

Overheard in Seville

*Bulletin of the  
Santayana  
Society*

No. 1  
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punit, qui alteri injuriam fecit, eandem civi indignari non dico, quia non Odio percita ad perdendum civem, sed pietate mota eundem punit.

## PROPOSITIO LII.

*Acquiescentia in se ipso ex Ratione oriri potest, et ea sola acquiescentia, quæ ex Ratione oritur, summa est, quæ potest dari.*

## DEMONSTRATIO.

Acquiescentia in se ipso est Lætitia orta ex eo, quod homo se ipsum suamque agendi potentiam contemplatur (*per 25. Affect. Defn.*). At vera hominis agendi potentia seu virtus est ipsa Ratio (*per Prop. 3. p. 3.*), quam homo clare et distincte contemplatur (*per Prop. 40. et 43. p. 2.*); Ergo Acquiescentia in se ipso ex Ratione oritur. Deinde nihil homo, dum se ipsum contemplatur, clare et distincte, sive adæquate percipit, nisi ea, quæ ex ipsius agendi potentia sequuntur (*per Defn. 2. p. 3.*), hoc est (*per Prop. 3. p. 3.*) quæ ex ipsius intelligendi potentia sequuntur; adeoque ex sola hac contemplatione summa, quæ dari potest, Acquiescentia oritur. Q. E. D.

## SCHOLIUM.

Est revera Acquiescentia in se ipso summum, quod sperare possumus. Nam (*us Prop. 25. hujus ostendimus*) nemo suum esse alicujus finis causa conservare conatur; et quia hæc Acquiescentia magis magisque fovetur et corroboratur laudibus (*per Coroll. Prop. 53. p. 3.*), et contra (*per Coroll. Prop. 55. p. 3.*) vituperio magis magisque turbatur, ideo gloria maxime ducimur, et vitam cum probro vix ferre possumus.

## PROPOSITIO LIII.

*Humilitas virtus non est, sive ex Ratione non oritur.*

## DEMONSTRATIO.

Humilitas est Tristitia, quæ ex eo oritur, quod homo suam impotentiam contemplatur (*per 26. Affect. Defn.*). Quatenus autem homo se ipsum vera Ratione cognoscit, eatenus suam essentiam intelligere supponitur, hoc est (*per Prop. 7. p. 3.*) suam potentiam. Quare si homo, dum se ipsum contemplatur, aliquam suam impotentiam percipit, id non ex eo est, quod se intelligit, sed (*us Prop.*

Translation

Sequential

To "follow" from an idea means to be the natural sequel to a state of mind, not that we might suppose, to be logically involved in a proposition. The sequel to "adequate ideas" (since only the objects of the organism it involved) must also be "adequate ideas"; that is, where we have experiences of a healthy state of the body develop in a healthy way out of the nature of the organism alone, then the subsequent experiences are also normal.

On the right is shown a slip of paper in Santayana's hand, found in his copy of Spinoza's *Ethics* in the University of Waterloo's collection of his personal library. It is marked p. 226, and on the left is displayed that page of the text, *Opera quotquot reperta sunt*, Hagae Comitum, M. Nijhoff, 1882-1883. The paper is so shaped that it could readily be attached to the page so as to appear as marginal commentary. Marked "Translation Sequential," it gives Santayana's translation of, or personal comment on, some of the previous propositions to which Spinoza appeals in his demonstration of Proposition LII of Part IV. Printed with the permission of the University of Waterloo and of John McCormick of Rutgers University.

# Santayana's Idea of the Tragic

For the purposes of this paper on "Santayana's Idea of the Tragic," I shall try to maintain a distinction between "tragedy" and "the tragic" as nouns, and "tragic" as an adjective. Further, I shall apply "tragedy" to the literary genres of drama and prose fiction, and reserve "the tragic" to philosophy, while "tragic" as adjective must serve both camps. Such pedantry as this is made necessary by the flagrant imprecision of the words "tragic" and "tragedy" in common speech. An example is one Jeff Sims, a heavyweight boxer in training for a shot at the title despite the presence in his large body of four bullets. When asked whether all that lead doesn't bother him, he answered, "My tragedy don't affect me no more. I got my speed back, and my stamina. I just got to get my balance together."<sup>1</sup>

Through some manner of wild conjunction, Santayana, too, seems at first glance to use "tragedy" rather like Jeff Sims. At second and third glance it becomes clear that Santayana has an entire structure of thought in mind, but one must follow his work chronologically in order to see that he began with a philosophical approach rooted in psychology, moved on to a literary approach, then mingled the two approaches in interesting ways. I hope thus to raise the question whether "tragedy" and "the tragic" can indeed be separated in order to conform to our current ways of specialization, and to suggest, in answer, that Santayana not only gave up the attempt, but also that in doing so he gained enormously both in philosophical and literary range and depth.

In *The Sense of Beauty* (1896), with its emphasis on the philosophical, and *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion* (1900), with its emphasis on literature, the discussions of tragedy and the tragic are conventional, smacking a bit of the academy that Santayana hated.<sup>2</sup> By the time of the World War I *Soliloquies in England and Later Soliloquies* (1914-1921), and on into the mid-nineteen-thirties, Santayana's set of mind strikes one as first philosophical and only secondarily literary, although the two ways cross and re-cross. With *The Last Puritan* (1935), we find a complex philosophical hypothesis posited in the selection of the central figures and in the narrative as a whole. Finally, in his autobiographical writing and in the correspondence of Santayana's late years, experience, reflection, knowledge, and humane-ness combine to form him into his own tragic, yet always ironic, hero; aware and engaged, authentic and rarely brave, remote from the monk-like recluse of legend. Of course the neat progression I outline is too neat; of course *The Last Puritan* was forty years in the making; nevertheless, gradations in tone and emphasis are

This paper was read to the Santayana Society, Baltimore, December 28, 1982.

<sup>1</sup> *New York Times*, Nov. 27, 1982.

<sup>2</sup> These and other books of Santayana cited below were published in New York by Scribner's.

present over Santayana's many years, and those gradations suggest to us how he lived, thought, and expressed himself.

Santayana's first, formal treatment of the tragic occurs in Part Four of *The Sense of Beauty* under the heading "Expression," where first emphasis is upon perception. Expression of the aesthetic involves two terms: the first is the object of appraisal actually presented to the mind and senses; and the second term is the object suggested, that further thought, emotion, or image evoked by the first term. The value of the second term, Santayana notes, "must be incorporated in the first."<sup>3</sup> Although still phrased in psychological terms, the argument becomes literary when Santayana turns to the question of "how a mind can be made happier by having suggestions of unhappiness stirred in it; an unhappiness it cannot understand without in some degree sharing in it." [p.152] Or in another phrase, he is concerned with how "The transformation of negative values into positive... [has]... given rise to the comic, the tragic, and sublime." [p.152] In passing, Santayana rejects the Kantian effort to ally beauty and morality, then turns frankly to the nature of the tragic, moving from his base in psychology and philosophical terminology to the literary. "Art," he notes in a famous phrase, "does not seek out the pathetic, the tragic, and the absurd; it is life that has imposed them upon our attention, and enlisted art in their service, to make the contemplation of them, since it is inevitable, at least as tolerable as possible." [p.167] The relationship of evil in events to art occupies him, leading to his assertion of the relativity of our judgment of evil. A fire, he says, is not evil, but exciting, if our own loss is not involved; understanding is a necessary preparation to the quality of pathos that exists in the tragic. Now Santayana slips from the tragic to tragedy when he writes that "The treatment and not the subject is what makes tragedy. A parody of *Hamlet* or of *King Lear* would not be a tragedy." [p.169]

*The Sense of Beauty* rarely contains references to actual works of art, but when Santayana lapses from the abstract, he turns to dramatic literature, giving full attention to the imagination and to its expression in metre, rhyme, and form. What the moralist calls evil takes its place in tragedy as suffering, Santayana says, a quality evoked by the treatment of the object (that first term) on the part of the artist. The essence of tragic emotion is our suffering at one remove the evil experience of the central figure in literary art. All depends upon treatment, Santayana repeats: remove from *Othello* "the charm of the medium of expression" and "tragic dignity and beauty" are lost. [p.170] Nobility of mind is essential to tragedy; this leads to the odd conclusion that "when men are noble in the very moment of passion: when the passion is not unqualified but already mastered by reflection and levelled with truth, then the experience (the first term) is itself the tragedy." [p.170] Here I think that Santayana has in mind Christ on the cross, a part of his rear-guard action to incorporate the tragic (in my distinction), rather than tragedy, and Catholic doctrine.

<sup>3</sup> New York: Scribner's, 1936, p.149.

But usually, Santayana notes, the two stages, the two terms, must be successive and united: in his felicitous phrase, "First we suffer, afterwards we sing." [p.171] Before moving on to Santayana's idea of the heroic in *The Sense of Beauty*, I would note the early appearance of a cohesive, structural theme of *The Last Puritan* when we read that "one of the chief charms that tragedies have is the suggestion of what they might have been if they had not been tragedies." [p.172] Whoever finds conventional development in Santayana is probably victim of his own efforts to construct neat categories. With respect to the heroic, Santayana says that it is the glimmering of happiness through trial that engages us; unrelieved evil, he implies, is merely melodramatic. That scene of the storm in *Lear* in which "four miseries, that of the king, of the fool, of Edgar in his real person, and of Edgar in his assumed character" [p.173] in its vividness "keeps the mind detached and free, forces it to compare and reflect, and thereby to universalise the spectacle." It is not only lost but still "glimmering" happiness in the tragic heroes' lot, but we take from their heroism a compensation "which the saddest things often have,—the compensation of being true," [p.173] and "Our practical and intellectual nature is deeply interested in truth." [p.173]

In *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion* of 1900, Shakespeare was again prominent, together with the Aristotle of the *Poetics*. In his chapter on "The Elements and Function of Poetry," Santayana affirms that Aristotle was correct in making plot "the chief element of fiction," for plot implies conclusion, a rounding off of events. Santayana then writes, "This is the essence of tragedy: the sense of the finished life, of the will fulfilled and enlightened: that purging of the mind so much debated upon, which relieves us of pent-up energies, transfers our feelings to a greater object, and thus justifies and entertains our dumb passions, detaching them at the same time for a moment from their accidental occasions in our earthly life. An episode, however lurid, is not a tragedy in this nobler sense, because it does not work itself out to the end; it pleases without satisfying, or shocks without enlightening. This enlightenment, I need hardly say, is not a matter of theory or of moral maxims; the enlightenment by which tragedy is made sublime is a glimpse into the ultimate destinies of our will. This discovery need not be an ethical gain—Macbeth and Othello attain it as much as Brutus and Hamlet—it may serve to accentuate despair, or cruelty, or indifference, or merely to fill the imagination for a moment without much affecting the permanent tone of the mind."<sup>4</sup>

The Shakespearian references here again suggest that Santayana leans toward the literary as he uncovers "the essence" of tragedy. The literary also dominates when Santayana indicates what tragedy is *not*: "The picture of an unmeaning passion, of a crime without an issue, does not appear to

<sup>4</sup> *The Works of George Santayana*, Triton Edition, (New York: Scribner's, 1936-1940, 15 vols.), Vol. II, p.195.

our romantic apprehension as the sorry farce it is, but rather as a true tragedy. Some have lost even the capacity to conceive of a true tragedy, because they have no idea of a cosmic order, of general laws of life or of an impersonal religion. They measure the profundity of feeling by its intensity, not by its justifying relations..." [Triton Edition, Vol. II, p.196] Thus Santayana continues his life-long skirmish against romantic egotism. The romantic mind is incapable of the idea of the tragic in its affection for intense disorder. The later essay, "Carnival," is also an anti-romantic piece, directed against romantic sentimentality, and implicitly against the absence of comedy in the romantic sensibility. Life in the long view, Santayana notes, is sad "and all things tragic;" but the long view is not inevitable, and life as we live it is composed of short, partial views, much of it "joyful, hearty, and merry." "Existence involves changes and happenings and is comic inherently, like a pun that begins with one meaning and ends with another."<sup>5</sup>

In his capacity as literary critic, Santayana published an introduction to *Hamlet* in 1908, an essay that was to bring about a certain amount of intellectual mischief on the part of F.R. Leavis, the Cambridge don of English studies and editor of *Scrutiny*, a moderately influential literary review. In his introduction, Santayana had remarked of the play, *Hamlet*, that in its vast range of effects, including idiocies, horrors, and ghastly confusions, we gain insight into the modern world, "compacted out of ruins," embracing a culture "imperfectly grafted on the living stem from which it must draw its sap," and producing just such "hereditary incoherence, ... perplexity and half-feigned madness" as is Hamlet's; all the product of "the radical and excruciating experience of the romantic mind." When, accordingly, "If we care to pass...from admiration of the masterpiece to reflection on the experience which it expresses, we see that here is no necessary human tragedy, no universal destiny or divine law." [Triton Edition, Vol. II, p.223] *Hamlet*, in brief, although a masterpiece, is not a classical tragedy, but an early example of romantic confusions and chaos.

Leavis, the magisterial successor to Samuel Johnson, according to his own and his disciples' estimation, was apparently bothered by Santayana's essay on *Hamlet*, but proclaiming admiration for Santayana's work, "Tragic Philosophy," published in *Scrutiny* in 1936. From its title, we might here expect to find Santayana's definitive statement on the tragic (a statement that would have made this paper unnecessary). Santayana had other things on his mind, however. The essay was the occasion for rebuke to his former student and hostile friend, T.S. Eliot. Eliot had compared the passage in *King Lear*, "As flies to wanton boys..." with a line from the *Paradiso* of Dante, finding Shakespeare's philosophy "inferior" to Dante's, although of equal poetic value. Santayana, mistakenly ascribing the Shakespearian passage to one in *Macbeth*, pointed out that no philosophy is superior or inferior to another, except in respect to its

<sup>5</sup> *Soliloquies in England and Later Soliloquies* (New York: Scribner's, 1922), pp. 140-141.

truth. Macbeth's philosophy, Santayana writes concerning the "Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow" soliloquy, is that Macbeth has no philosophy. "We can understand why Mr. Eliot considers Dante's religious vision to be a "superior" philosophy, but how can he fail to see that it is false?" Santayana questions. Religious inspiration, he says, "has a kind of truth of its own, but experience will contradict inspiration" and "will become tragic; for what is tragedy but the conflict between inspiration and truth?" [Triton Edition, Vol. II, p.285] Poetic inspiration too will be in conflict with experience, Santayana adds, and he cites the famous lines from Corneille's *Le Cid* in evidence:

Percé jusques au fond du coeur  
 D'une atteinte imprévue aussi bien que mortelle...  
 Je demeure immobile, et mon âme abattue  
 Cède au coup qui me tue.

If previously Santayana had appeared Aristotelian, classical, for the most part in his conception of tragedy, now he adds to his lines from Corneille the unclassical statement that "Tragedy must end in death: for any immortality which the poet or his hero may otherwise believe in is irrelevant to the passion which has absorbed him." [p.286] Shakespeare's philosophy, like Seneca's, is not inferior, for he "stuck fast to the facts of life," concerned as he was with "the earthly career of passionate individuals, of inspired individuals, whose inspirations contradicted the truth and were shattered by it." That defeat, together with its acceptance, "is final for the tragic poet." [p.287] Santayana concludes the essay by remarking that he can think of only one tragedy in which religion might play a leading part, "and that is the tragedy of religion itself" [p.287]; it is one of the inspired, higher fictions, the ultimate significance of which is determined in nature, in the field of action. Tragedy, therefore, correctly at this juncture, is the measurement of the distance of the fall of those "higher fictions," whether inspired by poetry or religion.

Leavis, for his part, allowed Santayana's essay to rankle for several years, until 1943, when he published his rather churlish "Tragedy and the 'Medium'" in *Scrutiny*. The burden of his attack is that Santayana fails to comprehend the intimate relationship between what is said in tragedy, and how it is said: how the poetic medium so centrally contributes to the totality of effect. Leavis indicates that Santayana wants to impose on tragedy preconceived ideas, and that he simply has a tin ear. Leavis's reading indicates ignorance of Santayana's views on the function of poetry, and conveniently ignores for the most part that Santayana is busy in his essay of 1936 refuting Eliot's error.

No reconstruction of Santayana's idea of the tragic can be satisfactory, I think, if it ignores the many occasions in his writings when Santayana uses the words "tragic" and "tragedy" with apparent casualness, even carelessness. We know that he was never really careless or casual when

writing, therefore I turn to his soliloquies, written during the slaughter of World War I and just afterward, and containing some of his most perfect performances in the genre of the essay. *Soliloquies in England* also contains three of his finest sonnets: "A Premonition: Cambridge, October 1913;" "The Undergraduate Killed in Battle: Oxford, 1915;" and "The Darkest Hour: Oxford, 1917." The Essay, "English Architecture" depicts a surprising entity, "tragic architecture," and we may wonder what on earth Santayana is about here. In isolation, the words "tragic architecture" seem at once casual and complex, an idea concealing a well of meaning that comes through mysteriously, if at all, in a kind of intellectual shorthand. But if one looks again, one finds Santayana ruminating about the origins of fortified towns and churches in Britain, half-fancifully basing religion in magic, and creating drama from the disparity between those towering structures and the lives of the ordinary folk, "building themselves huts to breed in under the lee of the fortifications." "This sort of architecture," he writes, "has a tragic character; it dominates the soul rather than expresses it, and embodies stabilities and powers far older than any one man, and far more lasting. It confronts each generation like an inexorable deity, like death and war and labour; life is passed, thoughtlessly but not happily, under that awful shadow. .. in their essential function these monuments are arresting, serious, silent, overwhelming; they are a source of terror and compunction, like tragedy; .." [p.79] "Terror and compunction" again remind us of Aristotle, while we may hear an echo of the Hegelian notion that the state has an existence independent of the individual citizen's. Santayana now, however, liberated from his professorship, no longer theorizes, as he did earlier on. He is not writing for the academy, but for the republic of letters, and for himself.

At many places in the essays of mid-career, Santayana seems to equate tragedy with mere motion through life to inevitable death. In the essay "Carnival" we read that "We are caught in the meshes of time and place and care; and as the things we have set our heart on, whatever they may be, must pass away in the end, either suddenly or by a gentle transformation, we cannot take a long view without finding life sad, and all things tragic." [See *Later Soliloquies*, p.140] Some twenty years later, in similar vein, he wrote of the suicide of a German friend in 1939, "We live in old-fashioned tragic times."<sup>6</sup> The essays of the war period frequently seem facilely to balance death with tragedy, yet in "War Shrines." Santayana wrote that "Death can do nothing to our lives except to frame them in, to show them off with a broad margin of darkness and silence," producing thus "a large nimbus of peace around our littleness." [See *Soliloquies*, p.99] Here one might conclude that, urged by his encompassing naturalism, Santayana simply *does* equate tragedy with death, and that since everyone dies, everyone, in that measure, is tragic. Any such conclusion would be both wrong and premature, and would

<sup>6</sup> Daniel Cory, *Santayana: The Later Years*, (New York: Braziller, 1963), p.220

shear away from tragedy its complex literary history and its philosophical dignity. If we know anything about Santayana, we know that he is always meticulous, even when, for him, he was at his most cavalier. He was not likely to use a term so burdened as "tragic" without having considered it long and fully. That meticulousness is apparent in the informal essays in which the idea of the tragic eases its way to the center in "Carnival:" in the essay on "Masks," and in the lecture on "The Unknowable." Even in these writings, however, the abundance of metaphor and the urbanity of manner may suggest to the unwary a muffling of intent, an unclear clarity.

In no fewer than four essays in *Later Soliloquies* (1918-1921), Santayana evoked the grotesquerie of the classical masks of tragedy and comedy to establish an objective view and to comment with dispassionate irony on human self-deception. He is bemused by the mask itself, which for a child (or an adult) dramatically transforms him, producing a sense of comic surprise and relief when removed. The effect of the mask is attractive, yet the mask itself is repellent; "A mask is not responsive; you must not speak to it as to a living person, you must not kiss it." [p.134] The child's fun in putting on a mask thus protests through comedy "the accident and fatality of having been born human ...." We are hurt at having to be confined to "one miserable career and forced to remain always consistent." "Our animal habits are transmuted by conscience into loyalties and duties, and we become 'persons' or masks. Art, truth, and death turn everything to marble." [p.134] What Santayana pursues here, elusively, becomes partially explicit in the final brief essay of the tetralogy, "The Mask of the Philosopher," where he writes that "Amongst tragic masks may be counted all systems of philosophy and religion." They are tragic because the maker of systems expresses his own ideas in his own idiom, which idiom in turn has been formed by his circumstance of nationality and education. That system displays his peculiarities, his bent, his imprint, and when broad cast, it is his mask: finished, set, glazed, immovable, mask-like indeed. "The Mask of the Philosopher" seems to me as close to despair as Santayana ever came. It is a statement of radical skepticism, and if one read no further in Santayana's work, one might well say that it is indeed despairing.

Santayana's lecture, "The Unknowable," delivered at Oxford in 1923, is in the vein of *Scepticism and Animal Faith* of that same year. The Unknowable, he remarked, "expresses an integral part of the tragedy involved in being finite and mortal - perhaps in being a mind or spirit at all. Poets and philosophers sometimes talk as if life were an entertainment, a feast of ordered sensations; but the poets, if not the philosophers, know too well in their hearts that life is no such thing; it is a predicament. We are caught in it; it is something compulsory, urgent, dangerous, and tempting. We are surrounded by enormous, mysterious, only half-friendly forces." [See pp. 169-170, *Obiter Scripta*, (1936)] Tragedy here is linked only imperfectly to epistemology (or anti-epistemology, if we heed Santayana's title); he still teases his listener, and

his loyalty is to poetic knowing rather than to the philosopher's knowing. These utterances of Santayana's mid-career may be said to belong to Santayana philosophizing, in the vein of Emerson's phrase, "man thinking." They do not establish a coherent definition nor establish a system; Santayana had already done that in his earlier, formal writing. The teasing essays of the soliloquies draw us in; they reflect a system in existence but they do not pretend to enunciate it.

Santayana's central statement on the nature of the tragic is not contained in his utterances of varying levels of formality, nor in his academic writings, with their systematic first and second terms. That elusive central statement lies partially embedded in the complexities of his prose fiction, *The Last Puritan* (1935). In Oliver Alden's character and being are united historical, national, religious and philosophical qualities, each of which has full weight in Santayana's imaginative reconstruction of tragic life. We are prepared for Oliver's career by his contrast with his father's untragic, ironic, self-indulgent life, and death by his own hand; by the comedy of his vulgar mother, by the diversity in outlook between his self-discipline and the sybaritic existence of Mario Van de Weyer; and tellingly by the contrast between Jim's kind of perfection and his own. As Professor Paul Kuntz has noted in a memorable analysis<sup>7</sup> of *The Last Puritan*, the novel presents us with the "paradox of humanity: men may succeed by failing." Oliver Alden's fidelity to his ideal of perfection necessarily results in failure. Darnley, the Vicar of Iffley and father of Jim, contrasts his son's pagan physical perfection with Oliver, whom he defines as *aner pneumatikos*, a man spiritual by nature. We are prepared for that identification by the Vicar's sermon delivered just after Oliver reaches Iffley to visit Jim, in which the Vicar says that "The truth is a terrible thing. It is much darker, much sadder, much more ignoble, much more inhuman and ironical than most of us are willing to admit, or even able to suspect." [p.250] The Vicar's truth about Jim, as he says to Oliver, is that Jim has no soul. "...in a man the perfection of merely bodily life or of worldly arts is somehow tragic. That was the tragedy of the Greeks. That is what I tremble for in Jim." [p.254]

Oliver is superbly fitted for a worldly existence: he has wealth, good looks, athletic skill, unlimited horizons; yet he is uncomfortable with his inherited money, bored by athletic games, and is cautious and reticent at worldly opportunities. His very worldliness makes him unworldly, therefore he is drawn to Mr. Darnley's spirituality. Darnley, however, blights any prospect of the spiritual life for Oliver when he tells him that to be a spiritual man "is a great privilege, a tragic privilege. For just as the merely natural man ends tragically, because the spirit in him is strangled, so the spiritual man lives tragically, because his flesh and his pride and his hopes have withered early under the hot rays of revelation.

<sup>7</sup> "The Tragedy of Oliver Alden: Santayana's *Last Puritan*, a Phenomenological Study of Order and Chaos", *Memorias del XIII Congreso Internacional de Filosofía*, (Mexico: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1964), Vol. 8, pp. 331-345,

Even the Church is no home for the spirit." [p.255]

This central conversation prepares us for the change in Oliver's fortunes that make up the entire second half of the novel. Earlier on, his tepid pursuit of Edith slowed to a walk and stopped. His illusions about Jim Darnley disappear in his knowledge of Jim's tawdry sexuality. Rose Darnley, with whom he believes he might be in love, wisely declines in favor of Mario; Oliver is not cast down by her rejection, but feels liberated, for, he muses, "the true lover's tragedy is not being jilted; it is being accepted." With this meditation [p.580] on what it is to be a surviving puritan in America, or in the modern world, Santayana exposes Oliver's fragility, reminding us through Oliver of his uncle Nathaniel, that "amiable ghost." And it is thus we see why Oliver does not meet his death more or less heroically as a volunteer in combat, but as a conscript and after the Armistice, when he dies ignobly in a collision between his motor-cycle and a milestone. He is not permitted even death, however accidental, in war, where, Santayana writes, "There was even a touch of grandeur, almost of triumph, in a life finished roundly, that seemed an action and not a succession of involuntary predicaments." The novel ends on a Vergilian note: *sunt lacrimae rerum* : Mario muses for Santayana, "Every human achievement is submerged in the general flood of things, and its issue soon grows ambiguous and untraceable. We must be satisfied to catch our triumphs on the wing, to die continually, and to die content." [p.584]

Oliver's idea of order in his life and circumstances is continually violated by the world itself; it cannot be re-asserted, Santayana seems to say, as it is re-asserted in Greek tragedy. Oliver Alden may be compared to a man who is given a magnificent elephant gun, but denied access to elephants. This is his tragedy, at least in part. Santayana does not give us the Kierkegaardian howl of despair, nor the Arthur Miller whine. Santayana, we recall, was a man who enjoyed darning his clothes and sewing on buttons.

Oliver's death is not tragic, in the sense that Socrates' death was not tragic, the Socrates of the *Phaedo* who saw the "separation of the soul from the body [as] a welcome release from earthly impediments to true wisdom."<sup>8</sup> Santayana's theory of tragedy, finally, seems to me to have components of Plato, possibly of Hegel, possibly of Max Scheler, and a good deal of Santayana at his philosophic and literary best. Richard Patterson locates Plato's idea of the tragic in the *Laws*, VII, where Plato distinguishes between tragedy and comedy in terms of knowledge (tragic), as against lack of self-knowledge (comedy). No "Fall" is required, nor a death. Tragedy according to the *Laws* "is that branch of drama which is important, elevated, and serious; it is... *spoudaios*, because it treats important matters in an elevated manner." [Patterson, p.79] Plato's additional words to the effect that if tragedy is drama that is "noble,

<sup>8</sup> Richard Patterson, "The Platonic Art of Comedy and Tragedy," *Philosophy and Literature*, VI (October 1982), p.77.

elevating, and serious, which grasps important truth," then it entitles its creator to the "high title of 'educator'" and true tragedy is the dramatization of a good, noble life. [Patterson, p.79] If that may describe *The Last Puritan*, and I think it does, then an irony results: Santayana the detester of the academy becomes an "educator" *malgré lui*, courtesy of Plato.

It is possible that a hint of Hegel exists in Santayana's idea of the tragic, in his practice of showing basic dilemmas not as good against evil, but good against good. But Santayana most decidedly is not Hegelian when he fails to observe Hegel's dicta that the end of tragedy denies the claims of both goods in favor of an absolute right that pushes these lesser rights into wrong. Santayana wanted no part of Hegelian Absolutes, of course. His idea of the tragic is closer to A.C. Bradley's, who wrote *à propos* Hegel's theory, "Any spiritual conflict involving spiritual waste is tragic."<sup>9</sup>

I do not now know, and may never know, exactly how much of Max Scheler's writings Santayana read; he refers to Scheler in a letter of the 1920's. It is tempting to see in Santayana's idea of the tragic a phenomenological turn, and particularly a turn that might have derived from Scheler's *Vom Umsturz der Werte* (1923), in which Scheler sees the tragic as a basic element of the universe itself rather than as an aesthetic product of the artist. Tragedy involves ethics, a scale of values, and particularly it is defined in the area of changing values. Something must be destroyed in the tragic: "a plan, a desire, a power, a possession, a faith;" yet it is not the destruction itself, but the forcing upon the higher value of a lower that creates the tragic condition. It creates grief; it is inevitable; it does not involve guilt. It is rather a construction of "guiltless guilt." The world is such that tragedy must ensue, without warning, unpredictably.<sup>10</sup>

The points of coincidence between Santayana and Scheler are many and obvious; above all, the central point that tragedy is in and of the world before art and after art, an idea that Scheler may have found in *The Republic*, in Plato's preference for philosophy over poetry. What is conspicuously absent from the Germanic theories of Hegel and Scheler is the element of the comic that sits cheek by jowl with the tragic in Santayana's mind, and particularly in his old age. Scheler would have been incapable of the letter which Santayana wrote to his old friend Mercedes Escalera after the death of his beloved sister Susana: "I don't know whether to take a wife or buy a dog." That returns our attention to the question of language in the tragic, to the question of philosophical statement versus lucid literary re-creations of states of mind and being. In old age, Santayana's mind went often to the words *tragic*, *tragedy*. In *Persons and Places* he wrote of the "tragic journey" that his mother made

<sup>9</sup> *Oxford Lectures on Poetry*, (London: MacMillan, 1909), p.87.

<sup>10</sup> Max Scheler, "On the Tragic," in *Moderns on Tragedy*, ed. Lionel Abel (New York: Fawcett, 1967), pp. 249-255.

with her young children from the Philippines to Europe after the early death of her first husband, George Sturgis. [p.52] He thought back to his boyhood years in Avila as "that crowded, strained, disunited, and tragic family life;" that was the pattern of "what life really is: something confused, hideous, and useless." [p. 119] What he called "the black sorrows of childhood" [See *Soliloquies*, p.98], however, are not possible in old age. Then comedy and tragedy merge. He could write in a letter of January, 1946, to his niece-in-law, Rosamund Sturgis, concerning a pair of lined slippers she had sent: "There was a tragedy about these nice warm slippers. I didn't need them. However, I tried to try them on; but although long enough, they were so narrow that I couldn't get my foot into them. Evidently providence was against us: but then I thought how lucky this really was. Here was an opportunity to make a good present to the Sisters, who I know suffer from chilblains: so I sent them to the Superior to bestow on the nun who might need them most. The tragedy thus ends *tutti contenti*. The slippers were luckily black so that the nuns could wear them." This and other letters to Rosamund Sturgis-Little might suggest the Jeff Sims attitude: "My tragedy don't affect me no more." I prefer to think of it as Santayana's "Rape of the Lock" technique: an elaborate rhetorical construction upon a trivial base, one of his favorite devices for irony.

Santayana's idea of the tragic does not develop nor really change over the years. Its philosophical basis was present, although not completely worked out, as early as *The Sense of Beauty*. His many returns to the idea of the tragic are like the filling out of a boy's body in maturity. Santayana remains faithful to naturalism. Nature, he seems to say, at once invites and discourages perfection. Somewhere between the invitation and the discouragement lies the tragic. The enchanting child becomes a hairy, fat, lazy, often drunken adult. All we really know about things is that they will go awry; as for the passions, they "are the elements of life; nevertheless they are deceptive and tragic. They fade from the mind of the old man who can survey their full course; unless indeed he makes himself a shrill and emasculated echo of them, forgetting the dignity of years. Sometimes these passions shock and repel a young soul even at their first assault: and then we have the saint or seer by nature, who can transcend common experience without having tasted it; but this is a rare faculty, abnormal and not to be expected or even desired."<sup>11</sup>

Literary expression rather than the symbols of the logician surely enhances philosophy here, as in so much else of Santayana's work; just as philosophy gives his literary essays and his prose fiction the texture of the tragic and those mysterious qualities that we call classical.

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<sup>11</sup> "A General Confession," in P.A. Schilpp, *The Philosophy of George Santayana*, (1940; 2nd ed. 1951, reprinted by Open Court Publishing Co. La Salle, Ill.: 1971), p. 27.

## ON GRUE AND BLEEN

Santayana is no philosopher of science; frequently he laments his inability to participate in the scientific advances of his day. Still, the integrity of his materialist philosophy, and the soundness of his common sense, give to his statements on natural philosophy a special value. In our day, when many philosophers are caught in the retreat from empiricism, and may find themselves unsure of their footing, we find much that is useful in his writings. Santayana's works are innocent of the delusions of empiricism, uninflated by claims of final justifications, and undogmatic about what subjects can or cannot be discussed coherently.

On several issues, philosophers have seemed in recent years to be retreating toward positions which Santayana has held all along - positions which earlier they were scarcely prepared to treat as serious philosophy. One example is his insistence that sensation has no special epistemic status, and that no sharp separation can be made between sensation and concept, observational data and theoretical constructs.<sup>1</sup> Another example is his scepticism about induction as a mode of inference.

Santayana believes that it is rational for us to project into the future, but he rejects any final justification of this projection or induction:

The habits of nature are marvellous, but they are habits; ... . This assumption is not justifiable by induction, because no experience covers any great part of nature, nor that part thoroughly; but it is nevertheless the anchor of rational life.<sup>2</sup>

Our faith in uniformity rests entirely on an "animal attitude:"

Belief in law when hasty is called superstition or, when more cautious, empiricism: but the principle in both cases is the same. Both take expectation for probability; and what probability can there be that an expectation, arising at one point, should define a law for the whole universe? Expectation is an animal attitude resting not at all on induction or probability, but on the fact that animals are wound up to do certain things and vaguely but confidently posit a world in which their readiness may become action. [RB p.303]

However this, he continues, is justification enough:

Yet in a roundabout way, on the scale and in the period of that animal life, this blind courage is normally justified by the event. For how should the

<sup>1</sup> See for example page 102 of George Santayana, *Scepticism and Animal Faith*, (Constable, London, 1923). We shall cite this book as SAF.

<sup>2</sup> See page 224 of George Santayana, *Realms of Being*, One-volume edition, (Scribner's, New York, 1942). We shall cite this as RB.

psyche be ready and eager for a particular employment, if in her long evolution she had not been moulded to just that employment by a world which allowed and rewarded it? [RB p.303]

Santayana is prepared to reject induction on the strength of this one rhetorical question: how should an expectation, arising at one point, define a law for the whole universe? However more complicated reasons have been presented; the belief in induction as a form of inference analogous to deduction has come under attack from Nelson Goodman. Suppose all emeralds examined before a certain time  $t$  have been green. Then this evidence supports the sentence "All emeralds are grue"<sup>3</sup> no less than it supports the sentence "All emeralds are green." The ingenious argument of Goodman demonstrates that the validity of an inductive inference is not a matter of its form; the second but not the first sentence is a correct projection from the given evidence, although the form is the same in each case.

A certain sophistication is required of anyone before that person is likely to take seriously the notion of "grue." From the point of view of common sense, it is a monstrosity. Obviously scientists could misuse such predicates, and, for instance, rid themselves of unpleasant phenomena like the periodic reversal of the earth's magnetic field. We could have a North Pole and a South Pole, invariant throughout the life of the earth. However the sophisticated philosophical argument has a limited application: it is meant only to show that it is something about the predicates involved, not the form of the inference, which validates inductive inferences. There is no claim that such predicates as "grue" lead to good science, and indeed, it is taken for granted that they do not.

Santayana agrees with Goodman's final conclusion, that some predicates can be more reliably "projected" into the future than can others. However he had his own reasons, and it is certain that he would have rejected the argument itself. Indeed the common sense uneasiness about "grue" and "bleen" can be expressed clearly in his system. Simple predicates name essences, and an essence is eternally unchanging; "grue" is not the name of any essence. This approach is not shaken by Goodman's argument that, since "blue" and "green" can be defined in terms of "grue" and "bleen" just as easily as the converse, the latter pair must be treated on an equal footing as the former. Santayana makes only one demand of users of a logical system - that they remain faithful to the essences they have assigned to their terms.<sup>4</sup> For him the definition of "grue" would simply be an invitation to ignore that single demand. Perception is no literal transcript of fact, but it is indispensable sign; any

<sup>3</sup> The predicate "grue" means "green up to time  $t$  and green thereafter." The predicate "bleen" has the complementary definition. These definitions are to be found in Nelson Goodman, *Fact, Fiction, and Forecast*, fourth edition, (Harvard University Press, Boston, 1983), page 73ff. We cite this book as FFF. The new edition contains a Foreword written by Hilary Putnam, from which we shall quote also.

<sup>4</sup> See pages 100-101 of RB.

change from green to blue of an object under scrutiny is a suggestion of change, and is not to be ignored.

At this point, the only difference between Goodman and Santayana is a verbal one: Goodman permits, while Santayana excludes, "grue" and "bleen" as genuine predicates; but both agree that the two lack projectibility. The substantive issue, as Hilary Putnam says in his foreword to *Fact, Fiction, and Forecast*, is the problem of characterizing projectible predicates or properties:

Goodman totally recasts the traditional problem of induction. . . . The central difficulty, which Goodman was the first to highlight, is the projection problem: what distinguishes the properties one can inductively project from a sample to a population from the properties that are more or less resistant to such projection?<sup>5</sup>

Although his discussions are couched in ornate language, Santayana was actually intrigued by the "projection problem." Speaking of a child reaching out to touch the moon, he writes:

When in stretching his hand toward it he found he could not touch it, he learned that this bright good was not within his grasp, and he made a beginning in the experience of life. He also made a beginning in science, since he added the absolutely true predicate "out of reach" to the rather questionable predicates "bright" and "good" (and perhaps "edible") with which his first glimpse had supplied him.

He invariably makes a double point; the scientific predicate is more reliable, but it too is visionary. (Thus the term "absolutely" in the above quotation is misleading.)

The terms of astronomy are essences no less human and visionary than those of mythology; but they are the fruit of a better focussed, more chastened, and more prolonged attention upon what actually occurs; that is, they are kept closer to animal faith, and freer from pictorial elements and the infusion of reverie.

Santayana believes that scientific success depends upon the elimination of the "visionary" or "pictorial" element from our ideas. Then science "becomes more and more mathematical, that is, operates with categories and terms more and more remote from pictorial physics." [RB p.39] A good experiment will measure things by means of other things:

When the act of measuring is an actual transition, like a journey, both the metre and the thing measured are material and equally internal to the flux of substance. The measure is then congruous and literal; and the disadvantage of perhaps leaving no precise image in intuition - ... - is counterbalanced by the advantage of bridging truly external relations, and catching nature in her own net. [RB pp. 239-240]

<sup>5</sup> See page vii of FFF.

Science has learned how to probe material things within the Realm of Matter, without being led astray by the unreliable ideas and moral categories we may associate with those things.

Thus we might ourselves project the rudiments of a theory of projection culled from Santayana's desultory comments.

1. It is reasonable to proscribe predicates like "grue" which fail to name an eternal essence. "Blue" looks different from "green," and coherent discourse depends on our fidelity to such distinctions.

2. There is no alternative for us than to deal in terms of ideas and phenomena, even though they are unreliable. A necessary condition for good projectibility is that the "visionary" or "pictorial" aspects in these ideas be minimized.

3. Modern experimental science, which "measures things by things," has found an effective, though inevitably partial, solution to the problem of minimizing the interference of "mind" in its experiments. However this has led to an extremely mathematical treatment, so that science has become remote from everyday understanding.

4. All this gives rise to a problem of interest to Santayana, who holds that knowledge and acceptance of our natural surroundings are prerequisites to the pursuit of a good life. How can we derive from the abstruse accounts presented to us by science an informed common sense view of the world which will assist sensible action?

What is to be said about a theory such as this? - that it is too obvious to be worth stating; - that in the absence of an empirical test for the visionary, it is vacuous. In its technical elaboration, it scarcely merits the name "theory," when set against the contemporary literature. Equally disappointing to the technical philosopher is Santayana's account of natural law:

There is then no necessity in the relation between cause and effect, and no assurance that law is constant. Nevertheless, causation is prevalent: were it not prevalent in fact, the expectation of it could never have arisen. [RB p.303]

Laws are just habits which usually hold, but which may at any moment fail without warning. One is reminded of a passage in Bradley, which Santayana quotes with relish:

It is *always* wet on half-holidays because of the Law of Raininess, but *sometimes* it is *not* wet, because of the Supplementary Law of Sunshine.<sup>6</sup>

Santayana enjoys this barb at Law considered as a "metaphysical idol." It is just because "Law" is so defenseless and open to ridicule that he chooses "habit" in its place. His pronouncement that laws are "prevalent" seems vacuous and disappointing to those who anticipate something more grand. In the face of the retreat from empiricism, however, statements

<sup>6</sup> See page 49 of George Santayana, *Some Turns of Thought in Modern Philosophy: Five Essays*, (Scribner's, New York, 1933).

like those found in Santayana deserve a second look. His speculations about "projectibility" can be suggestive and fruitful, so long as there continues to be no viable scientific account of the term. And perhaps there is no more that can be legitimately said about natural laws, than what Santayana has said; but that much *can* be said. If Santayana's comments are too obvious to be worth stating, then this should at least stop those philosophers who, seeking something better (which is perfectly sensible), plunge into a complete scepticism when they fail in their quest. It is false to suggest that we can claim rationality for our actions only if the validity of induction can be demonstrated. Is it not rational to anticipate the prevalent, and reasonable to prefer "blue" to "grue?"

AKL

## **ANNOUNCEMENT**

The annual meeting of the Santayana Society will be held in conjunction with the December meetings of the American Philosophical Association (Eastern Division) in Boston.

THE SANTAYANA SOCIETY  
invites you to celebrate  
the hundred and twentieth birthday of

**GEORGE SANTAYANA**

**Greetings**  
from his colleagues  
of Santayana's University

**A Birthday Poem**

**Santayana's Letters**

**Commentary**

**Chairman**

**Toasts**

**Acknowledgement**  
of the toasts

**Hilary Putnam**  
Harvard University

**Francis Sparshott**  
Victoria College  
University of Toronto

**William G. Holzberger**  
Bucknell University

**Herman J. Saatkamp**  
University of Tampa

**Paul G. Kuntz**  
Emory University

**John Lachs**  
Vanderbilt University

**Irving Singer**  
Massachusetts Institute  
of Technology

**Robert Sturgis**  
Architect,  
grand-nephew of  
George Santayana

7:45 P.M., 29 December 1983  
The Jefferson Room, Sheraton-Boston Hotel

# BIBLIOGRAPHIC CHECKLIST

## AN UPDATE

The items below will supplement the references given in *George Santayana: A Bibliographic Checklist, 1880-1980*, prepared by Herman J. Saatkamp Jr., and John Jones. Bowling Green: Philosophy Documentation Center, 1982. vi, 286 p. The following articles, reviews, and books are classified only according to their year of publication. Readers with further information or corrections are invited to send these to Herman J. Saatkamp, Department of Philosophy, University of Tampa, Tampa, Florida 33606.

### 1977

Olafson, Frederick A. "George Santayana and the Idea of Philosophy." *American Philosophy from Edwards to Quine*, ed. by Robert W. Shahan and Kenneth R. Merrill, 148-175. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1977.<sup>1</sup>

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Kuntz, Paul G. Review of *Thresholds of Reality: George Santayana and Modernist Poetics*, by Lois Hughson. *Philosophy and Literature* 4, 2: (1980), 278-279.

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<sup>1</sup> The book containing this article is listed in *George Santayana: A Bibliographic Checklist, 1880-1980*, as item number 1103.

## 1981

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## 1983

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<sup>2</sup> See item number 1638 of *George Santayana: A Bibliographic Checklist*.

# *The Santayana Edition*

## I. Background

The Santayana Edition was initiated by members of the *Society for the Advancement of American Philosophy*, and, in particular, by one of its foremost leaders, John Lachs of Vanderbilt University. Another member of the society, Morris Grossman, wrote to and consulted with Santayana scholars and laid the groundwork for a larger and more organized effort. In 1976 Herman Saatkamp was asked to coordinate and develop the project, and in October of 1977, the National Endowment for the Humanities provided funds for a plan-

ning grant. The work sponsored by the planning grant led to important discoveries and established a sound basis for editing the Santayana Edition. Subsequently, in 1979 and 1981, the Endowment provided funds to edit volume one, *Persons and Places*, (Santayana's three book autobiography). Continuing its support, the Endowment recently (1983) provided funds to complete volume two, *The Sense of Beauty*, and volume three, *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion*.

## II. Current Activities

To date, 1983 has been one of the most remarkable years for work on the Santayana Edition. It has included an agreement with MIT press, the discovery of a major manuscript as well as over one hundred letters, the reversion of rights by Charles Scribner, Jr., a publishing subvention from Corliss Lamont, and the continued support of the Endowment for editing volumes two and three as well as for publishing volume one.

By an unanimous vote of its board, the MIT Press agreed to endorse and publish the projected twenty volume Santayana Edition. Harry and Betty Stanton represented the edition *vis-à-vis* MIT Press and, principally through the leadership of Betty Stanton, the edition won the endorsement of the press and of many notable scholars (including Richard Bernstein, Arthur Danto, John Lachs, Richard C. Lyon, John McCormick, Joel Porte, Hilary Putnam, Richard Rorty, Irving Singer, and others).

After years of attempting to secure a suitable publisher, it is a delight to have the resources of a major press like MIT and the cooperation of its staff.

Fruitlessly for years, the General Editor searched for the holograph of *The Middle Span* only to find it mentioned in some 1940's correspondence. Then through the efforts of John McCormick, Scribner's released the last ten years of its Santayana files to Princeton University. Letters in these files indicated that the holograph had been given to a Sergeant Harry A. Freidenberg who had arranged to have the typescript hand delivered to Scribner's, since the army censors, suspicious of the chapter on Germany, would not permit it to be mailed. In gratitude for Freidenberg's efforts, Santayana gave the holograph to him. Textual Editor William G. Holzberger located Freidenberg, and the General Editor then arranged to receive the manuscript and to prepare its literal transcription.

Kenneth Lohf of Columbia University arranged for the purchase of the manuscript from Freidenberg, and now this manuscript may be found with its companion holographs of *Persons and Places* and *My Host the World* in the manuscript collection of Butler Library, Columbia University. Also in the Scribner files were over one hundred Santayana letters now located in the Princeton archives.

Throughout the work on the Santayana Edition, Mrs. Margot Cory (wife of the late Daniel Córý) has given her

gracious and complete support to the editors. In the spring of 1983, Charles Scribner, Jr., in a most cooperative act, agreed to revert all of Scribner's Santayana rights to Mrs. Cory. This action greatly simplified the usual problems associated with publishing contracts, and placed full authority for publishing Santayana material in the hands of Mrs. Cory, Santayana's literary executrix. Following on the heels of Scribner's generosity came the MIT decision, as well as the continued support of the Endowment and of Corliss Lamont.

### III. Publications Projected

#### Volume One

*Persons and Places*

Introduction by Richard C. Lyon

The editing of volume one will be completed during the fall of 1983 and it is scheduled for publication during the fall of 1984.

#### Volume Three

*Interpretations of Poetry and Religion*

Introduction by Joel Porte

Editing will begin in the spring of 1984, to be completed in September 1986, and will be published in 1987.

#### Volume Two

*The Sense of Beauty*

Introduction by Arthur Danto

Editing will begin in the fall of 1983, to be completed by March 1985, and will be published early in 1986.