

Overheard in Seville

*Bulletin of the  
Santayana  
Society*

No. 10  
Fall 1992



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# ANNOUNCEMENT

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

## **SANTAYANA SOCIETY**

1992  
ANNUAL MEETING

Speaker: **Tom Alexander**  
Southern Illinois University at Carbondale

**"Santayana's Unbearable Lightness of Being:  
Aesthetics as a Prelude to Ontology"**

Commentator: **John McDermott**  
Texas A&M University

Presentation of a brief update on the Santayana Edition:  
**Herman J. Saatkamp, Jr.**  
Texas A&M University

7:30 - 10:30 P.M. 28 December  
Lincoln West Room  
Washington Hilton Hotel

# Santayana's Whitman Revisited

Santayana thought that “the imagination of our time has relapsed into barbarism” (IPR 107), because he saw “the power of idealization” steadily declining in Western literature—and this, even though “our poets have more ... tragedies to depict...and have the...marvellous conception which ... science has given us” (IPR 104).

Or if, perhaps their inspiration is comic, they have...the long comedy of modern social revolutions, so illusory in their aims and so productive in their aimlessness.

Given that the motivating intellectual content of Santayana's life was, precisely the pursuit, in life and history, of what he called *ideal meanings* (IPR 72), he took the phenomenon very seriously. He found, paradoxically, that while comparatively *barbarous ages* had a poetry of the ideal and held to a vision of beauty, order and perfection, our *age of material elaboration* “has no sense for these things” (IPR 104). Our age finds strength in blind vehemence, its ideals are negative and partial, and “its poetry...is the poetry of barbarism.”

But, as the verbal echo of a general moral crisis and imaginative disintegration, this poetry is not insignificant and needs to be understood. The Western imagination, for Santayana, has been formed both in the school of classical literature and polity and in the school of Christian piety. Subject to a double discipline and a duality of inspiration, its methods of rationalizing the world have, therefore, always suffered from a certain contradiction or incoherence. Santayana already ascribed the “romantic indistinctness and imperfection” which he found in the modern arts to the impossibility of being either wholly Classical or wholly Christian. In “these latter times,” as he saw them, the quantum leap in the materiality and the diffusiveness of our lives, along with the new faith in technology, has caused “a kind of return to the inexperience and self-assurance of youth.” The two traditional disciplines have been rejected by the new inspiration.

... for the reason, excellent from [its] own point of view, that no discipline whatever is needed ... . Ignorance of the past has bred contempt for the lessons which the past might teach. Men prefer to repeat the old experiment without knowing that they repeat it. (IPR 105)

Nor has the development of historical studies helped. This is because the habit of regarding the past as a stepping-stone to the present or future is unfavourable to the capturing of “that element in the past which was vital and which remains eternal.” The moral similarities among all ages are lost to us by the insistence of modern historians upon “the mechanical derivation of one age from another” (IPR 106). A given age seems alien to other ages because it is the product of new and different conditions: existences that cause one another, Santayana says, exclude one another.

## (i) Anti-conventionalism as Barbarism

As systems of ideas both the Classical and Christian traditions “attempt[ed] to seize the eternal morphology of reality and describe its unchanging constitution.” In this contemplation of the essence of things, of the highest objects, mechanical science — the science of causes as opposed to the science of values — was neglected.

The reverse has now occurred and the spirit of life, innocent of any rationalizing discipline and deprived of an authoritative and adequate method of expression, has relapsed into miscellaneous and shallow exuberance. Religion and art have become short-winded ... [and] the multiplicity of ... incoherent efforts seems to many a compensation for their ill success or ... a ground for asserting their ... superiority. Incompetence, when it flatters the passions,

can always find a greater incompetence to approve of it. (IPR 107)

It is thus, Santayana concluded in 1900, that the imagination of our time has relapsed into barbarism. Master of disillusion that he was, Santayana goes on, however, to minimize this loss of discipline in phrases that *also, and startlingly*, turn out to be a refutation of the negativities of deconstructionism:

... the neglect of [discipline] need not be supposed to involve any very terrible ... loss. The triumphs of reason have been few and partial at any time, and *perfect works or art are almost unknown*. The failure of art and reason, because their *principle* is ignored, is ... hardly more conspicuous than it was when their principle, although ... acknowledged, was misunderstood or disobeyed. Indeed, to one who fixes his eye on the ideal goal, *the greatest art often seems the greatest failure, because it alone reminds him of what it should have been*. (IPR 107)

But the poetry of barbarism, in not subordinating sense and passion to clear thought or tenable attitudes, can “by virtue of its red-hot irrationality, utter wilder cries, surrender...to more absolute passion,” and so pile up a more stimulating variety of images than can seasoned poets of Classical and Christian inspiration. Santayana acknowledges that the power to stimulate is the beginning of greatness, so that

when the barbarous poet has genius ... he stimulates all the more powerfully on account of the crudity of his methods and the recklessness of his emotions. The defects of such art ... will hardly be felt by the contemporary public ... once its attention is arrested; for no poet is so undisciplined that he will not find many readers, if he finds readers at all, less disciplined than himself. (IPR 107-8)

## (ii) Whitman’s Anti-conventional Genius

Santayana does find Whitman to be a poet of “great influence” over his generation, because he sees him as a poet who “seek[s] to reveal and express the elemental as opposed to the conventional” (IPR 108). Interestingly, Santayana calls this poetic tendency “analytic” in the sense that it “reduces” or breaks experience down to “nothing but moods and particular images.” The world of Walt Whitman, he finds, is innocent of history or conventional passions in civilized settings; it contains only “simpler and more chaotic elements.” Its barbarism, he notes, is “avowed”, and the “barbaric yawp” is sent “over the roofs of the world in full consciousness of its inarticulate character.” The secret of this poetry is its ability to awaken in its audience a “new and genuine vitality.” The rejuvenation it brings is to be found, for Santayana, in the abandonment of Classical ideals and the Christian tradition which he equates with the “rebellion against discipline” (*ibid.*). The barbarian, in short,

is the man who regards his passions as their own excuse for being; who does not domesticate them either by understanding their cause or by conceiving their ideal goal. He ... does not know his derivations nor perceive his tendencies, ... who merely feels and acts, valuing in his life its force and its filling but, ... careless of its purpose and form. His delight is in abundance and vehemence. ... His scorn for what is poorer and weaker than himself is only surpassed by his ignorance of what is higher. (IPR 108)

But, and to Santayana’s credit, he recognizes that what he sees as the deficits and “solecisms” in Whitman’s poetry are only the obverse of his “profound inspiration and genuine courage”; for it is the latter that have earned Whitman his fame. We see that Santayana has glimpsed that Whitman might represent a revolution in, or challenge to, sensibility, but has not caught on to the language experiment Whitman was engaged in. What Santayana saw in Whitman that blinds him to the freshness of the latter’s

poetic utterance, can be summarized in a phrase from *The Genteel Tradition at Bay*: "a many-sided insurrection of the unregenerate natural man, with all his physical powers and affinities, against the regimen of Christendom" (GTB 141).

And now we perceive that Santayana's concrete criticism is not of Whitman's language, but of his *imagery* and "the method" by which "his rich, spontaneous, absolutely lazy fancy" works (IPR 109). Santayana sees that Whitman's poetry has "resolutely banished" such conventions as "metrical form [and] the echo of other poems" but, forgetting that it would not be poetry unless it somehow was still *methodic* in its own, new way, he offers no description of the traits of Whitman's methods, i.e., of his *poetics*.

We find swarms of men and objects rendered as they might strike the retina in a sort of waking dream. It is the...sincere...confession of the...most primitive type of perception...Walt Whitman has gone back to the innocent style of Adam, when the animals filed before him one by one and he called each of them by its name.

Sensing something of Whitman's experimentalism, Santayana does not look at the way it works in his text, but refers his "imaginary experiment of beginning the world over again" to the spirit of the age and the utopian illusions of liberalism and transcendentalism in America, "where the newness of the material environment made it easier to ignore the fatal antiquity of human nature." This parallels — we notice at once — the way in which Santayana in getting at its traits, had earlier referred *generically* to "the poetry of barbarism" and its producers rather than to Whitman specifically.

Of course, it was Santayana's traditionalism or, more exactly, his *renewal of classicism* that fed his feeling that the world was old and tragic. Yet, as a critic of the genteel tradition and social observer, Santayana was in agreement with Whitman on a number of moral matters. Furthermore, as a completely conventional poet himself, Santayana can hardly be expected to have been able to see the wave of the future in Whitman's verses, or the validity of their newness: that would be like expecting that pair of genteel if critical connoisseurs, Henry Adams and John La Farge, to have hailed and appreciated Impressionism and Cubism as the wave of the future in painting. Santayana is, however, right in saying that Whitman, like other Americans, "imagined ... that his own world was a fresh creation, not amenable to the same laws as the old. The difference in the conditions blinded him, in his *merely sensuous* apprehension, to the identity of the principles [in the past and the present]."<sup>1</sup>

But Santayana is unexpectedly wrong in ascribing Whitman's hope — which he calls an illusion — to his *mode of apprehension*; "unexpectedly," that is, for a literary critic who is the author of an aesthetics. No apprehension is *purely* sensuous. No poetry is unreflective, and certainly not Whitman's; his catalogues for instance, in *their* allusiveness, are no less reflective in the American context than Homer's catalogues were in his. Catching the echoes of English classics, the Bible, Shakespeare and Milton in Whitman's utterance, Santayana sees that Whitman has educated himself with success. But he also sees him as the unselfconscious heir of the Reformation, the American revolution, and that Romance which (for Santayana) pervades the Western imagination. So Santayana takes Whitman to be more interested and sure about the

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<sup>1</sup> My emphasis.

surface of things and “experience” than in “the causes of experience or the objects of knowledge” (GTB 140), as if “the world ha[d] no inside ... sublime only in the infinite aggregation of its parts” (GTB 140), and as if — finally and fatefully — “there could be nothing more real than the intense and the immediate” (GTB 140). Since, in the field of philosophy, this romantic tendency led to “British and German philosoph[ies] in which some psychological phantasm, sensuous or logical, interposes itself in front of the physical world” — what Santayana is objecting to is a consequence of romantic subjectivism for technical epistemology. And we see that this objection blames what I will call the presencing focus of Whitman’s experientialism for the mistake of some narrowly-trained English logicalists. There are three or four other cardinal points here that seem to jibe with Santayana’s general views, two or three of which, however, are either lapses of critical acumen or bad intellectual history — and I mean lapses from Santayana’s own aesthetics and from his own best historiographic formulations.

### (iii) Whitman, Santayana and American Culture

Santayana has not seen that Whitman is fulfilling Emerson’s call for less self-consciousness as a remedy for our fallen state; he has forgotten Emerson’s discourse against self-consciousness as the great intensifier if not the only cause of suffering. Reader and sympathetic rival of Emerson that he was, Santayana has yet not perceived in Emerson’s view of poetry the vivid anticipation of central attributes of Whitman’s utterance. In his essay on *The Poet*, Emerson had said that the poet is a prophet and an oracle whose “primal warblings” sing the “picture-language” of Nature. He “turns the world to glass and shows us all things in their right series and procession ... the poet is the Namer, or Language-maker ... giving to every one its own name and not another’s.” The poet’s genius “repairs the decay of things”; but

the poet also resigns himself to his mood, and that thought which agitated him is expressed in a manner totally new. The expression is organic...the new type which things themselves take when liberated ... what it sees, by sharing the path, or circuit of things through forms and so making them translucent to others ... . The condition of true naming, on the poet’s part is his resigning himself to the divine *aura* which breathes through forms, and ... unlocking, at all risks, his human doors ... suffering the etherial tides to roll and circulate through him.

— We pause to note that, if Emerson’s way of saying things here points unwittingly to the essentializing or typifying effect of Whitman’s poetry and namings, it is because *all* poetry, in being reflective, cannot avoid — even in its presentness and like language itself — having an essentialist dimension. And what Emerson saw prospectively Santayana, the philosopher of essence, may be chided for not having seen in retrospect.

Among the classic American philosophers from Emerson to Dewey, and in Randall’s useful contrast, Santayana of course stands out as a “philosopher of *being*” rather than a “philosopher of *experience*” (NHE 273f). In emphasizing essences as making intelligible the drama and process of sociohistorical existence, Santayana can be forgiven for not appreciating how much Whitman, with his focus on *experience*, is in the American intellectual mainstream. And in his intellectualist plaint that there are no “objects of knowledge” in Whitman’s poetry we see Santayana’s priorities as a professional philosopher overriding his literary acumen. Poetry highlights the existential *prevalence* of objects of knowledge; objects of knowledge in the cognitivist sense are the product of reader interpretation, not of the *exhibitive* judgment or construction which the poetry is. Poetic “understanding” may not be seeing “under,” but it is seeing

what is there in its ineluctibility.

In his technical philosophizing, on the other hand, Santayana is actually as antitranscendentalist as Whitman is in his poetry.

Understanding is nothing but seeing under and seeing far. There is indeed a great mystery in knowledge, but his mystery is present in the simplest memory or presumption. The sciences have nothing to supply more fundamental than vulgar thinking or ... preliminary to it. They are ... elaborations of it; they accept its presuppositions and carry on its ordinary processes. A pretence on the philosopher's part that he could get behind or below human thinking ... would be pure imposture ... . Every deeper investigation presupposes ordinary perception and uses ... its data. Every possible discovery *extends* human knowledge. None can base human knowledge anew on a deeper foundation or prefix an ante-experiential episode to experience. (RS 26)

This is what I mean by saying that, on his own theoretical terms, Santayana was equipped to avoid the complaint that Whitman revels in the appearances as the reality, in the aesthetic quality of the passing moment and of what is there. Whitman, rather, is the poet projected by Emerson who can endure as long as possible "the ecstasis" which tirelessly suggests "the splendour and meaning that plays over the world."

Santayana misses Whitman's will-to-inclusiveness altogether: he mistakes it for "the absence of any principle of selection" (IPR 111). And he believes, at first, that He has approached common life without bringing in his mind any higher standard by which to criticize it; he has seen it, not in contrast with an ideal, but as the expression of forces more indeterminate and elementary than itself; and the vulgar, in this cosmic setting, has appeared to him sublime.

Santayana, in other words, here thinks that Whitman lacked any ideal to which to refer his perceptions. Yet, on the next page, Santayana does attribute an ideal to him:

The perfect man of the future, the prolific begetter of other perfect men, is to work with his hands, chanting the poems of some future Walt, some ideally democratic bard. Women are to have as nearly as possible the same character as men; the emphasis is to pass from family life and local ties to the friendship of comrades and the general brotherhood of man. (IPR 112)

This ideal, unfortunately, Santayana thinks is already obsolete:

... what Whitman seized upon as the promise of the future [is] in reality the survival of the past. He sings the song of pioneers ... . When Whitman made the initial and amorphous phase of society his ideal, he became the prophet of a lost cause.

And it is a lost cause because the laws of social evolution have from the beginning of the world ordained that a development, such as that undergone by America, precludes the indefinite persistence of pioneer values because of its complexity, its wealth, and its knowledge. So, though Whitman gives voice to "some aspects of [his country's] past and present conditions," he is not, for Santayana, its spokesman; "nor does he appeal," Santayana adds severely, "to those whom he describes." For, all his love and comprehension of men and nature, for all his sincerity, and "for all his acquaintance with the ways and thoughts of the common man, he did not truly understand him." By "understanding," here, Santayana meant penetrating their characters and disentangling their inmost ideals; he meant "scientific and imaginative knowledge of their hearts."

Whitman cannot be a poet of the people for Santayana, because he missed the fact that the people "are natural believers in perfection." Here Santayana sounds a bit like the magazine editor or movie maker who deprecates the ability of his audience:

They have no doubts about the absolute desirability of wealth and learning and power, none about the worth of pure goodness and pure love. Their chosen poets, if they have any, will

always be those who have known how to paint these ideals in lively even if in gaudy colours. (IPR 113)

What people "really desire is an ideal good for themselves"; and, therefore, Santayana concludes, "a poet who loves the picturesque aspects of labour and vagrancy will hardly be the poet of the poor." Any sentimental story teller or sensational dramatist, any moralizing poet, will be preferred, because the people are at bottom hero-worshippers, "and are too wise or unfortunate to be much enamoured of themselves or the conditions of their existence" (IPR 114). Again, Santayana has bypassed the fact that Whitman is not a poet of the picturesque or the picturesque aspect of anything, by speaking in terms of the genre (the pastoral) rather than to his individual subject.

It emerges from all this that, in discussing Whitman, Santayana is talking as a culture-critic and generalist concerned with the effect of what he thinks of as Whitman's primitivism and democratic levelling upon the quality of already commercialized American culture. And the hidden agendas of these two different sorts of poets and thinkers appear as in an opposition between traditionalist values and individual liberation. But not only is Santayana an individualist in his own way, the two also agree that much is wanting in American culture, much that it must become able to reverence, encompass, or be both more universalist and relativist about. So it is interesting that when Santayana concludes, in *Character and Opinion in the United States*, that Whitman is *unrepresentative*, what he has shown is that he is not representative of the New England mind or literary tradition, not that he is unrepresentative of American culture (p. 6f). Santayana's negative tone, if we reread the passage carefully, is really aimed at "the conscious minds of cultivated" nineteenth-century New Englanders. It quite misses the Whitman who certainly does not represent them and whose interest was *liberation* from conventional literary culture, from prevailing provincialisms, and from alienating competitiveness.

Whitman's liberationism, moreover, causes us to see that Santayana on his side *renews* the tradition he is defending by liberating *it* from the encumbrances and inhibitions of dogmatic supernaturalism, asceticism, and other-worldliness, replacing these respectively with imaginative naturalism, rational conviviality and worldly prudence. Western theology and idealism he resolves into expressive mythology and inspiring symbolism. In contrast to Whitman whose song is powered by overflowing sympathy, Santayana's working assumption is that "true reason restrains only to liberate; it checks only in order that all currents ... may take a united course" (GTB 166). The contrast exemplifies quite fully Nietzsche's distinction between the complementary aesthetic principles of the Dionysian-Apollonian duality, in which affectivity and imagination are perfused with and ordered by poetic reason, as in Whitman, and in which rationality and detachment are infused with empathy and human passion, as in Santayana.

In any case, had Santayana not taken the "polite" and "cultivated" part of the country for the whole, and looked less negatively at the two phenomena, New England's "Indian summer of the mind" and New York's Walt Whitman, as each of them symptoms of a rising nationalism, he might have seen them in their proper relations. Horace Kallen, in terms that cover both Whitman and the New Englanders, conveniently lists for us the intellectual symptoms of rising new nationhood:

the translation and romantic imitation of foreign thought and foreign manners, the[ir] superiority to the ... tradition at home; the conscious, learned closed literature on native

themes; the turn toward a didactic realism regarding the native scene; the emergence of masters of the people's idiom like Whitman, and their repudiation of the cultivated; the multiplication of such masters ... of themes and interests, until ... national life gets ... set in direction and intent and literature takes on expressive pertinency.<sup>2</sup>

Both Whitman and Santayana in their different ways, then, can be seen as setting conventions aside and starting out again by returning to real fundamentals, the one to the fundamentals as it were of the "flesh" and the community to be found among individualists, the other to the basics of the "spirit" and the individual collectedness to be found in the bosom of the common tradition. And we their readers find, in this analysis, the "devil" or angel with which they each wrestled to have been the obsolete lumber of either poetic or philosophic conventions. But where the conventions to which Santayana continued to resort in his verse do not amount to a renewal of the neoplatonism and solitarist romanticism which constitute so much of their content, Whitman's spirited shouldering of his inherited democratical lumber does constitute a renewal of *that* American political tradition. Where democracy for Santayana was but a convenient constitutional device, for Whitman it was both a momentum-giving embodiment of the spirit of the age and the ground of the fraternal community he was ever searching and hoping for. In short, it seems fair to propose that while Whitman renewed and rehumanized the poetic and political traditions of 'America, Santayana renewed and humanized the classical and spiritual traditions of the West. That the latter half of this claim has not been fully appreciated at a time when the Western tradition as a whole is under attack by deconstructionists and multiculturalists so-named, should motivate further discussion of Santayana as an intellectual historian and transmitter of our heritage.

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<sup>2</sup> Horace Kallen, "America and the Life of Reason," *The Journal of Philosophy* XVIII. 20-21, pp.533-575; an essay-review of *Character and Opinion in the United States*.

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# The Primordial Myth of The Bad Mother and The Good Mother in *Persons and Places* and in *The Last Puritan*

**O**n Santayana's view the human personality possesses a number of sharply distinct talents for experiencing and expressing what it finds to be true. Its capacity to make myths plumbs the deepest of these truths. Myth is a form of poetry, whose function it is "to repair to the material of experience, seizing hold of the reality of sensation and fancy beneath the surface of conventional ideas, and then out of that living but indefinite material to build new structures, richer, finer, fitter to the primary tendencies of our nature, truer to the ultimate possibilities of the soul."<sup>1</sup> "Ultimate truths," says Santayana, "are more easily and adequately conveyed by poetry than by analysis."<sup>2</sup>

During the same decades when he was incubating the "realms" of his metaphysics, Santayana was also developing two *different* realms, in which were elaborated the more personal fruits of his experience: one was *Persons and Places*, subtitled "Fragments of Autobiography"; the other was his novel, *The Last Puritan*, subtitled "A Memoir in the Form of a Novel." Each of these can be read, in addition to many other ways, as a dramatization of the primal myth of the good mother versus the bad mother. Partly this was a subtle, bloodless, but devastating posthumous revenge against his own mother, as I shall try to indicate. Partly, also, the bad and good mother figures represent the two warring *traditions* that "mothered" him — Puritanism and the Catholic Church.

Artistic creation is the consummate play, and in playfulness Santayana has created full-rounded characters in his novel, some of whom leap off the page. But just as his philosophical system, gestated over the same stretch of time, exhibits audacious, ironically elaborated structures, so too the characters and plot of the novel deserve to be read wisely and variously.

Daniel Cory<sup>3</sup> quotes a letter in which Santayana, many years before the completion of the novel, describes Oliver's mother as "the quintessence of all New England virtues." O virtues! O quintessence! Who can look at this woman — lazy, selfish, cold, lacking culture or intelligence, manipulative, grasping — and miss the heavy irony? Examples of vicious descriptions of this woman's behavior toward all who depend upon her fill the book. Let one early scene stand here for all.

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<sup>1</sup> George Santayana, *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1990. Page 161.

<sup>2</sup> George Santayana, *The Idler and His Works*, New York, George Braziller, 1957. Page 16.

<sup>3</sup> *The Letters of George Santayana*, edited by Daniel Cory. New York, Scribner's, 1955. Page 190.

"Mother," Oliver said one day as they were passing the bridge and the boathouse, in front of which Mrs. Murphy was sitting sewing, and holding her youngest sprawling offspring somewhat inconveniently in her lap, "why doesn't she make the baby sit on the bench?"

"I don't know," Mrs. Alden answered without looking. "I suppose the child is too young and can't sit up yet."

"Oh, no; he's almost as big as I am."

Mrs. Alden now involuntarily looked up, a little irritated. But it was a settled principle with her never to show impatience. "Perhaps," she said, as if she were speculating on her own account, "he may be sleepy, and she's afraid he might drop off and fall into the water."

While her lips were uttering these words mechanically, Mrs. Alden couldn't help becoming aware that they were nonsense; for that hypothetically sleepy boy would have had to roll twenty feet on a level before reaching the river. Would Oliver notice? For fear he might, she instantly raised the argument to a higher level, and turned from physical to moral considerations; a great resource when the facts contradict one's convictions. "Very likely," said Mrs. Alden, a little sadly, "very likely it's mere stupidity. Probably that woman can't afford to have a separate chair at home for her little boy, such as you have in the schoolroom: and so the poor creature has got used to holding him in her lap, even when they are out of doors, and there's plenty of room on the bench beside her. They get almost to *like* huddling together. It's repulsive, and so bad for the little one's health, and so uncomfortable. But ignorant people are like that."

Far, far in a dim past, as if it had been in another world or in a pre-natal condition, Oliver remembered the long-denied privilege of sitting in his mother's lap. It had been such a refuge of safety, of softness, of vantage: you were carried and you were enveloped in an amplitude of sure protection, like a king on his throne, with his faithful bodyguard many ranks deep about him: and the landscape beyond, with its messengers and its motley episodes, became the most entertaining of spectacles, where everything was unexpected and exciting yet where nothing could go wrong: as if your mother herself had been telling you a story, and these pictures were only the illustrations to it which painted themselves in your listening mind. But now, in the real world, where you sat alone and were going to the dentist's, the centre seemed to be cold and only the circumference friendly and congenial: an untouchable world where rivers sparkled and flowed, and tugs whistled, and bright brown boats and canoes were moored together to the landing-stage, like bunches of bananas, and Mrs. Murphy sat sewing in the sunshine, and pressing her child to her broad bosom.<sup>4</sup>

The companion piece to this scene is a conversation the two friends have during their Harvard days. Mario speaks to Oliver about his own mother.

"I say, Oliver, were you brought up on the bottle or did you have a wet-nurse?"

Oliver laughed at the idea of a wet-nurse. Fancy Miss Tirkettle in that capacity! Nobody had a wet-nurse in America. Of course he was brought up on the bottle.

"I thought so," Mario exclaimed triumphantly. "You don't know what a woman is. You are not comfortable with women. It's all because you never loved your mother and she never loved you. That makes all the difference. My mother suckled me at her own breast. She would have given up the stage, given up music, given up everything rather than not do it, or let anybody else touch me. I seem still to remember it. But suppose I couldn't remember it; the habit would be there, the impulse, the confidence, the love of softness, the

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<sup>4</sup> George Santayana, *The Last Puritan*, New York, Scribner's, 1936, Pages 103-104.

sense of power. Even when I was a little boy every woman to me meant Woman. A room full of them was vastly exciting, like an orchestra.”<sup>5</sup>

This novel is not *merely* a critique of the Puritan worldview. But it is *also* that.

If a Catholic loses his literal faith in a personal God, Santayana has shown, he can live very happily with the myth of Christ and continue to enjoy the mythic symbols and celebrations of the Church, just as Mario continues to enjoy the memory of his mother’s nourishing breasts and unstinting affection after her physical death.

Puritans can not do this, because the mythic interpretation is precisely what they reject.

Unlike the Christ of a “lapsed” Catholic, the Puritan Lord can not have a *mythic* reality. He must be literally there as the object of the Puritan’s virtues of responsibility and self-denial. Oliver is left with the Puritan’s virtues *sans* their proper object. These virtues turn in him to a barren worship of responsibility itself — responsibility for even the most trivial of objects: football or rowing teams, a particular course of studies, the beginning of the freshman semester in some particular college.

When his *real* responsibility presents itself, the responsibility to keep his father alive, Oliver sloughs it off following the most superficial consideration, turning it over by mail to the murderer Darnley. When his father responds by killing himself that very night, Oliver seems to experience no strong remorse. He is not unaware of his failure, he notes it, but — no remorse. For this reason I disagree with readers who hold that Santayana portrays Oliver as “a superior individual, a very good man,” and who refer to Santayana’s admiration for Oliver’s “purity of soul.” Santayana is far too much the Aristotelian to present, seriously and without irony, as “a very good man” a character who feels no remorse at having allowed his father to die.

Note, by contrast, that Oliver’s (Catholic) cousin Mario — who hardly knows Oliver and his father, has just met them — incurs, out of spontaneous concern and affection for them, the sure punishment of a severe thrashing at the hands of his Eton master as well as, even more importantly, the probable destruction of his already shaky standing at Eton. He does it with full awareness of the consequences, with a full-blooded, humorous joy. Oliver’s and Mario’s behavior in this matter is set quite deliberately in contrast, inviting us to judge who is the truly good man, and which origins seem designed to promote such goodness, which mother to inspire it.

Oliver’s father has belatedly tried to get some spontaneity from his son. But he recognizes that Oliver is a horse in harness that will not leave the traces.

Oliver’s vaunted “purity of spirit,” again, to which much reference is made, is a purity not of temptation resisted, but rather of temptation not noticed. A kind of purity of blankness. Even his sexual “purity” is due not to self-restraint but to the absence of strong temptation. Neither Edith nor Rose deeply touches his heart or arouses his passion.

That Oliver is capable of love at all is due to Irma, his romantic German nurse-governess. In Santayana’s own emotional life as portrayed in *Persons and Places*, this role is taken by his half-sister Susana.

But Irma is also a *mythic* reference to Santayana’s *intellectual* “nurse-governess,”

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* Pages 408-413.

the German Idealism which was the prevailing philosophic mode of his Harvard days. (His thesis advisor was Josiah Royce.) Though rounded in flesh and blood, Irma represents the perfectionist strain of German idealism, at once earthy (in her early letters to her sister, Irma hopes to meet a man and marry, remember) and sacrificial. In his student days Oliver rejects her ideas as inconsistent and chooses to devote himself to solid facts. (We remember that her idol Goethe had a great interest, which she ignores, in solid fact — particularly landscape architecture, to which he devotes many pages of his novel *Wahlverwandschaften*.)

Irma is no mere philosophical icon, of course. She is one of the important engines of this novel: she teaches Oliver to love. His mother does not love him and he does not love her; furthermore, she has tried her utmost to prevent him from coming to love his father, and has tried to prevent Irma from bestowing any physical affection upon her charge. But there she has failed, for Irma adores Oliver and gives him at least some of this forbidden physical affection. And he loves her.

Consequently Oliver's emotional development is not completely stunted: he is capable of one kind of deep and complete love - the love for a mentor. He continues to love Irma herself, but as mentor she is replaced first by Jim Darnley and later by Mario. Furthermore, while rejecting some of her ideas, he never rejects her ideals. Virtue remains the touch-stone for him, exactly as she taught him. This permits him to reject Darnley, though it causes him intense suffering, as soon as he discovers the evil of this man.

Darnley, who flashes into his life with such blinding promise of liberation and release — who teaches him to swim naked to the elements. Darnley, who keeps Oliver's father from being swamped by ennui, and teaches Oliver himself the carefree joy of the body.

The turning point comes during those night hours while Oliver cools his heels beside the river lock in which Darnley has drowned the previous husband of his mistress. In that river lock drowns Oliver's innocence, as gradually he can no longer avoid the awareness of what is going on upstairs while he is made to wait.

He turns his love from Darnley to Mario.

Mario is Oliver's final loving mentor. Santayana laughs to us: "Don't make the mistake of identifying me with Oliver merely because he had a mother as cold as mine. *He* also had the cold mother of his Puritan ancestry. It is Mario, suckled by the lusty Latin Catholic Church, whose love remains with him even after she has died for him, who represents my warmest affinities." Again, of course, not only Mario, but Mario and Oliver both.

Because their wealth is ill-gotten, Puritanism has gone awry in Oliver's family. Their murdered ancestor had squeezed his tenants. Being Puritans, they can not live down his crime of greed while benefitting by the fruits of it; on the other hand, they have lost the Puritan force of character to give away the wealth itself to the poor. Puritanism is reaching the end of its line in them — there remains just enough of it to make the money sit uneasy on their conscience and on their life. It still enables them to inspire others, but lacks the force to give them effectiveness or lead them to grace. They carry too much Puritan guilt to *enjoy* their great wealth, which instead places a moral burden upon their souls, in different ways.

The father is enabled to drift comfortably about the world, but he can never seem to get a firm hold on some active way of doing good in it, of becoming engaged and

effective. Oliver does use some of the money for the good of others, particularly of Irma and Mario, whom he loves, while denying himself expenditures to promote his own pleasure. He takes pleasure at second hand in Mario's joy, buying him a magnificent automobile, which he enjoys very much himself after Mario abandons it to him, but which he would never have bought for himself directly.

With what remains in them of the Puritan inspiration, both Peter and Oliver inspire and direct the vitality of others, and ride this redirected vitality in place of the self-locomotion they no longer command. The father has an inspiring, though not ennobling, influence upon Jim Darnley, providing him with a wonderful ship and grand uniforms to shine in, but shine with a reflected glory. In his own person Jim is a blackguard, multiple murderer, adulterer, drunkard, wastrel.

Yet there is perhaps more force of character in Peter Alden than in his son. In Peter the stream is running thin — in Oliver it runs *out*.

It is wonderful to be able to read the following, written by Santayana — in an as yet unpublished letter — to Henry Ward Abbot in 1924: "My hero (in the novel) whose name is Oliver (after Cromwell) Alden (after John Alden of the Mayflower and Longfellow's poem, his supposed ancestor) is a *natural* Puritan, and it is not his sexual suppressions that make the thread of the story, at least not on the surface, but his general discovery that it is wrong not to live naturally, not to tell the truth about important things, as well as about trifles, and not to make hay while the sun shines. But he is very much too fine in texture and feeling to be happy in his world or to succeed in the things (including love-making) which it expects him to attempt: and so he peters out — which is so terrible a quiet tragedy that I have actually cried over the writing of it! But I mustn't describe my chicken while it is still in the realm of essence only, and I don't know when the book will be done."<sup>6</sup>

With all of Peter's feebleness, he yet exerts control, employing his wealth to exert it. Darnley is an unworthy steed, but Peter masters him to his purpose, so that Jim serves him, amuses him, attracts his son to him and keeps the son amused. Peter is an autonomous man. He dies autonomously, by his own hand, at the moment of his own choosing. Oliver dies by accident, in a meaningless, pitiful way, *after* the War has run its course and is over. He has never used his immense wealth to exert control. He employs it mainly to fuel Mario's fire. But the vitality of Mario's youth is directed to the effort to live up to Oliver's good opinion of him. It gradually dies in him after Oliver's demise.

Still, in contrast with Darnley's, Mario's affection is genuine and spontaneous. It survives Oliver's life by several years. It is he, after all, who works to perpetuate Oliver's memory by egging on the fictional "Santayana" to write the "memoir". However, gradually the flame goes out, and a few years later Mario is discovered a stocky Italian householder married to connections at the Vatican.

A novelist is a dreamer, a mythmaker. Santayana knew that, back in 1900, long before *The Last Puritan* began "dreaming" in him. Here is what he said then, in *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion*:

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<sup>6</sup> This letter to Henry Ward Abbot is in the archives of Columbia University.

Yet in our alertest moment the depths of the soul are still dreaming: the real world stands drawn in bare outline against a background of chaos and unrest. Our logical thoughts dominate experience only as the parallels and meridians make a checker-board of the sea. They guide our voyage without controlling the waves, which toss for ever in spite of our ability to ride over them to our chosen ends. Sanity is a madness put to good uses; waking life is a dream controlled.

Out of the neglected riches of this dream the poet fetches his wares. He dips into the chaos that underlies the rational shell of the world and brings up some superfluous image, some emotion dropped by the way, and reattaches it to the present object; he reinstates things unnecessary, he emphasizes things ignored, he paints in again into the landscape the tints which the intellect has allowed to fade from it. If he seems sometimes to obscure a fact, it is only because he is restoring an experience.<sup>7</sup>

What fact is Santayana obscuring, what experience restoring in *The Last Puritan*? We must *not* hope simply to look to *Persons and Places* for the "facts" of the novel's "fiction." Each of these books is a separate "realm" of moral truth — they may not be mapped directly upon one another. I have explained in detail<sup>8</sup> what Santayana means by "moral truth". Briefly, Santayana specifically identifies the "moral" plane with the plane of consciousness: "Nature reproduces itself by generation or derivation on the material plane. When it creates feeling or thought it passes on to the moral plane of comment and enjoyment."<sup>9</sup> And since consciousness itself is the "cry," the emotional exclamation, which the "predicament" of being alive wrings from the organism, the conscious plane as a whole is that which some living being radically cares about. The "moral" is so from one specific view at a time; its referent is simply what is *important* to a specific organism. And a judgement is called "true morally" when it expresses "the bias of human nature."<sup>10</sup> Since the mind is the expression on the part of the body about its situation in the world, every mental act is inherently emotional, and every "moral" truth is an emotional truth.

Santayana presents us with two companion versions of the myth of the good, nurturing mother versus the cold, domineering one. From *Persons and Places* I must again give you a single citation that must stand for all. Santayana has told us that in his mother's estimation her children were not virtuous. He describes her as moving silently, slowly but deftly, without hesitation or curiosity, "... as if carpeting the way as she went. Yet with all these signs of high breeding in her demeanour, she was too indolent or too disheartened to trouble about them in her children. We were innately too inferior and at times too inelegant."<sup>11</sup> (Oliver's mother, we remember, is also indolent.) Here is the passage which sets forth clearly Santayana's mother as the bad, Susana as the good maternal presence:

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<sup>7</sup> See pages 156-157 of *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion*.

<sup>8</sup> Henny Wenkart, "What Santayana Means by 'Moral'," *Proceedings of the Bicentennial Symposium on American Philosophy*, New York, 1976.

<sup>9</sup> George Santayana, *Realms of Being*, one volume edition, New York, Scribner's, 1942. Page 539.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* Page 480.

<sup>11</sup> *Persons and Places*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, MIT Press, 1986. Page 247.

A real father in my case was lacking, and the real mother was my sister Susana. This fact, that my sister took on the higher duties and influence of a mother over me, initiating me into religion and society, caused my mother to seem a superimposed and rather hostile power; for in her apparent passivity she retained absolute authority in matters of discipline and money. She was not meddling, she left us for long stretches of time to do as we liked; but then suddenly the sword would fall, pitiless, cold and surgically sterilizing, to cut off our tenderest tentacles for our own good. I could shrug my shoulders at this high control, because I was not passionately wedded to what I was doing in any case, and could view this interference sardonically, without in the least modifying my inner allegiances; I could even sympathize with my mother's intelligent firmness, granting her ideal of Victorian virtue and bourgeois eminence; but the others suffered. They demanded a sympathy that they never found, and they hadn't the strength of will to laugh at the tyrant precepts as I did, while momentarily bowing to the physical necessity of obeying them. In me, my mother saw and dreaded an equal ...<sup>12</sup>

When we set the portrayal of *his* mother side by side with that of Oliver's mother, we note the similarities at once, but we see also that in the novel the cold brutality of description is exacerbated by ridicule. What he seems unable to forgive his own mother is not that she was a New England matron — she was not, of course — but that, being something so much better, being Spanish, she *aspired* to New England. Her caricature in the novel is not a Boston snob (the reader might have considered *that* snobbery as justified), but a snob from a totally insignificant provincial Connecticut town.

His richest revenge upon his mother comes in a twist in the plot of which he was aware (though the full force of his animus may have remained hidden from him). In his Boston life, where money mattered, it was his mother who had the moneyed connections, although in his childhood the comfort of that money itself, tantalizingly all around him, was just out of reach of his immediate family's genteel poverty. His father had no money. By contrast, in the novel, the money belongs to the father, who puts it at the mother's disposal with sardonic *noblesse oblige*. Santayana refers to this reversal in a stunning unpublished letter to Bruno Lind, written in November 1951. Let me conclude by giving you his own words about this mythmaking:

I feel like straightening out a little, even if I have already written something about it, the relation of myself and my family feelings to *The Last Puritan*. That book contains all my experience of human life and character. But the moral "essences" are manifested in entirely different circumstances and careers than those in which I "intuited" them. For instance, Oliver's choice between his father and mother is a free choice. Both careers were open, and he chose the less alluring one because he was a Puritan. I had no real choice. Staying with my father in Spain was *impossible*, and he never proposed [it] to me, although ideally, if it had been possible, both he and I would have preferred it. For Oliver it was a sacrifice, not for his mother's sake, as you see later, in the scenes in the steamer returning to America after his father's death. He had and he showed no sympathy with his mother but bitterly enjoyed defeating her plans.

The relation between Peter and his wife was *emotionally* based on that between my father and mother, but *historically* the two cases are contraries. He had the money in the novel;

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* Pages 248-249.

she had it in real life, what little there was of it. But my father, if he had been very rich and yet independent of the world (which would not have been possible in Spain where there were a few rich landholders with complicated family and political duties, like the Duke of Alba, whose agent for the province of Avila was my brother-in-law, but no free capitalists) — if my father had been rich he would have lived much as Peter did, and would have behaved towards me as Peter did to Oliver. But I was more like my father (and like Peter) than Oliver was like his: for he really was more like his mother, only genuine and not sham in his virtue. And my mother was not like his. She was silent and indifferent in minor matters, and stoical. But the absence of affection all round was the same in both mothers and in both husbands and both sons. You will do right if you see the shadow of myself and my family in the book, but must not assimilate the circumstances. It was perhaps exactly a reversal, in a dream, of the circumstances of my life, while preserving the characters, that produced the novel.<sup>13</sup>

A reversal in a dream — a creatively dreamed personal myth, ultimate personal truth.

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<sup>13</sup> This letter to Bruno Lind is in Houghton Library, Harvard University.

## An Abulensean Pragmatist?

There appears in the 1991 Bibliographic Checklist the following stunning title, *El sustrato abulense di Jorge Santayana*, of a 1989 book by Pedro García Martín. “*Sustrato*” — if a single word describing each philosopher were demanded, in this hurried age, this might be Santayana’s one word. But what on earth did “*abulense*” mean? After some effort, we were astonished to learn that it merely means “of Avila”; when Señor Martín wishes to describe the sky above Avila, he writes: “*el esplendor y la luminosidad del cielo abulense.*”

Many of us who participated in the recent International Conference on George Santayana under the skies of Avila have come away feeling abulensean in a manner we had not anticipated.

A major theme of this splendid conference,<sup>1</sup> formulated at the outset by John Lachs, was that Santayana’s rightful place is in the pragmatist camp, when the question is considered in broad terms. The most interesting disagreement was not given until near its conclusion, and came from a fresh voice. Gérard Deledalle argued that the pragmatists, and in particular Dewey, were tempted to include Santayana as a pragmatist, but in fact did not *understand* him. Deledalle notes that both Dewey and Santayana had written, at the time of the first world war, tying the excesses of German transcendental philosophy to the excesses of a militant Germany. Although they both developed the same thesis, however, they had an entirely different conception of what they had in common with each other. Dewey was puzzled that Santayana should so much stress their differences, when he was so much struck by their similarities. Santayana’s wide-ranging attack on transcendentalism, on the other hand, was so broad as explicitly to include Dewey himself among the offenders, due to a considerable residue of idealism in the pragmatist theories.

All will agree, I think, that what is important is, not to establish some final position about whether or not a philosopher embraces some “ism.” Rather it is important to get each separate point right, and to give reasons why some aspects are more central than other ones. And here there may be considerable agreement. Thus Lachs has the impression that Santayana is a pragmatist. But should he relent on this point, and come over to the other side, little more than a rearrangement of his original paper would be required to make his case. The two major differences he notes between pragmatist doctrine and Santayana’s approach would open the new presentation, and become the main themes. The five points of similarity featured in the original paper would become the afterthoughts, upon noting that all of them are on the cognitive side.

My own impression is that Santayana differs with the pragmatists on most important issues, *apart* from those of the cognitive side; and if pragmatists have the opposite view, this is because they tend to see everything in cognitive terms.

Lest it seem that I am unfairly using this platform on a contentious issue, I would

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<sup>1</sup> We are all grateful to Herman Saatkamp, Pedro García Martín, Brenda Bridges, and many others for shaping this conference out of the flux.

refer the reader to the newly published book,

*Santayana, Pragmatism, and the Spiritual Life.*<sup>2</sup>

Here the case for Lachs' thesis is presented most ably by Henry S. Levinson. Santayana scholars of whatever stripe, moreover, will want to have this handsome book on their desk or shelf. Furthermore, the proponents of the "Santayana as pragmatist" contention had the floor at Avila; their opponents could only respond with critical questioning and with last minute additions to text. It is rather this opposition which was taken aback and has lacked a voice.<sup>3</sup>

Deledalle's example takes our theme right back to its origins: at the time of the great war, Dewey would have been content to include Santayana into the pragmatist fold; but Santayana saw himself as moving in a very different direction. Another issue is being raised here by Deledalle, and one less apt to lead to verbal questions. Were there features of Santayana's philosophy which Dewey altogether missed, which concealed from him radical differences in their overall positions? Related to the original question, then, is the issue whether there are aspects of Santayana's philosophy which tend to get ignored in commentaries, and which might signal a major difference with pragmatism. Here I am thinking of the *sustrato*.<sup>4</sup>

Suppose we survey matters from the point of view of the four realms of being, Santayana's "kinds or categories of things" which he finds "conspicuously different and worth distinguishing."<sup>5</sup> Such a perspective, decisive for Santayana, does not lead to many links with Dewey's pragmatism. The absolute realm of truth, for instance, is anathema to pragmatists, and Santayana uses his account of truth to refute them. Nor are these pragmatists, who often lean to nominalism,<sup>6</sup> any more friendly to essence: Santayana found "a cruder hostility to essence, a sort of political hostility"<sup>7</sup> in their critique. In the case of spirit, there is a clear link, noted by Santayana himself, with Dewey's notion of consummation. However, this link is a little tenuous, because Santayana is comparing the rôle or "status" of spirit in action, and not spirit itself, to consummation. Pure spirit, moreover, is distinctly alien to Dewey.

In regard to the realm of matter, we do not find sweeping pragmatist criticisms, like those of the other realms. Matter is rather ignored, and seen perhaps to be an area of agreement. Nevertheless, I believe that the substantive view of matter, so pervasive in Santayana, and entirely missing in the pragmatist focus on experience, makes the

<sup>2</sup> Published by the University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, NC.

<sup>3</sup> Of course others, including J. Guinlock and A. Reck, voiced their disagreement that Santayana should be included among the pragmatists.

<sup>4</sup> Of course I am somewhat straying from Martin's use of the term *sustrato*, and putting my own spin on it.

<sup>5</sup> See page vi of *Scepticism and Animal Faith*, (Constable, London, 1923). This book will be cited as SAF in the sequel.

<sup>6</sup> Peirce, of course, was an exception.

<sup>7</sup> See page 532 of George Santayana, "Apologia Pro Mente Sua," *The Philosophy of George Santayana*, Paul Arthur Schilpp, editor, (The Library of Living Philosophers, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 1940). We cite this volume as PGS.

most striking contrast of all, although one not always perceived on the pragmatist side. When he describes Dewey as a philosopher of the immediate, Santayana fixes upon this contrast.

By the time the realms of being had appeared, Dewey no longer felt the same kinship with Santayana's writings, seeing in essence and truth metaphysical entities in the old style. Santayana, he decided, had renounced naturalism in favour of dualism, metaphysics, and an ethics of detachment. He did not imagine that Santayana might be deepening and solidifying his naturalism, as he claimed to do, nor that a proper attention to the dominant place of matter would make it clear how harmless were essence and truth. Here was a second (and very common) misreading of Santayana, that he vitiated his naturalism by attaching to it an exotic metaphysics.<sup>8</sup>

I wonder if, today, some are not reverting to the original misreading, that there is little to choose between the naturalism of Dewey and that of Santayana. In today's philosophical world, certain kinds of metaphysics are once again respectable; the difficulty of the problems which lead some to dualism is well recognized; and detachment is perhaps not seen to be so detestable as before. The naturalistic similarities which Dewey had earlier seen between himself and Santayana apparently loom large once again, insofar as many of the obstacles he later saw to this view are diminished. We have come full circle.

Santayana accepts Dewey as a naturalist, meaning by this that:

he identifies himself with his body, and does not assign to the soul any fortunes, powers, or actions save those of which his body is the seat and origin. ... It would be hard to find a philosopher in whom naturalism, so conceived, was more inveterate than in Dewey.<sup>9</sup>

Nevertheless, this naturalism is "half-hearted" and "short-winded." It is, in the end, vitiated by the dominance in Dewey's philosophy of the foreground, something found in all the traditions he inherited. To Santayana, this is fatal to true naturalism: "If such a foreground becomes dominant in a philosophy naturalism is abandoned" (DNM 223).

Pragmatism may be regarded as a synthesis of all these ways of making the foreground dominant: the most close-reefed of philosophical craft, most tightly hugging appearance, use and relevance to practice today and here, least drawn by the lure of speculative distances.<sup>10</sup>

Santayana's notion of a dominant foreground is closely related to the current issue

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<sup>8</sup> Here I part company with Deledalle, who holds that Santayana in fact renounced naturalism.

<sup>9</sup> See pages 161-162 of "Dewey's Naturalistic Metaphysics," in *Obiter Scripta*, Lectures, Essays and Reviews by George Santayana, edited by Justus Buchler and Benjamin Schwartz, (Scribner's, New York, 1936); this article will be cited as DNM.

<sup>10</sup> See page 224 of DNM. Now who would claim of Santayana's philosophy that it is "close-reefed"? Rather it holds that we have no choice but to run with the wind, although a broad reach is possible, given a society which understands its real needs and respects the call of reason; however, those who think we can sail into the wind under nothing but sheer willpower are romantic dreamers.

of the possibility of objectivity, as discussed by Thomas Nagel and others.<sup>11</sup> Can philosophy be truly objective about the world? This is in part the question whether we can avoid the dominance of the foreground in a philosophically honourable way. In SAF, Santayana argues in some detail that there is no reason why we must accept this dominance, and that philosophical honesty calls on us to reject it, not in transcendental reflection but in natural philosophy.

To Santayana's critique in DNM, Dewey responds: "there are in nature both foregrounds and backgrounds, heres and theres, centres and perspectives, foci and margins"<sup>12</sup> He makes no ontological distinction between foregrounds or perspectives and things or events. In such a neutral stance, Santayana sees vestiges of a Humean philosophy of experience, although this is projected onto a social rather than a personal dimension. He does not deny that our intuition of nature is a foreground, and may be no better than a perspective; but events and things are substantial, whereas foregrounds and perspectives are (epi)-phenomenal.

In his various discussions of pragmatism, Santayana draws attention to these marked divergences from his own version of materialism.<sup>13</sup> Pragmatism, he says, "is very sympathetic to science, in so far as science is a personal pursuit and a personal experience, rather than a body of doctrine with moral implications." As noted above, there is no attempt to separate the peripheral and observational from the substantial: "If it denies the existence of cognitive energy and the colouring medium of mind, it does so only in a formal sense; all the colours with which that medium endows the world remain painted upon it; and all the perspectives and ideal objects of thought are woven into the texture of things." It may refuse to admit ideas, but it does admit the ideal objects which ideas reveal: "they are not regarded as spiritual radiations from the natural world, but as parts of its substance."

... the temper and faith of these schools are not materialistic. Systematic materialism is one of the philosophies of old age. It is a conviction that may overtake a few shrewd and speculative cynics, who have long observed their own irrationality and that of the world, and have divined its cause; by such men materialism may be embraced without reserve, in all its rigour and pungency. But the materialism of youth is part of a simple faith in sense and in science; it is not exclusive; it admits the co-operation of any other forces—divine, magical, formal, or vital—if appearances anywhere seem to manifest them. The more we interpret the ambiguities of American writers in this sense, the less we shall misunderstand them. (COUS 162)

Dewey certainly does not see himself as an idealist; does he not accept physical existences into his ontology? To the complaint that he admits too much, he challenges Santayana to explain how he knows that the world is dead and non-human, that in it,

<sup>11</sup> See *The View from Nowhere*, (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1986),

<sup>12</sup> See pages 74-75 of *John Dewey: The Later Works*, Volume 3, 1927-1928, edited by Jo Ann Boydston, (Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale, 1984).

<sup>13</sup> The passages immediately following are taken from pages 161 and 162 of *Character and Opinion in the United States*, (Scribner's, New York, 1920, reprinted by Norton, New York, 1967). We refer to this as COUS.

“there is no foreground or background, no here, no now, no moral cathedra, no centre so really central as to reduce all other things to mere margins and mere perspectives” (DNM 223). Had Santayana offered the success of a science which proceeds on this assumption, Dewey would probably demand instead some more direct experiential evidence. However in Santayana’s view, nature cannot be given directly in experience.

This is not to say that there are no similarities between Santayana and Dewey in regard to knowledge. If Lachs and Levinson want only to say that Santayana’s epistemology is *closer* to pragmatism than to standard alternative theories, then I entirely agree. However, Santayana means his critique to go much further; as he makes clear, his sights are set, not just on Dewey and the pragmatists, but to modern philosophy as a whole, with certain exceptions like Spinoza. The traditions, inherited by Dewey, which Santayana cites as dominated by the foreground, encompass the greater part of Western philosophy — certainly including the empiricist and the phenomenological schools. It is epistemological scruples which underlie these traditions: the insistence that we cannot refer to external things without knowing them; the demand that truth must have an epistemic side. These have led philosophers to deal with what Nagel calls “reductive substitutes” for things. Santayana objects to this substitution, noting that they are introduced for understandable epistemic reasons, but lead invariably to a false hypostasis in ontological terms.

Both Santayana and Dewey saw knowledge as symbolic and non-literal. Both wanted an epistemology which could be formulated once and for all, which would not dominate and interfere with their writings on all other topics. In Santayana’s opinion, Dewey wants to deal with actual things, in his philosophy, rather than substitutes. But he is unwilling to stand back far enough. He both colours the things with human perspectives, and admits much else besides material things into his ontology. Thus he does not escape the dominant foreground.

Santayana’s naturalism is uncompromising on this point, and *starts* with an external world peopled with living organisms having a partial indirect knowledge of that world, a knowledge filtered through a sensory apparatus which is remarkable, but which can scarcely reveal the true constitution of things. He was led, after much effort, to a radically sceptical stance about literal knowledge of matters of fact, but a radically realist position about the existence of things to which human actors come into cognitive contact through animal faith mediated by symbols. For all this to be plausible or even comprehensible, I think, one must recognize that it codifies the substrative account of our contact with reality, and serves to confirm and fortify it.

Two key aspects of Santayana’s naturalism, then, are the symbolic character of knowledge, which he found in pragmatism, and the substrative sense of reality, which he did not.

I cannot think that Santayana lived in the house of pragmatism. Perhaps it was one of his early transient hotels. If so, I can imagine him throwing open the front door to retain contact with matter, and throwing open the windows to allow truth and essence in. Truth could then be an object of reverence, and certain essences could be objects of consummatory intuition.

ANGUS KERR-LAWSON

# The Ascent of Spirit: Is Santayana's System a Naturalistic Neo-Platonic Hierarchy?

*Spirit, since its essence is to aspire, comes to life at the foot of the ladder; it lives by contemplation, by knowing the thing above it.<sup>1</sup>*

**T**his essay is a sequel to "Categories and Orders of Santayana's Christian Neo-Platonism," published a few years ago,<sup>2</sup> and I shall not repeat the material on order and the categories, but shift the focus to ascent of Jacob's Ladder, to which the initial essay did not refer. The present essay has also the advantage of a critique which minimizes the Neo-Platonic idea of life as a *pilgrimage*.<sup>3</sup> My reading of Santayana puts the spirit at the center, and organizes the other aspects of the metaphysical system, including naturalism, around this center. This is a reading that is different, I am told, from others.<sup>4</sup> Santayana, when he reflected on his long literary productivity found this meaning:

In my various books I have discussed things at very unequal removes from the fountain of spirit within me. But that center was truly philosophical. I can identify my self heartily with nothing in me except with the flame of spirit itself. Therefore the truest picture of my inmost being would show none of the features of my person, and nothing of the background of my life. It would show only the light of understanding that burned within me and, as far as it could, consumed and purified all the rest.<sup>5</sup>

This passage from *The Idler and his Works* presents a crucial problem for American naturalism. Is Santayana only a "half-hearted realist and less than a half-hearted American" who celebrated the spirit in man as the flame of the divine? Is he to be pitied as so old with senses failing and even regarded for these words "pathetically false to his naturalistic realist friends"?<sup>6</sup>

Even before we analyze some of the many sources we need to state clearly what

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<sup>1</sup> George Santayana, *Platonism and the Spiritual Life*, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1927, p. 73. Page references of the form (19-20) or (V, 19-20), without further identification, are to this book. A version of this paper was presented at the American Philosophical Association, Sheraton-Boston, 29 December 1986, in a series on Neo-Platonism and American Philosophers.

<sup>2</sup> Paul G. Kuntz, "Categories and Orders of Santayana's Christian Neo-Platonism," *Overheard in Seville: Bulletin of the Santayana Society*, No. 3, Fall 1985, pp. 9-21.

<sup>3</sup> Herman J. Saatkamp, Jr., "Hermes the Interpreter," *Ibid.* pp. 22-28 (abbreviated as **HI**).

<sup>4</sup> Beth J. Singer, "Naturalism and Generality in Buchler and Santayana," *Ibid.* p. 37.

<sup>5</sup> George Santayana, *The Idler and His Works, and Other Essays*, Ed. Daniel Cory, George Braziller, New York, 1957, p. 20.

<sup>6</sup> So Herbert W. Schneider rejects what I call the Neo-Platonic or spiritual Santayana in *A History of American Philosophy*, 2nd Edition, Columbia University Press, New York, 1963, p. 508.

the problem is in having a position called 'naturalistic Neo-Platonic hierarchy'. Although I had already given up the way down from the One, emanation, but claimed that Santayana could be a Neo-Platonist if he preserved a way up, the ascent of spirit, Saatkamp states a difficulty I had ignored. How can there be hierarchy without teleology, a cosmic purpose fulfilled in the ascent of spirits? The metaphysical dilemma is this, if there is fulfilment of such an end, then indeed Santayana may be a Christian Neo-Platonist, but if not, then he has so far diverged from Neo-Platonism that honesty demands that we not confound the issue by any discourse of man on a pilgrimage.

If I have introduced confusion by not following the conventional classification of Santayana as a naturalist who is only a naturalist, then I should allow Saatkamp the last word. But we must understand Santayana the Catholic, who, standing "at the church door," hoped that a philosopher, saint, or poet — Plotinus, Augustine, or Dante — would give him the key to enter that portal. But if that hope proved vain, there remains only the poetry of *homo viator* as a projection, or work of the moral imagination, imposed on a neutral and valueless and chance existence. Naturalism dispels the illusions of religion, and in the cold air of truth there should be no nostalgia for the warmth of the cozy and incensed interior of the church.

The naturalistic critique of the Neo-Platonic metaphors, which Santayana admittedly uses, nevertheless, according to Saatkamp admits an "integral relationship" between the "realisms of being and spiritual values" (HI, 22). But since these values are all presumably "genuine interests" of the body and the psyche, they can be only "projections from a material base." Bodies and circumstances are of many and diverse sorts, hence there are "diverse forms of good, each complete and not convergent with other goods ..." (HI, 23). It would then follow, as Saatkamp says, that the hierarchical claim that the spiritual life exemplifies virtues that are "higher than" the animal life has no basis. The single value specified as "spiritual" is that of freedom as the "goal of highest value," and there is no order, as of essences, for the spirit to aspire toward and to be united to (HI, 24-25). Therefore, although the "steps of spiritual progress" is a well-trod path held in many traditional philosophies of East and West to be sacred, these have only a certain "poetic beauty" (HI, 26). What Dante presents therefore could not give to pilgrims "a hierarchical map" with directions toward an ultimate goal." Saatkamp gives a beautifully logical and coherent picture. He is true to the central statement which he quotes from Santayana "So much for the projection of an ontological hierarchy, marking stages of spiritual emancipation, into a metaphysical world beyond the natural world, or taking its place. The fable is transparent."<sup>7</sup>

Yet if this critique from a naturalistic perspective is true, why does Santayana not reduce essence, truth, and spirit to chapters of *The Realm of Matter*? Why are they given full treatment as realms which are called "real" and called "realms of being"? Why does Santayana spend so much time on the journey beyond the level of matter and exploring the categories of these other orders? Why does he call attention to the wisdom of idealistic and transcendentalist Hindus and Buddhists, praising their guidance as superior even to the Neo-Platonic Greeks? Why should Santayana himself

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<sup>7</sup> (HI, 26) from "On Metaphysical Projection," George Santayana, *The Idler and His Works*, Ed. Daniel Cory, George Braziller, N.Y., 1957, 123).

trace the "steps of spiritual progress," indicating the virtues attained by saints? There is more than mere travelling through the varieties of religious experience, as though Santayana were a psychological companion of William James and an historical colleague of Josiah Royce. Saatkamp leaves us with Santayana the "festive critic" who interprets but does not judge the rank of a sheer plurality of forms (HI, 27).

How is it that, in *Three Philosophical Poets*, although Santayana the critic accepts the cosmology of Lucretius, he accepts the moral order of Dante, and ranks him the highest poet? How is it in *The Life of Reason* Santayana condemns the Jews and Protestants who are limited to prerational attachments to the natural world and are not disillusioned and detached as the Indians of the post-rational stage of development? When his attention was called to Dean Inge's restatement of the wisdom of Plotinus, Santayana wrote *Platonism and the Spiritual Life*. And, when rereading the *New Testament* as though *The Realm of Spirit* had not been sufficiently clear, he wrote *The Idea of Christ in the Gospels*.

Therefore I reread one of the above, *Platonism and the Spiritual Life*, and it convinced me that Santayana's naturalism can be read in a Neo-Platonic way, and this is more justified than the opposite reading of the spiritual life and its ascent in a naturalistic perspective.

Wherein does my reading of Santayana's Jacob's Ladder differ from Saatkamp's?

1. The naturalist rendering of hierarchy as a mere projection is not true to the realistic justification of the harmony and hierarchy that Plato discerns in the Cosmos (I & II, 1-8).

2. The naturalistic rejection of "pre-existing celestial models" for life frees us from committing the intellectual error of invoking "magnetic control over formless matter, inducing in it here and there an inward striving to imitate their form" (9-10). But it is not true to the realistic tendency of Platonists and Christians to fail to recognize the "natural *underpinning* which values require if they were to arise" (10). "Some constitution the cosmos must have, and must disclose to our faith of science" (11) (III).

3. The critique rejects Ideas as powers and as separate from exemplification (12) but not "the sense — a somewhat esoteric sense — in which such essences as beauty may be called 'the most real things in the universe'" (13).

The good may be called absolute (14). Only if we have some "absolutes" is there something higher for spirit to aspire to be united with.

4. The critique is true to the rejection of independent Ideas or Forms on the basis of artistic creation. The beauty lies in the poem that has a certain "precise arrangement of words and images." Those are natural causes of the thing which manifests that beauty (12). Although this naturalistic explanation ruins the possibility that forms emanate the formed, nevertheless there is according to Santayana a good case that God and the ideas are and must be independent. Otherwise they cannot be worshipped (16). Indeed Dean Inge's Platonism is too modern and subjectivistic in abandoning supernatural dualism.

Santayana knows the advantages of naturalistic reduction of vision to projection,

but also he sees deficiency and resultant inadequacy.

Platonism ... would be entirely stultified and eviscerated if it were not suffered to be all that modern criticism, inspired as it is by a subjective psychological philosophy, most thoroughly dislikes; I mean supernaturalistic, realistic, and dualistic. This is only another way of saying that God and the unseen world really exist in themselves, so that they can precede, create, attract, and survive their earthly emanations." (V, 17-18)

5. Naturalism faithfully uses the method of dissolving dogmas "into their subjective components, and showing them to be but verbal expressions for certain radical ambient values." Platonism can be naturalistically demonstrated to be "but a moral and poetic fable" (20). But this is Platonism "taken literally and dogmatically ... [as seen by] the outsider (19). Those who reject Platonism "have not understood it from within, historically, emotionally; they have not recovered the experience and the immanent logic ... " (19-20). Only when emanation is so understood do we understand that hierarchy or steps or levels are "rounds of a Jacob's ladder by which the soul might climb again to her native heaven, and it was only *'there'*, above, that she truly lived and had been blessed from all eternity" (25). When the spirit burns with "concentrated fire" there are hierarchies of angelic choirs above, and below are mere "incidents in the barnyard" (25). "The only ambition worthy of a philosopher was to transcend and transfigure his human nature, and to pass unsullied through the nether world in adoration of the world above" (25-26).

6. Moral life is a life of attachment and duties, and to this naturalistic ethics attends. Here there are and must be degrees: the "moral parable" of "the realm of ethics will always be a set of concentric circles. Life necessarily radiates from centres": self, family, nation, world ... (27). Yet when love is liberated from pious attachments, then intellectual life of the spirit, discounting the lower hierarchy, relegates animal needs and prejudices "to their relative station, where by their nature they belong" (29).

Santayana here is rethinking the political life in contrast to the spiritual life. As Plotinus says, there is order common to both, a lower hierarchy and a higher hierarchy. The analogy is implicit but most effectively conveyed by examples.

7. There is an illusion that the natural world is made for man, and specifically is a "protecting world designed for ... benefit or vindication" of our specific political way of life ... (31). Santayana denounces moralism, and sometimes it is only naturalism that is proposed as freeing us from illusions of a "coddling ... universe" (31). "Spirituality" says Santayana "comes precisely of surrendering this animal arrogance and this moral fanaticism ... ." The spirit attains "perfect candour and impartial vision."

At this point Santayana goes beyond even the Alexandrine Greeks to the Indians, Moslems, Christians, and Jews, in giving an account of universal mercy. "Spirit is merciful ... because it has no private motive to make it spiteful; yet it is unflinchingly austere because it cannot make any private motive its own" (31). At this point there is not only implicitly Gautama Buddha's universal sympathy but also Jesus Christ. "The spirit is content with the widow's mite and a cup of cold water; it considers the lilies of the field; it can say with literal truth: Inasmuch as ye did it unto the least of these, ye did it unto me." Here the theme developed twenty years later: the Christ represents

spirit (32).

Is there then, apart from the variety of pieties, each tied to a part of the human race, as well as relative to time and circumstance, also a universal orthodoxy? Earlier Santayana had appealed to Platonism as part of perennial philosophy. From the naturalistic perspective, the very idea of a transcending universal morality, appealing to an 'unchangeable order' is absurd. Does spirit then transcend moral relativism?

8. Another paradox emerges in IX: although as spirit ascends, all below its level appears contemptible, and mystics are famous for regarding matter as filth (cf. 25), with universal charity comes the Franciscan spirit: "As it loves the non-human parts of nature, so it loves the human parts, and is in no way hostile to the natural passions and to the political and religious institutions that happen to prevail" (32). Earlier spirituality was contrasted to political institutions and to institutions of piety. But there is a stage at which spirituality accepts piety.

9. Another paradox is that earlier spirit is disintoxicated (Santayana stressed disintoxication, 30) and renounces the world, but spirit can accept "any level of being" as good (33). Then is there nothing evil? Evil is only "accidental," as "slackness in the strings" that do not play the universal harmony (33). The harmony can be restored. The vision of universal good in musical or other artistic metaphors can be found in Leibniz and Berkeley, and is here called "orthodox morality." This is close to saying that evil is only privative, nothing real, or as Augustine says, "nothing."

"Imperfection enters [the world] only below the circle of the moon, like bad manners below stairs; and even here, on earth, evil is but an oscillation and dizziness in matter which nature perpetually calls back to the norm, as the motion of a top rights it in its gyrations" (34).

Not only then is everything good in its way, but also there is a principle which we call "homeostatic" which corrects excess.

10. The naturalistic critique of such a Platonic doctrine of cosmic harmony and balance is that it is belied by contingent existence. As we follow Santayana dialectically, the transcendentalist voice having become so eloquent calls for the naturalistic voice in him. "... existence, while it is the home of particular certitudes, is also a cage in which an inevitable and infinite ignorance sings and dies imprisoned" (35). Santayana goes on about the self-centeredness of existences, their limited character and duration, much as Bertrand Russell refers to a "higgledy-piggeldy job lot of a world in which chance has flung us." Is there nothing essentially orderly or unlimited or eternal ... ? What is there to aspire to and how can spirit ascend? Not so, replies the spirit. There is the realm of essence, which is alone "necessary" and "all-comprehensive being." This is not merely another possible world, to which spirit might flee seeking freedom, but "infinite Being" (36).

11. A naturalistic objection to spirituality is that there are few contemplatives and very few saints. To exist depends on "material conditions," and spiritual people are no exceptions. By what condition does a man become a "spiritual man"? Any such theory must provide an explanation of how some became "spiritual." "... concentration of thought, indifference to fortune and reputation, warmth of temperament (because

spirit cannot burn clear except at a high temperature) disciplined into chastity and renunciation" (38). Santayana speaks of "novices," and has in mind, as in St. Johannes Climacus and St. John Cassian, the specific virtues that must be attained as climbing the rungs of Jacob's Ladder. Santayana knows the encouragement of zeal, the examination of conscience, the striving for holiness by serving God alone (39). There is also patience implicit, specifically waiting for gifts of the spirit.

As we considered virtues earlier (6, 7), so here is an amplification of courage and confidence of those who become spiritual. "The spirit itself is not afraid of being stamped out here, or anxious to be kindled there; its concern is not about its instances or manifestations; it is not essentially learned or social; its kingdom is not of this world. It leaves propaganda to those who call themselves its friends but probably know nothing of it, or are even its enemies, and only agents of some worldly transformation ultimately quite nugatory" (39-40).

The whole of XI is on the antithesis between the world and the spirit, and ends with the world judging its spiritual people by what they contribute of value to the world, as business judges what artists create. The spirituals reciprocally evaluate what the world contributes from the perspective of spirit. Whereas politics is partial, "Spirituality is the supreme good for those who are called to it, the few whose intellectual thirst can be quenched only by impartial truth and the self-annihilating contemplation of all Being" (40).

The section begins: "it is the world's business to call down spirit to dwell in it, not the spirit's business to make a world in which to dwell" (38). The ambiguities involved are such that it might make more sense to say that "it is NOT the world's business to call down spirit to dwell in it."

12. A very obvious common sense naturalism opens XII: "It is impossible that spirit in a living creature should ever be wholly freed from the body and from the world ... ." The liberation of spirit from body cannot be a total detachment, otherwise the flame of spirit evaporates without the fuel of the lamp. Ontologically the talk of independence of spirit is therefore absurd. Santayana goes further and points out that if contemplation of "essences and truth" could lead spirit to union with "Pure Being," this particular mind ceases to be a special perspective, and omniscience has nothing which could be added to it.

How are we to think of the categories in which, for example, the Fourth Gospel contrasts the "spirit" to the "flesh"? Santayana's hermeneutics is that the distinction is not between kinds of substance but "*the quality of their attention*" (italics mine, 42). One is "intuitive possession." The other, flesh, means "an anxiety, inquiry, desire and fear." Can we make a choice between the naturalistic and the spiritual perspectives, having quickly switched from the dependence on the body and the environment to the troubles of the body in an environment? The position of Santayana is that both are true. The naturalistic truth is that "spirit must have some organ." The spiritual truth is that when spirit is "once aroused it does not look in the direction of its organ or care at all about preserving it. It looks rather ... to a realm anterior to all worlds, ... infinite Being ... " (43).

We had been told that the spiritual man has an "intellectual thirst [which] can be quenched only by impartial truth" (40). It follows that spirit does not invent another world. "The spirit," writes Santayana, "is not a tale-bearer having a mock world of its

own to substitute for the humble circumstances of this life" (42). Here the spiritual Santayana replies to the charge of some naturalists that spirituality is wishful thinking and self-deception.

But the spirit, telling the truth about the world, becomes the object of "worldly hatred, and it is very fierce ... ." At this point we have proceeded section by section through XII, roughly half of *Platonism and the Spiritual Life*, and it is time to pause and to reflect that, in spite of the naturalistic critique, there still remains for spirit a ladder of ascent.

Plato and his followers have projected their moral ascent onto the cosmos and ignored the naturalistic fact that only bodies have power and forms are not causes. Second, Plato is still political, attached to the *polis*, and reads the cosmos as a crystal setting for the Greek city state, with the failure to free spirituality from piety. With these deep reservations about Plato himself, what is there to be said for Platonism? The spirit knows the body as the body does not know the spirit. The body ties us to particular circumstance, but the spirit frees us for universal vision. The body leads to frustration because needs cannot be satisfied endlessly, and in disillusion the spirit contemplates essences and truths which do satisfy the desire to know. The body cannot set limits or find endless satisfaction, but the spirit discovers infinite Being and eternal essences and truths. The body is a source of values found in the environment and in other bodies, but the spirit loves all things and finds all things to a degree good.

The very recognition of the variety of goods through naturalism, its tolerance, makes it a phase of spirituality. It was wrong then to oppose naturalism to Platonic spirituality, as though it were a zero-sum game and the advantage of one were the loss of the other. The whole effort to state naturalism as basis for discounting Santayana's Neo-Platonism is a mistake. Santayana developed the two together, not one external to the other as exclusive alternatives. The whole style of Santayana in every section of *Platonism and the Spiritual Life* is a dialogue between Santayana the naturalistic critic and Santayana the defender of Plato and proponent of the spiritual life. There are not two Santayanas but one.

Without going into the same detail and without extensive quotation, the second half of the book elaborates the ways in which there can be and should be a 'naturalistic Neo-Platonic hierarchy'. It is going beyond the evidence of the text of *Platonism and the Spiritual Life* to say that the author is commending rather than merely describing.

On what basis can the two parallel movements of thought converge?

Spirituality among Calvinists reduced the fanatical belief in divine punishment. When Santayana judges that "the speculative sword" both exalts the superhuman above "the weak judgements of the heart" and should dissolve "moral fanaticism," is he perhaps referring to such New England Transcendentalists as Emerson, on whom Santayana in his early career had written eloquently? His statement is also in harmony with Spinoza's *Ethics*: "Pure Being is infinite, its essence includes all essences; how then should it issue particular commands, or be an acrimonious moralist?" (XIII, 45) The One of Plotinus, though "called good, is not properly so called" (46). Just as the relative forms of the good diminish prejudice when naturalistic analysis discloses the partiality of any life form, so the mystic transcendence of good itself as a category brings "the peace that passeth understanding ... " (46).

A familiar distinction of aspects of religion is between piety and spirituality.

Historically, as we know from *Reason in Religion*, piety is conceived in Hebraic terms as faithfulness to the Lord of the people to whom he has given his law, while spirituality is the Hellenic universalizing of salvation. Here the "profound dualism" is between "creative power and redeeming grace" which "point in opposite directions; but a complete religion needs to look both ways, feeding piously at the breast of nature, yet weaning itself spiritually from that necessary comfort to the contemplation of ... eternal things" (XIV, 48).

Our attention has been called to Santayana's devotion to Hermes. Santayana thought mythically, as should one in the Neo-Platonic tradition. Attachment to home and the detachment of travel can be reconciled. "The psyche in each of us is like Vesta, the goddess of the Hearth, mother of the Promethean flame, mother of spirit; and she needs to learn the difficult unselfishness of the parent — or of the foster-parent; for her child is of another race. She must be content to be abandoned, revisited only in haste or on some idle holiday, with a retrospective piety; and even as she embraces her full-grown over-topping son he will seem a stranger to her, and she will catch sight of his eyes, gazing over her head into a far country" (XV, 52).

Although doctrines conflict, questions of diverse perspectives converge. Santayana's naturalism and spirituality may sometimes be contrasted and contradictory views of causal efficacy and material causes without purpose are not tenable as a doctrine with universal providential design. But Santayana also expresses naturalistic questions about "moralistic metaphysics" and "spirit" also means to question "human vanity" (XVI, 55). "When I say the *light of the spirit*, I might as well say *light* simply; for what is spirit but the act of making light actual, or greeting, observing, questioning, and judging anything and everything. Spirit is awareness, intelligence, recollection. It requires no dogmas, as does animal faith or the art of living" (XVI, 56).

"Order" is a categorical requirement of naturalism and also of spirituality, and in many modes of order this is elaborated. "Chaos could not sustain the animal life, the psyche, which spirit requires for its organ" (XVI, 56). Natural forces "have established rhythms, such as day and night, favourable to that life ..." (58). And between spirit and its conditions there can develop "natural harmony" (58).

An important mode of order is balance, holding the middle way and avoiding excess. Wisdom is required of both piety and spirituality. The folly of Platonic and Christian piety is to worship power and to go beyond experience in positing other sources of life (XVII, 60). The folly of spirituality is to deny its dependence. These are bad forms of spirituality: "the pride of Lucifer, the mock independence of the Stoic sage, the acosmism and absoluteness of the Indian mystic, and the egotism of German philosophy, thinking to create and recreate its world in its flight through nothingness" (XVII, 60). There must be a marriage of piety with spirituality and no forced attitude that leads to any attempt to divorce them.

Santayana goes on to specify conditions of balance, harmony, reconciling the opposites: spirituality is not doctrinaire as scientific thought with a primary concern for the truth of a system (XVII, 61). And spirit accepts graciously whatever conditions support it, and towards institutions expresses "a resigned courtesy. Such things must needs be; it would be foolish to reject them instead of profiting by them" (XVII, 63).

Another danger of the spirit in forgetting its dependence is to so free itself from the finite that it loses itself in the formless infinite or the infinity of forms. The moral point of view is then to prevent any "idle aestheticism" (XVIII, 66). To be human is

to live under specific conditions. "Perfect impartiality is not human ..." (68). "It is therefore natural that the intrinsic infinity of Being should remain in the background, even in the spiritual life, and that essences should be contemplated and distinguished rather as ideals for the human imagination than as beings necessary in themselves" (XVIII, 68).

Only towards the end of *Platonism and the Spiritual Life* is the question raised: what is meant by emanation? "Consider the universe of Plotinus: a process of emanation from the One through the Ideas to the Soul of the World, whence, like rays from different stars, human and animal souls descend on occasion to animate material bodies." What is the purpose of this hierarchical cosmology? "This system was designed to encourage the spirit to rise from its animal prison ... reversing that emanation until it covered the primal bliss of contemplative union with pure Being" (XIX, 70). But nothing in the system itself "invite[s] the spirit to ascend at all." Therefore we might as well have an Hegelian evolution of stages without any "wish ... to reverse the process in his heart ... ." An Hegelian would wish to press on in the process, and would see "angels ... descending Jacob's Ladder, and none ascending." Santayana's system is to reverse Hegel and to state the purpose of Plotinus. The central proposition is, "only the ascent concerns the spiritual life" (XIX, 71). Emanation is by itself only to account for what has happened prior to spirit awakening, "entangled in animal passions and foolish ambitions." Santayana then does not totally diverge from the moral judgement that our spirits are imprisoned (71).<sup>8</sup>

Starting from whatever facts and predicaments may seem to envelop it, [spirit's] function is to detach itself from them one by one, escaping the flux and urgency which they have in the REALM OF EXISTENCE, unravelling and synthesizing their temporal perspectives, in order to transpose them all into the REALM OF TRUTH, where they form an eternal picture; and then to let this picture itself recede into its setting in the REALM OF ESSENCE, where it is but one form of being, which this world by chance has manifested, amid the countless forms of being which perhaps have not been manifested anywhere. (XIX, 71, capitalizations added.)

Here are the four realms of Being related as stages of ascent. Could we not then say that Santayana's system is a Neo-Platonic system, with acknowledged ancestry in Plotinus? Is this not another introduction to *The Realms of Being* that states, as did *Scepticism and Animal Faith*, that spirit is going toward salvation. Emanation is a "projection" with a soteriological intent, and the cosmology that is closer to fact, as naturalists judge fact, can be accepted as a substitute, just as *Three Philosophical Poets* holds to the moral degrees of virtues from the *Divine Comedy* as well as to the atomistic mechanism of Lucretius.

We have then a 'naturalistic Neo-Platonic hierarchy'! This is indeed at first paradoxical and contradictory, but not at the end of a long series of interpretative qualifications. But can such a 'naturalistic Neo-Platonic hierarchy' be 'Christian'? We saw above that Santayana uses the symbols of the angels ascending and descending. He is in the tradition of the Pseudo-Dionysus. Ponder the passage remembering the sermon of the Vicar of Iffley in *The Last Puritan*: "The angels, even in their descent,

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<sup>8</sup> See page 70: Santayana notes that "prison" was the word used.

will then be messengers to the philosopher from an eternal world, to which in ascending again, they carry up his heart ... " (XIX, 72).

Another Christian aspect of Neo-Platonism is speculation on the persons of the Holy Trinity, similar to that in the "General Review" of *Realms of Being* (XX, 73-74). In my original essay, I coupled the Trinity with the doctrine of the Incarnation. The point of "speculative fiction" is to express the concept of descent as well as of ascent (74).

The concluding chapters show a qualified sympathy with mysticism. The qualification of accounts of the bliss of union is that "the reports which reach us of the ecstasy indicate that the chasm has never really been bridged" with supreme Being (XIX, 76). But the best communication of the saint is silence and only by repeating his experience can we know. "The saint pulls up his ladder with him into his private heaven ... " (XXI, 76). This is of philosophic importance because the language of metaphysics uses metaphorical language. We might speak of a "heaven of forms" as well as a "realm of essence." We have no geographical spatiality relating "all sorts of regions which are not of this world" (XXI, 78).

Similarly, both religious mystics and speculative metaphysicians talk of Nothing as well as of Being (XXII, 80-82). The saints, including those devoted to the Buddhist Nirvana and Hindu Brahma, show the need of the "spiritual life" for a language of symbols. Santayana's cool naturalism comes out in XXII: "they use, like all of us, the words they find" (XXII, 81).

Santayana frequently quotes from the Gospels, and grasps one further point that recommends spirituality; it is a rebuke to the righteous. Spirit "crop[s] out marvellously in the sinner, as it may in the child or the poet" (XXIII, 84). Santayana prefers the Gospels to Plato:

Platonism is moralistic ... . It was a censorious, puritan, prescriptive love; it was not spontaneous, it was not sympathetic, it was not love of nature at all, but a political, human good. ... Free spirit would be more generous ... . The spirit, having itself suffered, recognizes in many an alien form of existence a maimed effort and a lost glory analogous to its own; but a love unqualified by prejudice, by envy, by fear of being outshone or discountenanced. ... It is the essence of spirit to see and love things for their own sake ... . (XXV, 92-93)

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# Realms and Hierarchies

Santayana's ontological system, with its four realms of being, can readily suggest a comprehensive hierarchical metaphysics. The very term "realm" is redolent of metaphysical system and hierarchical structure. However, Santayana is careful to scotch any such ideas, or at least tries to do so. A survey of the realms taken separately, and taken as a collectivity, will show that hierarchy is never the main consideration.

Santayana acknowledges that his doctrine of essences leads to an account of knowledge which is Platonic in a partial sense. The essences are stable intermediaries between the observer and the restless things under observation. Crucial to a good understanding of his epistemology, however, is an awareness of a sharp divergence from Platonism as well, in his insistence that essences are in no way substantial. It is not the essences which are known; they are only intuited. Whether or not certain essences are realized in the world is a contingent matter, and leaves their status within their proper realm entirely unchanged. No distinctions among essences, based upon intrinsic value or importance or anything else, have any reality *within* the realm of essence; it is not a hierarchy, therefore, but rather a "democracy." Even the notion of a semi-ordering based on logical inclusion gives difficulties to Santayana.

In his accounts of truth, Santayana uses language in which some have seen a certain idealist leaning. He begins with *the* truth, and sometimes seems to prefer a holistic language in dealing with that realm. Some commentators have found that this global approach dominates his thought about truth.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, he also speaks of simple truths, which arise whenever some existence exhibits a certain essence. While this question may be open to dispute, however, it is clear that the realm of truth is not arranged in a hierarchy. We do not have the most general scientific laws or religious truths at the apex of an ordering of all truths, as might have been projected. Rather it is just a boundless collection — an ideal one — recording plain everyday facts and occurrences. Scientists may discern that certain regularities and laws obtain here, and they may be correct. But it is also possible that the discerned laws are only partial and temporary, and will eventually cease to apply as matter continues to shift. The laws might not belong to a realm of truth at all; if all is truly contingent, there may indeed be no such universal truths. The focus of the realm of truth is on plain facts, not on vast generalisations or divine commandments. This seems independent of whether truth is best conceived as a single essence, or as a collection of essences. Again, no hierarchy.

I think that something similar holds in the realm of spirit. It is true that certain souls are inclined to spirituality, and that their lives will constitute some sort of spiritual journey with various stages of success. Many other souls are not so inclined. Moreover, the spiritual pilgrims will travel very different journeys over different terrain. If there is a ladder to be climbed, each climber must start afresh on some bottom rung. While one may reasonably speak of an ascent of spirit here, I do not find any associated hierarchy. It is certainly true that Santayana classifies a few people as

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<sup>1</sup> In particular, Timothy Sprigge has taken this position, most recently with "How Many Members Has the Realm of Truth?" This was read in My of 1992 to the International George Santayana Conference at Avila in May, 1992.

masters of life, and a few others are admirable spiritually. He does revere some and despise others. These estimates are in no sense taken as metaphysically transcendent truths, but they are not merely subjective either, for they are fixed by the nature and potential of those in whom the estimates arise. Wherever spirit emerges, such estimates can be expected. Any hierarchies we find in the realm of spirit, then, must be seen as ones of personal evaluation, relative to and grounded in material circumstances.

Like the realm of truth, the realm of spirit is holistic in some respects, yielding another possible avenue for an idealist reading. This also would be a mistake. Rather the function of holism about spirit in his system seems tied to the fact that spirit, at its apex, is self-forgetful.

Of course, the realm of matter is dispersed over physical space and time, and entirely contingent. Nobody has argued for a hierarchy here.

But what of the realms themselves, and their interrelationship? Is there some intrinsic ranking to be found in the connections among essence and matter, truth and spirit? It is of course the realm of matter which mirrors traditional ontology. Santayana posits a substance underlying the changes of the world, or flowing through events as their constant substrate; the best term he can devise for this is 'matter', meaning to suggest the physical ground of things, without a commitment to one scientific theory or another. Only matter exists, and it is the cause of everything else; it is a substance in Spinoza's sense, since it exists in itself and is understood through itself.

Traditional ontology also esquires of universals whether they exist or not, and Santayana's response to this question is that they have being but do not have full existence. Those so inclined might see in this an incipient hierarchy of being: both things and essences have being, but only things have existence. It is certain that Santayana himself had no such vision. Rather the dialectic he adopts thrives on pressing the difference between matter and essence as far as possible. Josiah Royce had once told Santayana that the gist of his philosophy was the separation of essence from existence, a remark which Santayana sees as a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Even if one were tempted to place essence and matter in a chain of being, the remaining two realms of truth and spirit can scarcely be treated in this manner. Spirit, for instance, is existential, but only in its genesis; in its living actuality, it is entirely novel and different from material existence. The concept of a hierarchy seems inappropriate here; instead, Santayana's method turns on the clarification of each separate realm, in part by stressing the contrast with other realms.

While it is a mistake to think of the realms as though they were various substances, they do share one aspect of classical substance. Just as different substances, for Descartes, must be disjoint and independent of one another — mutually perpendicular, one might say — so Santayana's realms differ radically from each other, and are exploited by pressing these differences to their natural limits.

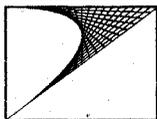
I close by looking at two examples among many of this contrastive dialectic. The first exploits the distinction between matter and truth. The vast gulf between past and future, as fixed by a present moment, is magnified by life and existence into a crucial feature of the realm of matter. However, it is not at all fitting to allow this exaggeration into the unhurried realm of truth, which knows nothing of such a gap, since it does not draw up its records at any present moment. Accordingly, we find a radical difference between the hectic material world of change, and the record of that world in the eternally unchanging realm of truth. The philosopher who insists on knowing which of

the two is right has failed to give Santayana a sympathetic reading, or has not made the attempt. This is not to say that Santayana has no bottom line; the realm of matter is the one part of his thought he finds indispensable.

The second example turns on the distinction between spirit and matter. In various philosophies, and in particular in the Indian, one hears the dictum: "Only the good is real." Santayana accepts this, in the sense that only the good is real from the standpoint of morality. It is a serious mistake, however, to consider the good as the only real thing in the dynamic realm of matter. To do so is superstitious. In his view, Western philosophy since Socrates has fallen into this trap to a certain extent. It has confused the sway which the good has over the human spirit with a possible influence which spirit alone in its perception of the good might have over material events.

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# The Santayana Edition

*The Last Puritan*, Volume IV of *The Works of George Santayana*, is scheduled for publication in the late fall of 1992. This volume represents the cumulative work of many persons, and its appearance exemplifies the pattern of scholarly editing and high-quality production associated with our volumes. Once again the Modern Language Association's Committee on Scholarly Editions awarded the seal of "An Approved Edition." Donna Hanna-Calvert, Associate Editor, and Bill Holzberger, Textual Editor, provided invaluable assistance and leadership in managing both the details and the scholarship associated with this volume. Irving Singer wrote the fine Introduction. If anyone wishes to review the volume for a journal or paper, please write to me or to MIT Press.

Presently we are working on ten books: Volume V, *Letters* (four books); Volume VI, *The Life of Reason* (five books); and the *Marginalia*. The *Letters* will provide valuable information that has long been missing from Santayana scholarship. Fewer than six hundred of Santayana's letters have appeared in print, and we have collected approximately twenty-five hundred letters for the volume. This is a project that Bill Holzberger has worked on since 1972, and it will be a delight to see it come to fruition in a few years. *The Life of Reason* is a significant multi-book volume that stands as a major contribution to philosophy and to pragmatism during Santayana's early career. John McCormick is editing the volume of Santayana's marginalia. This will be quite valuable since Santayana's extensive marginalia is largely inaccessible to scholars unless they can travel to the many repositories of Santayana's books.

This past year I made trips to Canada, Spain, England, and China giving lectures on American philosophy and on Santayana specifically. I was pleased by the growing interest in Santayana in these countries. I was somewhat surprised to find several scholars and graduate students in China working diligently on Santayana.

The First International Conference on Santayana was held May 27-30 in Avila, Spain (Santayana's boyhood home). The conference was a major success featuring forty-two international scholars and approximately one hundred and twenty participants. The papers were excellent and provided a clear indication of the growing interest in Santayana scholarship. Much appreciation goes to the work of José Luis Gutiérrez, Pedro García-Martín, and Brenda Bridges for their assistance in organizing, funding, and running the conference. The *Fundación Cultural Santa Teresa* provided significant funding for this conference as well as Texas A&M University, the *Comision Quinto Centario*, Henny Wenkart, and Corliss Lamont. In addition, Santayana's Spanish family, the Sastres, were remarkably gracious and kind during this celebration of Santayana scholarship.

In May, the Santayana staff completed another detailed proposal to NEH for 1993-96. This is a task that takes considerable energy and time, but we simply cannot continue our work without the appreciable support of NEH. The NEH staff has been consistently supportive and helpful in our endeavors. The narrative portion of the proposal has been sent to all Board members.

HERMAN J. SAATKAMP, JR.  
General Editor

# BIBLIOGRAPHICAL CHECKLIST

## NINTH UPDATE

The items below will supplement the references given in *George Santayana: A Bibliographical Checklist, 1880-1980* (Bowling Green: Philosophy Documentation Center, 1982) prepared by Herman J. Saatkamp, Jr., and John Jones. These references are divided into primary and secondary sources. Except for the book reviews, the following articles and books are classified according to their years of publication. Readers with further information or corrections are invited to send these to Herman J. Saatkamp, Jr., Santayana Edition, Department of Philosophy, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas 77843-4237.

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