

Overheard in Seville

*Bulletin of the
Santayana
Society*

No. 12
Fall 1994



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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 Boston, Massachusetts.

SANTAYANA SOCIETY

1994
ANNUAL MEETING

Comments on the Santayana Edition:

Herman J. Saatkamp, Jr.
Texas A&M University

Speakers: ***John Lachs***
Michael Hodges
Vanderbilt University

"Thinking in Ruins:
Santayana and Wittgenstein"

Commentators: ***James Edwards***
Furman University

Joseph Margolis
Temple University

8:00 - 11:00 P.M. 27 December
Bentley Room
Boston Marriott Copley Place

Santayana and Making Claims on the Spiritual Truth about Matters of Fact

Some critics have been disturbed by the view, presented most recently, if differently, by John Lachs and by me, that Santayana might well be characterized as a kind of pragmatist, or as a kind of pragmatic naturalist.¹ Andrew Reck and James Guinlock argued at the 1992 International Conference on Santayana, held in Avila, that Santayana's commitment to critical realism signaled his angling away from the pragmatists on epistemological and ontological issues. Angus Kerr-Lawson, responding in "An Abulensean Pragmatist?" to Lachs's paper on "Santayana as Pragmatist," has maintained that Santayana was a "substrative materialist" and that pragmatism cannot accommodate such an ontological position or vice-versa.²

Robert Davidoff, reviewing *Santayana, Pragmatism, and the Spiritual Life* for *The Journal of American History*, finds himself surprisingly won over to a view of Santayana as speaking from "the heart of the very [American] traditions the philosopher delighted in criticizing," including the pragmatic tradition, but finally wonders "how elastic the[se] traditions of discourse can be."³ Wesley Kort, writing for *Christian Century*, also is struck by the force of the arguments that recast the figure Davidoff describes as "the cosmopolitan, naturalist outsider" as a founder of American pragmatism, but requests more light on how pragmatic naturalists might reasonably embrace spiritual disciplines without accepting "spiritualist and metaphysical ties" that, he presumes at least, must be antipragmatic and antinaturalist.⁴

In the only wholesale criticism of my book that I have read, Timothy Sprigge asserts that the characterization of Santayana as "belonging essentially to the pragmatist movement" cannot be taken seriously, because it violates Santayana's "insistence that [pragmatic] truth only works because it adopts us to a literal truth about the way things really are and that it is deplorable human egotism to equate this to our symbolic access to reality, or with our procedures of verification, as pragmatism does."⁵ The upshot of committing this grave injustice to Santayana's position, Sprigge claims, is a "signal failure to appreciate the force of [Santayana's] systematic ontology" — an ontology

¹ This paper was read to the Santayana Society in Atlanta, Georgia on December 28, 1993.

² *Overheard in Seville*, No. 10, Fall, 1992, pp. 17-21. For some other views of Conference participants, see also Herman Saatkamp's review of *Santayana, Pragmatism, and the Spiritual Life* in *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, Winter, 1993, Vol XXIX, No. 1, pp. 91-101 and Morris Grossman's review of the same book, *Religious Studies Review*, January, 1993, Vol. 19, No. 1, p. 51.

³ *Journal of American History*, June, 1993, p. 294.

⁴ *Christian Century*, March 17, 1993, p. 302.

⁵ On one, but I believe only one occasion, Santayana made the same sort of claim. See *Winds of Doctrine* [hereafter cited in the text as WD:pp], Scribners: New York, 1913, p.133, where Santayana refers to "a kind of assumed truth which cannot be reduced to its pragmatic meaning, because it must be true literally in order that the pragmatic meaning of other beliefs may be conceived or tested at all."

that was “intended and [is] deserving, to be taken as a serious attempt to explore the basic categories of being.”⁶

Now these are important caveats, questions, and complaints expressed by learned and incisive students of Santayana’s writings; indeed they are voiced by scholars whose judgments I hold in the greatest esteem. Moreover, at least in the case of my book, they certainly are issues that haunt its research and writing. When I set out to write it, I wasn’t looking for the Santayana that I found. Indeed, I presumed that I’d find the Santayana described in the current standard history of philosophy in America by Murphey and Flower, i.e., the Golden Age philosopher who “belongs to no American tradition.”⁷ I was continually *surprised* to discover Santayana shaping and shaped by the cluster of views I identify as distinctively American including the opinions I recognize as pragmatic.

So what to do? In the spirit of Santayana’s portrayal of Hermes, I will attempt to appreciate “the innocence” of the criticisms I have noted along with “the clearness” of the judgments that inform them, though I will also and ultimately try to explain why they are conclusions, to employ another of Santayana’s tropes, that I ‘frown on or deny’.⁸

I believe I can do all this in a telling way by focussing on questions that concern Santayana’s understanding of the truth about spiritual matters of fact. To do that, let me turn initially to Davidoff’s query about the elasticity of traditions of discourse. How, one might ask innocently enough, can one of pragmatism’s most incisive critics himself be a pragmatist?

Answering this question, I think, not only clarifies pragmatism as a vital tradition but also sheds light on Santayana’s importance to it. Put another way, issues pertaining to the elasticity of traditions of discourse strike both at the core of perduring pragmatic traditions, but also at the truth about spiritual matters of fact as Santayana grasps it. Davidoff’s question arises as a matter of course and guiltlessly because Santayana is found far more often criticizing the pragmatist movement than he is characterizing his stance as pragmatic. Nonetheless he does both and, what is more, his writings have been rather continually appreciated and criticized for doing both.

There is no doubt: Santayana clearly opposed many of James’s assertions about the meaning of truth. He stated baldly that he believed “in the reality of Truth, the denial of which by Nietzsche, James, Dewey and a lot of Evangelicals and Idealists is ... genuine atheism.”⁹ He chided Corliss Lamont and Dewey himself for attaching him to “the pragmatic heresy.” [L:389] He surely characterized Dewey’s alignment of pragmatism with Enlightenment self-assertion as near-sighted and needlessly anthropocentric, even egotistical. He distinguished his “hard non-humanistic naturalism” from Dewey’s more romantic humanism which bordered, he thought, on maintaining

⁶ *London Times Literary Supplement*, December 25, 1992: 20.

⁷ Elisabeth Flower and Murray Murphey, *A History of Philosophy in America*, 2 vols., (Putnam’s: New York, 1977), Volume 2, p. 373.

⁸ See George Santayana, *Soliloquies in England and Later Soliloquies*, Scribner’s: New York, 1922 [Hereafter cited in the text as SELS:pp], p. 263.

⁹ *The Letters of George Santayana* ed. Daniel Cory, Scribners: New York, 1955, p. 333. Hereafter cited in the text as L:pp.

atavistically that “the world is governed by human interests and an alleged universal moral sense.” [L:408] To the contrary, Santayana thought mankind was “condemned to live dramatically in a world that is not dramatic.” [RB:463] Following Spinoza, he declared that humankind was an incident within an incident, not the voicebox for some providential divinity, whether supernatural or natural supernatural. All in all, if James’s theory of truth and Dewey’s romantic humanism reveal the essential core of pragmatism, then surely there is great integrity in counting Santayana out — indeed more, in counting him quite simply opposed.

On the other hand, however, consider this: when James called *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion* “the perfection of rottenness,” Santayana retorted by claiming, in “On My Friendly Critics,” that he had written it with Jamesian scruples in mind, and he echoed this assertion in his “Apologia.” Then again, we must never forget the decisive and positive role that James played in “The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy.” For Santayana, James’s “new way to hope,” emerging out of his recognition that the scope, duration, and quality of the life of the spirit are “all contingent,” was liberating for him and his culture, breaking through sophistic crust. It set the boundaries for his own reflections. Indeed, it established a new horizon for “the whole ultra-modern, radical world” (about which, to be sure, he was ambivalent) [WD:204]

As for Dewey, Santayana’s commitment to the large idea that spirit is impotent, along with his qualms about democracy, decisively separated his views from the Columbia pragmatist and his followers. On the other hand, at least seven aspects of Santayana’s philosophy surely rendered Lamont and Dewey, not to mention Arthur Kenyon Rogers (1906), Horace Kallen (1911), Paul Conkin (1968), and John Lachs (1992) — rather innocent in *their* reception or avowal of Santayana as moving along in a pragmatist stream.

These features include, first, Santayana’s abiding insistence that existence is utterly contingent; second, his construal of “intelligence” as “experimental act”; [WD:206] third, his continual attack on any sort of foundationalism; fourth, his characterization of reason or criticism as immanent — as a “life”;¹⁰ fifth, his commitment to a view of thought or language as basically poetic or expressive; sixth, his embrace of philosophy as reflection on problems of human finitude; and last but not least, seventh, his celebration of consummate moments of incandescent appreciation, intelligence, and impersonal love as informing and inflaming spiritual life. All of these characteristics so closely resemble traits informing Dewey’s project that from the angle they provide, Santayana *looks* familial. No wonder Dewey smiled on him like a brother, at least until Santayana kicked him and then, ultimately, they ended up mud-wrestling one another.

How elastic can a tradition be? More specifically, how elastic do pragmatists contend their movement can be? Certainly answers to the latter question, anyhow, depend on whom we ask. Ask people committed to disciplinary professionalism in philosophy, say, Ralph Barton Perry or Arthur Lovejoy or Bruce Kuklick, and you’d find traditions in general and pragmatism in particular needing to be more or less rigidly defined. Ask philosophers taken with the family resemblances of natural history

¹⁰ See George Santayana, *The Life of Reason*, 5 volumes, Scribners: New York, 1905-06, throughout.

like Horace Kallen or Richard Bernstein or Richard Rorty and you'd find capaciousness, pliability, and resilience.

It may be helpful, along these lines, to take a hint from Thomas Kuhn, if only a hint, and distinguish pragmatism understood as a 'normal' philosophy with basic or axiomatic principles to apply to particular cases, from pragmatism understood as an intellectual tradition that is too lively or internally contentious, to convey basic or axiomatic principles, or any internal conditions that are necessary and sufficient, or any essentialist essence. There are self-avowed pragmatists and critics alike who split on the question whether pragmatism is a normal philosophy commensurate with all the other such schools, or an intellectual tradition designed, rather pointedly, to disturb such normalcy as a matter of course.

In this regard, it is well to remember James's indictment of virtually *all* previous Western philosophy. It was James, recall, who devised pragmatism as an *alternative* to the philosophical tradition that, he said, had been on a false scent ever since the days of Socrates and Plato. It was they, he contended, that taught

that what a thing really is is told us by its *definition*. Ever since Socrates we have been taught that reality consists of essences, not of appearances, and that the essences of things are known whenever we know their definitions. So far we identify the thing with a concept, and then we identify the concept with a definition, and only then, inasmuch as the thing is whatever the definition expresses, are we sure of apprehending the real essence of it or the full truth about it.¹¹

This strategy, James insisted, was "but the old story, of a useful practice first becoming a method, then a habit, and finally a tyranny that defeats the end it was used for. Concepts, first employed to make things intelligible, are clung to even when they make them unintelligible." [PU:99] (Santayana caught this insight aphoristically by asserting that "Thought becomes obvious when things betray it.")¹²

Picking up on a distinction Peter Strawson makes about the varieties of naturalism, I want to call the pragmatism that James opposed to essentialism, "liberal pragmatism."¹³ I want to distinguish it from the sort of pragmatism that Jeffrey Stout, following Hilary Putnam, has recently called "reductive."¹⁴ The liberal pragmatist interested, say, in various ways the term 'true' is used in various sorts of rhetoric, claims that there is more trouble than worth in trying to establish something shared by all true statements, while the reductive pragmatist looks for some theory — say truth as warranted assertibility — to replace all the others. To my mind, reductive pragmatism exemplifies the old story of a useful practice become tyrannous. At any rate, it is a normal philosophy, with basic principles, e.g., 'truth' is 'whatever is good

¹¹ William James, *A Pluralistic Universe* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, 1977), p. 99. Hereafter cited in the text as PU:pp.

¹² George Santayana, *Scepticism and Animal Faith*, Scribners: New York, 1923, p. 123. Hereafter cited in the text as SAF:pp.

¹³ See Peter Strawson, *Skepticism and Naturalism: Some Varieties*, Columbia University Press, 1985.

¹⁴ Jeffrey Stout, *Ethics After Babel*, Beacon Press: Boston, 1989.

in the way of beliefs,' which cover particular cases, e.g., 'the earth is roundish' or 'genocide is evil'. Liberal pragmatism, to the contrary, is an intellectual tradition which takes James's notion that 'truth' means 'whatever is good in the way of belief' to signal a rejection of essentialist theories of knowledge altogether and with them, any epistemic reductivism.

The liberal pragmatist bets that beliefs like these — 'the earth is roundish' and 'genocide is evil' — are true and will always hold up in the face of criticism; indeed she bets this is so even if some community of inquiry believes the contrary, even if individuals constituting those communities find themselves justified in believing the contrary. But she admits that her claim on the truth is presumptive; she admits that coming to make a claim on the truth and coming to be justified in holding that claim should involve one and the same set of practices; and she has nothing to say about the essence of truth.

Switching to another metaphor venerable to the tradition: like Neurath's boat, liberal pragmatism is malleable enough to replace crooked planks with better timber as it makes its way from port to port, but it doesn't have any axioms or necessary truths, or planks so resistant to any sort of rot that we know in advance that they may be depended on forever or for certain. Santayana claimed that "sure knowledge ... is not real knowledge, while real knowledge ... is never sure."¹⁵ But among others, he recognized just how sectarian or reductive James's *Meaning of Truth* was, and just how corrupting Dewey's all-too-ativistic humanism could be. That's why he called pragmatism a "heresy." Exemplified by James's truth and Dewey's romanticism, it was both sectarian and atavistic, the two marks of Santayana's "philosophical heresy."¹⁶ So much the worse for epistemic reductivism of any sort and for ultraromanticism too, but not, inevitably at any rate, for pragmatism, or for the interpretation that — from a particular angle and in a particular light — Santayana counts.

The argument I make in my book is that a pragmatic fleet is still afloat and that various efforts Santayana made actually buoy up some of its flagships. Santayana dumped decaying timber — e.g. James's 'theory of truth' and Dewey's 'romanticism' — from the Emersonian and Jamesian traditions he had inherited. Moreover, he outfitted these traditions' hulls more solidly, by sticking with planks emphasizing his metaphilosophical stance focussed on problems of finitude, his view of existence as contingent, his non-foundational, corrigible characterization of knowledge, his depiction of reason as a sort of life, and his portrayal of the poetic or expressive character of thought.

These modifications helped rebuild Santayana's inherited traditions in midstream, and in ways that left his philosophy just as pragmatic as, say, Stout's pragmatism, or Cornel West's, or Richard Rorty's, or Putnam's, or Richard Poirier's. So to answer Davidoff's important question, let's just say that pragmatism, understood the way these avowed current proponents profess it, is elastic enough to include Santayana. Indeed, the elasticity of vibrant traditions is part of what Rorty calls the "final vocabularies"

¹⁵ George Santayana, *Obiter Scripta*, Scribners: New York, 1936, p. 129. Hereafter cited in the text as OS:pp.

¹⁶ See George Santayana, "Philosophical Heresy," pp. 94-107 in *Obiter Scripta* (Scribner's: New York, 1936), hereafter cited in the text as OS:pp.

of these pragmatists; it is one of their ultimate concerns.¹⁷ Whatever *you* choose to call the tradition to which they belong, *they* choose to call it pragmatism, and they are not thieves; they do so because they can offer persuasive narratives showing how their views descend from the likes of James and Dewey and Santayana. Perhaps obviously they are variant and selective. So goes natural history.

Eventually I will try to show that mental and psychical elasticity is very much at the heart of the claims that Santayana makes on the truth about spiritual matters of fact. But for now, let's turn to the more specific complaints made by Reck, Kerr-Lawson, and Sprigge.

Criticisms focussing on apparent differences between critical realism and pragmatism are innocent enough for a number of reasons. Of paramount significance is the fact that Santayana made a contribution to *Essays in Critical Realism*, a book envisioned by some and received by many as a manifesto presenting critical realism as an epistemological movement competing with both naive realism and pragmatism. But the point I try to make is that there is no difference that makes a difference between Santayana's critical realism and Santayana's pragmatism (in much the same way that, currently, there is no difference that makes a difference between Putnam's internal realism and Putnam's pragmatism).

The crux of Santayana's presentation of critical realism was caught in his aphorism that "The fact that observation is involved in observing anything does not imply that observation is the only observed fact" [SAF:293] Santayana's aim here was to undercut any variety of reductive psychologism or intentionalism, from phenomenalism to sense-data empiricism to personalism to absolute or objective idealism. Indeed, Sprigge's claim that "it is deplorable human egotism to equate [the truth with] our symbolic access to reality, or with our procedures of verification," *clearly* echoes assertions that Santayana made over and over again. Repeatedly, Santayana argued that when we use our scientific, moral, and spiritual languages, each of which is symbolic or poetic, we do so to make claims about the ways that things are, not simply to make claims about the poetry that conveys those ways.

So if pragmatism is reducible to the view that Santayana and Sprigge condemn, so much the worse for the claim that Santayana exemplifies pragmatism. But that is not what Rogers in 1905, or Dewey in 1906, or Kallen in 1911, or Conkin in 1968, or Lachs or Levinson in 1992, had in mind. Santayana opposed James's 'theory of truth' for good pragmatic reasons: James's theory was practically unsatisfactory. Here is Santayana, reflecting on the "comments" constituting our claims on the truth:

To suppose that some of these comments are poetical and others literal is granituous. They are all presumably poetical in form ... and all expressive in function, and addressed to the facts of nature in some human and moral perspective, as poetry is too. ... It is not resemblance but relevance and closeness to adaptation that renders a language expressive or an expression true. We read nature as the English used to read Latin, pronouncing it like English, but understanding it very well. If all other traditions of Latin euphony had been lost, there would be no means of discovering in what respect the English pronunciation was

¹⁷ Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, p.73. Hereafter cited in the text as CIS:pp.

a distortion. ... Each ... stage of experience and science reads the book of nature according to a phonetic system of its own, with no possibility of exchanging it for the native sounds; but this situation, though hopeless in one sense, is not unsatisfactory practically, and is innocuously humorous" [SAF:88]

James's theory of truth, when it collapsed truth with justification or with the event of verification, was practically absurd because "these images or words of mine are not the things they designate, but only names for them." [SAF:101] Indeed, "the ideas we have of things," whether scientific, moral, or spiritual, "are not fair portraits; they are political caricatures of things made in the human interest" [OS:104]

Santayana's claim that a distinction between poetical and literal comments "is gratuitous" bedevils Sprigge's charge that characterizing Santayana as a pragmatist violates Santayana's "insistence that [pragmatic] truth only works because it adopts us to a literal truth about the way things really are" The innocent nub of Sprigge's claim, I believe, is this: Santayana insists that we steer clear of any use of the term 'truth' or 'true' that obscures our efforts to adapt, *not* to what Sprigge calls "a literal truth about the way things really are" but more simply 'to the way things really are.' In Santayana's view, for example, the earth really is roundish and genocide really is evil.

Are those comments poetical or literal? That is a question, as the Buddha put it, that tends not to edification. The distinction, Santayana said, is gratuitous. "Our worst difficulties," he asserted,

arise from the assumption that knowledge of existence ought to be literal, whereas [it] has no need, no propensity, and no fitness to be literal. It is symbolic initially, when a sound, smell, an indescribable feeling are signals to the animals of his dangers or chances; and it fulfills its function perfectly — I mean its moral function of enlightening us about our natural good, if it remains symbolic to the end. [SAF:101-102]

True enough: On Santayana's grounds, an intuition of an essence may be literal, in the sense that what appears is what appears, or that what we fancy is what we fancy. But such intuitions are not true or false, they just are or, rather, they are had. So they are not literally true or literally false, either. Indeed, Santayana proposed that "the discrimination of essence has a happy tendency to liberalize philosophy, freeing it at once from *literalness and from scepticism*." [SAF:98; my italics] Intuition of essences, he said, "lets us live without responsibility [K]nowledge of existence ... [is] playful too Yet in the investigation of facts all this play of mind is merely instrumental and indicative; the intent is practical, the watchfulness earnest, the spirit humble." [SAF:103]

Now surely it is the case that Santayana maintained that "most things in space and time are the effects of causes that do not include human mental states," as Rorty now puts the brunt of his own non-reductive or pragmatic physicalism. [CIS: 5] Indeed, when 'mental states' are narrowed to exclude psychical machinery, Santayana claimed that *nothing* in space and time is the effect of mental states. In a round about way this fact raises Kerr-Lawson's criticism about difficulties involved in splicing what Kerr-Lawson calls Santayana's "substrative materialism" with any sort of pragmatism.

The point, I take it, is that pragmatism's world must be malleable to human interest

but that Santayana's world, the one best captured in scientific images, ultimately is randomly related to such malleability. The world uncovered by science, the material world which is the only world there is, is both usually and eventually non-attached to human wish and will. At least I hope this is Kerr-Lawson's point, and not that Santayana turns out to be some sort of reductive physicalist or materialist or strong scientific realist. This is just not so. Sciences are "fictions of the fancy" as much as any sort of discourse, and discriminable in terms of their purposes, not in terms of some ontological hierarchy. [OS: 182] But these fictions do not obscure matter; when they are taken aptly as signs (which is a practical determination) they reveal it. "There is no screen of ideas, ... no arrest of cognition" [OS:138] "Knowledge is not knowledge of appearance, but appearances are knowledge of substance when they are taken for signs of it." [OS:183]

Now I agree with Kerr-Lawson that Santayana pictured human wish and will as drama played out in an undramatic universe. But I also think that Santayana held that it surely was in our interest or relevant to our purposes, especially to our spiritual purposes, to know this. Following Santayana himself, however, I'd rather call such materialism "recondite" than "substrative." [OS:124] Santayana held that

the obscurity of ... matter (and psychic substance is in the same case) is merely one due to distance and complexity; it is the obscurity of crowds. Matter is corpuscular. . . immensely multitudinous, monotonous, democratic; its units (even if they are not ultimate units) are very small; its aggregates are very complex; and we, whose minds are, so to speak, cloud-minds, themselves expressions of vast moving systems, grope among the aggregates; we cannot seize either the units or the laws that may bind or unbind them. Yet if our means of approach and the scale of our apprehension could be adapted to the fine texture of substance — which for practical purposes would not be helpful — there is no reason to suppose that any insuperable obscurity would be found in that substance. [OS:126-127]

Having rejected *both* scepticism and literalness, then, and having admitted the recondite character of much that we need or want to know about matter, Santayana left us able to make claims on the truth about a variety of statements.

Finally, then, let me turn in particular to the issue of making claims on the truth about spiritual matters of fact.¹⁸ Santayana claimed that "a sensation or a theory, no matter how arbitrary its terms (and all terms are arbitrary), will be true of the object if it expresses some true relation in which that object stands to the self, so that these terms are not misleading as signs, however poetical they may be as sounds or as pictures." [SAF:180]

J. L. Austin once remarked that "There's the bit where you say it and the bit where you take it back."¹⁹ The trouble I find with Santayana on questions of moral and spiritual truths is that he said, and then took back, some important claims that I endorse. I interpret Santayana's work as allowing us to make moral and spiritual truth

¹⁸ I am deeply indebted to Stout's arguments splicing pragmatism with moral realism of a sort in *Ethics After Babel*, especially pp. 33-59 and 246-250. As regards Santayana, I admit I develop insights of his in some ways he may not have chosen himself.

¹⁹ Quoted in Stout, *op.cit.*, p. 246.

claims. In my view, Santayana's "philosophical orthodoxy" followed James in delivering the sort of credal holism that undercuts any sharp relevant fact/value distinction when it comes to making truth claims. In other words, reading "Philosophical Heresy," among other things, leaves me thinking that making moral and spiritual truth claims proceeds in much the same way that making truth claims about other sorts of conditions, i.e., in terms of evidence and inference.

Following the line of thought articulated above, Santayana maintained that a claim about an object or an objective, say an astronomical state or a moral circumstance, is true, no matter how arbitrary its terms, if the claim expresses some true relation in which these circumstances stand to a self, so that its terms are not misleading as signs. I want to argue that this understanding of knowledge should hold as much for 'genocide is a vice' as for 'the earth is roundish'.

This interpretation of Santayana on morality, I believe, may clash not only with Lachs's, which I take to be the most perspicacious around, but also with ways that Santayana himself drew out his views. Lachs has forcefully argued that Santayana was committed to a sort of moral relativism, indeed, that for Santayana, "values are relative to the nature and needs of individuals," and that both individual natures and needs are plural and may — sometimes do — conflict.²⁰ On Lachs's reading, Santayana opposed moral relativism to the notion that there is some overarching moral or spiritual view, whether antecedent or ultimate, and held, as Lachs puts it, that "although the conflict of values is lamentable and inevitably leads to the destruction of some good, it is an inescapable feature of reality." (GS:106) Indeed, Santayana had maintained that another inescapable feature of reality is this: "the nerve of moral judgment is preference, and preference is a feeling or an impulse to action which cannot be either true or false." [RB:473] In this sense, indeed, "there would *seem* [my italics] to be no conceivable object or reality in reference to which any type of morality could be called *true*." [RB:474]

Now I agree with Lachs's claims entirely, and also with Santayana's insights. But I believe they finally commit us to a relativity of epistemic circumstance and, so, a relativity of justification, without banishing moral or spiritual truth. Santayana waxed hot and cold on the propriety of claiming moral or spiritual truth, justly fearing fanaticism, admirably endorsing toleration, and aptly characterizing moral and spiritual judgments as emerging out of "animal bias," [RB:483] or out of dispositions to welcome or fear. But he also criticized the *seeming* impropriety of moral and spiritual truth claims, by arguing that "a moral precept may be true or false in respect to moral interests in general." [RB:475] What is more, we can clarify these interests or "intrinsic values," which "life in every form" has, through disciplines of knowledge or self-knowledge. What we can never assume is that "these values are unanimous or that life in one form can adopt or morally ought to adopt, the interests of life in every other form," [RB:476-77] because life forms are variable and modifiable.

Not *assuming* unanimity, however, does not banish the possibility of overlapping consensus, especially the possibility of making one. Just as people may once have believed, and even have been justified in claiming, that "'the earth is flat' is true," even

²⁰ John Lachs, *George Santayana*, Twayne: Boston, 1988, p. 106. Hereafter cited as GS:pp.

though we now have good reasons to ridicule dogmatic (or, *per impossible*, experimental) flat-earthers confronted with the truth, so people, even now, may believe and maintain they are justified in claiming that “‘genocide is a virtue’ is true,” even though we have good reasons to indict, morally and spiritually, people with genocidal intentions and label them moral or spiritual dwarfs or deceivers. “The earth is roundish” is true, always was and, presumptively, always will be. The same goes for “genocide is a vice.” We know this to be true even if we know that we cannot hold certain people blameworthy for having been flat-earthers or for having committed genocide, because of the gross ignorance or self-ignorance under which they labored.

That we can make these claims does not depend on any overarching antecedent or ultimate or absolute specification of knowledge, or of the truth, nor do they upend Santayana’s claim that moral judgment emerges out of preference based upon dispositions to welcome or fear, nor do they betray his view that real knowledge is never sure and sure knowledge is never real. Real knowledge is still real though and, on Santayanan grounds, I really know that genocide is a vice. Coming to be justified in making this claim puts me in position to make a claim on the moral truth. I really know that genocide is a vice because, as Santayana put it, “knowledge is a relation of living bodies to their environment,” [OS:180] and I maintain a justified belief that “genocide is a vice” is as apt a description of that relation as is “the earth is roundish.” What makes it an apt description is that, without denying either the plural or antinomial character of human impulses, interests, and desires, it captures a way in which that diversity overlaps, only sacrificing an interest or desire antagonistic to the actual moral and spiritual overlap I am trying appreciatively to capture.

Recall that James had argued that “truth may well consist of certain opinions, and does indeed consist of nothing but opinions, though not every opinion need be true.”²¹ Santayana, preserving a distinction between truth and claims on the truth, would have claimed, similarly but not identically, that ‘claims on the truth consist of opinions and nothing but opinions, though not every opinion need be true’.

In the case of claims on moral truth, a Santayanan might well assert that such claims consist of asserted interests and nothing but asserted interests, though not every asserted interest need be morally true. This is the case because claims on moral truth must be made, Santayana claimed, in respect to “moral interests in general.” Of course, just how we analyze or specify ‘moral interests in general’ in a Santayanan way is still an open question.

In this regard, though, Santayana’s concern for connections and disconnections between ‘moral interests in general’ and diverse ‘forms of life’ suggests a direction that Wilfrid Sellars eventually took on the matter, analyzing moral claims in terms of shared intentions. On the Sellarsian reading that I find compatible with Santayana’s, ‘ought’ statements cash out as statements about what I *as one of us* intend to do, all other things being equal.²² On these grounds, to argue that an asserted interest or preference has no claim on moral truth is to argue that it is not compatible with *our* form of life,

²¹ *The Meaning of Truth*, p. 271.

²² See, e.g., Wilfrid Sellars, *Science and Metaphysics*, Routledge and Kegan Paul: London, 1968, pp. 175-229.

especially with our shared intentions. For example, 'I desire genocide in certain instances' may well state a certain preference but *not* a moral truth, if that desire is at odds with our shared intentions, our form of life and the standards internal to it. Construing moral propositions in this Sellarsian way does not make moral truth a simple matter of consensus or public agreement. I may be right and everybody else may be wrong. But if I am right, this is so because the claim I make — genocide is a vice — fits our overlapping nature(s) and needs better than relevant options.

Does this inevitably upend Santayana's insistence on the variability nor modifiability of 'forms of life'? No, not in principle. Neither variability and modifiability preclude areas of overlap. If I am right and everybody else is wrong about the vicious character of genocide, I know more and I know better than everybody else about our overlapping desires and interests, understood in light of our overlapping natures and needs.

Santayana asserted that "the texture of the natural world, the conflict of interests in the soul and in society, all of which cannot be satisfied altogether, is ... the ground for moral restrictions and compromises."²³ But that is ground enough for the power of moral persuasion to play itself out, and to do so in terms of claims on moral truth. If this extrapolation from Santayana's work is a strong misreading, so much the better for strong misreadings.

That "genocide is acceptable in certain cases" is a view I hate, frown upon, and deny. This, of course, does not preclude my appreciating whatever innocence there is about the person making such a claim, or about the making of it, if there is any, nor my understanding its clearness to her. But my wager is that if she submits to the same or similar spiritual disciplines of understanding that have opened my heart and mind, say, to whatever guiltlessness or sense of clarity she exhibits as an alien other, she will have begun to see how she might be led to reject her own initial claim. To do so would be to perform the pragmatic and naturalistic disciplines Kort yearns to know more about: the skills, as Santayana put it, involved in "identify[ing] ourselves not with ourselves"; [RB:741] in "willing not to will, but [in understanding]-the lure and suffering in all willing;" and in "detaching us from each thing with humility and humour, and attaching us to all things with justice charity and pure joy." [RB:745]

Arguing for this sort of spiritual elasticity, and arguing that Santayana actually proposed it, was a large part of my book's aim. Whether I succeeded is another matter, best left to others to judge. But I believe that Santayana was exhibiting just the sort of spiritual elasticity some current pragmatists still prize, just the sort that depends on confronting the truth rather than blinking it, and just the sort that leaves selves playful enough to jeopardize their own views while trying to forgive those of others.

Despite Sprigge's distrust of the salient play I give to Santayana's playfulness, seriously fearing for the seriousness of Santayana's reputation, it was of course that seriously playful performer (as Whitman would have put it, "both in and out of the game") who reminded us that "there is ... a sort of play, or game of thought, which intervenes in all alleged knowledge of matters of fact, and survives that knowledge, if this is ever questioned or disproved." [SAF:75] That game of thought provides a

²³ George Santayana, *Reason in Religion*, Scribner's: New York, 1905, p. 216.

motive for an aspect of the spiritual life, and I know that anyone indebted to Santayana's genius intends to play it well. Santayana believed that playful "fancy disorganizes conduct only when it expresses vice; and then it is the vice that does the mischief, and not the fancy." [SAF:96] Moreover, he claimed that "diversity in signs and descriptions for a single thing [like his own work] is a normal diversity [which] irritates only unreasonably dogmatic people." [SAF:176]

In his soliloquy on "Masks," Santayana wrote that "no one would be angry with a man for unintentionally making a mistake about a matter of fact; but if he perversely insists on spoiling your story in the telling of it, you want to kick him; and this is the reason why every philosopher and theologian is justly vexed with every other." [SELS:129] My own preference would be to try to find ways, as Santayana put it in his soliloquy on "Comedy," to let each of us philosophers or critics acknowledge ourselves somehow beaten and deceived, and still be happier for the unexpected state of affairs.

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Moral Truth or Empirical Truth about Morality?

Not very long ago, a person wishing to talk seriously about the philosophy of Santayana would have had to engage in the dialogue of the soul with itself.¹ Few professional philosophers knew much about Santayana and it would have been difficult to find even a couple with enough mastery of Santayana's language to sustain a conversation about the subtleties of what he meant. Santayana's reputation was in full decline by the 1930s; after his death, he all but disappeared from the philosophical scene. His remarkable resurrection in the last few years would have left no one more surprised than this marvelous sceptic of all resurrections.

The great renewal of interest in this unjustly neglected, unquestionably important philosopher leaves me in an ambiguous position. On the one hand, I am elated that we have at last reached the stage where a significant number of us can talk seriously and in an informed way about the technical details of Santayana's thought. On the other hand, however, I am concerned that these conversations lead to disagreements among friends.

Unanimity is a great good so long as we don't lose our native accents in the harmony. If dissent cannot be avoided, it must at least be cushioned by respect for our opponents. What makes my task so difficult tonight is that the higher the respect, the more difficult it is to disagree. Over the years I have known him, Henry Levinson has become an ever more subtle, sensitive and insightful interpreter of Santayana's thought. My regard for his work is so high that I dissent from his views with great reluctance and only because so much is at stake.

Levinson defends two important theses. He argues (1) that Santayana is a sort of pragmatist and (2) that Santayana thinks there are moral truths. I have some problems with the *form* in which Levinson casts the first claim and great difficulties with the *substance* of the second. Let me first discuss Santayana's pragmatism.

Santayana's ideas stand in intimate and interesting relations to the theories of James, Dewey, Mead and even Peirce. Depending on what one means by the term, one could sensibly argue that the similarities are enough to call Santayana a pragmatist. There are at least three ways of making this argument. The time-honored philosophical way is to choose two or three marks of pragmatism, to declare that they constitute the essence of the view and then to show that Santayana meets these necessary and sufficient conditions.

Levinson is too sophisticated a thinker to go for this essentialist gambit. Instead, he asks if the concept of pragmatism might not be elastic enough to accommodate Santayana. For him, ideas are not rigid after the manner of staples, but springy and flexible like rubber bands: if we stretch them a little, we can slip them around yet another sheaf of documents. We managed to get enough elasticity to include Rorty and perhaps even Putnam and Quine among the pragmatists; surely, the band will not snap if we coax it around yet another collection of volumes.

¹ This paper was read to the Santayana Society in Atlanta, Georgia on December 28, 1993, in response to the above paper of Henry Levinson.

This second way of arguing, I am afraid, is still essentialist and, as such, out of keeping with the thought of both Santayana and the pragmatists. Whether categories are thought to be steely or elastic, viewing them out of the context of human purposes makes us suppose that their function is to replicate reality. The aim of classification, however, is not to capture the single proper order of the world. When we say that Santayana is a pragmatist, we surely do not mean that until now everyone has mistakenly thought he was something else, but we have uncovered the awesome truth. The issue is not whether Santayana *is* a pragmatist, but how much it helps our understanding to suppose that he is.

The third way to persuade us that in important respects Santayana's views are similar to those of pragmatists is, accordingly, tentative and experimental. We need to keep in mind that our concern is not with establishing his pedigree once and for all, but with learning more about his ideas and about pragmatism. Juxtaposing him to Dewey highlights some aspects of his and of Dewey's thought that we might otherwise miss. Looking at what he says about consciousness and perception from the standpoint of James' *Principles of Psychology* reveals interesting influences and makes us think hard about why, having accepted so much, Santayana dissented on some central points.

The conclusion of Levinson's argument becomes, in this way, the hypothesis that starts mine. Instead of trying to show that he is a pragmatist, our efforts need to be focused on seeing what good comes of categorizing him that way. If the hypothesis proves useful and we detect important similarities, we can leave it to individual judgment to decide whether or not they are extensive enough to justify calling him a pragmatist. This way of putting the matter eliminates the disagreement between Levinson and Sprigge and focuses our attention on exploring resemblances without forgetting dissimilarities.

In case you think this is too pragmatic a way of dealing with the issue, let me rephrase it in Santayana's terms. Arthur Lovejoy distinguished thirteen pragmatisms. In reality, there must be hundreds, perhaps thousands, of complex essences all of which can reasonably be called "pragmatism." No two pragmatists instantiate the same essence in this continuous series of minimally differing forms. The series shades off into German idealism essences at one end, into Roycean religious philosophy essences somewhere else and into Meadian social psychology essences in another place.

Which pragmatism essence are we fighting about? Is there any danger that Santayana's philosophy will lose its essence if we say it is similar to some forms of pragmatism? Might we not be able to develop a better appreciation of some of the elements of the complex essence that is Santayana's thought if we compare it to other essences that have similar constituents in exaggerated form? Although Santayana does not have a formal theory of classification, the disintegrating force of the idea of an infinity of essences makes it clear that, ironically, he is no essentialist. Everything or nearly everything concerning how we think about such things is a matter of our interests and choices.

I hear passion in Levinson's voice when he denounces genocide. Not surprisingly, he wishes to enlist Santayana in support of his cause. But he is not satisfied with Santayana's agreement, which he could surely obtain. For such harmony in moral judgments inevitably involves a relation to those who judge: only for similar natures, for natures with like interests and dispositions, is the same event or object bad. Levinson wants Santayana to say that there are moral *truths*, that is, objective and

eternal verities concerning what is good and bad for everyone everywhere.

Saying that such truths are about "spiritual matters of fact" strikes me as jarring for two reasons. "Spiritual" is a word that, in his terminologically careful moments, Santayana reserves for the life of pure intuition. He never ceases to remind us that in such spirituality there is no room at all for values of any sort. "Fact" is also reserved by him to mean "a thing or an event against which the speaker has inevitably run up; as it is a fact that the Atlantic Ocean separates Europe from America, or that men die."² Clearly, nothing spiritual is a matter of fact in this sense: neither intuitions nor their immediate objects constitute substantial realities we encounter in action.

Let us overlook terminological problems, however, and see if Santayana can yield what Levinson wants. I think the answer is that he neither can nor wants to yield it. The realm of truth is the collection of essences that gains instantiation in the history of the world. Instantiation occurs in two ways: matter embodies essences and intuitions envisage them. Any essence embodied in substance belongs to the realm of truth: it is forever the case that that essence characterized just that bit of matter at that stage in the world's development. Any essence that appears to intuition also belongs to the realm of truth: it is forever the case that that essence was intuited just then and there.

Although he says that the intuition of some essences would mean instant death, Santayana sets no clear limits to what can be intuited. He does, however, restrict the sorts of essences that can be embodied. To be sure, the word "mechanism" occurs in his later work much less frequently than it did in *The Life of Reason*, but there is no doubt that he continued to think of matter as devoid of purpose and of moral properties. Neither the ultimate ingredients of matter, natural moments, nor the substance that exists independently of our cognition manifests the qualities good and bad. The material world is a field of action and change; it has room for such facts as animal tendencies and strivings and needs, but none for such values as the goodness of what we want and the rightness of what we do.

If moral truths cannot come from embodiment in matter, perhaps they derive from envisagement by mind. And, indeed, Santayana is perfectly prepared to admit such truths as that Levinson thinks of genocide as awful. Now let us suppose that everyone who has ever thought about it to this day agrees with Levinson that genocide is a vice. This means that in every intuition in which the essence genocide occurs, it appears suffused with or characterized by the essence bad. Is this an eternal value? It is more nearly right to say that it is a cosmic accident. Such agreement is simply a brute fact about the history of the world; as an empirical and not a moral truth, it can exert no normative force over any creature whose nature takes it in a different direction.

Value is the way animal interest and partiality are experienced in consciousness. As such, they involve a relation between objects of pursuit, animal tendencies and the intuited moral essences the psyche projects on what it seeks. We cannot speak of virtue and vice, therefore, without taking the needs and the desires, the very nature of the animal into account. These natures are diverse and changeable; any overlap

² George Santayana, *Scepticism and Animal Faith* (New York: Dover, 1955), p. 229.

between them is a contingent matter of fact. Moral truth thus becomes empirical truth about morality, a prosaic catalogue of who prizes what, a record of the moral history of the world rather than a guide to its correct development.

I cannot believe that this would satisfy Levinson, yet I cannot see how Santayana could give more. Just as he is a pragmatist in certain respects, he is a positivist in others. He is particularly insistent on keeping the world of facts distinct from the value perspectives we take of it. This means that though the good has its ground in nature, it is not properly a part of it; facts and values occupy different ontological realms. His account of mind as private and evanescent, along with his persistent efforts to lodge value in consciousness make it impossible for him to be a moral realist in any of the now proliferating senses of this term.

Moreover, even if his system left room for objective values (which it clearly does not), Santayana would not want to endorse them. One does not have to be a particularly careful reader to notice his abhorrence of moral absolutism and his recognition of the use dogmatists make of transcendent ideals. He views the human scene as though through reversed binoculars; at this immense distance, good and bad become local incidents in the life of animals. Such a naturalistic perspective on virtue and vice, which he associates with his masters Lucretius and Spinoza, commits him to denying the moralist the comfort of justification by reference to universal standards and eternal truths.

Finally, eternal moral truths are neither sufficient nor necessary for purposes of ordinary moral life. They are insufficient because they entitle us to condemn our enemies without enabling us to bring them in line with the true and the good. They are unnecessary because shared but evolving ideals are no less effective in rallying us in the fight for human decency. What then are they good for? They are a part of what has from the start been the consolation of philosophy: they provide reassurance that the structure of the world endorses our heart's desire. Santayana and we should be at one in affirming that the possibility of moral despotism is too high a price to pay for such illusory comfort.

All of this leaves, of course, the possibility of constructing a moral consensus. Wisely, Levinson takes this into account, even though he does not distinguish it clearly enough from his preferred idea of moral truth. In fact, constructing agreement concerning belief, conduct and feeling has little to do with moral truth; it is a matter of education and social policy. In order to establish and to perpetuate shared values, each society engages in the production of relatively uniform, locally typical human natures. Our task today is not to affirm eternal verities. Instead, we need to find ways to shape these natures more effectively and we need to make sure that the values they live by are sensible and humane.

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Pragmatism and Santayana's Realms

When I set out to read Henry's book, I wasn't looking for the Levinson I found.¹ Indeed, I presumed that the pragmatism issue would take centre stage and dominate everything else. This is not the case at all, notwithstanding the stress he puts on the theme. A much deeper concern, manifested throughout the text, is the place of religion and spirit in today's world, and the contribution which Santayana makes to this subject, with his personal account of how they might best be placed in a polity, a social context, and a private life. To this theme, Levinson brings a welcome interest and expertise in religions, and an enviable knowledge of both Santayana and his American contemporaries. It would be a pity if disputes about Santayana's relationship to any other philosopher or group of philosophers, a very secondary and elusive question, were to divert our attention away from this theme, and Levinson's excellent focus on it.

About this question of pragmatism, I shall have little direct to say, eager though I might be to set forth my position in the opposite corner from Henry. He has presented the differences between Santayana and the pragmatists no less faithfully than the similarities, as did John Lachs in Ávila; but where is the common principle which will allow a referee to count the punches which landed and render a decision on this partly verbal question? My own view of the match would be filtered through Santayana's realms of being, and I would see a one-sided fight.

Rather, my direct focus will be on Santayana's realms. One thing seems clear, and might indeed be accepted by all: to the extent that one adopts as one's own methodology something like Santayana's later ontology, to that extent one will shy away from analogies between Santayana and the pragmatists.

Timothy Sprigge — some twenty years ago in 1974 — inaugurated a reading of Santayana's philosophy which placed the main thrust on his hitherto neglected later works, especially on *Realms of Being*. This approach stands opposed to a prominent reading which places the better known and much earlier *The Life of Reason* at the apex of his achievements. I count myself a follower of Sprigge on this point. Henry, I would say, has affinities with the other viewpoint. This is not to say that he is unfamiliar with the later writings, for it is clear that he knows all of Santayana's works exceptionally well. Nor does Levinson neglect the later doctrines concerning his theme of how the human spirit might thrive in private life and in society. How could one make such a claim, given the largely sympathetic scrutiny he has given to *The Realm of Spirit*, to *Dominations and Powers*, and to other late works? I nevertheless say that he is not entirely comfortable with the ontological method created and employed by the older Santayana, which some of us see as one of the high points in modern philosophy. The realm of essence, for instance, is seen by Henry as "more trouble than it is worth," and as leading one into a realm of Platonic myth. This is a commonly held view, but I believe it is incorrect. Both essence and truth, I hold, are seen to be entirely free of mythology and concealed posits, when they are juxtaposed with a full-blooded

¹ Henry Samuel Levinson, *Santayana, Pragmatism, and the Spiritual Life*, (University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill and London, 1992). To be cited as SPSL.

This paper was read to the Santayana Society in Atlanta, Georgia on December 28, 1993, in response to the above paper of Henry Levinson.

acknowledgement of Santayana's substrative matter.

Levinson observes that Santayana's four realms are informed, "from first to last," by a demand for spiritual transformation; at the heart of *Realms of Being*, he finds the concept of worship. I do not in the least quarrel with the significance for Santayana of the spiritual life, and the importance of his ontology to it; but with the realms comes a comprehensive philosophy, which grounds his message on spirit and much more as well. This philosophy stands at odds with all the modern schools, whether the analytic school which follows Hume, whether the various phenomenologies which trace back in part to Kant, whether the pragmatists which borrow from both.

In his book, Levinson discusses truth in a section on James, and there puts his finger upon Santayana's reasons for the sharp distinction between knowledge and truth:

In Santayana's view, the distinction between the "essence" of truth and the "existence" of knowledge claims captured the intuition ... , that we idolize our knowledge claims—we eulogize them—whenever we count them as literally mirroring the way things are. When we do this, we commit what Santayana calls the first false step in philosophy (SPSL 190-191)

But I am not sure he avoids this trap himself. Santayana does say that it would be gratuitous to separate our assertions about the world into the literal and the merely poetical — in fact they are all poetical. However, Santayana is certainly not saying that the distinction between knowledge so understood and the truth is gratuitous. Nor does he find this distinction unedifying, for the very reasons Levinson has cited. When we ignore the distinction, and lose sight of an absolute underlying truth, we end up by glorifying knowledge into truth, an ever-present danger of empiricism and pragmatism.

The situation is similar for Santayana with substance. If we deny or ignore substance, we end up hypostacizing something else, ideas or experience in earlier philosophies, language in more modern times.

Henry's argument involves two steps, of which Santayana only takes the first. Levinson dismisses as gratuitous the claim that there are both poetic and literal forms of knowledge of external things, as Santayana does also. But, in addition to this, he is led to drop as unedifying the separate notion of absolute truth and of literal knowledge of that truth. Such a step is characteristic of the pragmatist methodology, but it is foreign to Santayana's philosophy at all stages of his career, although the point is driven home better with the later ontology. Santayana believes that this second step would leave knowledge high and dry; symbolic knowledge, without literal knowledge as its foil (even if there weren't any), would eventually be magnified into full-fledged truth — the only truth there is. Any idea of absolute truth would be dismissed.

I think something like this is taking place towards the end of Henry's paper. To say that the earth is roundish is sound enough, as is the stronger statement that it is round. But in neither case can one claim literal truth, without making an assumption that our view of geometry corresponds to the geometry of the physical world, and this is a major assumption indeed. One might say that this assertion, along with other statements of our symbolic physical knowledge, have *epistemic* truth. They are true in the symbolic sense that they mirror reality in the ways that our senses permit, and they are true also in the pragmatic sense that they are functional. I introduce this notion of epistemic truth in order to make an analogy with Santayana's *moral* truth:

“the earth is roundish” is epistemically true, and “genocide is a vice” is a moral truth. In this way, I think that Levinson’s comparison could be maintained; both are truths under the given qualifications.

But my analogy also brings out a difference. “The earth is roundish” is epistemically true not just in the sense that it can guide our actions effectively, but also in the sense that it is our best stab, given our resources, at a literal truth about the constitution of our planet. The moral truth, however, is grounded entirely on the good effects which it yields, without an appeal to overarching ethical truths. This I take to be Santayana’s position on moral truth, which Lachs has just discussed, and about which I shall say little. Genocide is surely a vice for Santayana, whose ethics is based on harmony and mutual accommodation. That we might yearn to see this as a universal imperative, he would not deny; but for him, this would not solve the problem. The German philosophy did not renounce the categorical nature of ethical imperatives, but rather detached them from their natural sanctions. In his eyes, this is the greater danger, for the imperatives can then wander, in their fanatical ways, into themes which would have appalled Kant.

To be sure, I have some difficulty with one of Henry’s citations, where Santayana speaks about being freed from literalness and scepticism. Levinson concludes from it that Santayana rejected, *tout court*, the scepticism of the earlier part of SAF. But surely he cannot be understood to mean this. Santayana never renounces his complete scepticism about literal knowledge, which he calls *ultimate*. According to my reading, what we are freed from is not ultimate scepticism, but rather the false assumption that our lack of literal knowledge makes knowledge impossible. We are freed because our epistemic truths are very practical. And I think Henry would agree this far. Our difference comes when he wants to say that, since all our knowledge is non-literal, and it is useful knowledge, we need no longer retain a separate notion of literal knowledge of the truth, and the scepticism associated with it: if the predicate “literally knowing x” has empty extension, can we not dispense with it?

In sum, then, Santayana retains throughout a double meaning both for the term “knowledge” and the term “truth.” Literal *knowledge* of external things, he says, is not to be expected; the literal *truth* about nature is real, but is probably not available. We do have symbolic knowledge, which is fully adequate for our needs. And he sometimes speaks of truth in a derivative sense, such as “moral truth,” and “the sort of truth accessible to discourse.” While Henry is fully aware of all this, he seems to feel that the distortion would not be too great if these double meanings were dropped, and with them both scepticism and literalness. Once the notion of literalness is gone, such claims as “The earth is roundish” can qualify as fully valid claims on the truth, perfect exemplars of knowledge.

It is understandable why someone might make such a move. Does not Santayana say that symbolic knowledge is entirely adequate to our needs? And if it makes no practical difference to us whether or not we continue to speak of a literal truth beyond our conceptions of things, why not take the pragmatic way and, innocently, toss away this useless idea?

Nor is it just the classical pragmatists who would be tempted to turn away from Santayana’s declared position. The philosophy which is taught to students commonly includes the dogma that the terms “scepticism,” “knowledge,” and “truth” must be used univocally, if they are to be used coherently. Does Rorty not dismiss a strong notion

of truth as absolutist and outmoded? Does not Putnam rail against the use of any "in itself" language as flawed and misleading?²

It is strange, is it not, the story that our leading philosophers are telling us: we really must get along without ever mentioning external things as they are, independent of mind, because of the difficulty this causes for knowledge; and we must not try to consider the truth about what is happening around us independent of human language, since this becomes metaphysical and unverifiable. It is widely agreed that Hume's philosophy leads to an impasse, but with such doctrines as these, one must wonder if we have made any progress in resolving his difficulties since his time.

Now Santayana's realms of being offer a radical solution to the difficulties brought on by the psychologism dominating modern Western thought. With matter as the starting point and the only existence, essence no longer poses the problems it would as a posited existence; truth is not tied to human forms of expression, and so can be an ideal description of the changes in matter, without some built-in connection with knowledge; and the origins of spirit in matter through the psyche clarifies human action as depending on spirit only through the dynamism of that psyche. However, it is no secret that many would prefer the sickness to the medicine Santayana has prescribed. This is where the substrative materialism comes in, according to my reading. Without Santayana's view of matter as pervasive, omnipotent, and hidden, I think it very difficult for philosophers to come to terms with the ontology. So long as the Humean view holds sway, stating that substance should be discarded from philosophy because experience does not bring us into contact with it, it will be hard for Santayana to get a fair hearing.

But whether or not we are tempted to accept his position, I plead that we must recognize how markedly different it is from the alternatives being offered to us.

I think Henry is a bit puzzled over my emphasis on the substrative matter, and their relevance to the issues at hand. It is rather indirect. A full appreciation of the other three realms is blocked for those whose notion of matter is abstract or theoretical. And it is this full appreciation of essence and truth which unmasks the radical gulf between Santayana's naturalism and the pragmatic spirit, even where the latter is broadly conceived.

Does Santayana's ontology also bear upon the spiritual and religious issues Henry is considering? I believe it does, and offer one example: the account of mind, where mind makes up the realm of spirit, and its relation to psyche, which he places in the realm of matter. Our psyche is that part of our material constitution which is dynamic, he says: it generates spirit, pursues survival, and accepts some measure of reason. How it might do so is not explained, and indeed that anything material might do so will seem implausible to those who accept as literal our theories of physics, which do not lend themselves to such elaborations. With Santayana's substrative account of matter, along with his scepticism about the literal truth of any physical theories, this radical

² Contemporary philosophers, and in particular Putnam, have difficulties with truth, which they insist must be dependent upon some language. This has the effect, in the end, of hastening, rather than blocking, the move to idolize or eulogize our knowledge. We note in passing that Santayana's account of truth in terms of essences has the radical advantage of being entirely free from such psychological ties.

implausibility dissolves, although of course he does not elucidate the nature of a psyche, any more than he explains the nature of matter itself. Matter is hidden and is very different from what our theories might lead us to visualize. We know the motions of material things best when represented in terms of other material motions; but our imagined picture of the constitution of matter is poetic. It is no different with psyche. And the same temptation exists with psyche as with substrative matter in general. The theory is so thin, as pure theory, that to think of it as a cornerstone will seem ridiculous by those to whom philosophy is just a theory. These will see no reason to retain either of them, and will seek to interpret Santayana in their absence.

Levinson correctly notes that the quest for truth has a spiritual value, but it is not usually at the heart of a spiritual life. The questions I raise about his treatment of knowledge and truth therefore do not figure so large, in the context of Levinson's main religious theme, where I am in much closer agreement. Henry notes, quite correctly, that within the American tradition there is an established place for the alienated critic who lies outside the mainstream; I prefer to see Santayana in this mode, *vis-à-vis* the community of American philosophers. His overall allegiances are to what was earliest and best in Western society — to the ancient Ionians and to Democritus in natural philosophy, to Plato and Aristotle in moral philosophy, to Spinoza among the moderns, to Christ as well as to the Indians on questions of spirit. A bond with Santayana is available to Americans and to anyone else who accept the vitality and importance and wisdom of the traditions which inform our culture. Events in the late twentieth century have no doubt had a chastening effect on the heady optimism betrayed by much American philosophy. Perhaps the notion that we can learn from the past is gaining ground. I like to think of Levinson's book in these terms. Does he not show an appreciation in Santayana of a cosmopolitan mind, and an ability to seek out what is ideal and best from a variety of sources, both recent and earlier? Is not the comedy and sense of joy he sees in Santayana just a version of the ancient philosophical principle of happiness? Most of all, does he not welcome Santayana's treatment of non-dogmatic religion as an essential part of philosophy?

ANGUS KERR-LAWSON

University of Waterloo

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The 'Spanishness' of Santayana

Santayana¹ was born in a town famous for its encircling walls, a town like a tower, a rock of defense amid the inhuman grandeur of the lofty Castilian plateau: "... *Castilla, mística y guerrera, / Castilla la gentil, humilde y brava, / Castilla del desdén y de la fuerza*² ..." in the words of Antonio Machado, the great, rueful laureate of those parts. That same town of Ávila was famous too for harbouring one of the two greatest Castilian mystics, Santa Teresa, friend and mentor of St. John of the Cross, and author of the Interior Castle, the innermost shrine where the soul finds union and safety with God. Those two factors, domination and peace, make an apt context for a thinker like Santayana. At the climax of his greatest work, *The Realm of Spirit*, one aspect of the nature of the spiritual life is focused by a significant image:

In the animal psyche the passions follow one another or battle for supremacy, and the distracted spirit runs helter-skelter among them, impressed by the sophisticated arguments which each of them offers for itself; but if the psyche grows integrated and rational, its centre, which is the organ of spirit, becomes dominant, and all those eloquent passions begin to be compared and judged, and their probable issue to be foreknown and discounted. The waves will not be stilled, but they will now beat against a rock. And with inner security comes a great inner clearness.³

The rock is an image of defence and domination, the latter being not an unusual concomitant of spiritual life in the later writings of Santayana; yet there are other passages which propound an eschewal of Will, and advocate an ideal of charitable detachment universal in its scope. So too, for the Christian mystic, there is a paradoxical sense in which the soul, having renounced all things, regains them, purified, *sub specie aeternitatis*, and is triumphantly dominant in its very humility. Such conformity with an eternal and higher mode of being has ineluctably dualistic connotations, though not, of course, in the case of an orthodox Catholic mystic, lapsing into Manicheanism. Santayana's system, too, was not formally dualistic, and indeed he inclined in many contexts to stress the dependence of Spirit upon Matter, which generated and sustained it. It is nevertheless legitimate to speculate that he never really resolved the tension in his outlook between a rhetoric of total spiritual transcendence, and a dynamic naturalism whose logical terminus might appear to be monistic.

That irrepressible quasi-dualism was one of the features which linked Santayana with a pervasive tradition in the civilization of Spain. A Spanish thinker contemporaneous with Santayana, Miguel de Unamuno, touched on it in the course of

¹ This paper is an expanded version of what was due to be delivered at the Santayana Conference in late May of 1992, in Ávila; due to a variety of adverse circumstances, the author was unable to attend.

² Castile, mystic and warlike land,
Castile the noble, the humble, the untamed,
Castile the land of haughtiness and might,
Translated by Alan S. Trueblood

³ *Realms of Being*, One-Volume Edition, (Cooper Square Publishers, Inc., New York, 1972) 824.

his essay "El Espíritu Castellano," when discussing the theatre of Calderón, that epitome of the spiritual absolutism of the old Spain, as well as of its deeply rooted, harshly realistic "desengaño," its disillusion:

There is in our pure-blooded, traditional theatre a dissociation between idealism and realism ... a spirit of polarisation, of dualism. ... Our pure-blooded traditional heroes oppose a tense, interior will to all external pressure, which is what Schopenhauer relished in the Castilians. ... (Their wills) were tenacious, inflexible; interior castles of diamond, all of a piece, harsh and sharp-edged. ... In their social setting each of these souls confronted one another so as to produce a truly egalitarian anarchism ... a truly absolutist anarchism; a world atomistic, indivisible, impenetrable.⁴

Some years ago, a most intelligent and perceptive friend, who was not especially familiar with Santayana's writings, to whom I had lent *Person and Places*, returned the book with comments of enjoyment and admiration, adding — "how *hard* he is, though, isn't he?". I was momentarily taken aback by the comment, but should not have been so. It opened my eyes, a trifle blurred by the graciously accommodating manner of Santayana, to the quintessential Spanish intransigence and absolutism of his disposition, akin to what Unamuno was describing:

The lady who said she envied me for not having a conscience did not altogether misread me. ... Like my mother I have firmness of character; and I don't understand how a rational being can be wrong in being or doing what he fundamentally wishes to be or to do. He may make a mistake about it, or about the circumstances; or he may be imperfectly integrated, and tossed between contrary desires, not knowing his own nature or what he really wants. Experience and philosophy have taught me that perfect integrity is an ideal never fully realised, that nature is fluid and inwardly chaotic in the last resort, even in the most heroic soul; and I am ashamed and truly repentant if ever I find that I have been dazed and false to myself either in my conduct or in my opinions. In this sense I am not without a conscience; but I accept nobody's precepts traversing my moral freedom.⁵

That passage of Santayana, taken along with Unamuno's preceding comments, chimes well with some remarks by the noted Spanish cultural historian, Américo Castro, concerning his fellow-countrymen's character throughout a portion of their history:

The premium set upon the will that affirmed the absolute value of the person had fatal results for the logical, rational effectiveness of that absolute person, but admirable ones for his expressive capabilities. Spaniards in the future should not forget either side of this human problem in order, first of all, not to scorn a past so rich in works and actions of truly

⁴ M. de Unamuno, *En Torno al Casticismo* (Espasa-Calpe S. A. Madrid, 1983) 72 .. 75 .. 77.

⁵ *Persons and Places: Fragments of Autobiography*, edited by William G. Holzberger and Herman J. Saatkamp, Jr., with an Introduction by Richard C. Lyon, critical edition (Cambridge, Mass., and London: MIT Press, 1986) 133-134.

universal dimensions; and, secondly, to be aware of the risks inherent in the extravagant cult of what I would call personal absolutism, not individualism.⁶

Despite the “enlightened” point of view of Castro’s history, his comments, like those of Unamuno, show the curious brooding fascination which so many Spaniards display when expatiating on the peculiar features of their racial and national destiny, however disastrous — until quite recently — its effects in terms of adaptation to the modern world. Spain was the great “Other” to the rest of Europe, insofar as Europe was Americanised, as well as to America itself. Not only Spaniards themselves, but fascinated and sympathetic foreigners — especially perhaps foreigners — have dramatised this fact: creative writers like Hemingway, Roy Campbell, Montherlant; literati like Gerald Brenan, V.S. Pritchett, Honor Tracy, Jan Morris ... Spain religious yet skeptical; Spain aristocratic yet profoundly egalitarian; Spain mystical yet disillusioned; Spain autocratic yet individualistic. That intense individualism, or personal absolutism, as Castro preferred to call it, was accompanied by an equally intense intuition of ‘Nada’, the nothingness of all things in the context of that absolute generative power which we may call God — or Matter. Santayana expressed the matter thus in his Autobiography, in the course of an account of Arthur Strong, an authority on Moorish civilisation:

He reminded me of my father. Through the Moors he had good knowledge of Spain also: and he said something about the Spanish mind that has given me food for reflection. “The Spaniard,” he said, “respects only one thing, and that is —,” and he raised his fore-finger, pointing to heaven. There is no power but Allah: he is omnificent, and all appearance and all wills are nought. It is quite true that no genuine or reflective person in Spain trusts anybody or is proud of himself. He may be vain and punctilious, but that is play-acting: he thinks that pose is set down for him in his role: but inwardly he knows that he is dust.⁷

It should be noted at this point that both Unamuno and Américo Castro, cited as indirectly bearing witness to aspects of Santayana’s traditional ‘Spanishness’, emerged from an ethos deriving from that “Generation of 1898” which attempted to reform Spanish cultural and national life along more rational lines, thus bringing it into line with selected elements of modern progress — without necessarily abjuring the mystical and religious elements of Spanish civilisation. The movement derived from the group around Giner de los Reyes and his *Institución Libre de Enseñanza*, a pedagogic genius whom one might call “the Ignatius Loyola of the liberal-minded”, as Brenan put it.⁸

Santayana was not a Spaniard of that stamp. He managed to combine in a deeply ambiguous fashion some of the most dissolvent and skeptical currents of modern thought — his Hume-ian, William James-ian side — with a disposition quick to respond in the most absolute, autocratic Spanish — and Platonic — way to the sublimity of ideal good in the purity of its essence, as something set over against the

⁶ Américo Castro, *The Spaniards, An Introduction to Their History*, translated by W. F. King and S. Margaretten (University of California Press, 1971) 367-368.

⁷ *Persons and Places*, 284.

⁸ G. Brenan, *The Literature of the Spanish People* (C. U. P., 1965) 418.

chaotic pretence of ever-shifting mundane existence. It made him contemptuous of the shabby moral compromises, combined with a certain ant-like efficiency, which successful enterprise in the modern world requires. There was an aura of 'nobleza' in Santayana's demeanour, which, along with cynical detachment, made him very much the Spaniard of tradition. That detachment, moreover, was perceptibly skin-deep when it came to certain matters Spanish or Catholic, as Bertrand Russell remarked in his agreeably malicious pen portrait of Santayana:

In the Spanish American War he found himself passionately on the Spanish side, which is perhaps not surprising, as his father had been Governor of Manila. Whenever his Spanish patriotism was involved, his usual air of detachment disappeared. He used to spend the summers at his sister's house in the ancient city of Avila, and he described to me once how the ladies there would sit at their windows, flirting with such male acquaintances as passed by, and would make up for this pastime afterwards by going to confession. I rashly remarked: "It sounds a rather vapid existence." He drew himself up, and replied sharply: "They spend their lives in the two greatest things: love and religion." ... The American dress in which his writing appeared somewhat concealed the extremely reactionary character of his thinking. Not only did he, as a Spaniard, side politically with the Church in all its attempts to bolster up old traditions in that country, but, as a philosopher, he reverted in great measure to the scholasticism of the thirteenth century. He did not present this doctrine straightforwardly as neo-Thomists do; he insinuated it under various aliases, so that it was easy for a reader not to know where his opinions came from. It would not be fair to suggest that his views were completely those of medieval scholastics. He took rather more from Plato than St. Thomas did. But I think that he and St. Thomas, if they could have met, would have understood one another very well. ... Although not a believing Catholic, he strongly favoured the Catholic religion in all political and social ways. He did not see any reason to wish that the populace should believe something true. What he desired for the populace was some myth to which he could give aesthetic approval. This attitude naturally made him very hostile to Protestantism, and made people with a Protestant way of feeling critical of him. William James condemned his Doctor's thesis as "the perfection of rottenness." And, although the two men were colleagues for a great many years, neither ever succeeded in thinking well of the other.⁹

It seems only fair at this point, in the light of James' rather too well-known denigratory comment - provoked, incidentally by Santayana's bifurcation of the ideal from the existent - to remark that, from Santayana's perspective, James was open to the accusation of moralistic hypocrisy. This emerges in the following episode, narrated in Santayana's *Autobiography*.

William James was pained by the peace terms imposed on Spain by the United States after the Cuban war; outraged by the annexation of the Philippines: "What could excuse that? What could be a more shameless betrayal of American principles?" To Santayana, in his role of philosophic sage, and despite his Spanish affiliations, it was all just the way of the world: the inevitable innate aggressiveness of one material force expanding to its destined climax, and another phase of matter receding inevitably to its decline:

⁹ Bertrand Russell, *Portraits from Memory* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1958) 86-89.

Catastrophes come when some dominant institution, swollen like a soap-bubble and still standing without foundations, suddenly crumbles at the touch of what may seem a word or an idea, but is really some stronger material force. This force is partly that of changing circumstances, partly that of changing passions; but passions are themselves physical impulses, maturing in their season, and often epidemic, like contagious diseases. James, who was a physician and pragmatist, might have been expected to perceive this, and did perceive it at moments; yet the over-ruling tradition in him was literary and theological, and he cried disconsolately that he had lost country, when his country, just beginning to play its part in the history of the world, appeared to ignore an ideal that he had innocently expected would always guide it, because this ideal had been eloquently expressed in the Declaration of Independence. But the Declaration of Independence was a piece of literature, a salad of illusions.¹⁰

For Santayana, James's pragmatism camouflaged an innate, inappropriate moralism, hypnotised by the illusion of anthropocentric ideals, purposes which the natural world was in duty bound to subserve. The antipathy of the two philosophical colleagues, despite occasional public and private demonstrations of good-will, lends a symbolic import to recent debates concerning the degree of Santayana's alignment with Pragmatism — a philosophical movement predominantly associated with America, and to which the 'Spanishness' of Santayana would seem, in any ultimate sense, irremediably alien.

In certain technical respects the alignment is extremely plausible; the deliverances of what Santayana called Animal Faith are deemed true if efficacious, and confirmed by events. But events also figure within a timeless Realm of Truth, in what Santayana called 'Truth Super-Temporal':

The truth, then, forms an ideal realm of being impersonal and super-existential. Though everything in the panorama of history be temporal, the panorama itself is dateless: for evidently the sum and system of events cannot be one of them. It cannot occur after everything else or before anything else. Thus the truth about existence differs altogether in ontological quality from existence itself. Life and motion are gone, all scales are equally really, all ages equally present. Intensity, actuality, suffering have become historical. The truth is like the moon, beautiful but dead.¹¹

Such a passage must seem mystical and obscurantist — Santayana the theologian *manqué!* — to many a modern philosopher, but especially, one would think, to any calling themselves Pragmatist, neo- or otherwise. It forms a portion of that whole hierarchical aspect of Santayana's later thought which Paul Kuntz has been at pains to emphasise;¹² even if, from another point of view, it may seem dubious whether Santayana had the right to such a vertical panorama of Being in which Matter,

¹⁰ *Persons and Places*, 404

¹¹ *Realms of Being*, 485-486.

¹² "Categories and Orders of Santayana's Christian Neo-Platonism," *Overheard in Seville: Bulletin of the Santayana Society*, No. 3, Fall 1985, 22-28; and "The Ascent of Spirit: Is Santayana's System a Naturalistic Neo-Platonic Hierarchy?," *Overheard in Seville: Bulletin of the Santayana Society*, No. 10, Fall 1992, 22-31.

exemplified in Essences, is crowned by Spirit, and embodies Truth: an exalted latter-day neo-Platonism. Moreover it would be imprudent to underestimate how numerous were Santayana's hostages to a Pragmatist fortune, when subjected to acute technical analysis. Yet, running counter to all that, there is the great cleavage of spirit between Santayana and the philosophical outlook one thinks of as Pragmatist; so marked, as to make any such labelling suspect. A passage such as this, from the concluding section of *Apologia Pro Mente Sua*, entitled 'Pragmatist Propaganda' — which he identifies, significantly with "the general recalcitrancy of positivistic minds" — surely marks a crucial parting of the ways:

The active man therefore cannot understand that something given in idea should not exist in fact. And yet it never exists simply because it is given, although it often is given because, in some object, it exists. More often, however, it has no such embodiment, and borrows existence, as pain does, only from the wholly dissimilar life of its organ. Therefore in a disillusioned analytic mind attention intently fixed on the given, far from inducing belief, induces definition of the given, and suspension of all belief; for now what in animal life was a mere incident in action has become absorption in intuition, and belief in existence has turned into contemplation of essence. I happen to be able to do this trick and to enjoy doing it; which by no means implies that I refuse ever to trust perception or to believe in facts, when the facts really impose and justify such belief, which is not always. I do not, then, substitute essences for things *in rerum natura*; but as Aristotle says, the mind can absorb only the forms of things. It is for the body to deal with their matter.¹³

Despite the lightness of touch in that passage — "I happen to be able to do this trick" — it is perfectly clear where Santayana's true treasure is laid up: in that "Realm of Essence" which is such a puzzle and offence to the practical, positivistic thinker, and so patent to the contemplative disposition. The basic feature of Santayana's philosophy lay, as was long ago seen, in the distinction of essence from existence, whatever difficulties this may have caused for his "dogmatic materialism."

Santayana's materialism was more thorough-going than the 'naturalism' he was purported to share with the Pragmatists. His naturalism chimed with theirs as to the symbolic character of knowledge, but, as has recently been pointed out,¹⁴ he missed in them "the substrative sense of reality." The naturalism of the Pragmatists was in spirit a heritage of the Enlightenment.¹⁵ They had displaced the absolutism of Reason as a good grounded in the nature of things, which the Enlightenment had inherited in devious fashion from the fundamentally Reason-based outlook of Christian Natural Theology, as Whitehead observed. Yet Pragmatists retained the Enlightenment sense of reason's role as experimental and instrumental, ever tilted toward a future which should ensure humanity's self-perfecting in this earthly life: "Faith in the power of intelligence to imagine a future which is a projection of the desirable in the present,

¹³ *The Philosophy of George Santayana*, ed. P. A. Schilpp (New York, 1951) 542.

¹⁴ Angus Kerr-Lawson, "An Abulensean Pragmatist?" *Overheard in Seville: Bulletin of the Santayana Society*, No. 10, Fall 1992, 21.

¹⁵ cf. H. S. Levinson, "Pragmatic Naturalism and the Spiritual Life," *Raritan X* (2) Fall, 1990.

and to invent the instrumentalities of its realization, is our salvation," in Dewey's wholly typical, profoundly revelatory phrasing.¹⁶ This was a naturalism pervaded — in Santayana's famous phrase — by "the dominance in the foreground"; it was anthropocentric, even though abjuring the traditional religious scheme of things. The contingency of existence, as vividly present to the Pragmatists as to Santayana, never prevented the former's fusion of ideal good with secular progress as part of an ongoing exploratory process or risk-taking, perpetually subject to revision and improvisation. For Santayana, it was profanation to identify what was transient, imperfect, 'on-going', with ideal and essential good. The latter was available — in religious exaltation, in art, in un-burdened gratuitous moments of intuition — precisely in order to redeem human life from the Ixion's wheel of Progress. Such an outlook on the part of Santayana was the reflection, in a rarefied philosophical form, of that specifically Spanish disjunction between the real and the ideal which Unamuno noted. A slightly more extended quotation from the same source strengthens the point:

That pure-blooded, traditional spirit did not, to judge from its intransigence, aim at any cosy harmony or covert equivalence of the ideal and the real: it did not fuse ideas, dissolve them in clouds, nor did it aspire to harmonise eternal time and infinite space, whence, like a melody, struggling to take form, the Ideal of our own human spirit might emerge. (On the contrary, for the traditional outlook) there were just two worlds: a kaleidoscope of facts and a system of ideas, and, over and above, an Unmoved Mover. ... It was a dualistic, polarising spirit. Don Quixote and Sancho travel together, help one another, squabble, love, one another, but never merge, the extremes touch without blurring.¹⁷

The reference to Don Quixote and Sancho Panza surely sets us thinking of that famous peroration to Santayana's *Apologia Pro Mente Sua*, where he does not disclaim the appellation, 'mystic'; but only if associated with the tense and limpid atmosphere of that Castilian plateau where Hispanic dualism — which, paradoxically, is a deeper form of union — finds its symbolic point of reference:

Marichalar has said that I am a Castilian mystic. I have written harsh things about mysticism, and had I been called a mystic simply it might have sounded surprising or even offensive. But that happy restriction, Castilian, removes all those unpleasant suggestions. Castile can breed nothing nebulous. No danger there of thinking oneself God or thinking God is oneself. That word Castilian dries the wind, clears the jungle, lays bare earth and sky alike, infinitely apart yet separated by nothing, as the soul and God should always remain. The mere mystic might be anything, good or bad; but the Castilian mystic is vowed to an unflinching realism about the world and an unsullied allegiance to the ideal. He is Don Quixote sane.¹⁸

"Don Quixote sane": how deftly, by such a phrase, Santayana aligns himself both with the mystical fervour of a spirit aspiring to dwell, as best it may, in the realm of essence, where all things may be contemplated in their beauty and their truth; as well

¹⁶ Quoted in Levinson, *ibid.*, 73.

¹⁷ Unamuno, *op. cit.*, 69.

¹⁸ Schilpp, *op. cit.*, 603-604.

as with an earthly 'Sancho Panza' acceptance of the gross contingencies of the Realm of Matter. The latter bred that harsh commonsense of Santayana, with its source in Spanish *desengaño*. It was calculated to shock the Anglo-Saxon temperament, especially perhaps its American out-cropping, which is ever prone to encumber worldly goals with misplaced idealism. More broadly, as well as more extremely, it was this which Santayana found so chronically repellent in the Protestant ethos. It even made him take one of the most notorious Catholic ascetic practices and give it a turn which endorsed Spanish spiritual extremism. Such extremism ever lay in wait to insinuate itself amid the elegant contours of his prose:

There is a folly of the cross also, when the knowledge or half-knowledge that life must be suffering, until it is cleared of the love of life, erects suffering into an end in itself, which is insane and monstrous. I suspect, however, that in asceticism as actually preached and practised there is less of this idolatry of suffering than the outsider imagines, who lying amid his cushions severely reproves those who indulge in a penance. There is an asceticism which may be loved for its simplicity, its clean poverty and cold water, hygienic like mountain air, but flagellations and blood and night-long wailings are not an end in themselves; no saint expects to carry them with him into heaven; at best they are a homeopathic cure for the lusts of the flesh. Their purpose, if not their effect, is freedom and peace. I wish Protestants, who find their ascetic discipline in hard work, were equally clear about its object. From the worship of instrumentalities, whether penitential or worldly, the cross redeems us: in draining the cup of suffering it transcends suffering, and in being raised above the earth it lifts us out of it. My instinct is to go and stand under the cross, with the monks and the crusaders, far away from these Jews and Protestants who adore the world and who govern it.¹⁹

In its 'Golden Age', for a century or so, Spain could be said to have governed the world. But Spain never adored the world. Its great mystics were the correctives to its Conquistadors. Domination was chastened by humility and repentance. In Santayana, the expatriate who never renounced his Spanish nationality, the Catholic who never surrendered the spirit of his religion, whatever his ambiguity concerning its substance, there was a kindred alliance of disillusioned fortitude and spiritual elevation. It remains to be seen whether the new, outward-looking Spain can preserve, even if only in part, some of the elements which made her a unique symbol amid modern Western civilisation: symbol of resistance to a world wholly democratised, secularised, and trivialised.

ANTHONY WOODWARD

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¹⁹ *Soliloquies in England and Later Soliloquies*, (London: Constable and Co. Ltd. 1922) 94-95.

The Santayana Edition

This past year has been one of significant advances, including the reversal of the preceding year's two major setbacks. NEH funding was renewed on 1 June 1994 and extended through 31 May 1996, and *The Last Puritan* was published in May 1994. Both of these successes represent major progress for the edition and for those associated with it. In addition, the Comité Conjunto Hispano-Norteamericano provided funding for a publishing subvention of *The Last Puritan* and for research trips requisite for completing the *Letters* edition.

Many individuals merit accolades for their consideration and efforts on behalf of the Edition. The NEH Research Division, in particular, the Editions staff, were remarkably helpful, considerate, and understanding. They include: Doug Arnold, Margot Backas, Guinevere L. Greist, and George Lucas.

The Dean's office at Texas A&M University provided bridge funds during the period we were without NEH funding. Deans Daniel Fallon, Woodrow Jones, and Ben Crouch exercised clear leadership during a time when it was decidedly needed.

In Spain, Javier Jiménez-Ugarte and Delfin Colomé, provided support at the most opportune time; and Thomas Middleton, Deputy Executive Director of the Comité Conjunto Hispano-Norteamericano, has followed through on funding.

Most of all, thanks are extended to the Santayana staff who worked diligently through this past year: Kris Frost (promoted to Associate Editor), Brenda Bridges (research assistant), Denise Johnston (student assistant), and Donna Hanna-Calvert (who served as Associate Editor for nearly nine years until this past May).

Prospects for our work are good. We are on schedule for the publication of the *Letters* volume, and we are making clear progress on John McCormick's edition of marginalia. We are slightly ahead of schedule for the publication of *The Life of Reason*. As well, thanks to Texas A&M University, the Comité Conjunto Hispano-Norteamericano, and one of our Board members, Henny Wenkart, we have raised the \$30,000 in matching funds that are a part of our new NEH grant. We must now begin thinking about matching funds for a new application, due 1 June 1995, that will cover June 1996 through May 1998.

HERMAN J. SAATKAMP, JR.
General Editor

Mr. Santayana and the New Mysterians

Consciousness has lately become considered a fit subject for scientific research. Neuroscientists have been tracking paths, through human brains, of electrical and chemical activity associated with a variety of conscious choices and actions. They have already obtained some fascinating results, and there is every reason to think that, in time, they will find neural correlates for a wide range of conscious experiences. Whether this will lead to an explanation of how awareness can arise in organic life forms, whether a solution to the mind-body problem can be anticipated, these are entirely different questions. Many cognitive scientists are optimistic (like good scientists). There are others, however, who anticipate in-principle reasons why the project must in the end lead to impasse. Some have argued that the capacity of the human brain as it has evolved may be inadequate to deal with such problems. These make an analogy with less complex life forms, whose brains are insufficiently powerful to deal with certain mental tasks: a monkey's brain would just not be powerful enough to master quantum mechanics. It stands to reason that there are tasks which the human brain cannot master, and an understanding by the mind of itself is seen as a candidate for this.

Such scepticism can be seen as a hindrance to the healthy progress of cognitive science, and those who voice these doubts have been given the pejorative label "the new mysterians." The old mysterians were the dualists, who held that mind was inaccessible to science because it had a different substantial seat quite independent of the body and the brain. New mysterians reject dualism; they are naturalists, who believe that some property or properties of the brain do explain consciousness — but that these properties are inaccessible. Of course, doubts that consciousness would yield up its secrets to experimental science have not been confined to dualists. It was only a short time ago that behaviourism dominated psychology, and consciousness was entirely banned from scientific discourse. The new mysterians accept consciousness, are willing to discuss it, and give it a natural seat in the brain; they merely are sceptical about an experimental science of mind.

Santayana might be characterized as a new mysterian, according to these criteria. He is strongly naturalistic, but believes that the mental (behaviour aside) will always need to be treated subjectively; the quantitative methods of objective science are not suited to deal with the realm of spirit. In his treatment, however, the reasons for this have little to do with brain capacity or power. They are tied rather to Santayana's scepticism, and do not have the *ad hoc* character evident when brain size is taken as the explanation. I shall sketch these reasons (in the three leftover pages of this *Bulletin*).

Although it was not his first concern, Santayana spent considerable time reflecting on the status of scientific knowledge when he wrote *The Realm of Matter*. What he arrived at was in many respects similar to fairly standard views. He endorsed the idea that studies of the mind, if they were to be scientific, would have to be behavioural. And he held that science has its foundation in regularities discovered in the changing material world, but that theories built upon these uniformities are always somewhat suspect. This latter is very close to that offered by standard positivist philosophy of science, and is eminently plausible. But Santayana gave a superior and more durable formulation of the theory. The empiricist statement of this classical account is in terms of laws, scientific formulations of what we find as physical regularities, and not as the

underlying regularities themselves. This left them open to the inevitable criticism that laws are theory dependent, and are subject to the same impermanence that plagues theory. Santayana makes the case forcefully that scientists *study* actual substances (and actual regularities), that people *deal with* substances, and consequently that philosophers must *talk about* actual substances too, else they are bound to stray into idealist directions. His discussions always treat the actual regularities, and what he calls tropes, which are the forms of actual regularities, in place of laws. The latter, as he points out, and which has been rediscovered more recently, fall on the human, theoretical, suspect side. This characterization of science must be expressed in terms of the *actual* regularities, in order to be valid. However, the empiricists and their followers have barred themselves from holding such a doctrine; far from seeing it as durable and superior, they would surely find it incomprehensible. They are convinced that to speak of substance or of an actual regularity is logically suspect, epistemologically irresponsible, and utterly unnecessary. For these and for other reasons, many philosophers of science have felt forced to abandon the account of regularities, and unfortunately to desert an excellent theory.

One of the merits of this account is that it makes plausible how science can be so precise and reliable regarding predictions, and so labile regarding theory. Santayana believes that predictive success ensued because ways had been found to eliminate unreliable mind. Experiment consists of measuring one physical object against another, without the intervention of deceptive mental categories. Both the ruler and the object whose length is being measured lie in the material realm. Of course, one must convert the results into data, and all discussion or theory deal with this data. Here one moves into an area of uncertainty, where radical changes may be forced on the researcher by fresh theoretical approaches or by novel and better ways to expose the true regularities. Nevertheless the measurements discovered and traced, by remaining within the realm of matter, have provided a sound foundation which is stable under theory change.

If science has made progress by excluding mind in order to make reliable comparisons between kinds of material change, and if the unstable theoretical portion of science has its sources in mind, it is difficult to see how the methods presently used in science can yield a good explanation of consciousness. Such a failure would be traced, not to insufficient power or insufficient capacity in the human brain, but to the kind of data which science can successfully turn into stable laws.

Professional psychologists used to demand, as does Santayana, that a scientific study of mind must be behavioural. However, they have since considerably relented, and permit reports of conscious emotion or choice as a legitimate part of their techniques. The recent research on consciousness is a case in point. In order to localize the brain stimulations associated with certain conscious acts or decisions, it is necessary for the subject person to enact these conscious states; they are an integral part of the experiment, and the stated results of the experiment involve them.

Of course, we cannot know how Santayana would react to this departure from the behaviourism he expects of the scientific approach. But it seems likely that he would be little disturbed, and would feel that they posed few serious problems. The actual data of the experiments are the localized brain activities, as measured in standard ways with electrical probes or magnetic resonances. Here one obtains verifiable experimental results in the strictest sense. However, when the mental reports are tied in, and the conclusions are expressed in terms of ideas or thoughts or intentions, one goes beyond

the realm of strict science. There is an assumption, which may go into the background, but which must not be forgotten.

This assumption is analogous to Church's Thesis, the hypothesis that mathematically precise recursive function theory is in fact the correct description of the vaguely defined class of calculable functions. This is set forth as an assumption, incapable of proof, because no exact definition of the set of calculable functions is available. Indeed the thrust of Church's Thesis is just that we assume, as our definition of calculable functions, the very plausible recursive functions. This identification is assumed without comment by many mathematicians. But the careful always bear in mind the hypothetical nature of the reasoning; they may refuse to accept the identification. So the mystesian may acknowledge the scientific merit of these experiments, but nevertheless argue that any assumption of identity with the subjective is unwarranted.

The characteristic claim of today's new mystesians is that some property of the brain *explains* the consciousness, but that humans are unable to access or understand the nature of this explanation. Santayana would surely find it overly hesitant and rather incongruous to deal on the level of explanations, rather than on the level of causes. To say that there is an unknown cause is more fitting than to speak of something which is to be an explanation, but which can never be understood.

Much energy has been devoted to the belief that mind and consciousness can be given a definition allowing for the gathering of objective data and the application of scientific methodology. The orientation of these researches, and the concepts used, lean heavily upon ideas from the philosophy of science, like that of explanation. Such efforts seem always to culminate in the identification of consciousness with something other than consciousness; or such is the criticism coming from the mystesian quarter. But surely those who reject any such identification owe it to themselves to set aside scientism, and to seek a perspective in which science and consciousness alike have their subordinate place.

The new mystesians are correct, then, in their belief that naturalists need not insist on the reducibility of consciousness and subjectivity. However, they have not so far drawn the conclusion that they must move on to a broader stance which looks at science from the outside. Santayana shows us that all the ingredients are there for a common sense overview of the evolution of well adapted behaviour and of awareness, all within animal life. That consciousness should have emerged is a wonderful gift; for him, even while holding pure spirit to be impotent, it is still the most important aspect of life. Wonderful also is the fact that humans have found techniques to study the ways of nature. The methods use natural events to explain other natural events, with superstition and other gratuitous mental interventions kept out as much as possible. These methods do not plausibly expose the origins or the real nature of the dynamism in which we find ourselves. But on both the practical and the scientific level, we have a remarkable insight into the ways of nature. A mystesian who looks at science from the outside believes that such insights and methods do not extend to the subjective, but that spirit is nonetheless entirely natural.

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TENTH 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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