

Overheard in Seville

*Bulletin of the  
Santayana  
Society*

No.19  
Fall 2001



## **ERRATA in *OVERHEARD IN SEVILLE***

The following typographical errors were made in the names of editors associated with The Santayana Edition:

- Marianne S. Wokeck's first name is misspelled in both the Table of Contents (page i) and on page 38.
- Kristine W. Frost's middle initial is incorrectly represented as "A" on the Table of Contents page.

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OVERHEARD IN SEVILLE

ANNOUNCEMENT

*The Santayana Society*

2001

ANNUAL MEETING

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

Topic

*George Santayana, Literary Philosopher*  
by *Irving Singer*

Speakers

*James Seaton*

Michigan State University

"Santayana in the Era of Postmodernism"

&

*H. T. Kirby-Smith*

University of North Carolina at Greensboro

"Santayana's God"

A response by Irving Singer will follow  
the readings of these papers

Chair

*Angus Kerr-Lawson*

University of Waterloo

The session begins with comments by  
*Herman J. Saatkamp Jr.*  
on the progress of the Santayana Edition

8:00 - 11:00 P.M. 29 December

*Fayette*

Hilton Atlanta and Towers

# The Meaning of Self-Knowledge in Santayana's Philosophy

What, I ask, is this 'I' which seems to perceive the wax so distinctly? Surely my awareness of my own self is not merely much truer and more certain than my awareness of the wax, but also much more distinct and evident ... [E]very consideration whatsoever which contributes to my perception of ... any other body, cannot but establish even more effectively the nature of my own mind. But besides this, there is so much else in the mind itself which can serve to make my knowledge of it more distinct, that it scarcely seems worth going through the contributions made by considering bodily things.<sup>1</sup>

It is probably an overstatement to call these words from Descartes's second Meditation the sole driving force in modern transcendental philosophy. However, they nicely encapsulate his influential "subjective turn" in which he redirects the focus of modern metaphysical thought away from matter and onto the conscious awareness of a personal subject. Metaphysics begins with an "I" that thinks and, from that starting point, constructs a world. The above passage reads like a prologue to the drama of modernity that has come to equate knowledge of reality with the discriminate awareness of such things as innate ideas, categories, or subjective moments of the conscious mind. In so doing, the attention to the clarity and distinctness of these constitutive structures of consciousness has perpetuated the age-old denigration of matter in the modern dress of intellectual idealism; matter is not lowly or evil, it simply does not exist. Much of contemporary philosophy — phenomenology, in particular — has tried to reconsider the "contributions made by ... bodily things" by investigating bodily experience. In this case, the focus is still on consciousness, but a wider range of subjective experience is included among its constitutive forces. But this attempt to bring the body back into the philosophical picture is, to my way of thinking, insufficient and misdirected. It is not merely that I think it problematic to reduce the entirety of existence to relations among moments of consciousness, but, more importantly to my present purpose, I find it especially misleading when trying to make sense of what is meant by self-knowledge. By contrast, the non-reductive ontology of George Santayana — specifically his distinction between conscious spirit and material psyche — can offer a richer picture of reality and thereby provide a more adequate and more useful framework for examining what we mean when we say we are trying to understand ourselves.

In Santayana's ontology, the relationship between spirit and psyche takes place in a reality composed of four separate realms of being — spirit, matter (to which psyches belong), essence, and truth. These realms need not, and in fact must not, be misunderstood as four independent regions of existence. Matter alone exists substantially and is the generative source of spirit and, in a sense, of truth. Essences do not even exist, but are real only as possible descriptions and depictions of matter. All four realms are fundamentally interrelated as aspects of a single natural world. At the same time, one must acknowledge the importance of refracting reality into these ontological dimensions: "It is very true that one and the same flux of events exemplifies

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<sup>1</sup> René Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes, Vol. II*, Trans. J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff & D. Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 22.

This paper was read to the Santayana Society at its annual meeting in New York on December 28, 2000.

now one and now another of these realms of being, or variously impinges upon them; but this amphibious character of existence is far from being a reason for not distinguishing these realms."<sup>2</sup> In order to make any real sense of what is going on in the process of self-understanding, it is essential to recognize the distinction between immaterial spirit and material psyche and to examine their mutual relationship in Santayana's philosophy. In fact, I can think of no other system that has as thoroughly and fully expressed the complexity, intricacy, and depth of the problem of both individual self-knowledge and that of the human species.

Much of modern philosophy has run together various aspects of human subjective existence into one and the same entity and loosely termed it "mind." All aspects of subjectivity are assumed to derive from the same source, be they objects presently observed, representations not present yet somehow accessible, or the forms that give shape to thought itself.<sup>3</sup> Even when a metaphysical system provides distinctions between these factors of subjective life, it rarely goes so far as to suggest that they hail from different shores. Santayana's ontology stands out as unique in this manner. In distinguishing between spirit and psyche as different realms of being, he is able to acknowledge how wholly transcendent to our conscious mind much of what we call our "self" actually is. In acknowledging this, however, he does not give up on the possibility of self-knowledge but rather puts it in proper focus. By extending his epistemological notion of animal faith to the possibility of making one's psyche an object of knowledge, he describes what amounts not only to a more accurate depiction of the complexities of self-knowledge, but to a more therapeutic one as well.

"By spirit I understand the actual light of consciousness falling upon anything — the ultimate invisible fruition of life in feeling and thought" (RM 139). The realm of spirit is what one might simply term present awareness. It is the attention that I focus on objects, feelings, and so forth, even though the rest of my organism may be taking in all sorts of information unbeknownst to me. When I say that I must have earlier heard some melody that I am now incessantly humming, but I simply was not aware of it, I am making a distinction between spirit and my material being. For Santayana, psyche is part of that material being. Instead of equating my self with my actual awareness, "I must thicken and substantialize the self I believe in, recognising in it a nature that accepts or rejects events, a nature having a movement of its own, far deeper, more continuous and more biassed than a discoursing mind: the self ... is a living psyche."<sup>4</sup> Psyche is the animating force of a material body that, by some ultimately inconceivable miracle, produces spirit as an epiphenomenon of itself. Consciousness is wholly other to the matter which produces it, yet depends on it for its very existence (RM 143).

What does it mean for psyche to be an animating material force productive of natural

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<sup>2</sup> George Santayana, *The Realm of Matter, Book Second of Realms of Being* (Westport, Conn., Greenwood Press, 1974), vi. Hereafter, this work will be cited parenthetically according to the standard abbreviation *RM*.

<sup>3</sup> The examples I have in mind are the following: the stream of consciousness as in William James, non-conscious representations within the Leibnizian monad, and Kant's system of categories. In the latter two cases, although the moments or structures are not actually "present" to the subject in the way an immediate object is, they are assumed to be in some sense part of the mind. It is this notion that Santayana departs from with his concept of psyche as a material, rather than ideal, principle of organization.

<sup>4</sup> George Santayana, *Scepticism and Animal Faith* (New York: Dover Publications, 1955), 147. Hereafter, this text will be cited parenthetically according to the standard abbreviation *SAF*.

moments of spirit? Santayana refers to it as a trope or habit of matter: "On the human scale of observation it is the larger habits of living beings that are most easily observed; and the principle of these habits, transmitted by a seed, I call the Psyche ..."<sup>5</sup> According to Santayana, matter is the substrative foundation, unknowable in any literal sense, that grounds conscious reality. He describes it as being in continual flux and claims that, occasionally, this flux of material forces forms vortices, that is, organizes itself into certain self-maintaining habitual patterns. In such cases, matter becomes life. This organization, this principle that organizes material force into life — any kind of life — is a psyche. At the level of the human organism, the psyche is "that habit in matter which forms the human body and the human mind" (SE 221). In one sense, then, Santayana repairs the Cartesian mind/body problem by placing both elements on the side of matter. If this were the end of the story, however, Santayana would not be the insightful thinker that he is — he would simply be reversing idealism by reducing all of reality to the material realm. But Santayana does not simply dismiss Descartes's problem as a sophistic ruse; he notes the validity of the skeptical move to a limited extent. In a sense, he takes Cartesian skepticism further by noting that, not only do we lack immediate awareness of existence, but we do not even possess such awareness of ourselves. Not only is conscious awareness separated from any "outside" world, it is largely separated from the formative ground of the mind itself, and self-knowledge is, therefore, anything but an introspection into the clarity and distinctness of transcendental elements; it is an investigation and an interpretation of an entirely opaque and transcendental realm that is causative and destructive of its own moments of awareness.

If one's "self" as psyche is irrevocably obscured from consciousness in any immediate sense, how is one to know oneself, or anything for that matter? The clue lies in calling attention to the realm of essence. Essence may be defined as the immediate and interior data of awareness. They are that on which the light of consciousness shines. They are not literal representations of material reality, but they may be the mediate signs of that reality. They cannot be hypostatized — they possess no independent existence — but they correlate reliably with existence as symbols of the processes of an individual spirit's material organism and that organism's relationship to the external forces with which it comes in contact. In this sense, Descartes was correct to note that as we know — or fail to know — other things we come to understand better our own selves: "All the errors ever made about other things, if we understand their cause, enlighten us about ourselves; for the psyche is at once the spring of curiosity and the ground of refraction, selection and distortion in our ideas" (RM 145). In a sense not wholly unlike Kant's transcendental theory of knowledge, Santayana points out that if we examine the objects of our experience we are bound to get insight into how our mind, its nature, and its interests shape that experience. But, if we equate those objects with the constitutive structures of consciousness, we are bound to be misled. For this reason, Santayana opposes transcendental philosophy, which he calls psychologism, for its goal of finding a metaphysics within consciousness.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> George Santayana, "Cross-Lights," *Soliloquies in England and Later Soliloquies* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1967), 221. Hereafter, this text will be cited parenthetically according to the standard abbreviation SE.

<sup>6</sup> It is very important to clarify Santayana's definition of psychologism here, for his critique of transcendental philosophy is not merely a critique of a thoroughgoing denial of matter such as idealism. He likewise criticizes philosophies such as that of Kant, which — while acknowledging the existence of

When spirit, in attending to the essences before it, confuses those essences with itself, it misconstrues its own nature, for "spirit is not a reality that can be observed; it does not figure among the *dramatis personae* of the play it witnesses" (SAF 274). Spirit is always a subject, as such it can never be the immanent object of that which it observes, much less the transcendent object to which the interior datum refers. When psychologism misconstrues the realm of essence as the formative basis for consciousness, it assumes a direct translation between objects of consciousness and the material forces that constitute them. By contrast, essences must be understood to be signs in a language fundamentally foreign to their source. Spirit can translate well enough for practical purposes, but it can never be said to have fully captured even the 'grammar,' to use the term loosely, of that foreign land.<sup>7</sup> Spirit, in examining objects of knowledge, must always keep in mind that it investigates something other than itself. "While spirit manifests its own nature no less freely than matter does, it does so by freely regarding and commenting on something else, either matter or essence: its primary nature is to be secondary — to be observant and intelligent" (RM 163). Spirit has nothing but essence for its intuited object and must remember its twofold role in relation to that object. It can examine essences in their relation to matter in order to obtain practical knowledge — that is, to formulate a dynamic belief — or it can suspend the issue of belief and disbelief in the field of action and concentrate on the appreciation of essences for their own sake. The former practice in its developed forms constitutes scientific knowledge, including scientific psychology;<sup>8</sup> it is this sort of practice that self-knowledge, as conceived in Santayana's terms, would have to entail. In order to comprehend how self-knowledge entails transitive knowledge — transitive in the sense of access to a realm transcendent to both spirit and its immanent objects — it is necessary to turn to considerations of psychology, specifically to psychoanalysis. Not only does Freud's analytic psychology mirror Santayana's philosophy in significant ways, Santayana's own words on psychoanalysis can illuminate his own philosophy and bring out the best in Freud as well.<sup>9</sup>

In many ways, Santayana's depiction of spirit and psyche parallels Freud's theories of the relationship between consciousness and the unconscious. The notion of the id, of the instinctive forces of Eros and Thanatos and their repressed mechanisms, helps to depict a theory based on the concept of a consciousness largely unaware of its own

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transcendent reality — despair of any access to that reality and instead erroneously posit that consciousness itself possesses formative structures. He specifically excoriates Kant for this error: "[Kant] never abandoned the general sense that . . . perceptions had organs and objects beneath and beyond them; but having cut off, by his malicious criticism of knowledge, the organs and objects which perceptions notoriously have, he was forced to forge others, artificial and metaphysical. Instead of the body, he posited a transcendental ego, the categories of thought, and a disembodied law of duty; instead of natural substances he posited the unknowable" [SAF 299].

<sup>7</sup> This is not to imply that there is such an inaccessible grammar. Psyche is a principle of material organization and as such possesses structure, but any formal description of it (as in the case of Chomsky's "deep grammar," for example) belongs solely to the realm of essence and should not be confused with the structure itself.

<sup>8</sup> Within "scientific psychology" Santayana would include both psychoanalysis and behavioral psychology, for both take as their object of inquiry a realm transcendent to subjective awareness.

<sup>9</sup> Due to restrictions on the length of this work, and as a result of using Freud as a means of understanding Santayana, the treatment of psychoanalysis is based largely on Santayana's own perspective. It does not pretend to make an exhaustive comparison of the theories of the two thinkers.

motivations or origins. Psychoanalysis, then, has the task of learning how to read signs of these motivations to which it has no direct access. Psyche, whether the concept of Freud or Santayana, is indirectly accessible to consciousness if one knows how to read the signs adequately. "The whole life of the psyche, even if hidden by chance from human observation, is essentially observable: it is the object of biology. Such is the only scientific psychology, as conceived by the ancients, including Aristotle, and now renewed in behaviourism and psycho-analysis" (RM 141). It is illuminating to note Santayana's inclusion of psychoanalysis within biology, for such an equation would surely rankle those contemporary scientists who feel that neurons and electrical impulses are the true source of consciousness while Freud's constructs are mere fabrications. Santayana would not disagree with the scientists' opinion of Freud; he calls Freud's theory a good mythology, and remarks that the psychologist considered his own theories of the instincts "mythical in their terms."<sup>10</sup> He would simply exhort the neuroscientists to more critically examine their own system of knowledge.

The inclusion of both psychoanalysis and behaviorism under the heading "scientific psychology" highlights Santayana's notion of knowledge as animal faith, or functional belief; under this connotation, psychoanalysis, behaviorism, and neurobiology are all in their own way edifying of the nature of material psyche. Transitive knowledge has the responsibility of telling spirit more or less practically adequate stories about its underpinnings. Neurobiology is one story told from a certain perspective, psychoanalysis is another. As long as both are consistent and useful in providing insight into the workings of material psyche, so much the better for each. But what must always be remembered is that all the essences that constitute these stories are metaphorical:

[P]sychoanalysis, in really opening a trap-door, as disease does, into the dim carpentry of the stage, is compelled to transcribe that intricacy [of the psychic mechanism] into metaphors. Its reports come to it in hectic language, the latest, most wayward, most hypocritical ebullition of psychic life; while its own theories, for lack of physiological knowledge, must be couched in mythological terms. Thus the psyche remains a mystery in her intrinsic operations . . . we are warned that we do not, and probably cannot, understand [RM 143].

While this quote would seem to agree on the one hand with the earlier-mentioned neuroscientist who would accuse Freud of simply lacking the proper physiological perspective, one should keep in mind Santayana's later admonition. The mythological metaphors of psychoanalysis may be more readily recognizable as symbolic representations due to the fact one cannot observe Eros himself under a microscope in systematic fashion, but one must also recognize that neither the id nor neuroscientific models are *literal* transcriptions of matter. The philosopher who takes either convergence of or correspondence between thought and existence as the criteria for knowledge and who thereby wishes to decry both Freud and neurobiology on the grounds that neither literally explains the nature of the mind can take heart. There is not a literal Eros and Thanatos, nor a literal id or super-ego. Neither are there literal neurons or neurotransmitters whose activities neatly sum up the workings of the material self. Psyche herself, to say nothing of the miracle through which she produces spirit, is a mystery. But there is also no cause for the analyst and the neurobiologist to despair, unless of course they will settle for nothing less than literal truths. Their biological sciences provide useful metaphors for obtaining some transitive knowledge of psyche.

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<sup>10</sup> George Santayana, "A Long Way Round to Nirvana," *The Philosophy of Santayana*, ed. Irwin Edman (New York: Modern Library, 1942), 575.

Psychoanalytic practice in particular, by virtue of its admittedly metaphorical nature, provides a useful illustration of self-knowledge as transitive knowledge. Psychoanalysis closely resembles Santayana's description of awareness as the observation by spirit, or consciousness, of material psyche by way of the essences — images, symbols — she expresses:

Mental discourse is the inner luminosity or speech that accompanies dramatic crises in the fortunes of the body; it is not self-generated; it is always the *expression* of another event, then occurring in the body, as is a cry of pain; and it is usually, at the same time, a *report* of still another event that has already occurred beyond the body, as is a memory or a perception. Feeling and thought are perpetually interrupted and perpetually renewed by something not themselves [SE 218-219].

Spirit is a natural observer; it attends to the essences that present themselves — as do actors on a stage — and places itself in the role of audience and interpreter, searching for hidden themes within the manifest dialogue and on-stage activities. The dramatist, in this case, is neither spirit nor essence, but psyche herself. This 'play' of essences concocted by psyche constitutes "a perpetual waking dream — a view of the world which is not a part of the world and which even in sleep continues and shifts fantastically in many a muted development" (RM 152). The investigator of psyche recognizes essences as symbols for material churning underneath — in "the dim carpentry of the stage" (cf. p. 5) — in much the same manner as an analyst detects the disguised desires of the id in the patterns of dream symbols and the rambling speech of free association. Essences, in this case, may be viewed as symptoms of one's own psychic function. The "moments [of one's inner life], though probably intent on external material events, are yet directly but symptoms of psychic movements; so that it requires only a shift in apperception to transform all this immediate experience from active consideration of dubious external objects into a certain and accurate index to an internal psychic life" (RM 152). Spirit may translate essences as signs of its own psychic origins just as the task of psychoanalysis is to interpret conscious expressions as symbolic disguises of subterranean instincts. The essences passing before the 'mind's eye' do not themselves clearly exhibit the unstated associations that link them, but when viewed as symptoms of an unconscious, material engine, they may point the way to some self-understanding. Symptoms of bodily distress — psychic included — are not themselves the illness but expressions of it in observable form. Whatever the motivation for self-knowledge — whether to relieve pain or to enrich one's well-being — the path toward that goal lies in treating the objects of subjective awareness as translatable expressions of psyche.

The contextualization of self-knowledge as transitive knowledge entails a relationship between a passive observing spirit and an active productive psyche, and this dynamic offers therapeutic benefits when correctly understood. The primary distinction between the roles of each element is one of agency and passivity — a willful psyche and an attentive spirit — and the possibility for well-being derives from the recognition of these separate functions. To again draw a parallel with psychoanalysis, therapy very often involves restructuring the client's notion of the will from conscious force to animal drive; the goal is for the patient to learn that her role in healing is more indirect, more passive, than tends to be believed. Patients discover that, though they cannot force themselves to feel better, they may *let* themselves heal, or allow the psyche to repair herself. Santayana, too, recognizes psyche's self-mending capabilities: "If crippled at first by some loss, she may ultimately heal the wound (healing being one of her primary functions) and may live on with her residual equipment all the more nimbly" (RM 148). It is interesting to note that a person who is content to take to bed and wait for a flu to

run its course often tortures himself because he cannot seem to just 'get over' psychic pain. The patient compounds his suffering by failing to recognize that both kinds of illness originate from the same substantial source, and, in each case, the body needs time to rest and recover to the best of its ability.

In general, the task of self-understanding as conceived within Santayana's non-reductive naturalistic framework and as exemplified in psychoanalytic therapy is for spirit, or consciousness, to learn to listen to the greater wisdom of its material being. Matter, along with the equally material psychic principle that organizes it into life, is not wise in the sense of having a privileged knowledge of existence, but in the sense of being part and parcel of it. It produces an ideal language of essences, and spirit may learn something about its wellsprings — its bounty as well as its limitations — if it learns to view the symbols, poignantly clear and immediate on their own terms, as signs to a distant and unfamiliar homeland.

Nothing could be more obscure, more physical, than the dynamics of our passions and dreams; yet, especially in moments of suspense or hesitation, nothing could be more intensely felt. There is the coursing of the blood, the waxing and waning of the affections, a thousand starts of smothered eloquence, the coming on of impatience, of invention, of conviction, of sleep. There are laughter and tears, ready to flow quite unbidden, and almost at random [RM 145].

Honest attention to our streams of consciousness attests to the fact that spirit is not the self but is an observer of our self. We watch feelings and thoughts rise and fall away, usually beyond our deliberate control, and we must admit something other than us (if "us" be equated with spirit) is the seat of power and will and is the active force that makes us who we are. Psychotherapy, if it is working well, teaches us how to live best with that habit of matter rather than fight it. As in Homeric Greece, we must find livable ways to appease our gods or they will retaliate against us.

The problem with writing about Santayana's work is that he seems to have already expressed himself better than another could in attempting to explicate his thought. I have already provided many passages where he comments on the relationship between spirit and psyche in great detail. But Santayana is perhaps best as a philosopher of straightforward thought and common sense; he seems most eloquent when he states matters most simply. So I close with his own words: "it is the body that speaks, and the spirit that listens" (RM 146). In these brief terms, Santayana zeroes in on the central flaw of the modern ideal and transcendental theories of mind as well as his (and our) contemporaries' phenomenal and phenomenological equivalents. Santayana holds a prism, so to speak, up to the impoverished conception of mind as immediate awareness and refracts it into the rich dimensions of spirit, essence, and truth; furthermore, he gives that spectrum depth by grounding it in the wholly transcendent realm of matter. Self-knowledge then becomes a journey — a crossing into the foreign land of one's origins rather than a retreat into a solipsism of pure presence. The possibility for wisdom involves the humbling but sometimes rewarding experience that existence — including our own — amounts to much more than the passing visions we quite naturally hold dear to us. Santayana puts in philosophical focus the psychoanalyst's teaching that, in learning from and about something truly other than us, that "other" includes ourselves.

JESSICA WAHMAN

*SUNY Stony Brook*

# Self-Knowledge and Psychology: Literary, Dialectical, and Scientific

In her thoughtful discussion of self-knowledge, Jessica Wahman turns our attention to a subject of the highest importance in Santayana's philosophy. It is of the highest importance since Santayana essentially identifies the quest for the good life with the quest for self-knowledge. He maintains that one could not begin to live morally, rationally, or happily without sufficient awareness of one's interests and abilities. When Santayana tells us in *Persons and Places* that the contemporary world has turned its back on the attempt to live rationally, he means that while we are technologically advanced, we are at the same time blind to our true interests (pp 542).<sup>1</sup>

Wahman makes it very clear that the key to a proper conception of the self is found in Santayana's notion of the psyche, a portion of the realm of matter organized into a self-maintaining, reproducing form of life. In the psyche she finds the antidote to modern subjectivist philosophy that identifies the self with spirit. Contrary to subjectivist accounts, the self or psyche is not comprised of the thin flux of consciousness — according to Santayana, the most superficial part of an individual's total being (AFSL 115). The psyche is rather those habits of matter that make-up our predispositions and preferences. It accounts for everything from the habit of the body to repair itself to one's capacity for enjoying music. And perhaps most importantly, taken as the "predetermined, specific direction of animal life," the psyche is "the key to everything moral" (SE 219).

If the psyche represents a proper, materialist conception of the self, how are we to know its organization and movements? Here Wahman's comments are particularly illuminating. She tells us that each branch of physical science that takes the psyche as its object, such as "psychoanalysis, behaviorism, and neurobiology are all in their own way edifying of the nature of material psyche" (Wahman 5). This is true to Santayana's system. He writes that "[t]he problem is not where to place the frontier between two disparate regions [of science], but only to discover how the tropes most obvious in each of them are superposed to grow out of one another" (RB 333).

One question raised by Wahman's analysis is whether scientific psychology in any of its forms is the *only* way to acquire self-knowledge. It certainly might seem so. For the other two types of psychology that Santayana distinguishes, namely, literary psychology and dialectical psychology, are not considered descriptive of nature. For example, in the case of literary psychology, or the "art of imagining how [people] feel and think" (SAF 252), Santayana asserts that "not one conclusion in it has the least scientific value" (SAF 254). This is so because the moral and emotional essences native to spirit cannot be observed to exist in the realm of matter. In order to be known, the moral and emotional essences of literary psychology must be given to spirit; they are not known as measurable units of matter. Similarly, Santayana states that dialectical psychology, which traces the ideal implications of desires and feelings, "is also out of place in a psychology that means to be an account of what happens in the world. For these dialectical implications do not actually work

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was read at the annual meeting of the Santayana Society in New York on December 28, 2000, in response to the above paper by Jessica Wahman.

themselves out" (LR5 136). While dialectical psychology might reveal to us the scope of our desires and where they would lead should our psyches remain resolute, it is the dynamic processes of matter that determine the facts. Thus neither literary nor dialectical psychology seems to provide us with knowledge of the psyche.<sup>2</sup>

I think we must agree that for Santayana knowledge must ultimately be tied to matter, and that self-knowledge must be tied to the organization and movements of the psyche. However it would also seem true that, despite Santayana's sometimes dismissive sounding comments, both literary and dialectical psychology can provide knowledge of psyche. Although this knowledge is given in terms native to spirit and at a distance from its object, it is knowledge nonetheless.

How is it possible that these two non-scientific branches of psychology can provide knowledge about the psyche? In a way, this follows trivially from Wahman's quote from the *Realm of Matter* that every moment of spirit is an "accurate index to an internal psychic life" (RM 152). Since the psyche is the material basis for spirit, spirit must always be expressive of the psyche's movements. More to the point, however, we can say that in order to see how literary and dialectical psychology can provide us with knowledge of the psyche, we need to learn how their respective essences are signs of the psyche's movements.

The art of literary psychology is imagining how one would think and feel in the presence of certain facts. It is what we find in novels, poetry and plays: it is not a science. If I esteem that a certain situation is good or bad, and then judge that others similar to myself must feel as I do, I am practicing literary psychology. But supposing my moral estimations correct, there is no reason why I cannot convert the presence of those expressive moral essences into signs of the life and movement of the psyche. Santayana writes, "[a] good literary psychologist, who can read people's minds intuitively, is likely to anticipate their conduct correctly" (SAF 256). Literary psychology would thus seem capable of providing insight into the psyche. And indeed it is difficult to imagine having a full conception of one's self that excluded the moral and emotional terms of literary psychology.

Dialectical psychology might also provide us with a type of knowledge about the workings of the psyche. Santayana holds that in dialectical psychology an "intensive knowledge of the heart is given" since it "reveals what our passions mean and what sentiments they would lead to if they could remain fixed and dictate all further action." He adds that "[t]his insight may make us aware of strange inconsistencies in our souls ... [and] we may be shocked into setting our house in order; and in trying to understand ourselves we may actually develop a self that can be understood" (LR5 139-140). If dialectical psychology envisions what our passions imply and where they might lead, then it seems even this exercise might provide us with an understanding (at a particular point in time) of the psyche's moral relations and its possible conflicts.

The point I hope to have made in this brief commentary is that although Wahman is correct to observe that only scientific psychology takes the psyche as its direct object of investigation, both literary and dialectical psychology are able to provide us with insights into the self, and thus cannot be overlooked in an analysis of self-

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<sup>2</sup> That Santayana distinguishes these two types of psychology shows that it is not quite right for Wahman to assert that spirit has only a "twofold role in relation" to essences: that of "dynamic belief," and the "appreciation of essences for their own sake" (Wahman 4). The intuition of moral essences, and the tracing ideal relations, falls under neither of these categories. Santayana comments that "the realm of spirit may contain any number of forms of spirit" (SAF 275).

knowledge. To be sure, since these types of psychology use essences native only to spirit, one must be careful to see these essences as expressive of the psyche and not themselves dynamic forces in nature. But even here we might think the danger is not too great for, if Santayana is correct, "even when the derivation of a feeling is obscure we have but to study its meaning, allowing it to tell us what it is interested in, for a roundabout path to lead us safely back to its natural basis" (LR5 159).

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## The Notion of the Tragic in Santayana's Thought

I am sure that the very title of this paper stirs the memory of some of you here tonight. Exactly eighteen years ago to the day, John McCormick read a paper entitled "Santayana's Idea of the Tragic" to the Santayana Society in Baltimore.

It is the *first* formal work treating the tragic and Santayana specifically. Subsequently, in his authoritative biography of Santayana published in 1987, McCormick would include passages directly relating the tragic to the subject of his book. The greater part of these thoughts are found in his chapter in *The Last Puritan* (Chapter 23, "The Life and Death of Oliver Alden"). In no way whatsoever does the tragic frame his understanding and subsequent assessment of Santayana the man or Santayana the thinker. Thus his use of the word "idea" would suggest, rather, his characterization of Santayana's thought about the tragic. Understood thus, it was merely one among literally hundreds of ideas (or concepts) that Santayana explored and wrote about throughout his reflective life.<sup>3</sup>

In my reflections on Santayana over the past ten years I have come to a different comprehension as how to wed Santayana to the tragic: Santayana's very *being* was tragic, his outlook on and attitude towards the sphere of human institutions, interpersonal relationships (including familial ones), events, occurrences, developments, spawned by humans or any other material force — all were tragic. Even that ironic smile of his which his onetime pupil Walter Lippmann described as "Mona Lisa furnished with a beard," was tragic, not as an indication of some pathological vulnerability hiding itself, but as a courageous response to the metaphysical *given* of the tragic. In short, both his evolution from infant to eighty-nine year old man dying in a convent in Rome, coupled with the evolution as philosopher from student to professor to unattached "vagabond scholar,"<sup>4</sup> were, as I will argue in this paper, tragic.

<sup>3</sup> This paper was presented to the Santayana Society at its annual meeting in New York on December 28, 2000.

<sup>4</sup> This term was first used by Bruno Lind in his *Vagabond Scholar: A Venture into the Privacy of George Santayana*. (New York: Bridgehead Books, 1962).

Notwithstanding the parallel between life and thought, this paper will deal exclusively with his thought. If some aspect of his personal side is revealed it is only inadvertently; this will occur, as Santayana's life was inextricably bound up with the nature of his thought.

I face two small but significant challenges before initiating my argument. One is to elucidate my contention that the tragic manifested itself first as a self-defining concept or idea, or as I prefer to say, notion, in Santayana's evolution as a thinker; said notion was always present, sometimes expressed and sometimes silent, throughout the roughly seventy years of his mature thinking life, remarkably resurfacing with a comforting vengeance in the last years of his life. The other is to present to you in the clearest and most concise manner, while not sacrificing the time requisite to approximate the goal in mind, what my intended meanings are when I employ the words *tragic* and *notion*. Were I to eschew doing this, not only could my argument sound superficially vague, but I will open myself up to justifiable criticisms of scholarly irresponsibility.

In the Rortian sense, these two words are a part of my own "final vocabulary."<sup>5</sup> To discard them in favor of other language would precipitate circular reasoning. Facing that possibility, I could be corralled into silence, or worse, *speaking* through physical signs or force. In short, the vocabulary that I choose to define me as a human would be sabotaged. As a result of persistent doubts about my own understanding of the two words, realizing that arguments framed using these words can never dispel the doubts, and that these two words of my own "final vocabulary" are just as suspect as any other human's choice of different words to describe or interpret what actually has gone on and is presently going on internal to human minds and in the phenomenal world, I qualify as an "ironist" in the Rortian sense. So would Santayana, I think. As we are aware, he already is included in that elite group of thinkers designated "edifying philosophers," in the final chapter of Rorty's *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*; all of these share this one attribute, among others, that they "... hammer away at the holistic point that words take their meanings from other words rather than by virtue of their representative character, and the corollary that vocabularies acquire their privileges from the men who use them rather than from their transparency to the real."<sup>6</sup>

First, *notion*. Despite being laden with a ponderous history in English-language philosophical literature, I will employ this word as denoting a general disposition, a mental and attitudinal connection to the world at large, and *not* as denoting a specific idea, or concept, or judgment. In one of its definitions, the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines it as: "A general concept under which a particular thing or person is comprehended or classed; a term expressive of such a concept."<sup>7</sup> By calling 'the tragic' a notion, I can philosophically defend it as an inclusive, broad, subsuming denotation *under* which all else is viewed and subsequently hued. If challenged to support my denotation with philosophical precedence or authority, I would fall back on Berkeley's definition of a 'notion' in his *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* (1710), and steer clear of any and all Lockean, Kantian, and Hegelian associations:

<sup>5</sup> See his "Private Irony and Liberal Hope," in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) pp. 73-78.

<sup>6</sup> Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1979) p. 386.

<sup>7</sup> See *The Compact Oxford English Dictionary*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., p. 1183.

We comprehend our own existence by inward feeling or Reflection, and that of other spirits by Reason.—We may be said to have some knowledge or *notion* of our own minds, of spirits and active beings—whereof in a strict sense we have not ideas. In like manner, we know and have a *notion* of relations between things or ideas—which relations are distinct from the ideas or things related, inasmuch as the latter may be perceived by us without our perceiving the former.<sup>8</sup>

Now, to illuminate the *tragic*. The above quote is especially helpful in supporting why I, in opposition to McCormick, do not think Santayana had any ‘idea’ what the tragic was, and most definitely never even remotely hinted at a theoretical comprehension. What passages in his publications (essays, philosophical texts, poetry, dramatic pieces, published and unpublished letters) reveal is a vital and ever-present *notion* of the tragic, which for the most part remained unexpressed, but would erupt suddenly, randomly, as in his “Preface” to the 1910 Everyman Edition of Spinoza’s *Ethics*. Spinoza tragic? Santayana, convincingly in my view, argues his case there.

The notion of the tragic that I will be conveying has nothing in common with the Aristotelian or the Hegelian, which primarily were concerned with tragedy as an art form, and not a view of life. I am in agreement with Scheler’s claim that the tragic is a metaphysical given and fundamental constituent of the world we find ourselves amidst. According to my understanding of Santayana’s life and writings, I think he would, for the most part, agree. To reject such a claim is understandable (Nietzsche once quipped that one cannot expect someone to hear music for which s/he has no ear), but it is a claim on a par with claims that love does not exist, or that selfless kindness is not possible because everyone is essentially a self-loving egoist who does nothing without having something to gain. But these are relativistic questions of value, and given that, will always remain contentious. How can one entertain a ‘notion’ of the tragic unless one’s very constitution (mind, emotions, attitude, sentiments, passions) is attuned to the pulse of that recognition? I am also in agreement with Unamuno’s notion of what he calls “el sentimiento trágico de la vida” (the tragic sense of life) which he verbalizes as:

something that ... carries with it an entire conception of life along with the universe, an entire philosophy, more or less formulated, more or less conscious. ... And more than giving rise to ideas, it determines them, even when afterwards, as it clearly is the case, these ideas react on it, corroborating it.<sup>9</sup>

Both Scheler and Unamuno convey a similar idea (here ‘idea’ is appropriate, but it’s an idea expressing a notion) and I will present my argument tonight that Santayana shares it too. To synthesize: as I use ‘tragic’ in this paper I want to communicate a relational human disposition, a personal predilection which informs one’s impressions of how the world (to use a Santayanan favorite) ‘hangs’ together. The ‘tragic’ is a rational-sentient orientation on the part of an individual towards the circumscribing world — and this includes the non-terrestrial cosmos at large — which cherishes and affirms as a constant of that orientation the conviction that human lives are lived out in an indifferent, volatile, aleatory world without inherent purpose, justification, or redemption; that in response to this given, we can enhance such a condition with our reason and creative efforts. The written *oeuvre* that

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<sup>8</sup> George Berkeley, *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* (Peru, Illinois: Open Court, 1962), pp. 109-10.

<sup>9</sup> Miguel de Unamuno, *Del Sentimiento Trágico de la Vida* (New York: Las Americas Press) p. 7 (Translation mine)

Santayana left behind was his labor and effort. Tonight, for example, is an acknowledgment of that effort.

Considering the entirety of Santayana's written *oeuvre* as a creation in an artistic sense, it is not that farfetched to consider Santayana always returning to a few 'notions' in order to nourish the projects he was working through. His own words bear this out. May I suggest, in passing, that permanent exile or homelessness, and a preference for permanent aloneness or alienation, were the two other dominant notions of his life and thought.

In the second line of Santayana's fourth published sonnet, but actually the first sonnet he ever wrote, he writes: "It is not wisdom to be only wise."<sup>10</sup> As he would later confess in *Persons and Places*, he lifted the line from Euripides' *The Bacchae*, which affirmed the same in the original Greek; he writes:

It was this phrase, in that year 1884, that led me to write my first sonnet, printed a year or two later, and reappearing as Sonnet III in my *Poems*; the first two having been composed afterwards on purpose to frame in the earlier one and bring the argument to a head. I translated the dictum of Euripides in the rather thin and prosaic line: "It is not wisdom to be only wise"; and then, given that sentiment and that rhyme, I built the whole sonnet round them. Even when I wrote it this sonnet was belated. I was twenty years old, and the sentiment was what I had felt at sixteen. But I still recognized, as I recognize now at nearly eighty, the legitimacy of that feeling. (PP 231)

Let us pry into these words: "I was twenty years old ... was what I had felt at sixteen ... as I recognize now at nearly eighty, the legitimacy of that feeling." First of all, we have an expression of Santayana's frequent insistence on what I like to call a 'rational-sentient' composite of human capacities, a blending of the mind and heart which understands and intuits the human condition via *immediate* experience. This relational state of being does not seek engagement with the external world or with other humans: rather, it *is*. It is an approach, an attitudinal presence. Santayana wrote to a classmate on July 10, 1887: "I have of course my strong side — a strip of greatness, as it were — but I am altogether too poor a specimen for this to tell in the long run. Don't bet anything on my turning out well. I don't care enough about it myself to work for success. What I crave is not to do great things but to see great things."<sup>11</sup> The detached philosopher, aloof, was budding in the being of the undergraduate student.

I cannot address the sonnets in any in-depth manner here. They do, however, contain insightful, serious reflections. For instance, in Sonnet XI, as a telling example, the following six lines end the poem:

For some are born to be beatified  
By anguish, and by grievous penance done;  
And some, to furnish forth the age's pride,  
And to be praised of men beneath the sun;  
And some are born to stand perplexed aside  
From so much sorrow—of whom I am one.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> William G. Holzberger, ed., *The Complete Poems of George Santayana* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1979), p. 92. Further references to this text will be designated CP..

<sup>11</sup> From an unpublished letter to Henry Ward Abbot, July 10, 1887. [Ms: Columbia Univ.]

<sup>12</sup> See Holzberger's CP, page 96. What would be *unreal* arrangements? Cf. Note 1. I feel the same discomfort here. The forms most truly present in nature are not *parts* of nature. But without them nature could not exist.

Santayana's well-known *metanoia*, his thoroughgoing transformative experience that shaped the course of everything afterwards, occurred in 1893. In its aftermath, he recognized, he writes, that "the truth could be seen only in the shadow of death: living and dying were simultaneous and inseparable" (PP 427). He even likened this *metanoia* to a catharsis, a purgation of sorts. Writing of it later in *Persons and Places*, he would make the following claim: "This transition may be called philosophic *metanoia*. Like a tragic catharsis, it turns disaster into a kind of rapture, without those false comforts and delusions by which religious *metanoia* is cheapened" (CP 423).

During the period of 1893-1896 when he was teaching at Harvard, Santayana developed as a professional philosopher, yet he was never fully at home with his surroundings. There was always the air of the outsider which enveloped him, even defined him. I understand the publication of *The Sense of Beauty* (notice the choice of "sense" and not 'idea' or 'theory') in 1896, as his effort in spelling out the notion of the tragic as an aesthetic notion, one which framed his understanding of beauty and art at the time. Eventually, it becomes a moral notion, as Santayana later in his development would insist that all "aesthetics" falls under the rubric of the moral. *The Sense of Beauty*, in a certain sense, expresses his first intellectual attempts to give voice to the rational-sentient notion of the tragic on a formal basis. In a passage from the Part IV, "Expression," Santayana captures to some extent, I think, the notion of the tragic that I am trying to convey:

If we could count the stars, we should weep before them. While we think we can change the drama of history, and of our own lives, we are not awed by our destiny. But when the evil is irreparable, when our life is lived, a strong spirit has the sublime resource of standing at bay and of surveying almost from the other world the vicissitudes of this. The more intimate to himself the tragedy he is able to look back upon with calmness, the more sublime that calmness is, and more divine the ecstasy in which he achieves it. For the more of the accidental vesture of life we are able to strip ourselves of, the more naked and simple the surviving spirit; the more complete its superiority and unity, and consequently, the more unqualified its joy.<sup>13</sup>

Stated simply, even in the very midst of the terrible, the incomprehensible, the unutterable, the meaningless, and the contingent, there is a distinct human excellence and affirmation of life in relating to them as embedded in the world we are a part of. Santayana's suggestion that it can become a "joy" belies a tragic understanding already in accord with some of life's most depressing, sad, painful, or unpleasant qualities.

Considering time limitations, I cannot address the continuity in the manner it warrants tonight. I can, however, bring to light some passages in Santayana's own words that provide evidence of this central and consistent notion of the world that human beings can exist and flourish. In 1899 he completed a five-act play entitled *Lucifer: A Theological Tragedy*. Here, Santayana highlights the essential incompatibility between the Christian and the classical understandings of the world. *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion* followed in 1900, containing numerous mentionings of the tragic.<sup>14</sup> In two passages in one of the ten essays in the book, Santayana gives written testimony of the notion of the tragic in his own words. Both passages are found in the essay "The Elements and Function of Poetry." The first reads:

<sup>13</sup> George Santayana, *The Sense of Beauty* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988), p. 147.

<sup>14</sup> *Lucifer: A Theological Tragedy* was a five-act play in verse originally published in 1899. *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion*, a collection of ten essays, was first published in 1900.

This is the essence of tragedy: the sense of a finished life, of the will fulfilled and enlightened: the purging of the mind so much debated on, which relieves us pent-up energies...This enlightenment I need hardly say, is not a matter of theory or of moral maxims: the enlightenment by which tragedy is made sublime is a glimpse into the ultimate destinies of our will.<sup>15</sup>

Later, he captures this more definitively:

Some have lost even the capacity to conceive of a true tragedy because they have no idea of a cosmic order, of general laws of life, or of a impersonal religion. They measure the profundity of feeling by its intensity, not by its justifying relations; and in the radical disintegration of their spirit, the more they are devoured they fancy themselves fed.<sup>16</sup>

This notion of the tragic as a primal relationship with the surrounding world, whether viewed organically or inorganically, humanly or cosmically, replete with pain or abundant with joy, is a given. The *tragic* unifies our very existence as self-reflective creatures, yet can be as ruthless, indifferent, violent, and contingent as we can imagine or conceive.

In an unpublished letter of 1904,<sup>17</sup> Santayana likened the five-volume *The Life of Reason* to a trilogy. Five volumes: a trilogy? One aspect of the work which hues my own understanding on the whole is the recognition of finitude and limitations. We cherish the possibility of fresh beginnings and developments unknown to us. We live with expectations and plans. Yet on the whole, do we really have a strong warrant for such considerations? Realistically, are they not themselves underpinned by contingency? I would imagine it to be highly sad, even pathetic, to live one's life in constant preoccupation with one's notion of the tragic and am convinced Santayana would too. His irony, his appreciation of the comic and fundamental cheerfulness belie this. To live as one who relates to the pomp and circumstance of the ongoing human drama with an active sense of good humor and non-dramatic, self-effacing detachment cannot mask a profound conviction of the ultimate transience of all physical being. With Santayana, in my view, it only confirms the opposite. *The Life of Reason* explores in great depth and detail a naturalistic congruity with the external world. I contend that the notion of the tragic underpinned Santayana's basic approach to life-enhancing and creative accomplishments of humans such as he explored with religion, government, art, and science.

*Reason in Religion*, the third volume published in 1905, contains a passage reflecting this subtending tragic naturalism:

Not only is man's original effort aimed at living for ever in his own person, but even if he could renounce that desire, the dream of being represented perpetually by posterity is no less doomed. Reproduction, like nutrition, is a device not ultimately successful. If extinction does not defeat it, evolution will...But beyond this planet and apart from the human race, experience is too little imaginable to be interesting. No definite plan or ideal of ours can find its realization except in ourselves....A note of failure and melancholy must always dominate in the struggle against natural death.<sup>18</sup>

As very few passages in the entirety of his written *oeuvre* or extensive correspondence can do, these words embody and communicate the notion of the tragic that Santayana never renounced or attempted to argue out of existence.

<sup>15</sup> George Santayana, *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989) p. 167.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 167.

<sup>17</sup> Unpublished letter from George Santayana to Charles Scribner's Sons, 25 May 1904. [Ms: Princeton University].

<sup>18</sup> George Santayana, *The Life of Reason, or The Phases of Human Progress* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1954), pp. 289-90.

I will conclude this paper by contrasting his notion of the tragic with the views of two other thinkers: Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. In doing so, my hope and intent is to illuminate the Santayanan notion. Schopenhauer maintains that the quintessential, sublime quality characteristic of the tragic is an awareness that human life is futile, affording nothing but disappointment and ultimate failure. This awareness, in turn, spawns resignation and detachment. In my understanding of Santayana, I would most definitely consider him a detached thinker, but in no way a resigned thinker, if resignation be understood here as betraying a closet *nay-sayer* to life and the joys it engenders. Santayana's entrenched naturalism and love of the ironical (the Democritean grin) were too ingrained for such a *pessimistic* understanding of the tragic. Santayana would probably have smiled, indulgently, when faced with the Schopenhaurian claim that "I am fully of opinion [*sic*] that the tragedy of the moderns is at a higher level than that of the ancients."<sup>19</sup> And if this statement did not elicit an indulgent smile, then the following most surely would have. Writing of Greek tragedies, Schopenhauer asserts, "almost all show the human race under the dreadful dominion of chance and error, but not the resignation these bring about which redeems us from them. All this was because the ancients had not yet reached the summit and goal of tragedy, or indeed of the view of life generally."<sup>20</sup> Redemption from what? Suffering? Santayana maintained that the conflict and ensuing struggle between the urgencies of the *psyche* and the unbridled *spirit* were intractable. They could not be avoided or resolved once and for all. Schopenhauer's resignation approximated Buddhist dimensions. He sought escape from the tragic. On the other hand, Santayana's detachment took refuge and delight in a Hermesian lightheartedness always able and willing *to play*. He acknowledged, lived with, and valued the tragic.

So did Nietzsche. However, Nietzsche valued and *reveled* in the tragic, and Santayana *flourished* in it. In what ensues, and as a closure to my paper, I analyze this essential difference. Before proceeding, an important distinction should be made concerning Nietzsche. He deals with both the medium of *tragedy*, and his thinking on the *tragic*. These concerns are dispersed throughout the entirety of his corpus. As he makes clear in the very first lines of *The Birth of Tragedy*, he is approaching the origins of tragedy in this work in a learned spirit of "ästhetische Wissenschaft." For Nietzsche, all art results from "Apollonian and Dionysian duality,"<sup>21</sup> ("Duplizität"), and tragedy is the stellar example of this.<sup>22</sup> This is *not* my concern here. I am, on the contrary, interested in his most incisive passages on the *tragic*.

As I view it, these are found in "What I Owe to the Ancients," #5 (*The Twilight of the Idols*, 1888), and in "The Birth of Tragedy," #3 (*Ecce Homo*, 1888). In these sections of two separate works, Nietzsche isolates four crucial concepts. I feel compelled to quote his own words here, for I think a careful consideration of them allows us to counterpoint what I am affirming Santayana's understanding of the tragic entails. With regard to what I grouping as the first two, Nietzsche, to a degree nowhere to be found in anything Santayana left behind in published or unpublished form, qualifies the tragic as first and foremost a "feeling," and then links that with the *worldview* (or understanding of the world) of the tragedian:

<sup>19</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 2, trans. E.F.J. Payne, p. 434.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 434-35.

<sup>21</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), p. 33.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, see sections 8 and 9.

The psychology of the orgy as an overflowing feeling of life and energy within which even pain acts as a stimulus provided me with the key to the concept of the *tragic* feeling ["des tragischen Gefühls"] which was misunderstood as much by Aristotle as it was by our pessimists. Tragedy is so far from providing evidence for pessimism among the Hellenes in Schopenhauer's sense that it has to be considered the decisive repudiation of that idea and the *counter-verdict* to it. Affirmation of life even in its strangest and sternest problems, the will to life rejoicing in its own inexhaustibility through the *sacrifice* of its highest types—that is what I called Dionysian, *that* is what I recognized as the bridge to the psychology of the *tragic* poet [des *tragischen Dichters*].<sup>23</sup>

In the above quote the notions of "*tragic feeling*," and "*tragic wisdom*," are isolated. In the following, the "*tragic philosopher*," and "*tragic wisdom*" are clarified:

In this sense I have the right to understand myself as the first *tragic philosopher* [den ersten *tragischen Philosophen*]*—*that is to say the extremest antithesis and antipodes of a pessimistic philosopher. Before me this transposition of the dionysian into a philosophical pathos did not exist: *tragic wisdom* [*tragische Weisheit*] was lacking—I have sought in vain for signs of it even among the great Greeks of philosophy, those of the two centuries *before* Socrates.<sup>24</sup>

Santayana never considered himself a "*tragic philosopher*," nor did he ever maintain that he built his naturalistic ontology around any "*tragic wisdom*." However, so many passages in his *oeuvre* reveal a thinker very much in touch with the *tragic* pervading the human condition. As for "*tragic wisdom*," let us again recall here the second and fourth lines of the first sonnet he ever composed: "It is not wisdom to be only wise,/...But it is wisdom to believe the heart" (CP 92). These words are not only congruous with the Nietzschean "*tragische Weisheit*," but believing "the heart" could be interpreted along lines parallel with "the concept of the *tragic feeling*." When Santayana writes in the soliloquy "The Tragic Mask" that self-knowledge involves the knower in a renewed process of self-understanding, he implies a self-transformation. Self-knowledge engenders fresh ideas of personhood, identity, and difference.

The Santayanan concept of animal faith, with its roots in self-professed "bacchic faith," is analogous to the Dionysian in Nietzsche's thought. Both affirm the value of *human* life — but each proceeds in vastly different directions of development. Whereas Nietzsche's thought rises in a heightening intensity, in iconoclastic bravado, Santayana's individual engagement with the natural surrounding world is one of adaptation, transitive judgment, even *pragmatic* problem solving on an everyday basis.

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<sup>23</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), p. 110.

<sup>24</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth, 1979), p. 81.

# Is Santayana Tragic?

Charles Padron's presentation of Santayana's notion of the tragic is refreshingly speculative. Not wanting to dig another theoretical pigeonhole for Santayana scholarship, Mr. Padron steps back and surveys a remarkable philosophical-literary career, finding the tragic to be a pervasive and conspicuous presence throughout; a presence, he furthermore argues, which is not merely *conceptual* since the tragic manifests in Santayana's thought as a courageous, sober-minded response to a metaphysically given reality. This less 'theoretical' approach has the advantage that it allows for a thematic access by way of a single thread, one whose unraveling need not destroy, as it were, the whole sweater. One may, if one wishes, take Padron's claim seriously without compromising any pet interpretations of the subtler points of Santayana's formal ontology, or more informal philosophical reflections (Padron even suggests two further "notions" that might be explored.) Briefly stated, we are offered a sort of a psychoanalysis by Padron, which is profitable not for having provided a governing principle from which the rest of Santayana's philosophy can be derived, but as I like to think of it, an interpretive foothold which offers a visionary glimpse of what *might be* lurking below the surface of the multi-layered narrative the great philosopher leaves us.<sup>1</sup>

Needless to say, there is a challenge presented by the long view Padron takes, one that he himself acknowledges but to my mind doesn't sufficiently confront in the presentation he gives us here. This challenge can be summarized by what I detect as an equivocation regarding the exact *status* of the tragic character he (otherwise) so deftly identifies. In regard to this equivocation, I wish to probe into the philosophy of mind driving Padron's analysis. Furthermore, it will be instructive to compare Padron's presentation to the one he contrasts his own with by John McCormick, delivered before this Society in 1982.

To support his contention that Santayana's thought bears a *notion* and not a mere concept or idea of the tragic, Mr. Padron offers his own philosophical understanding of what he variously calls "constitution," "character," "attitude," "sentiment," "passion," and "mind". Distinguishing himself from McCormick, Padron wants to consider the tragic as a relation in Santayana's thought which reflects on these aforementioned phenomena in such a manner that helps (among other things) reveal something of 'Santayana the man'. The question to consider with respect to this last concern is what, if anything, of Santayana is revealed in a sheer conceptual analysis of the sort offered in McCormick's 1982 address?

First, one must observe the warning McCormick issues regarding any consideration of the tragic in Santayana: "No reconstruction of Santayana's idea of the tragic can be satisfactory...if it ignores the many occasions in his writings when Santayana uses the words 'tragic' and 'tragedy' with apparent casualness, even carelessness"<sup>2</sup>. As McCormick persuasively goes on to say, this carelessness is only *apparent* since, as devout readers are well aware, Santayana was a remarkably careful purveyor of concepts, which in other places he more appropriately calls "themes".

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<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this paper was read to the annual meeting of the Santayana Society in New York on December 28, 2000, in response to Charles Padron's paper, "Santayana's Notion of the Tragic".

<sup>2</sup> McCormick, John, "Santayana's Idea of the Tragic" in *Overheard in Seville: Bulletin of the Santayana Society*. Vol. 1: 5.

Quite apart from the other strengths of Santayana's thought, he rarely considers a given *theme* without demonstrating an uncommon grasp of its historical meaning, and we are warned by McCormick against the temptation to understand his use of "tragic" and "tragedy" otherwise. Based on this warning, I come to a different conclusion than Padron regarding the conceptual approach McCormick adopts to examine Santayana's "idea" of the tragic. It is not only that for McCormick a sheer conceptual analysis of Santayana's idea of the tragic is *preferable* to one that draws further-reaching conclusions, but *necessary* in light of the fact that he was so unerringly precise in his use of concepts. A clearly sloppy or otherwise careless use of a given concept on Santayana's part might justify the attempt to discern an underlying motivation, or as Padron defines it: "an inclusive, broad, subsuming denotation *under* which all else is viewed and subsequently *hued*." But in the case of the "tragic," at least for McCormick, such speculation is unjustified. Thus McCormick proceeds as he does, without the desire to consider the tragic in Santayana as a means to frame one's understanding of *Santayana the man* or *Santayana the thinker* (paraphrasing Padron). To my mind, McCormick chooses this procedure for a rather convincing reason. Padron however, is not convinced.

One way to shed light on this issue is to consider an instance where Santayana's use of "tragic" seems to justify McCormick's approach. In the revised preface to the second edition of *Reason in Common Sense* in 1922, Santayana reflects on his change of perspective since having written the book nearly twenty years earlier: "I now dwell by preference on other perspectives ... I cannot take every phase of art or religion, or philosophy seriously, simply because it takes itself so. These things seem to me less tragic than they did, and more comic; and I am less eager to choose and to judge among them, as if only one form could be right"<sup>3</sup>. I am inclined to couple this reflection with the crucial parting vision of "Normal Madness" in *Dialogues in Limbo*, where the moral is drawn that "[t]he young man who has not wept is a savage, and the old man who will not laugh is a fool"<sup>4</sup>. I view Santayana's understanding of the tragic very much in the manner that McCormick does, who concludes: "What is conspicuously absent from the Germanic theories of Hegel and Scheler is the element of the comic that sits cheek by jowl with the tragic in Santayana's mind, and particularly in his old age" (*Bulletin* No. 1, p. 10). Much in the same way, the comic receives only a token nod in Padron's portrait of Santayana's *oeuvre*.

This raises a related, if less critical point of difference I have with Mr. Padron's analysis. Padron asserts that not only did Santayana not have any "idea" of the tragic, but he "most definitely never even remotely hinted at a theoretical comprehension." Surely this must be an exaggeration. Padron's own concluding observations of the differences between Santayana and Schopenhauer and Nietzsche bear this out. Santayana consistently criticized German romanticism, especially as he saw it in Hegel, who he accuses of romanticizing the *life* of the *tragic* hero. Goethe's young *Werther* offers a good illustration of this tragic-romantic figure. The life of the tragic hero, Santayana insists, is not a good one<sup>5</sup>, and we would be philosophically irresponsible to claim otherwise. Similarly, Santayana claims that a subterranean "leaven" of romanticism led Schopenhauer to conceive Will as a bottomless source of

<sup>3</sup> Santayana, George, *Reason in Common Sense*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1922, p. vi.

<sup>4</sup> Santayana, George, *Dialogues in Limbo*. Ann Arbor Books, University of Michigan Press, 1957, p. 57.

<sup>5</sup> Padron himself credits Santayana with this acknowledgement, but without recognizing it as a need to include a significant sense of the comic as well as the tragic.

permanent suffering, a *tragic* metaphysical presence the escape from which could only be a mystical one. I feel that these criticisms more than suffice as evidence for a theoretical development or comprehension of the tragic in Santayana.

Thus, in my concurrence with McCormick, I cannot help asking the question: what accounts for Padron's isolation of the tragic, not merely as one amongst a set of developed concepts in Santayana's thought but as an "attitudinal connection to the world at large" resurfacing in his advanced age with "a comforting vengeance"? This is the question that perplexed me when considering Padron's fruitful investigations, and it is not one for which an answer was forthcoming until I approached the issue as follows. It seems to me that there is an equivocation regarding the status of the tragic notion Padron identifies, which is reflected in the following alternatives: is the pervasive tragic sense Padron gives us one which centrally functions as a portrait of Santayana *himself*? Or does it simply capture a particular *insight* of Santayana's into the world? For myself, there is a crucial difference between these two conclusions, a difference it appears Padron does not find crucial in the presentation he offers here.

To conclude, Mr. Padron's welcome examination of Santayana's notion of the tragic invites us to consider it as no mere concept-among-concepts, but as providing a broad, thematic access which serves as an interpretive foothold. What I understand to be the central significance of Padron's examination is as follows. I feel that he has indeed put his finger on the pulse of Santayana's work — if not having identified *the* fundamental strain in his philosophy, at least *one* of them. Santayana's unremitting (and to some cold and merciless) willingness to conjure up the sober-minded view of things, based upon a deeply naturalistic insistence upon human finitude and limitation, is unparalleled in twentieth-century thought. My only difference with Padron concerns whether and to what extent this insight is *wholly* tragic (why not *equally* credit the comic?), and as such, an appropriate way to understand Santayana *the man*, rather than simply, Santayana the *philosopher*.

MATTHEW CALEB FLAMM

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## **The *Bulletin* and other Web Pages**

The web page for *Overheard in Seville* is:

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

Articles from 1993 to the present are posted there (in unpolished form). More recent papers are in .pdf form, readable by Adobe Acrobat, which is available on most systems or is easily downloaded.

*The Santayana Edition* maintains a full web page dealing with all aspects of the project:

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

Tom Davis maintains a site dedicated, among other things, to Santayana citations and exchanges of opinion on various issues:

<http://members.aol.com/santayana>

## Some Abbreviations for Santayana's Works

Page numbers given with no further information on the edition will refer to a volume in the critical Santayana Edition, where this exists, or to the Scribner's edition in most other cases.

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

## *Overheard in Seville*

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# THAT BIT HAS ITS UNFADING COLOR

In 1973, the Smithsonian Institution acquired a 1950 painting of Santayana by Harry Wood (acquisition number NPG.73.42). Mr. Robert G. Stewart of the National Portrait Gallery there sent me, with Wood's permission, a Xerox copy of "Harry Wood's literary comments on painting George Santayana's portrait," saying that he was "somewhat at a loss as to where such a thing could be published." At that time, I too was at a loss as to where Harry Wood's charming memoir of his sojourn with Santayana in February 1950 — that he evidently actually wrote in 1972 — might be published. So, after reading it and then putting it aside for more than a quarter century, I recently fished it out of my file, reread it, and thought that it would make an informative and entertaining feature in *Overheard in Seville*.

An obituary notice in the Arizona State University faculty and Staff newspaper of April 21, 1995 describes Harry Wood as the former director of the University's School of Art, the post he had occupied since coming to Arizona State in 1954. Harry Wood was born in 1910. In 1933, he received a master's degree in journalism from the University of Wisconsin, and afterward earned a master's degree in art and a doctorate in fine arts from Ohio State. During his long career at Arizona State Harry Wood was known as a painter, sculptor, innovative teacher, and farsighted administrator. A photograph of Harry Wood taken in 1970, accompanying the obituary notice, depicts the artist looking on smiling while a young boy of perhaps fourteen or fifteen sketches the face of Abraham Lincoln, with whom Harry Wood was fascinated. He himself did several portraits of Lincoln in various media. In this photo, Wood wears glasses, as he does in a fine self-portrait he painted in 1933; and his hair, though now grizzled, is as full and thick as in the youthful self-portrait. This photo of Wood at about sixty shows him with a white mustache, whereas he is clean shaven in the self-portrait of him at about twenty-three. Harry Wood retired from Arizona State in the mid-1970s, and a gallery in the School of Art, for the exhibition of graduate student artwork, was named in his honor. According to Lise Hawkos, Curator of the Harry Wood Gallery, Wood was, as he appears in the photographs, a tall and imposing man. But, she adds, he was very gentle, pleasant, and kindly. He was, according to Ms. Hawkos, something of a character, with a keen interest in the occult. He was much interested in the use of halos in paintings. Harry Wood was made professor emeritus after his retirement, and he died on April 7, 1995 at the age of eighty-four. Shortly before his death, Harry and his wife, Ann, lost most of their papers in a fire in their home. Fortunately, the copy of Harry's memoir of Santayana had been sent to Mr. Stewart at the Smithsonian and its text is available to us today.

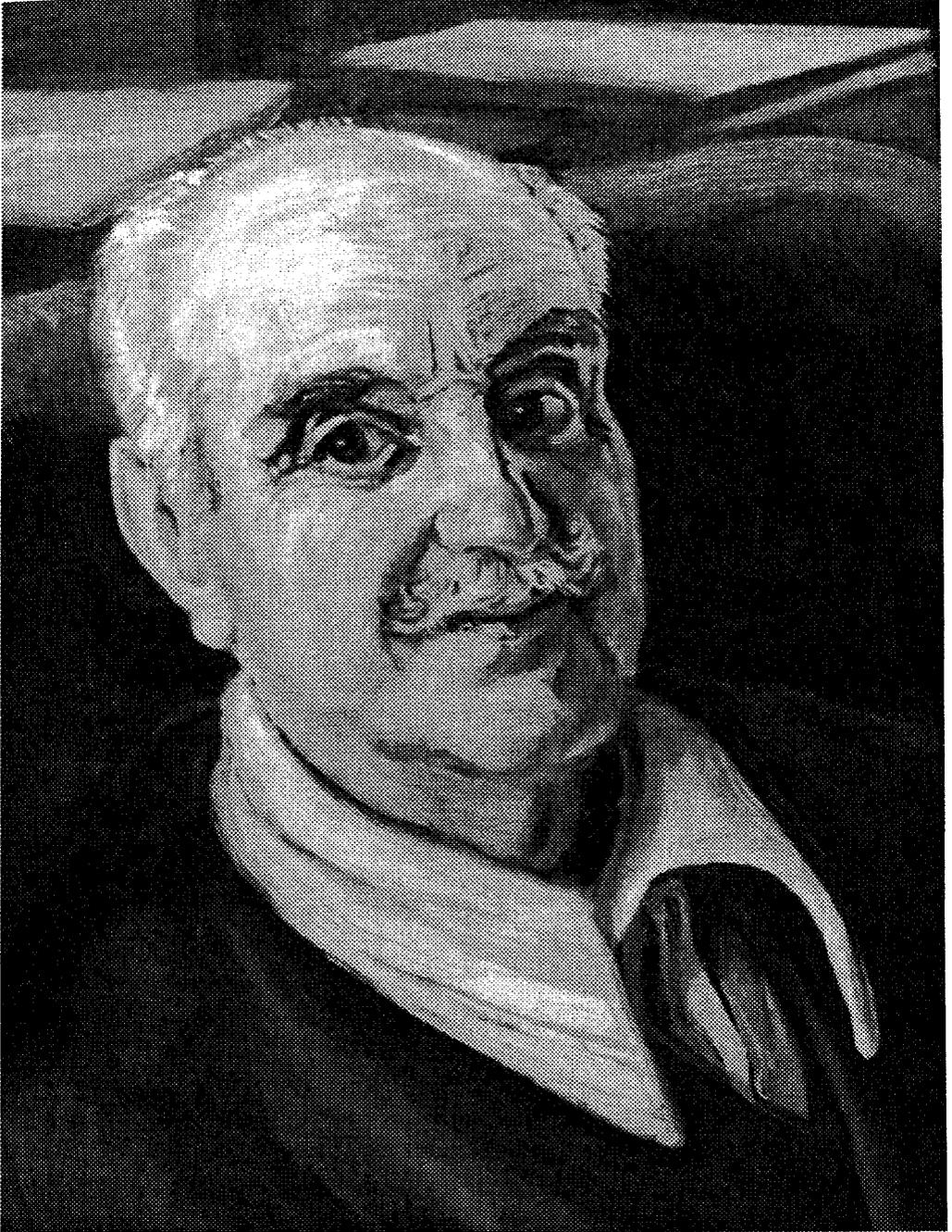
The oil-on-canvas portrait, seen on the opposite page, is 23¼ by 28 inches, and may be viewed today at the National Portrait Gallery of the Smithsonian.

WILLIAM G. HOLZBERGER

Now that he is dead, I am free to follow the advice George Santayana gave me about buying books. It was February, 1950. I was painting his portrait in his nunnery-hospital room in Rome. He asked me point-blank if I had bought the second volume of his autobiography, *Persons and Places*. I confessed that I'd read a library copy, but hadn't bought one yet.

"Well don't," he chuckled. "It will be a better bargain after I'm gone. It'll be in one volume instead of three. And some of the things left out will be back in."

"My memories are works of art," he said, "and the older they are, the brighter and more clear they seem. This causes me to suspect that I may have elaborated them and perfected them artistically. So I can no longer vouch for their accuracy."



From a 1950 Painting of George Santayana by Harry Wood

That good-humored advice was pure Santayana. All his life in prose and poetry, he warned his readers to beware his artistry before he began to beguile them with his philosophy. It was the same with his face. During the three afternoons I was with him, he discussed its benign disfigurements with keen immediate awareness, yet with distant historical perspective.

"I've got a twisted nose, from my father, as a kind of badge of legitimacy. And lately, when I've caught a glimpse of myself in the glass, I've seen resemblances to my mother when she was very old. She lived to be 86, just my age now. I don't go out. I'm deaf. The words all run together. And I'm blind in my right eye, so I have nothing to do from tea-time till supper."

He told me I would be the first to paint his portrait in oil,<sup>1</sup> one charcoal portrait sketch in 1923<sup>2</sup> being the only other artistic assault on his face.

"If you get a good portrait my publishers will be very happy. When a recent book was published, *Atoms of Thought*,<sup>3</sup> they wanted one, but I would *not* have one. So they used a photograph taken in 1932. That's all, and I'm content. The public always wants to see one at his oldest and worst, you know. For the little book called *The Idea of Christ in the Gospels*, they enlarged the 1932 photograph so that it became a horror. I think this was the influence of the cinema."

Yet any portrait painter would agree that Santayana's face was one of his choicest creations. It perfectly expressed his personality, his style, and his philosophy. Like the face of Rembrandt, it became in itself, a document incorporating his richest discoveries as an artist and as a thinker. There was enduring truth in it, coupled with warm human pliability. Perfection shone undiminished through the ruins. The dawning awareness of this, gave me such a sense of responsibility to history that my awkward folding easel, dripping brushes, and yard of white-faced cloth, seemed like the bells and motley of a mountebank. No pigment on canvas, in fact, could portray his pale, transparent skin. Like ancient parchment, lighted from within, it had acquired a shimmering patina. His delicate surface resembled an old applewood saint, polished smooth by many fingers.

The slight displacement of his nose, the Spanish blue of his jowl, the glowing ruddiness of his cheek, and particularly his great eyes, burning like dark carbuncle stones, made him look so much like an El Greco nobleman, that I had to make a conscious effort to resist exaggerating those traits. Even his bathrobe of Spanish black and the wide white collar of his lounging pajamas, recalled the 17<sup>th</sup> century ruffs and broadcloth doublets of El Greco's frail aristocrats. His face offered technical problems to a portraitist, too. Just as reviewers and teachers find Santayana's plausible union of opposites uncomfortable — reason with faith, pessimism with confidence, disillusionment with constructiveness — so I found difficulties subduing his tandem face.

For he really had two faces; his "speaking face" and his "listening face." The first came all-of-a-sudden, with Spanish speed, each time his gaiety accelerated. Laughter tumbled out of him. His face became an excitable madcap mask. The dark pupils of his eyes swam in the exact middles of his eyeballs, like ripe olives

<sup>1</sup> Actually, an earlier oil portrait of a standing, bearded Santayana was done by Denman Ross in July 1909 and hangs in Emerson Hall, Harvard University. [WGH]

<sup>2</sup> The charcoal sketch by Andreas Martin Andersen, done by firelight in 1896, was Santayana's favorite picture of himself. [WGH]

<sup>3</sup> Cardiff, Ira D., anthology selected and edited by, *Atoms of Thought*, Philosophical Library, N.Y. 1950.

surrounded by white. His wispy mustache, which needed weeding, cocked up rakishly on his starboard side, baring a row of helter-skelter teeth, too ragged to be false, functional, or photogenic. There were no deeply chiseled or permanent grooves in his face; but a fine web of lacy wrinkles puckered his cheeks and brow like shirred organdy, when he laughed. In this mood he might have been a welterweight Silenus or a grandfatherly Satyr.

His opposite face was dreamy, meditative, and detached. A timid smile, soft as a baby's teased his lips. His eyes lost their highlights and became inky pools as their gaze receded deeper and deeper. Then he seemed to wear the invisible cowl of the mystic, peering clairvoyantly through the walls of his cells [*sic*] beyond Time and Space. At these times his hands would be tucked submissively into his dressing-gown sleeves, like a Mandarin's. But when his thoughts were in spate, his hands flew about animatedly as conductors and choreographers for his orchestrated phrases.

Any unwary soul, however, who mistook one of the damped-down periods of equilibrium for the idle daydreaming of the dotard, was open to shock. For his awareness of every detail was keen and continuous. When he wished to draw a book from one of the heavily freighted shelves in his small room, he and the book seemed to meet each other half way, so unerring was the flight of his white finger to its exact location. He could pluck thoughts from their hooks in the same deft way. Not a single thread of the temporary conversation, or the larger life-theme, or Project Portrait, escaped his alert, simultaneous scrutiny. In fact, these quiet spells, like the "inactive action" of Gandhi's favorite passages in the *Bhagavad-Gita*, seemed Santayana's moments of most vital activity. There was a silent stir in the room, intense and rhythmical. And echoing through such stillnesses were the spilled jewels of his lifelong laughter.

If he had unconsciously turned his head into an El Greco grandee, he had surely also turned himself "like the superb Democritus" into a "laughing philosopher."<sup>4</sup> I wish that those who found him only a singer in a minor key who "never caught the heart cleansing laughter of paganism"<sup>5</sup> might have sat with him an hour. They would have a lifetime deposit of the 20<sup>th</sup> century's most precious laughter stored in their ear-memories, as I have.

"I laugh far too much," he apologized, after one of his jubilant tongue-sprees. His tone implied that, while he was willing to quote some of his stuffer literary cronies on this point, he himself rather relished such harmless sport. The next instant, however, as if to prove his power to himself, he drew a deep draught of silence. For a full five minutes he seemed drenched in dutiful sobriety.

I seized the moment to make an effort to memorize his face. But a strange elusiveness of a kind I have felt in no other human face bewildered me. At that moment I felt it impossible to bring him into visual focus. It was as if his body had become faintly translucent, its outlines shifting and undulating gently. If it had not been for the few oversized brown freckles sprinkled on his cheeks, I think my brushes would have turned to water in my hands.

I finished working at dusk on the third afternoon and thanked him from the bottom of my heart for letting me share his face and fireside. He seized my hand, heedless of turpentine. "So nice of you to think of doing it," he said.

<sup>4</sup> Santayana, *Reason in Science*, p. 90. Santayana's admiration of Democritus is shown by his reconstruction of the ancient Greek as the protagonist of *Dialogues in Limbo*.

<sup>5</sup> Will Durant, *The Story of Philosophy*, p. 551.

He had, in fact, enjoyed every moment of the sittings, with the excitement of a small boy being dressed up for an excursion into the Future. Small and compact, yet in no sense feminine, he seemed to be man-woman-child, youth and sage, in one. Even with his bad vision, he had followed every step. He asked questions about lighting, background and expression, about the use of the palette knife, the sizing of Italian linen, and the choice of the pink armchair, the horizontal format, and the informal pose.

Back in the United States, a few months later, I sent him a photograph of the completed portrait. By return mail I received a letter dated May 12, 1950. 'Til now it has never been published.

Dear Wood, (he wrote in a vigorous, lyrical longhand)

The photograph of your painting is easier for me to take in than the original, and under a strong light and magnifying glass, I can see the twinkle in its eye. It is unmistakably a living figure. In so short a time and with no previous acquaintance, also with the rather tired and neglected aspect which I had for good reasons of health and of preoccupation with my unfinished book, you could not paint my "animation" indirectly, I mean by the potentiality of it suggested in tranquillity, which I suppose is what a long acquaintance and many sittings might have enabled you to convey. And I also, for that purpose, ought to have been more silent, more decently dressed, and less worn out generally. If you come back to Rome while I am still on deck, you must paint me again more at leisure, more in my normal and more abstracted state of mind....

Meantime, Mr. Wheelock of Scribner's writes that he has received a photograph of the same picture from you, and asks me if I wish to have it used for the usual purpose of publicity, and he adds that he thinks it an interesting work, but does not see me in it. He has never seen me at all so that his standard must be ideal. But he means, I think, that it is not quiet and respectable enough for a professor of philosophy, retired, and ancient sage. He is right. But all the portraits people care to see are snap-shots of a man unawares, with his mouth open and his weight not visibly balanced because he is caught between possible poses. I have told Mr. Wheelock that I leave the matter of using your work to his expert knowledge, but that I think you are a genuine artist and ought to be encouraged. Your sketch was necessarily impressionistic—all except the ear, which is evidently by El Greco.<sup>6</sup>

Yours sincerely G. Santayana.

The letter was beautifully spaced, filling both sides of the paper brimful, and showing in every line that fine sensitivity to visual form and physical gesture which his prose always exhibited. Especially remarkable for an 86-year-old hand were the last ten lines. Except for the signature line, they were shadowed with a superimposed re-writing, effectively ironing out in rhythmical sweeps a shakier first version underneath. Throughout the entire ten lines the formation of the two sets of script exactly coincides. Very few men in their prime, with good eyes and steady fingers, could duplicate such a manual performance. And the few who could, would probably lack such driving esthetic compulsion and such proud perfectionism.

This feat of his old age showed that his Dean back in Harvard had been right in the 90's when he stimulated the young teacher to write the earliest and most famous of his books, *The Sense of Beauty*. Santayana, however, disagreed, or professed to. Just as he had reviewed for me the misadventures of his face, so he revealed with the same unposturing detachment, the inglorious origins of his literary career.

"I never had good eyes," he said, "so that I couldn't see pictures very well. I couldn't wear glasses because my nose isn't in the middle of my face. They tried

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<sup>6</sup> On the holograph letter, Santayana wrote 'Il Greco'. [WGH]

putting an extra piece on one side of the nose piece, but it wasn't satisfactory. I never could remember pictures well, perhaps because I couldn't see them well."

"*The Sense of Beauty* was the only one of my books I didn't want to write. I was a young instructor at Harvard and I was told, 'Now look here, if you're going to get anywhere, you must write.' I'd never written anything but poetry, and of course, that was of no use.

" 'What about?' I said.

" 'Oh,' they said, 'ART. You're an esthete.' "

" 'Well,' I said, 'I know the word esthetics, but I don't know what it means.' I knew the Greeks a little, and Taine was a great favorite, and Schopenhauer, and I constructed it out of those, after I'd read all the old-fashioned books in the field. I haven't read Schopenhauer now for 50 years, and doubtless if I did, I'd find much in him that I didn't like. But I still value his basic distinction between appearance and reality."

Santayana chuckled. "I'd still be just an instructor back at Harvard, if I hadn't written that first book."

There was nothing solemn or pontifical or "important" about Santayana. He wore his fame like the thinnest most casual of veils. Nor was there any winking "cuteness" in his words or demeanor. Unlike some professional wits, he did not parade a plush passage, then pause for dramatic effect and applause. His wit was quick, natural, and fluent. He always enjoyed it himself; not the idea that he was being witty, but the fun of sharing some comical insight with another human specimen and with the legions of those-out-there. Sometimes after a jest, his eye would wander upward, not as if preparing a new sally, but as if listening, assured of companionship in the ambient air. He rattled away with no attempt to hoard energy.

He quoted several long passages from the archaic French of Racine, a favorite poet of his, memorized in his youth. Gongoristic Spanish acrostics of the 17<sup>th</sup> century were also quoted with relish and translated for me in threefold detail. "Now that I can't read much," he explained, "I amuse myself by lying in bed, playing these poem games with myself." Edmund Wilson, Bertrand Russell, the Latin poets, Homer, and the Sitwells were others he quoted verbatim, sharing the pleasure they had given him.

"I'm trying to educate myself to like the moderns," he said, pointing to a Spanish book about a Milanese sculptor. "His portraits are good, but when he tries to do Narcissus, he has no imagination. I enjoyed reading it though. I hadn't read any Spanish for years."

This prompted me to point to a volume lying just under his elbow on the lamp table — Bernard Berenson's *Sketch for a Self Portrait*. I knew that the famous writer on Florentine art had been a lifelong intellectual sparring partner and benefactor of Santayana. "B.B.," I said, "does not believe in educating one's self [sic] to like the moderns."

Santayana nodded sad acknowledgement. "I didn't care for his self-portrait," he said with a trace of disappointment. "Just gossip about what he thought about things. No *substance*."

Then he laughed gaily. He had caught my counter-thought, unspoken as yet, that some reviewers had found his own memoirs richly enchanting garrulity rather than crystallized experience.

"There were some objections when my story came out, too," he admitted. "Cameron Forbes wrote me that he regretted my saying my hero in my novel, *The Last Puritan*, was based on him, because the hero petered out. He hasn't petered out,

he says. His father didn't peter out, either, because he bought a great many shares in Telephone when it was new and became very rich."

For a few moments he elaborated the theme that some of his best friends were self-licensed for the valuable office of Severest Critic. Bertrand Russell and Robert Bridges and Edmund Wilson were those whose scoldings he remembered especially.

"I asked Bertrand Russell once," he said, "'Berty, why did you leave me out of your history of philosophy?' 'Why George,' he told me, 'your philosophy is not a philosophy. You're an eclectic!' And you know! He was right."

I started to utter a disclaimer, remembering the zest with which Santayana's 1923 preface to *Scepticism and Animal Faith*, written when he was in his 60<sup>th</sup> year, had announced "one more system of philosophy." But he was already laughing. I saw that every trace of disappointment or rancor had long since been swept away. For me to profess to reverse Bertrand Russell's judgement would imply a pettiness in Santayana that did not exist. Santayana's sinuous prose can safely be trusted to climb with his banner, even after Bertrand Russell has quit trudging. "...No modern writer is altogether a philosopher in my eyes," Santayana wrote in 1923, "except Spinoza..."<sup>4</sup> I wondered whether being omitted by Santayana so highhandedly would leave as few wounds on Bertrand Russell, as Russell's omission had on his victim.

"Robert Bridges chided me," Santayana went on, "for neglecting music in my esthetics. I only put it in, anyway, because I thought it was necessary in a book on esthetics. Actually, I know nothing about music. Architecture I know. *I should have been an architect.*"

"You've given us some very architectural prose," I said. "Your stairs always lead to new landings."

"I hope so," he said simply. Then his face kindled. "Prose is easier. Poetry is less pliable. You can't really say what you mean because it doesn't rhyme."

"Which do you consider the best of your books?" I asked.

"I always fancied I knew something about religion," he replied. "In *Reason in Religion*, I told what I know. I'm writing a book on politics now. And of course what it really is, is my philosophy. I'm using the word 'Spirit' a good deal, and the word 'Essence' sometimes. That's fine for my readers here (in Italy) but not so well understood in America. The Greeks used the word 'Energia' and Americans like the idea of Spirit as Energy. But not in the Greek sense. The Greeks also used 'Dynamos' which comes closer. The basic difference between Spirit and Matter is that one is dynamic and the other isn't; dynamic, I mean, in the sense that a seed has in it all the passions, all the experiences yet to be unfolded in the plant. That's what I call the 'Psyche'."

This reminded him of a letter he'd received from Ezra Pound only a few days earlier. "It had my initials in one corner and his in the other and a big Chinese symbol of some sort in the middle," he said. "Another time he wrote, 'The cherry stone knows.' I wrote back, 'Of course you won't get a watermelon out of a cherry stone, but how do you know the cherry stone is conscious?'"

There were two small unexorcized misgivings in Santayana's account of his life. One was the time he was "almost invited to Oxford. Robert Bridges wanted me," he said, "but I didn't like the other staff members."

The other misgiving concerned a collection of Santayana's most quotable passages, *Atoms of Thought*, published in 1950. "They were gathered by a man

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<sup>4</sup> Santayana, *Scepticism and Animal Faith*, p. 305.

named Cardiff whom I've never met," he explained. "I wrote to him and told him they seemed chosen from the *left* of my work, but not from the right, and thus didn't give a true picture of my philosophy. But he replied that he did that so that the work would be read. Very American."

Jibes at American foibles were always proudly paternal in Santayana's talk. I had mentioned to him my quest in Italy for a smiling, yet sufficiently rugged face of Christ, to satisfy modern conceptions.

"I've never seen a smiling Christ," he said, "And yet there were many occasions when a smile would have been appropriate. You may recall my interpretation of his words before the miracle at Cana — how he was saying one thing, meaning another, satirically, and knowing his words would be understood in that light. Surely they must have brought a smile to his lips. I'd like to see what you do with such a subject. But no teeth, please! That would be the American way!"

He thought Leonardo's head of Christ one of the "noblest," while Velasquez' were "simply men." "I had one around here a while," he went on, "a newspaper reproduction of the head of Christ from a Christ at Emmaus by Caravaggio. It was fat — too fat — but it showed the *kindly* and pleasant human side of him. There's a copy of it in another room down the way, and I'd like to ask the sisters for it." (Here a touch of old-man's-terror came into his eye. For the first time he looked momentarily senile.) "But I wouldn't want to bother them."

His voice became resonant again. "I suppose you must give him a beard, at least a little one. It's the conventional thing, and most of those from the East had them. Do you intend to make a portrait or an idealized image?"

"I'm trying," I said, "to bring together everybody's idea of what he would look like — for our times."

"Oh dear," he cried, "That would be pink and white and freshly scrubbed—like a valentine. That would be horrible!"

I told him that I had found inspiration in his little book *The Idea of Christ in the Gospels* because it seemed written by a sceptic who is also a man of faith, for faithful sceptics like me.

"I'm glad you *understood* it," he said. "It was not widely understood in America. I haven't read many reviews of it, but the most laudatory one was by a young Italian priest. He balked a little at the second part. The translation is very good — *better than the original*. I read every word of it."

This statement, probably unique among authors, was spoken without any taint of false modesty. He was not fishing for praise. He was genuinely delighted.

In this same little book Santayana had spoken of the great insight of the Hebrews in banning images. As a painter I protested mildly, wondering why Santayana himself seemed to imply that images defeat self-transcendence.

"Oh," said Santayana, "I'm inclined always to defend those called idolators. Spain has many images, you know. But for the person worshipping, the image is not the God. They cherish the image because it meant much to dead spirits who were dear to them before their death. It is a means of establishing the spiritual bond — of bringing about transcendence, if you will."

The same, I thought, might be said of portraits of great philosophers.

I glanced around the cramped little room, looking for significant details that represented him. Books were everywhere of course, on shelves, in casual stacks, and in half-unwrapped packages. There was a narrow bed, partly hidden by a screen, and an old secretary-desk. The light was wholesome, but stingier than in most of Italy.

His large back window looked into a small, not-too-tidy hospital garden. Sanitary odors drifted through from the wide hallway with its high oaken woodwork. I could see why, in this setting, all of Santayana's expanding must be done inwardly.

"Do you get good food and care here?" I asked, remembering that he had lived through the Fascist spasm and the bombings of war under this same roof.

"No," he said plainly. "The food is monotonous and cold. I don't mind cold dishes, if they're supposed to be cold. It's not comfortable living here. I came here eight years ago (1942)<sup>7</sup> and didn't expect to live so long. A lot of people die here. There's a door at the back where they carry out the dead ones. It's a good place to die, but not to live."

Yet the merry face that looked at me as he said those words was a face that expressed complete mastery over life. The *truth* of his daily existence was discomfort, confinement, and a worn-out body. But the radiant poise of his mind transformed it utterly and effortlessly into *beauty*. Again it struck me: his face was his philosophy.

Long before, in clear-eyed prose, Santayana had unriddled the death he so obstinately postponed:

Nothing ... is eternal in its duration. The tide of evolution carries everything before it, thoughts no less than bodies, and persons no less than nations. Yet all things are eternal in their status, as truth is. The place which an event fills in history is its inalienable place; the character that an act or a feeling possesses in passing is its inalienable character. Now, the human mind is not merely animal, not merely absorbed in the felt transition from one state of life to another. It is partly synthetic, intellectual, contemplative, able to look before and after and to see fleeting things at once in their mutual relations, or, as Spinoza expressed it, under the form of eternity. To see things under the form of eternity is to see them in their historic and moral truth, not as they seemed as they passed, but as they remain when they are over. When a man's life is over, it remains true that he has lived; it remains true that he has been one sort of man, and not another. In the infinite mosaic of history that bit has its unfading colour and its perpetual function and effect. A man who understands himself under the form of eternity knows... that he cannot wholly die, even if he would; for when the movement of his life is over, the truth of his life remains. The fact of him is a part forever of the infinite context of facts. This sort of immortality belongs passively to everything; but to the intellectual part of man it belongs actively also, because, in so far as it knows the eternity of truth, and is absorbed in it, the mind *lives* in that eternity. In caring only for the eternal, it has ceased to care for that part of itself which can die.<sup>8</sup>

In Santayana's sense, he, himself, has not died, though more than two-score years have elapsed since his demise.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, I find it consoling, being more painter than philosopher, that portraits for earthly eyes last a little longer than people. I'm glad I have that bit of unfading color in its frame on my wall. For it somehow seems to set some of Santayana's laughter ringing in my room.

HARRY WOOD

<sup>7</sup> Santayana moved into the Blue Sisters' nursing Home (from the Grand Hotel in Rome, where he had been living) on 14 October 1941. He remained there until his death on 26 September 1952. [WGH]

<sup>8</sup> Santayana, from his preface to the *Introduction to Spinoza's Ethics*, London, 1910, pp. xviii-xix. Santayana valued this phrasing of his thoughts enough to re-quote the passage in both editions of *Realms of Being*, e.g. pp. 405-6 in 1942 ed.

<sup>9</sup> Evidently, Wood meant 'two decades' rather than 'two-score years'. Santayana died in 1952, and we assume that Wood wrote this memoir about 1972 (not 1992). [WGH]

# A Conversation, Partly Real and Partly Imaginary

The following dialogue is a literal transcription of part of a typescript extant in the Charles A. Strong Papers (Box 7, Folder 104) at the Rockefeller Archive Center, Sleepy Hollow, New York, and is printed here by their permission. Apparently these notes were typed by Strong following a philosophical debate between him and Santayana, and then mailed to Santayana. These pages with Santayana's handwritten comments were then enclosed with the 1 March 1932 letter to Strong. The dialogue is the work of Strong, and only the inserted comments in a changed italic font are written by Santayana. The first paragraph of the accompanying letter reads:

Dear Strong: I return your latest manifesto with a few notes on the parts put into my unworthy mouth. Though I should have used different word's [*sic*], like Gretchen's parson, I might perhaps not have said anything more valuable. I am vaguely conscious that in our verbal discussions, of late years, I have been a good deal of a dummy. As for your elucidations, I find the word luminosity in them, but not the thing, and I had better abstain from commentaries which would surely seem to you only blind and irritating. ... G.S.

The full typescript along with editorial notes and two pages of handwritten comments by Strong will be made available on the *Overheard in Seville* website.

KRISTINE W. FROST

*Santayana*.—When you say that “feeling” is “that in the nature of matter which makes it possible for it ever to be aware” I am still in doubt as to your meaning. What is your criterion of possibility in such a case? The previous existence of something like awareness?

*Strong*.—Not like *awareness*.

*Santayana*.—The previous existence of the “luminosity” which in awareness is focussed into conscious feeling?

*Strong*.—That comes nearer to my meaning. But it is focussed into *what is felt*.

*Santayana*.—Into the qualities of experience?

*Strong*.—Into these, and also into that temporary being which they have when intuited (and have not at other times). This being is what I have always meant by “luminosity”.

*Santayana*.—Then you do *not* mean merely such qualities or arrangements as give a *normal occasion* for conscious feeling—in a word, matter capable of being organised into living bodies? If you meant only this last, I should agree. But I don't think it helps at all to produce awareness that there should have been awareness, or something *like* awareness, earlier.

*Strong*.—As I have said, it is *not* awareness or something like it. But it *is* something like the temporary being which qualities have when intuited. And I *do* mean such qualities or arrangements as give a normal occasion for conscious feeling; but I do not mean *merely* these, for I think that in the occasion there must also be something to account for and produce the temporary being—something like luminosity; like it in kind, but not in status or in complexity.

*Santayana*.—There must be something to account for it; but not something like it. To this last I cannot agree.

*Strong*.—That is because we differ in our epistemological principles.

*Santayana*.—What are the differences?

*Strong*.—I will state them as I at present understand them, and ask you to correct me if I mis-state your views. We differ at three points. (1) You say that things are similar

because they contain identical universals—I say that their containing identical universals is a convenient way of thinking correctly about their *exact* similarities.

*Universals are not contained in particulars in the material way you suggest here. They are names or signs for the particulars, or heads under which particulars come!*

(2) You think that intuited qualities and shapes are universals or essences, having the same being

*The same Essence, not the same presence.*

when not intuited as when intuited—I think that they are particulars and *phantasms*, with a temporary being which they have *not* when not intuited. (3) You say that, in external perception, while we learn that real things are in space, there is no reason to suppose real space to be anything like intuited space, and that, in self-consciousness, there is no reason for supposing the psyche to be anything like the “luminosity” of the intuited datum—I say that, in both, there is such a reason. In short, you are a Platonic idealist and agnostic—I am a nominalist and gnostic.

*Santayana.*—Are the two views in each case logically connected?

*Strong.*—Yes. Your idealistic view of data as essences makes it possible for you to suppose that the essence embodied may be wholly different from the essence intuited—while my view that the datum is a phantasm, and that universals are ways of stating similarities, enables me or rather obliges me to hold that the real thing to some extent resembles the datum.

*Santayana.*—I do not see what obliges you to hold this.

*Strong.*—It is physiological psychology, making clear how phantasms are produced.

*Santayana.*—This is a rather arbitrary theory.

*Strong.*—No, it is a theory got by reasoning strictly from the facts.

*Santayana.*—You take for granted—arbitrarily—that things are more or less as we perceive them.

*Strong.*—That is *not* arbitrary. If you are not arbitrary when you think that perception shows us *that* things exist, I am not arbitrary in thinking that it shows us (cloudily and imperfectly indeed) *what* they are. It is not arbitrary, but natural and inevitable to do so in both cases. There is no reason for relying on “animal faith”

*By animal faith I do not understand any propensity to believe, e.g. in witches or immortality. I mean the confident reaction of animals to existing objects, and the expectation implicit in it, which expectation may be utterly vague pictorially.*

in the one case and not in the other. The instinct that prompts us to assume the existence of things prompts us with equal strength to assume that they are many and arranged more or less as we perceive them to be. And you admit this when you say that they are in *some sort of space*.

*Santayana.*—I can go with you part way here,

*Hardly: the difficulty is initial.*

but not the whole distance. Let me hear how you establish your gnostic conclusion, and see whether, with what I am able to grant, I can assent to it.

*Strong.*—The crucial point is that consciousness arises by natural processes. It is not an intruder from another sphere, but Nature produces it by using natural means and putting them together in a new way. What this way is may be seen from the facts of physiological psychology. These lead to a naturalistic account of the *modus in quo* of intuition.

*Santayana.*—I say in my “biography” that I have never made clear to myself how consciousness arises;

*I don't imply that I believe it arises in some unknown way by derivation. I think that impossible in anything mental, even when the antecedents are themselves mental and well known. One sound can't produce another sound.*

but I have not, so far, been able to understand your account of the matter.

*Strong.*—And I, on my side, have never succeeded in understanding how you conceive intuition—whether you think it observable, or not observable.

*Not observable. How could I entertain the other notion? Intuition is a spiritual act*

There are two possible views of it: (1) that it is like an eye, which sees without being seen; (2) that it is like a coloured light, in which the light is as obvious as the colour. The latter view is that now generally held—since James made his discovery that “consciousness” is not observable. It identifies intuition with what I call the luminosity of the datum.

.....

*Santayana.*—Do you not feel that you are in rather deep water, and arguing confidently from premisses that are far from being perfectly clear and assured?

*Strong.*—I do; and if you can point out error anywhere, I shall be most happy to alter my views. But, until you or some one else does so, I must continue to think that my analysis is clearer and sounder than any others I have met with and been able to understand.

*Santayana.*—You have accounted in your way for the flow of data and awareness, but have not yet explained how you deal with their complexity.

*Strong.*—Temporal complexity is an aspect or incident of flow, and so has been already dealt with. Spatial complexity is due to the manyness of points—for I analyse space into points, as I do time into instants—to differences of intensity caused by the heaping up of energy or sentience in each point, and to the varied forms or shapes which thus arise.

*Santayana.*—I can see how this might explain the various qualities and shapes that appear in the datum. But forms are unities, and, if they are to exist and cause shapes and qualities to appear, there must be more in the instantaneous spread of the universe than a multitude of diversely occupied points. There must be real

*What would be unreal arrangements? feel the same discomfort here. The forms most truly present in nature are not parts of nature. But without them nature could not exist.*  
unities—form-actualities and potentialities. ....

CHARLES A. STRONG

## Consolations of an Impotent Spirit

**G**eorge Santayana defines spirit as consciousness, and alleges that it is entirely impotent — an observer but not an agent in the determination of events. Many of his readers, both early and late, have been uneasy with his doctrine of an impotent spirit; on this point, his text surely deviates from his plan to formulate the beliefs of common sense. Quite aware of this reaction to his account of mind, Santayana responds that he is using the term ‘spirit’ in a sense quite different from his critics. This answer cannot fail to arouse further suspicions among these

critics; *ad hoc* definitions of the terms involved could hardly lead to satisfactory solutions of longstanding, difficult problems about mind and body. I suggest that he does have satisfactory answers to this criticism, always in the context of his system. However, I am more concerned in this sketch with a second question, perhaps subsidiary to the first, and sometimes posed in the same breath by the same critic. What possible application to philosophy might an impotent spirit have? What reasons can there be for his extended discussions of spirit, when Santayana says at the outset that spirit is impotent?<sup>1</sup>

A word about the first question; this is Santayana's response:

The critics will tell the public that I run hopelessly away from common sense in denying the material efficacy of spirit. Yet this is a misunderstanding, because neither the critics nor the public take the word spirit in my sense. They understand by it the self, the soul, the psyche: and nothing could be farther from me than to deny the interaction of the psyche — that is, of bodily life — with surrounding events. [RB 835]

For him, spirit is consciousness, but consciousness with everything except the felt experience stripped from it; but the critics are unwilling or unable to consider consciousness apart from its causal powers. The key point is that spirit is introduced not at all as a solution to the mind/body problem. Issues concerning the *causal* relationship between the body and consciousness are questions about matter; what he has to say on the subject is found in *The Realm of Matter*. On this, he makes few claims for his own theory, and consigns the problem to scientists who concern themselves with that realm. His view of *mind*, however, is not so different from accepted contemporary positions, and he makes no claim to special insights about the causal ties between matter and mind. The realm of matter, by definition, contains anything that pertains to the dynamism of nature, including the psyches of living organisms. To the extent that consciousness might play a part there, it too must be considered. What is radically different in his position is not a deviant perspective on the realm of matter, but rather the added notion of an impotent spirit radically disentangled from this puzzle about mind and matter. It is of philosophical interest in that it permits an elaboration and evaluation of things spiritual in the absence of any detailed solution to the mind/body problem. Such will be my main theme.

Throughout his discussion of spirit, consistency is achieved by taking into account a simple maxim found in one of his marginal headings, where he says of spirit: "It has no magic powers and its supposed effects are the effects of its [psychic] causes" (RS 81). I believe that this maxim is a foolproof answer to those who find his epiphenomenalist doctrine inconsistent.<sup>2</sup> Whenever some action is attributed to spirit, Santayana can point to the psychic cause of that moment of spirit as the real cause. This fundamental principle, I think, is essential to a viable epiphenomenalism; it can be found in the writings of T. H. Huxley, who is often seen to have originated the doctrine

In a quite remarkable fashion, Santayana appears to prize the impotence of spirit:

<sup>1</sup> A sample of early criticism of Santayana's epiphenomenalism may be found in John Lachs's anthology *Animal Faith and Spiritual Life* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1967) 241-290; and from a much later time in several articles in PGS, especially that of Eliseo Vivas 315-350.

<sup>2</sup> That the critic might find his doctrine implausible is another matter. On the propriety of taking spirit to be an *effect* of a material *cause*, see POML 27.

The freedom and glory of spirit come from its impotence; by its impotence it is guiltless, by its impotence it is universal, by its impotence it is invulnerably supreme. Its essence is to be light, not to be power; and it can never be pure light until it is satisfied with an ideal dominion, not striving to possess or to change the world, but identifying itself only with the truth and beauty that rise unbidden from the world into the realm of spirit. (RS 89)

This passage appears in the chapter "Freedom" in RS; similar remarks are found in the following chapter "Intuition," where he says that a leading characteristic of intuition is its "moral autonomy in physical dependence," and that its great privilege is to be indomitable (RS 105, 118).

Immortality, as conceived by Spinoza, allows the eternal part of the mind to remain even after the body is destroyed. Santayana speaks of this doctrine with some approval. Critics point to the tension or outright contradiction between Spinoza's claim and the forthright insistence, also in the *Ethics*, that the mind can last only insofar as it involves the actual existence of the body. Roger Scruton sees tension but not contradiction here; he finds the proofs obscure and unsatisfactory, but correctly sees that the issue turns on Spinoza's account of time. The mind "can last" only so long as the body does, where both are seen under the aspect of duration. However, under the aspect of eternity matters are different, and it makes no sense to speak of the disappearance of the eternal aspect of the mind.<sup>3</sup>

The following remarks on Spinoza's treatment of immortality appear in Santayana's introduction to a 1919 printing of the *Ethics*:

When a man's life is over, it remains true that he has lived; it remains true that he has been one sort of man and not another. In the finite mosaic of history that bit has its unfading colour and its perpetual function and effect. A man who understands himself under the form of eternity knows the quality that eternally belongs to him, and knows that he cannot wholly die, even if he would; for when the movement of his life is over, the truth of his life remains.<sup>4</sup>

Returning to this theme later, in the setting of his realms ontology:

Spirit dies too, but with the knowledge of its essential capacity to rise again, so that it rather sleeps than dies; and all its sufferings in so many incarnations are properly not its own, but those of the animal organism which for the moment it inhabits, and which but for this descent of spirit, would have been condemned to grow, to work, and to die without ever loving anything ideally, or knowing its own *raison d'être*. (RB 620)

This appears to suggest that that spirit has an existence going beyond any one life, that it descends from some kind of superior station. This is surely not his intention, and he can point to his doctrine that spirit when pure is divorced from the subject, so that it is reasonable to see it as common to various subjects; Santayana is pressing his assumptions to their logical conclusion. It is not easy to follow his intuition on this point.

Freedom takes on a variety of forms in Santayana's thought, one of which is a freedom "proper to spirit." He makes a sharp distinction between this, which he explicitly calls *spiritual* freedom, and *psychic* freedom; of the former, he says:

As to the freedom proper to spirit, this is no power to move matter by magic, but the fact of being sometimes liberated from distraction and permitted to be pure spirit. (RB 836)

This spiritual liberty is not a power to initiate or alter or prolong existences. Rather it is "sent like Christ into this world by an older Generative Power." He frequently

<sup>3</sup> Scruton, Roger. *Spinoza*, Past Masters Series (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) 88-9.

<sup>4</sup> "Introduction," Spinoza's *Ethics*, Everyman's Library, (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1919), pp. xviii-xix. See p. 30 above for the longer passage from which this is drawn.

appeals to religious imagery. For instance, when diseases and vices debase the body, pollute and torture the spirit:

It is then that the spirit cries in religion for mercy and grace. ... For spirit, in its essential vocation, transcends humanity and transcends existence; it is the Word that distinguishes and names all things; the Light that falling on them equally and together would reveal them in their Truth; the Love that divines in each its half-manifested virtue. (POML 285-6)

This is not orthodox, but what he calls lay religion; his existential assumption is just the psyche, and the references to religion are metaphorical, as dictated from the outset by his doctrines.

As depicted here, spiritual freedom is an achievement, a happy state, with no mention of how it may be achieved. When we raise questions about the *sources* of freedom and how it might arise in humans, we are forced to consider freedom in the context of the material realm. Psychic or vital freedom is not at all concerned with spirit:

The freedom that so many people, learned and unlearned, passionately wish to possess is a vital freedom, freedom to be themselves, and to bring to light the potentialities of their psyches, all knocking at the door of life. (RB 836)

That living creatures are free in this psychic sense is maintained by Santayana. The psyche of each individual is a participant in the realm of matter, the sphere within which all vital initiative must spring. This makes radical independence an impossibility, but a partial autonomy is possible, and a kind of responsibility is assumed. Like Spinoza, whom he appears to follow on the question of freedom, Santayana distrusts the conscious will. He holds that action has deep psychic sources frequently at odds with the superficial determinations of the will. The will for him is a conscious phenomenon, a part of the impotent spirit. It is contrasted with Will, the driving energy of the realm of matter (something akin to *conatus*); and so once again his terms exhibit the ontological gulf between the two realms.<sup>5</sup>

For spiritual freedom to be achieved, it is necessary to come to terms with that part of universal Will driving the psyche. A process of harmonisation must take place at the level of psychic impulse (arising, of course, from a further, more comprehensive impulse). This leads to a classical ethic of self-knowledge, and shows that the search for freedom is a struggle with internal as well as external contradictions. Where *psychic freedom* is regulated by its participation in a *life of reason*, there can arise *spiritual freedom*. Santayana's discussion of freedom turns on these three notions; because conscious will is subservient to the latent psyche, his text has little to say on methods of making choices.

Spinoza's observation that we typically think ourselves free on account of ignorance of the sources of our actions is enlarged into a notable feature of spirit that appears in a variety of ways. It is a quite frequent occurrence for spirit to ignore its secondary status, and to exaggerate its importance and influence. A prominent theme in Santayana's treatment of the human condition is that of egotism. This is not commonly considered to be a pressing philosophical issue. Indeed, egotism is not much distinguished from egoism in today's discourse; but for Santayana, the two are very different, in a manner that illustrates his particular notion of spirit. Egoism is to be expected, in his naturalist philosophy, although it is self-defeating in excess. As he says, it is an old human failing (and a childish one) to press too far one's own wishes and interests without heeding the equally important interests of others.

<sup>5</sup> In Spinoza's case, the will is assigned to the attribute of mind, which deals alone with the sequence of thoughts and is divorced from the causal sequence of bodily events.

However, self-interest is at the centre of his ethics, and it is self-interest that restrains this failing in a life of reason. Natural egoism and self-assertion, he says, are proper to every living creature. However egotism is an outright vice. It might be called a spiritual vice, and is for him a chief characteristic of transcendentalism and the subjective trait found in much of today's philosophy. Because it distorts the true status of a subject, it is destructive, and in the longer term can be expected to lead to disaster. Because it over-rides the just assessment of one's virtues in relation to those of others, it fails radically to represent pure spirit.

I think that many critics of the quiescence they find in Santayana's writings miss something. He does not at all dismiss the importance of political commitment and social action; indeed (like the Greeks) he thinks of morality in this context. However, his discussion of spiritual ideals takes him in a different direction, without at all setting aside the prerogatives of politics. A spiritual ideal may require us "to transcend everything in human nature except intellectual light, and lies beyond the horizon of politics" (DP 47). One certainly has the right to pursue such a spiritual life, he says; but by the same token, society has the right to control or curb such activity, if genuinely threatened by its pursuit. To curb unduly the activities of free spirits in its midst would be wrong, however, for it would be unwise and counterproductive: "It would be cruel and stupid to wish to suppress the voice of nature in any creature."<sup>6</sup>

Those familiar with Santayana's writings may spot the similarity between these and the ideas of Thomas Nagel, as expressed for instance in his excellent *The View from Nowhere* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986). His eye for residual idealism in today's theories is a delight for the follower of Santayana. The objective viewpoint — the view from nowhere — is found in Santayana, who does not just characterize it, but makes use of it throughout his philosophy. His acceptance of an absolute realm of truth, and his insistence on referring directly to psyche and other material configurations in the absence of a sure grasp of their intrinsic properties, are suggestive of the objective stance that Nagel's title announces. Along with this objective view from nowhere, in Nagel's view, one must retain within philosophy an entirely different perspective, the subjective one, which is indispensable in dealing with some of the most intractable puzzles. This is Santayana's realm of spirit.

Setting aside the many points of analogy between the two, I note one difference between the perspectives they judge indispensable — subjectivity in Nagel and spirit in Santayana. The former renounces the need to determine the relationship between the subjective and the objective. It is sufficient, he says, to say that both are parts of reality. (Is this residual idealism?) Santayana the materialist differs; spirit is supervenient on matter, and more explicitly has material sources in the psyches of organisms. Santayana is willing to speculate on how it might have evolved, hinting that it arose among mobile organisms to satisfy their need for an objective assessment of their situation, and even an objective appreciation of the needs and aspirations of other organisms. From these speculations, he secures some justification for his notion that a part of the psyche, that which generates spirit, is dedicated to objectivity in knowledge and impartiality in the appreciation of goods. Thus it is from pure spirit that the view from nowhere arises. Likewise, the culmination of a spiritual life banishes, at least for a moment, subjective cares, desires, and self-consciousness. Thus spirit seeks objectivity both in its sources and in its full realization; it deviates in principle from an unqualified subjectivity.

<sup>6</sup> See PGS 562, in "Rational and Post-Rational Morality," his fullest treatment of these issues.

Santayana offers, in the setting of his realm of spirit, an austere approach to ancient problems about god, freedom, and immortality. Mortal we remain, our psychic life is hectic, but on occasion we perceive and appreciate things under the aspect of eternity, and for a moment touch a kind of immortality. At these times, we attain a spiritual freedom, a state that is accessible to those able to exploit their vital liberty. The aesthetic appreciation of essence or the union with the good are his substitutes for worship; but to existing powers and things — perhaps designated by the term ‘God’ — we owe only understanding and piety.

ANGUS KERR-LAWSON

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## The Santayana Edition

Two years ago, the offices of the Santayana Edition moved from Texas A&M University following Herman Saatkamp, General Editor of the project, and now Dean of the School of Liberal Arts at Indiana University–Purdue University, Indianapolis (IUPUI). With generous support from the School and the University, the Edition’s work has progressed significantly, and we are pleased to announce the publication of *Book One, [1868–1909]*, of *The Letters of George Santayana* which received the seal of approval from the Modern Language Association’s Committee on Scholarly Editions. Released in the spring (2001) by MIT Press, this is the first of eight books of letters constituting *Volume V of The Works of George Santayana*. We anticipate publication of *Book Two, 1910–1920*, this fall (announced for December in MIT’s fall catalog), with the remaining six books to be issued at six-month intervals. For more information about *Book One*, view the Santayana Edition web page at <http://www.iupui.edu/~santedit/bookone.html>.

A great deal of thanks is owed to Joshua Garrison, Assistant Editor, for preparation of these volumes for publication, and we are very sorry that he has decided to resign his position on the staff to return to graduate school and finish his Ph.D. in the History of Education at Indiana University, Bloomington. We do, however, wish him much good luck in his pursuits. Johanna Resler has joined the Edition as the new assistant editor, beginning 1 June. Johanna is an English/Philosophy major from the University of Wisconsin, and has worked with QuarkXPress, the desktop publishing program that is used to produce files for MIT.

A proposal will be submitted in the fall to the National Endowment for the Humanities requesting funding beginning fall 2002 to support completion of *Volume V* and to continue the critical editing of the five books of *Volume VI, The Life of Reason*.

HERMAN J. SAATKAMP JR.  
MARION S. WOKECK

*Indiana University – Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI)*

# BIBLIOGRAPHICAL CHECKLIST

## SEVENTEENTH UPDATE

The items below will supplement the references given in *George Santayana: A Bibliographical Checklist, 1880-1980* (Bowling Green: Philosophy Documentation Center, 1982) prepared by Herman J. Saatkamp Jr. and John Jones. These references are divided into primary and secondary sources. Except for the book reviews, the following articles and books are classified according to their years of publication. Readers with additions or corrections are invited to send these to Herman J. Saatkamp Jr., Santayana Edition, School of Liberal Arts, IUPUI, Indianapolis IN 46202-5140.

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