrows of finitude; at the same time, he was able to see beyond them to a world free of limits in which, because it is unlimited, sorrow and pain have no part. We are in a similar position in that while we must live within our limits, we can readily imagine what it would be like to be able to exceed them.

Another ideal expressed by the stories of Jesus is that of freedom from craving through union with the eternal. Although it animated the body of a man, the will of Jesus was one with the will of God. This enabled him to endure even his passion and death with composure. We do not always will what God wills, but when we forget our desires, our minds rest peacefully in the present. Objects of consciousness, Santayana explains, are timeless forms;<sup>6</sup> while our attention rests on them, we taste the peace of eternity. The passion of Christ is thus a symbol not of our desire to exceed our limits but of our longing to transcend them altogether.

It is easy to find human ideals expressed in other religions. The Zen master's notion of attaining nirvana — a non-spatial, non-temporal reality free of all conflict — is one; the Taoist's idea of oneness with the Tao or complete self-surrender is another. Like the obedience of Jesus to his Father's will, these ideas express our desire for liberation from the limits of finitude and for the joy we imagine that would bring.

Religion that attempts to deal with matters of fact is organized around dogmas that are supposedly indifferent to evidence; in reality, they are indifferent to evidence only for those who, like Abraham, are prepared to believe on faith alone. For everyone else, belief depends in varying degrees on some sort of evidence. The belief that God exists is no different in this respect from the belief that our planet spins in space or that the world continues beyond the horizon. Objects of belief are necessarily hidden from view; it is because they are not self-evident that it makes sense to say we believe in them. If we act as if we have direct access to the realities we believe in, we do so because our faith in them is perfect, but even the most perfect faith may be disappointed. There is, as Pascal noticed,<sup>7</sup> a gamble or wager behind the kind of religion that purports to deal with facts. Whether it succeeds or fails depends on whether its dogmas turn out to be true or false.

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<sup>6</sup>George Santayana, *The Realm of Essence* (New York, Scribner's, 1927), 18–25.

<sup>7</sup>Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, trans. A. J. Krailsheimer (New York: Penguin Group, 1995), 121–26.

Those who wish to bet on God's existence are free to do so, but they will have to contend with whatever science can throw at them. On the other hand, Santayana's view of religion as poetry suggests there is something to be gained from the idea of God alone, whether or not a being corresponding to it exists. But what can be gained from a God that is no more than an idea? The idea of God, like all ideas, is incapable of action; it cannot pull us out of harm's way or make way for us by parting the sea. Even if we stand to gain something from an idea of God, we need to figure out which idea to turn to.

The word "God" has at least three traditional meanings. It has been a name for nature or the source of existence. For the Ancient Greeks, as for the writers of the Old Testament, gods were natural powers on which the weal and woe of humans often depended. Spinoza could find no difference between God and nature. But nature is impersonal; the idea of it in its non-human vastness offers little comfort, and to call it beautiful is a stretch.

Building on the idea of power, God has been conceived as an omnipotent being. The appeal of this idea, assuming God is on our side, is that there is no limit to what he can do. But there is nothing in the idea of omnipotence that suggests God shares our values. On the contrary, an omnipotent being would likely find human virtues implausible if not repugnant. Courage, temperance, justice, and wisdom do not make sense from the standpoint of omnipotence. It is obvious that an omnipotent being would gain nothing from courage or temperance. The same is true of justice and wisdom, in that a being of infinite power could correct any mistakes it might make, and such a being would be the only appropriate judge of its own aims and achievements. "The justification of God's ways is that he has chosen them. What ultimate reason can any of us give for loving anything, except that we love it?"<sup>8</sup> The idea of God as an omnipotent being, then, does not provide the beauty, comfort, or satisfaction we seek from religion.

Others have employed the word "God" to indicate a pure or disembodied spirit. Christians have this idea in mind when they admire God's infinite love. Of course, it would be impossible for a disembodied spirit — one that, for lack of physical supports, did not exist — to love anything; for the basis of love is exclusion, and the seat of exclusion is existence. A pure spirit would have no reason to prefer one object over another. Its attitude would be more like infinite compassion and understanding than love. This idea of God as a being of infinite understanding and compassion is very close to the Christian one, except that most Christians would insist its value derives from the fact that a being corresponding to it exists.

But even the most dogmatic believer knows God as an idea. Anyone who has conceived of God as a real being has entertained an idea of him. And if a being of infinite compassion and understanding does not exist, the idea of such a being is still of value. In the midst of our struggles, no doubt there are times when we would prefer to be rescued by a benevolent power than to reflect on an idea, but the ideal expressed by Christianity, Santayana explains, is that of triumph through suffering, not over it.<sup>9</sup> Through suffering, we are reconciled with our limits and desire is stilled. The stilling of desire brings peace that is absolute. Buddhism expresses a

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<sup>8</sup>George Santayana, *The Idea of Christ in the Gospels* (New York: Scribner's 1946), 207.

<sup>9</sup>George Santayana, *The Idea of Christ in the Gospels* (New York: Scribner's, 1946), 147.

similar ideal. Reflecting on the idea of God as a pure spirit of infinite understanding and compassion helps us approximate if not achieve this ideal.

Many religious dogmatists say they enjoy a personal relationship with God. Is there any sense in which an idea can live up to their demand for a personal God? There is. The explanation is that personal relations do not really require persons in the sense of intentional beings. Some drivers relate to their favorite cars as persons, and children's toys often enjoy the status of persons conferred on them by their owners. Objects that may be viewed as persons are sufficient for personal relationships, and these objects, in many cases, are no more than ideas.

All ideas are timeless realities that seem to shine in clarity and peace above the chaos of existence. To view them for their own sakes is to rise above the chaos. But to those who contemplate it, the idea of God as a being of infinite compassion and understanding offers not only peace but a kind of unconditional validation of the individual that makes that peace more complete and more durable. Not even those who love us the most can provide this, for their love, no matter how great, is not unconditional. God, on the other hand, would understand and feel for us as if from the inside out, seeing our struggles and our frustrations just as we see them, and knowing, as we often do not, what we really want and why we go wrong. Perhaps more importantly, God would take an interest in us, no matter with how little interest or with what contempt or disdain we were viewed by our fellow humans. Here is an idea of God that is not without beauty; and it is one that at least comes close to providing the sort of comfort and satisfaction sought by religious persons of all types.

In Catholic theology, God is held to exist outside of space and time, observing the turbulence of the world from the serene environment of eternity. If this is understood as a claim about facts, it presents a scientific problem. How can anything exist outside of space and time? But if religion is poetry that makes no claims about facts, the idea of God as a being of infinite compassion and understanding simply expresses one of the highest ideals of human life. It suggests the peace of eternity. But its value does not end here, for it also suggests unconditional acceptance and affirmation of each individual, and that suggestion alone helps us approach the peace we crave. Fortunately, religion as poetry does not depend on the findings of science; it is possible as long as we continue to think and to imagine.

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# The Spirit's Alchemicana

The intellect in its widest sweeps and highest reaches comes back and back to the concrete, the particular, the momentary perception. Our generalities are rooted there, and find their confirmation there. Indispensable as conceptions are to all that we call reason, deliberation, or judgment, they yet are secondary or dependent: conception must look tirelessly to perception for inspiration and support. “The real kernel of all knowledge,” Schopenhauer says, “is reflection or thinking that . . . goes back to the primary source, the foundation, of all concepts” — the percept, the datum of sensible intuition, or to what Schopenhauer sometimes calls a “picture . . . of the imagination.”<sup>1</sup>

If unitary, momentary, individual images are parent to our generalizations, they are not of course the only begetters. For *concepts* may also breed concepts, mating and reproducing their kind with profligate abandon. Such offspring will be called wise if they steadily honor their ancestors. Too often they do not. The encounters with the things of the sense which gave rise to their line will be ignored. Mere words will now breed words. Philosophy will become a verbal exercise, having for its material what Schopenhauer calls mere “husks of thoughts . . . empty, poor, and . . . insufferably tedious.”<sup>2</sup> Or, changing his metaphor, he likens these “mere combinations of conceptions” lacking ground or warrant in perceived particulars to the notes of a bank “which for security has again merely deposited other promissory notes,” not cash.<sup>3</sup> As Emerson would put it twenty years later, “a paper currency is employed, when there is no bullion in the vaults.”<sup>4</sup> Wall Street philosophers we shall always have with us, and Schopenhauer’s tart advice here is perhaps the best: “One should not speak to them more than is necessary.”<sup>5</sup>

Emerson counted on the wise scholar and poet to “pierce this rotten diction and fasten words again to visible things.” In his eyes the discourse of an original thinker will be known by the spontaneous imagery which serves it, and from which it is inseparable. “A man in alliance with truth,” he says, will hold fast to the things of nature. And in the hands of such thinkers we are delivered back to the world we know, so that once again “the woods wave, the pines murmur, the river rolls and shines, and the cattle low upon the mountains.”<sup>6</sup>

The resolve to carry up into general concepts our daily experience of a quotidian world must attend the work of both philosopher and scientist. But it is the *poet*, preeminently, who insists with vehemence on the final authority of experienced particulars. For the poet they alone are the elements of the real, comprising the

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, *The Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason* [1813], trans. E. F. J. Payne (LaSalle, IL: Open Court Publishing Company, 1974), 154.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 147–48.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

<sup>4</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Nature” [1836], in *Selections from Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Stephen E. Whicher (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957), 33.

<sup>5</sup> Schopenhauer, *The Fourfold Root*, 154.

<sup>6</sup> Emerson, “Nature,” in *Selections*, 34.

only realities he is able to see clearly and hold fast. And no one has examined with greater energy and precision the nature and status of these particulars than the poet-philosopher Santayana. He called them essences, and declared them to be the bedrock upon which the super-structures of science, of poetry, of philosophy and religion are built.

And no one understood him. Are essences, like perfumes, aromas more or less exotic, attending certain perceptions? Are they Platonic Ideas in disguise, ideal types subsisting behind or beyond the apparent? Or are they, perhaps, artificial sections, freeze-frames, cut from the stream of consciousness? Perhaps they are the visions of a mystic, or the intensities of consciousness cultivated by a self-absorbed aestheticist. Santayana as an old man would laugh at these miscomprehensions, but I wonder if the perdurable young man within him did not weep a little also. To speak an accurate speech was his passion — but then, having spoken, to find that his words meant nothing, or meant little, or meant the wrong things to those he would reach: I think his mighty heart must have shaken more than once. Late in his life, noting the general unease and bafflement, he observed with perhaps a little wistfulness, “My theory [of essence] ought to be intelligible to poets and artists who have not bothered with modern philosophy. . . .”<sup>7</sup>

That suggestion is one we would do well to pursue. I want to make a beginning tonight by noticing in the work of several poets and poet-philosophers their apprehensions of the world under the aspect of the essences it embodies, writers who would recognize and salute them as household familiars. They would understand at once how in discerning essences the world suddenly becomes available to the mind, how in and through them we touch the only realities we can ever find, would understand their being as indelible identities, timeless and perfectly individual. Of course this approach is *one* way toward the discovery of essence; it is not the only way. Santayana argues, as you know, that a rigorous skepticism will lead us there (and with less danger of overbidding our hand), as also will dialectic or spiritual discipline. Essences have no exclusive or necessary connection with the arts, but it is the contemplative or aesthetic road, as Santayana calls it, which I want to travel for a short while tonight.

The wish of the poet and of the poet-philosopher to join the concrete to the general and the general to the concrete springs from the vivacity and intimacy of his engagement with the mundane. It may be a passable definition of poetry to say that it is discourse which resolutely maintains its ties to momentary but momentous encounters with the things of the earth: the milk in the pan, the glance of the eye, a certain slant of light, the look of a pineapple or a clock, the taste of a madeleine dipped in tea, the red of the wheelbarrow or the green of the lettuce, the clink of bottles, the stir of the tops of hemlock trees “in which the sun can merely fumble.” You may recognize the trees as the hemlocks of Wallace Stevens, contemplating the vexed relations between the world of fact and the world of imagination. Here are Stevens’ words, taken from his essay on “The Figure of the Youth as Virile Poet”:

If we close our eyes and think of a place where it would be pleasant to spend a holiday,  
and if there slide across the black eyes, like a setting on a stage, a rock that sparkles, a

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<sup>7</sup>George Santayana, “Apologia Pro Mente Sua,” in *The Philosophy of George Santayana*, ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp (New York: Tudor Publishing Company, 1940), 500.

blue sea that lashes, and hemlocks in which the sun can merely fumble, this inevitably demonstrates, since the rock and the sea, the wood and sun are those that have been familiar to us in Maine, that much of the world of fact is the equivalent of the world of the imagination, because it looks like it.<sup>8</sup>

Three isolated particulars, made to rise from their sleep at the touch of Stevens' words, become the complex essence known to many of his readers as the coast of Maine. This quick-brush demonstration of a poet's legerdemain is designed to establish Stevens' philosopher's thesis: that such images as these — when focused, brought stage center and intensely apprehended — are revelations of reality, or of that portion of reality which has thus been brought from half-light into light. The world of fact and the world of imagination seem one. Stevens goes on to say,

True imagination is . . . the sum of our faculties. Poetry is the scholar's art. The acute intelligence of the imagination, the illimitable resources of its memory, its power to possess the moment it perceives — if we were speaking of light itself, and thinking of the relationship between objects and light, no further demonstration would be necessary. Like light, it adds nothing, except itself.<sup>9</sup>

These are large claims. Yet in saying of poetry that it is the sum of our faculties and the scholar's art, Stevens stakes a claim for poetry not bolder than Emerson's a hundred years before him, and the echo of Santayana is clear in Stevens' metaphor of light: for the Spaniard, too, a sleeping world lies waiting in darkness for the light of spirit, a quickened awareness, to reveal things as they are — or rather, this thing, as it is, an indelible component of our fated world. Only through our heightened attention to the particular, the given datum, may we achieve that incandescence of the intelligence which Santayana called "the sheer light of [pure] intuition." "Awaken attention," he says, "intensify it, purify it into white flame, and the actual and unsubstantial object of intuition will stand before you in all its living immediacy and innocent nakedness."<sup>10</sup> So lucent an apparition — the object, as it were, proclaiming its identity — is now an essence.

We might say that the familiar, the *too* familiar things of our everyday lives are transformed under the rapt gaze of the poet, as when, in Wallace Stevens' words, "we look at the blue sky for the first time, that is to say: not merely see it, but look at it and experience it and for the first time have a sense that we live in the center of a physical poetry."<sup>11</sup> For it is a metamorphosis to which the poet bears witness. As Emerson might put it, the "dull miscellany and lumber-room" of the world is made to soar and sing, animated by a trifle sufficiently attended.<sup>12</sup>

To see the world as continuous with the imagination, to see it, for the moment, as ideal through and through, requires, it is clear, that we bring attention to white heat in the presence of the particular. To the Romantics, to the Symbolists, nature whispered a perpetual promise: come close, come closer, come closer still, and I

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<sup>8</sup> Wallace Stevens, *The Necessary Angel* (New York: Vintage Books, 1965), 61.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>10</sup> Santayana, *Realms of Being* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1942), 15.

<sup>11</sup> Stevens, *The Necessary Angel*, 65.

<sup>12</sup> Emerson, "The American Scholar," in *Selections*, 78.

will yield my secret. Yet such intimacy will not be won through attentiveness alone — or say, rather, that the kind of attention exacted by the object exacts of its lover a transcendence of the self and the accustomed claims of the self. There’s a wonderful fable devised by Rilke in a letter to Merline in which nature appears as a reluctant bride. The things of a physical world will disclose their “essential life” only to the suitor who will bring proofs of selfless devotion; he must come to the promised union without preoccupation; he must go out of himself in his total absorption in the object before him. In the absence of these, Rilke says, the object will refuse

to give you its heart. . . . If a thing is to speak to you, you must regard it for a certain time *as the only one that exists*, as the one and only phenomenon, which, thanks to your laborious and exclusive love, is now placed at the center of the Universe, and there, in that incomparable place, is this day attended by the Angels.<sup>13</sup>

That the hosts of heaven, singing hallelujahs, may attend the acute perception of a table will doubtless seem to the commonality a pleasant piece of nonsense. And I’m afraid that for many contemporary philosophers it has seemed either trivial or darkly mystical to declare as momentous the discovery that a thing is what it is. Yet for the poet it is so: upon his revelations of identity — what he sees and hears and feels when the world is made to stand still — not less than everything depends. Let me read a passage of Wallace Stevens’ meditation on “An Ordinary Evening in New Haven”:

We keep coming back and coming back  
To the real: to the hotel instead of the hymns  
That fall upon it out of the wind. We seek

The poem of pure reality, untouched  
By trope or deviation, straight to the word,  
Straight to the transfixing object, to the object

At the exactest point at which it is itself,  
Transfixing by being purely what it is,  
A view of New Haven, say, through the certain eye,

The eye made clear of uncertainty, with the sight  
Of simple seeing, without reflection. . . .<sup>14</sup>

Such shocks of recognition — recognition of New Haven, say, as it is — are a result of the poet’s power to fix, or transfix, the objects he encounters. They become for all time radiant nodes in the history of a human spirit, items in the catalog of what Stevens calls “the spirit’s alchemicana.”

It is an alchemy worked not only by the attentive mind or spirit but, in the poet’s case, the apposite words he chooses to serve his recognitions; intuition and language conspire to transform the earth — or, what is now the same thing, to transform the landscape of mind. There is no harm in this celebrating of the poet’s powers. But it would be better to say that under the poet’s gaze the world leaps into being, acquires

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<sup>13</sup>Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters to Merline* (1920), tr. Violet M. MacDonald, in *The Modern Tradition: Backgrounds of Modern Literature*, eds. Richard Ellmann and Charles Feidelson, Jr. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), 48.

<sup>14</sup>Wallace Stevens, “An Ordinary Evening in New Haven,” *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1954), canto IX, 471.

form for the first time and is not “transformed.” Notice that in Stevens’ reflections on New Haven the poet does not transfix the object but is transfixed by it. To the exclusion of all else, it fulfills awareness in declaring its being. It does not speak of human genius but only of itself. It is a finding, a discovery, a new territory of the real into which the poet has come. The fact of the discovery may be momentous for the explorer, but the thing discovered stands indifferent, knows nothing of human vicissitudes, remains simply what it is. We must put history and psychology and autobiography to one side if we would understand how it may be said that a poet’s business is to *realize* the world — or why essences are objective and not subjective in their intrinsic nature. The witness who apprehends them drops from view, and, being absent, is neither lamp nor mirror. Vision is self-transcendent.

For confirmation, let me go to James Joyce, and to his redoubtable figure of the youth as virile artist, Stephen Hero. Hero believes it to be the artist’s business to register in his work those “most delicate and evanescent of moments” which he calls epiphanies. In the normal traffic of the everyday there is nothing which may not, suddenly, yield its nature — a “vulgarity of speech or of gesture or . . . a memorable phase of the mind itself.” Such an epiphany Hero defines as a “sudden spiritual manifestation.” And as schoolmaster to his thin-lipped companion Cranly, Stephen informs him that the Ballast Office clock is “capable of an epiphany.” He goes on,

I will pass [the clock] time after time, allude to it, refer to it, catch a glimpse of it. It is only an item in the catalogue of Dublin’s street furniture. Then all at once I see it and I know at once what it is: epiphany. . . . Imagine my glimpses at that clock as the gropings of a spiritual eye which seeks to adjust its vision to an exact focus. The moment the focus is reached the object is epiphanised.<sup>15</sup>

It’s amusing to think of the unpredictable schoolmaster Joyce in Trieste, trying somehow to open the eyes of his pupils to the things around them. One of them, poor Boris Furlan, asked by his master to describe an oil lamp, “fumbled helplessly,” Ellman tells us, “and Joyce then took over and spent half an hour, in what seemed to Furlan ‘a descriptive lust,’ explaining the lamp’s obvious and minute details.”<sup>16</sup> This is the Joyce who told Furlan to lay aside his Schopenhauer and Nietzsche and read Thomas Aquinas instead, and who himself read Aquinas a page every day, in the Latin. It is applied Aquinas which Stephen Daedalus, that later apparition of the young artist, administers to his friend Lynch. Daedalus is trying to explain to Lynch the moment of “silent stasis” (as he calls it) wherein “the clear radiance of the esthetic image, is apprehended luminously . . . ,” although a basket now and not a clock waits for discovery. It is the word *claritas*, named by Thomas Aquinas as a third and essential element of the beautiful, whose meaning Daedalus searches. And he finds it in his discovery that the basket is, as he says, “that thing which it is and no other thing. The radiance of which [Aquinas] speaks is the scholastic *quidditas*, the *whatness* of a thing. This supreme quality,” he concludes, “is felt by the artist when the esthetic image is first conceived in his imagination.”<sup>17</sup> I wonder if Wallace

<sup>15</sup> James Joyce, *Stephen Hero: A Part of the First Draft of “A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man”* (New Directions, New York, 1944), 211.

<sup>16</sup> Richard Ellman, *James Joyce* (New York, 1959), 353.

<sup>17</sup> Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), in *The Modern Tradition*, 140.

Stevens was thinking of Joyce when he said of the youth as a virile poet that he lives “a life apart from politics . . . in a kind of radiant and productive atmosphere,” as surely he was thinking of Joyce when he titled his essay.<sup>18</sup>

Perhaps we can say, then, that artists or poets are men and women who pay attention, as the more usual run of our kind do not or cannot. Having come into a daylight world, poets will be impelled to tell others what they have seen, in a language more or less impassioned. They may speak of a revelation always at hand, an annunciation or an epiphany, a vision of things as they are. And yet their audience continues on its somnambulist way and will be all too apt to jeer. In the marketplace it is the *poet* who is named the dreamer, and his “realized particulars” the productions of an overheated fancy. The essences which the precisionist poet lovingly delineates will be called, to use Santayana’s language, mere “ghosts that someone says he has seen in the dark.”<sup>19</sup> To all these uncritical realists Santayana replies, “these ghosts are the only realities we ever actually can find: and it is rather the thought-castles of science and the dramatic vistas of history that, for instant experience, are ghostly and merely imagined.”<sup>20</sup>

*Why* does the obvious escape everyone’s notice? Idealists have always pondered the question of men’s blindness to what lies nearest to them, and have sought through metaphor to characterize it. We live in a cave, dimly lit, seeing only shadows, ignoring the light which is their cause. A veil, the veil of Maya it may be, is interposed between ourselves and reality. At our birth sand was thrown in our eyes, and fallen man sees imperfectly the sharp edges and colors of the creation. But such fables as these characterize a condition and do not explain it. The young Santayana, in the late 1890s, arrived at an explanation while attempting to demark the terrain of poetry as distinct from that of prose. For purposes I hope to show, I want to quote at some length from that essay, “The Elements and Function of Poetry”:

[I]n its primary substance and texture poetry is more philosophical than prose because it is nearer to our immediate experience. Poetry breaks up the trite conceptions designated by current words into the sensuous qualities out of which those conceptions were originally put together. We name what we conceive and believe in, not what we see; things, not images; souls, not voices and silhouettes. This naming . . . subserves the uses of life; in order to thread our way through the labyrinth of objects which assault us, we must make a great selection in our sensuous experience; half of what we see and hear we must pass over as insignificant, while we piece out the other half with such an ideal complement as is necessary to turn it into a fixed and well-ordered conception of the world. This labour of perception and understanding, this spelling of the material meaning of experience is enshrined in our work-a-day language and ideas; ideas which are . . . prosaic because they are made economically, by abstraction, and for use. . . .

[But] the poet retains by nature the innocence of the eye, or recovers it easily. . . .

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<sup>18</sup> Stevens, *Necessary Angel*, 57.

<sup>19</sup> Santayana, *Apologia*, 500.

<sup>20</sup> Santayana, “On the Unity of My Earlier and Later Philosophy,” Preface to Volume VII of *The Works of George Santayana*, Triton Edition (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1936), xiii.

The fulness and sensuousness of [the poet's] effusions bring them nearer to our actual perceptions than common discourse could come; yet they may easily seem remote, overloaded, and obscure to those accustomed . . . never to be interrupted in the algebraic rapidity of their thinking by a moment's pause and examination of heart, nor ever to plunge for a moment into that torrent of sensation and imagery over which the bridge of prosaic associations habitually carries us safe and dry to some conventional act.<sup>21</sup>

Santayana, in arguing here the primacy in experience of the immediate datum, sees our obliviousness to it as a function and consequence of forward intent, the need of the practical intellect to read its data as signs of the next and of the removed. In this early passage lie the seeds of a hundred later growths in Santayana's mature philosophy. The "mental images" of which he speaks in the same paragraph will elsewhere be called essences, and he will understand essences as the fundamental terms of all awareness — the sensible primitives of the poet but also the conceptual primitives of the philosopher. His early platonism, refined, will become a radical nominalism. The workings of practical intellect will be called in the later philosophy animal faith, and while animal faith may blind us to the obvious and prevent our understanding of poets, he sees it as instinctive. It is the ground of what properly should be called knowledge, and a name for the only belief we may call inevitable — the belief in existing things which outrun all presence to thought or dream. In those directions, of course, lie his chastened pragmatism and his materialism.

The reflections of the young Santayana in the 1890s, reflections honoring the seizable and the definite, testify to the great influence of William James in shaping the philosophy of his student. Of course, the later Santayana would move away from the later James, but the younger James, like his brother Henry an artist upon whom nothing was lost, was acknowledged master to the young Santayana. "I imbibed from the spirit and background of his teaching . . ." the Spaniard has testified, "a sense for the immediate: for the unadulterated, unexplained, instant fact of experience . . . always momentary and self-warranted." He learned from James, he said, "A man's life or soul borrowed its reality and imputed wholeness from the intrinsic actuality of its successive parts."<sup>22</sup> Late in 1899, two months after Santayana had submitted to Scribner's his manuscript of *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion*, a French philosopher whom James admired extravagantly, Henri Bergson, was publishing in the *Revue de Paris* the reflections that would become his essay on laughter. Bergson's observations there on "Art and Reality" are so strikingly consonant with Santayana's that the two young men would seem to have drawn their insights from the same text.

It is Bergson's contention that an always original music plays in our heads but we do not hear it — a metaphor Santayana would himself use later in speaking of essences. "The *individuality* of things or of beings escapes us," says Bergson. And why? Why is a veil interposed between ourselves and reality? — "a veil that is

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<sup>21</sup> Santayana, "The Elements and Function of Poetry," in *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion*, Volume III of *The Works of George Santayana* Critical Edition (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 1989), 155–56.

<sup>22</sup> Santayana, "A General Confession," in *The Philosophy of George Santayana*, ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp, 15.

dense and opaque for the common herd, — thin, almost transparent, for the artist and poet”? Because, he says, “life demands that we grasp things in their relations to our own needs. Life is action. Life implies the acceptance only of the *utilitarian* side of things in order to respond to them by appropriate reactions: all other impressions must be dimmed or else reach us vague and blurred.” Also serving to conceal the object, in Bergson’s view, are words: “we do not see the actual things themselves; in most cases we confine ourselves to reading the labels affixed to them.” The artist who would reveal the forms of things will be free of urgencies. His is “an innate and specially localised disinterestedness of sense or consciousness” which “reveals itself by a virginal manner, so to speak, of seeing, hearing, or thinking.” To the adequate artist is given the power, Bergson says, to “perceive all things in their native purity: the forms, colours, sounds of the physical world as well as the subtlest movements of the inner life.”<sup>23</sup> Thus spake the man who would become master to that formidable connoisseur of essences, Marcel Proust.

Let me note in passing that Santayana would in time react with vehement protests, as you know, against Bergson’s developed philosophy. It encouraged an aesthetic which was, in Santayana’s words, too passive, too feminine. Nor did Santayana incline to anti-intellectualism. Bergson was, in his eyes, all too ready to make matter “the pack of which ‘ideas’ are the cards.”<sup>24</sup> That, too, was the source of his dismay with the later James: the world seemed to vanish without remainder into our collective experience of it.

Thinking in these ways of the whatness of things, of the absolutely individual character of each moment — or rather, of what each moment contains, thinking of things as they come to us in our quiet times, we are confronted by the looming figure of Schopenhauer. Schopenhauer presides whenever we talk of detachment from life or a supreme disinterestedness as a condition of clear vision. “The *Idea*, the eternal form” of a thing, he declares, will be known only on condition that we suspend the will, abstain from the anxious quest for understanding, and refuse to be governed by the concepts of abstract reason. “Raised up by the power of the mind,” Schopenhauer says, “we relinquish the ordinary way of considering things, and cease to follow under the guidance of the forms of the principle of sufficient reason merely [the] relations [of things] to one another, whose final goal is always the relation to our own will. Thus,” he continues, “we no longer consider the where, the when, the why, and the whither in things, but simply and solely the *what*. . . [We] devote the whole power of our mind to perception, sink ourselves completely therein, and let our whole consciousness be filled by the calm contemplation of the natural object actually present, whether it be a landscape, a tree, a rock, a crag. . . We *lose* ourselves entirely in this object, . . . [which] at one stroke becomes the *Idea* of its species.”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Henri Bergson, “Laughter,” tr. Brereton and Rothwell (1911), in *Modern Continental Literary Criticism*, ed. O. B. Hardison, Jr. (New York: Appleton-Century Crofts, 1962), 190–93.

<sup>24</sup> Santayana to the writer, letter of 1 March 1949. Published in *The Letters of George Santayana: Book Eight, 1948–1952*, ed. William Holzberger (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008), 148.

<sup>25</sup> Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation* (1819), Volume I, tr. E. F. J. Payne (New York: Dover Publications, 1969), 178–79.

We know from long experience that such observations as these — of Schopenhauer, of Santayana, of Bergson — will set the stage for philosophic war. Epistemologically they are dualist, asserting two levels of awareness, two modes of consciousness, two ways of knowing. The world that lies before the eyes of the poet and the world confronting the utilitarian simply have a different look. It is one world — and yet two. The poet or poet-philosopher inevitably feels — even though he may insist on the equal legitimacy, the equal necessity of the two perspectives — that in penetrating to the essences of things he has come home to his native place, recognized for the first time. It is, after all, not simply perception the poet honors, but pure perception. The adequate objectification of the world through the discernment of the essences it embodies will be called, irresistibly, a higher or a deeper mode of the intelligence, an awakening, a raising up of the mind, a proof of its transcendental status and powers. And yet how shall the naive realist, the commoner, the positivist, the literalists of science or religion, how shall all those who are blind to the world as Idea, be made to see?

Schopenhauer, despite his sustained, impassioned reasonings, despaired of converting the multitudes, those condemned in advance to the tragic workings of private interest and, as it were, private perception. So also the impassioned William Blake dismissed with contempt the generality of men — the idiots, as he called them — so little able to transmute corporeal appearance into spiritual presence. Now Santayana might have gone to Blake as easily as to Proust to report a language like his own in characterizing essences. Blake calls them eternal identities, another name for all created things when seen with the eye of Blake's "man of imagination," the burning eye which renders the opaque transparent: a kind of perception he calls spiritual sensation. To his eternal identities Blake opposes the material world of generation and flux, the finite and temporal. "This World of Imagination," in radical contrast, is, he says, "Infinite & Eternal." Blake's identities, like Santayana's essences, are not abstract; each is perfectly individual. The "Oak dies as well as the Lettuce," Blake says, "but Its Eternal Image & Individuality never dies." And how very close to Santayana, how close to Proust, is Blake in the feeling of liberation which attends the visitations of essence: "If," Blake writes, "the Spectator could Enter into these Images . . . , could make a Friend & Companion of one of these Images of wonder, which always intreats him to leave mortal things . . . , then he would arise from his Grave, . . . and then he would be happy. General Knowledge is Remote Knowledge; it is in Particulars that Wisdom consists & Happiness too."<sup>26</sup>

A century before Blake, that great forerunner of the Romantics, George Berkeley, sought to bring men to their senses, back to sensation. Under the banner of actually perceived particulars, Berkeley went to war against abstractions and general names. Those accustomed to traffic in them — materialists, skeptics, the whole band of "minute philosophers" — seemed to Berkeley to have lost the use of what he called their visive faculty. Only by a direct and immediate seeing could men recover their power to apprehend "things in their native forms."<sup>27</sup> It's not to my present purpose to

<sup>26</sup> William Blake, "A Vision of the Last Judgment" (1810), in *The Complete Writings of William Blake*, ed. G. Keynes (New York: Random House, 1957), 605, 611.

<sup>27</sup> George Berkeley, *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous* (1713), in *Berkeley* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929), 342.

mark the fundamental ways in which Santayana departs from Berkeley; I would note here only that in the Bishop's multitudinous, separate, and inert ideas of sensation we encounter once more the insubstantial particulars of the world immediately at hand, images become images of wonder. Philonous' best advice to the unregenerate Hylas is his admonition, "Look!" — look at the fields, the woods, the river. Any scene of nature, any object in nature, when apprehended by a mind which has come to rest in "the immediate and proper objects of sight," will yield the liberating assurance that *all* the universe is just such an apparition — an indefinitely extensible series of pictures in the imagination.

Pragmatists have found in Berkeley a forerunner of pragmatism, and for good reason. But Santayana did not fail to discern the young enthusiast, the lyric poet and Platonist, at the center of this philosophy. Here is Santayana's judgment:

Berkeley gloriously detached the "idea," the pure phenomenon, from the irrelevant strains of presumption and idolatry with which animal life originally encumbers it. The stupid world calls this an act of abstraction; but Berkeley, who hated abstractions, knew it to be an act of realisation. Realisation, indeed, simply of the obvious, and of the ideality and unsubstantiality of the obvious. He rose at once to a radical insight which it had taken all the experience and discipline of Indian gymnosophists to reach. . . . When Berkeley denied the existence of matter, he felt not the unreality but the intense reality of experience, enjoying it as a vast web of heavenly music, perfectly composed and performed, with its recurrent phrases coming in at the right places. . . . The gladness of [the world] came of its vividness as an experience and its unreality as a power.<sup>28</sup>

"To speak truly, few adult persons can see nature. Most persons do not *see* the sun."<sup>29</sup> Those are Waldo Emerson's words. Despite that skeptical judgment, Emerson held fast to the faith that America's new democrats might yet be made to see the things around them. Entering his peaceable kingdom, we have left behind the thunder and lightning in the atmospheres of Blake and Schopenhauer; the clement man who speaks to us would persuade us gently that we, too, have genius enough to alchemize the base metals of appearance. No writer, I think, has searched with an energy and ingenuity greater than Emerson's for the apposite word which might convey the exaltation felt when the dark engine of nature opens itself to mind. And it's not surprising that Santayana should say that if all American philosophy were consigned to oblivion, Emerson's should be the last to go.<sup>30</sup>

Emerson's bimodal theory distinguishes two levels of apprehension: that of the Understanding and that of the Reason. It is Reason which brings us face to face with nature. It is Reason which transfers nature into mind by leading us up into the presence of "the ideas," or what Emerson also terms "immortal necessary uncreated natures." In their luminous presence we are "transported out of the district of change."<sup>31</sup> Although these eternal natures lie at our doorstep, they will now be

<sup>28</sup> Santayana, "Bishop Berkeley," in Volume VII of *The Works of George Santayana* (Triton Edition), 205.

<sup>29</sup> Emerson, *Nature*, in *Selections*, 23. Italics mine.

<sup>30</sup> Santayana, comment to the writer, July 1948.

<sup>31</sup> Emerson, *Nature*, in *Selections*, 46–47.

perceived by a jaded eye. Like the aging Matisse, explaining his need to go on painting, we must recover again and again our naiveté in the presence of things.

Paradoxically, for language, this coming closer to things involves a kind of estrangement from them — a distancing which renders the familiar unfamiliar. The world then stands before us as a vivid dream, a spectacle, a puppet-show. The real — or rather, what we *used* to call the real — has become unreal. The world we've known — solid, fixed, refractory, impenetrable — becomes all surface; it is all outside, and has no inside. Emerson, whose words and metaphors I have just been using, insists it's not so difficult to come into the spirit's inheritance in this way, to see the world as phenomenal. A change of physical position suffices to give the hint of a possible transfiguration: look at the world upside down between your legs! The old then seems new; the fixed is unfixed; the world is put afloat and acquires "a pictorial air." Or an unaccustomed carriage ride will suffice to work the magic: "A man who seldom rides," says Emerson, "needs only to get into a coach and traverse his own town, to turn the street into a puppet-show. The men, the women, — talking, running, bartering, fighting, — the earnest mechanic, the loungeur, the beggar, the boys, the dogs are unrealized [are made unreal] at once," and, "wholly detached from all relation to the observer [are] seen as apparent, not substantial beings."<sup>32</sup>

At some level of the psyche of George Santayana, Emerson's man-in-a-carriage was not forgotten. A century after the appearance of Emerson's *Nature*, when Santayana tried his own hand at leading his readers toward the discovery of essences, the carriage reappears. In the passage before me, Santayana seeks to establish the position that "the clearest and purest reality" is "formal and ideal." He has begun to chart the third of the possible roads to essence, the "aesthetic or contemplative" road we've been travelling for the past hour. To show us that road, to suggest the experience of having his thought "absorbed in the image and arrested there," Santayana invokes a cart: "As I was jogging to market in my village cart," he writes, "beauty has burst upon me and the reins have dropped from my hands. I am transported, in a certain measure, into a state of trance. I see with extraordinary clearness, yet what I see seems strange and wonderful, because I no longer look in order to understand, but only in order to see. I have lost my preoccupation with fact, and am contemplating an essence."<sup>33</sup>

These words are a part of Chapter One of *The Realm of Essence*, a chapter which Santayana read aloud in manuscript to an Oxford philosophical club in 1923, four years before the book's appearance. In the presence of that knowing, indocile audience he found "no sympathy in the air . . . everybody," he reported, "seemed at sea, and caught at phrases or trifles that struck them as odd."<sup>34</sup> That was a portent, although by mid-century Santayana would be met with more than blank incomprehension: a certain irritability and hostility toward the idea of essences was manifest in the critical essays gathered together for the Library of Living Philosophers volume devoted to his work. And that, too, was a portent of much that would follow in the often perplexed criticism of our own time.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>33</sup> Santayana, *Realms of Being*, 6–7.

<sup>34</sup> Santayana, *Persons and Places*, Volume I of *The Works of George Santayana*, Critical Edition (Cambridge, MA, and London: The MIT Press, 1986), 521.

Perhaps we are all poets in the beginning and poets at the end. In the middle passages we are, or we say we are, carrying out the necessary business of the world. But from the poet's vantage, our business has the look of a distraction, a sad waste of time. In all ages there have been poets and philosophers who would, instead, sustain lifelong meditations on things under the aspect of their essences. From the Indians and Plato to the neo-Platonists and scholastics, to the transcendentalists, Romantics, and Symbolists, to the phenomenologists and poets of our own time, we can trace the tradition. It is a tradition that springs from the perennial discernment that the real is constituted by the ideal — whether we give those constituents in their purest form the name of essences, Ideas, eternal identities, immortal natures, quiddities, native forms, pure phenomena, or eternal objects. So we are returned to the question: Why so much puzzlement and misapprehension of Santayana's meaning?

Santayana himself supplies a many-sided answer, of course, in his indictments of modern philosophy as subjectivistic and moralistic — in its muddle-headed conflation, for example, of idea as mental event and idea as objective content, or the conflation of pure essence and essence as sign, confusions which underpin the notion that “our ideas” are the objects of knowledge. These discriminations were correctives which Santayana the Platonist would urge upon empiricists who seemed ignorant of Platonism or could not feel its force. But his special genius lay in his power to disentangle the theory of essence from the unnecessary dogmas, the overbeliefs, of poets and philosophers inspired by it. Extravagant knowledge claims, extravagant truth claims have too often followed in the wake of a reversion to immediate experience: mysticism or solipsism may follow, or a monistic metaphysics grounded in the pathetic fallacy, or an “irrational poetry of sensation and impulse.”<sup>35</sup> Lifting the Ideas out of their customary historical contexts in theological and metaphysical assertion and debate, and out of their contexts in modern subjectivist aesthetics, Santayana asked us to see that they still are there, shining luminously, not in heaven but here, in the back garden, waiting for notice. Essences are not agents or powers; they are not things or existences; they are not abstractions or universals; nor do they speak of a beneficent primal Cause of creation.

Here, I think, we arrive at an explanation for many of the miscomprehensions of Santayana's critics. They have not been able to free themselves, as Santayana freed himself, from the long historical associations and the accretions of belief clinging still to the idea of essences. Thus many a commentator, venturing a leap momentous for both conscience and for criticism, has ascribed confusion in himself to confusion in the philosopher.

No one needs really to insist that essences are alive and well and in our midst. Men and women everywhere will go on, as Wallace Stevens says, stepping barefoot into reality. A reminder of this came to me in an issue of *The New Yorker* magazine. Cynthia Ozick reflects there on the feel of the passage of time for a woman in her sixties. Whatever signals of her “redundancy or of superannuation” come to her from the outside world, she knows that within her are certain fastnesses impervious to time:

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<sup>35</sup>George Santayana, *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion*, Critical Edition (Cambridge, MA, and London: The MIT Press, 1989), 161.

It is not so much a fixity of self as it is of certain exactnesses, neither lost nor forgotten: a phrase, a scene, a voice, a moment. These exactnesses do not count as memory, and even more surely escape the net of nostalgia or memoir. They are platonic enclosures, or islands, independent of time, though not of place; in short, they irrevocably *are*. Nothing can snuff them. They are not like candle flames, liable to waver or sputter, and not like windows or looking glasses, which streak or cloud. They have the quality of clear photographs, or of stone friezes, or of the living eyes in ancient portraits. They are not subject to erasure or dimming.<sup>36</sup>

Could there be a clearer confirmation than these words supply of Santayana's belief that poets and artists would understand him?

RICHARD C. LYON

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<sup>36</sup>Cynthia Ozick, "Alfred Chester's Wig," *The New Yorker* magazine, 30 March 1992, 79.

## BIBLIOGRAPHICAL CHECKLIST TWENTY-EIGHTH 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 and dissertations, the following articles and books are classified according to their years of publication. Readers with additions or corrections are invited to send these to Kristine Frost, Santayana Edition, Institute for American Thought, School of Liberal Arts, IUPUI, Indianapolis, IN 46202-5157, or by email to [santedit@iupui.edu](mailto:santedit@iupui.edu).

A special thank you to Daniel Moreno for his time and effort in researching and compiling entries for this year's update.

### CHRONOLOGICAL LISTING OF PRIMARY SOURCES

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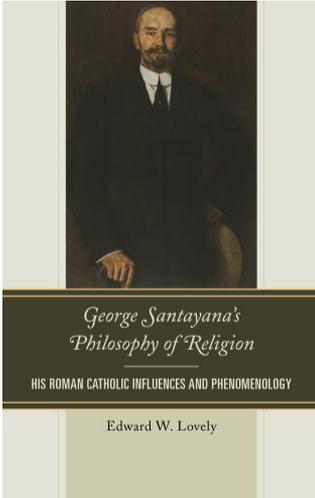
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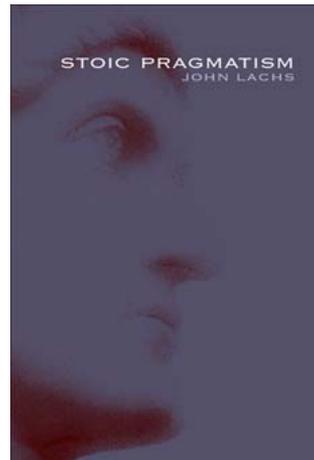


*George Santayana's Philosophy of Religion: His Roman Catholic Influences and Phenomenology*  
Edward W. Lovely  
Lexington Books  
2012

This book is an examination of Santayana's philosophy of religion, derived from his basic philosophical principles, addressing phenomenological aspects of his approach and the influence of his Roman Catholic background.

*Stoic Pragmatism*  
John Lachs  
Indiana University Press  
2012

Lachs, a leading Santayana scholar, engages Santayana's thought in new ways, suggesting its relevance for the future of philosophy and, perhaps more importantly, for the enhancement of human life.



# Overheard in Seville

*Overheard in Seville* is edited by Glenn Tiller, David Spiech, Kristine Frost, and Martin Coleman. It is published and distributed by the School of Liberal Arts at Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis. Archived issues are available at <http://iat.iupui.edu/santayana/content/overheard-seville-bulletin-santayana-society>.

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## Some Abbreviations for Santayana's Works

Page numbers refer to the critical edition of Santayana's work, where this exists, or to the Scribner/Constable edition in most other cases.

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