

Overheard in Seville

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Santayana
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | | |
|---|----|--|
| | i | Table of Contents |
| | ii | Announcement |
| <i>James Seaton</i> | 1 | Santayana after September 11, 2001 |
| <i>H. T. Kirby-Smith</i> | 8 | Santayana's God |
| | 14 | The Bulletin and other Websites |
| <i>Irving Singer</i> | 15 | Santayana on Culture and Religion |
| <i>Edward L. Shaughnessy</i> | 19 | The Letters of George Santayana |
| <i>Angus Kerr-Lawson</i> | 27 | Santayana on Limited Government |
| <i>Chris Skowronski</i> | 38 | The Santayana Edition |
| <i>Kristine A. Frost Herman J. Saatkamp</i> | 39 | Bibliographical Checklist Eighteenth Update |
| | 42 | Some Abbreviations for Santayana's Works |

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ANNOUNCEMENT

The Santayana Society

2002

ANNUAL MEETING

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

Topic

George Santayana and John Dewey

Speakers

John Shook

Oklahoma State University

"The Metaphysical Inquiries of Dewey and Santayana"

Richard Rubin

Washington University at St. Louis

"The Absence of Religion in Shakespeare"

David A. Dilworth

SUNY at Stony Brook

"The Principled Differences between Dewey and Santayana"

Chair

Angus Kerr-Lawson

University of Waterloo

The session begins with comments by

Herman J. Saatkamp Jr.

on the progress of the Santayana Edition

7:00 - 10:00 P.M. 29 December

Philadelphia Marriott Hotel

Santayana after September 11, 2001

In *George Santayana, Literary Philosopher* Irving Singer encourages the reader to admire Santayana as a novelist and writer of memoirs, a literary critic and aesthetic theorist.¹ For Singer Santayana is “the first great aesthete in the history of American philosophy” (198), and, even more important, “his creativity in the literary presentation of his philosophy excels as only great art does.” Santayana’s works are especially valuable today because “[t]he world in which we now exist needs such aesthetic achievements more than ever before” (199). Santayana has been especially relevant for Singer himself because he has served “as a model of the literary philosopher trying to overcome his alienation from a world that has become increasingly oblivious of its need for the humanities” (198). Singer is not, however, entirely uncritical. Santayana, he suggests, had an “imperfect appreciation of romanticism,” perhaps because his willed detachment from personal ties left him unwilling to see “the world in terms of moral and interpersonal problems” (141), which were the problems paramount to the Romantics. Perhaps the most “serious shortcoming” of Santayana’s philosophy in Singer’s view is its implicit support for “the maxim that Might is Right.” Acknowledging that Santayana himself insists that “his doctrine is in fact more intricate,” Singer finds that his “ethical theory cannot really meet the arguments of one who believes that Might makes Right” (185-6).

Whatever objections critics might raise to particular points of interpretation, *George Santayana, Literary Philosopher* surely succeeds as an introduction to a thinker that too many otherwise educated people know only as a famous name. Singer’s Santayana is an attractive figure whose literary creativity insures that readers will enjoy his work even when they disagree. From reading Singer one would learn that Santayana was not only a gifted writer and perceptive critic of literature and art but also an insightful observer of human life who could aid an individual seeking emancipation “from possessiveness, egoism, self-deception, and the restless hunger for dubious goods” (121). This should be enough to convince anybody to begin reading Santayana’s own work, and yet there is something lacking. Singer explicitly renounces any claim to present Santayana’s work in “the more technical branches of philosophy” (5), and that is fair enough. It would be unreasonable to expect Professor Singer’s small book to cover all aspects of Santayana’s *oeuvre*; it would be even more unreasonable to expect Singer to have anticipated the events of September 11, 2001. Yet it would be unfortunate if readers introduced to Santayana through Singer’s appealing portrait failed to realize that in addition to Santayana the literary man and Santayana the analyst of metaphysical and epistemological tangles, there is Santayana the cultural critic, the shrewd commentator on politics and society. Singer emphasizes the first, acknowledges the second and, in this book, neglects the third. Yet it may be that today, especially after the events of 9/11, it is Santayana the cultural critic whose revival is most urgent.

A student introduced to Santayana through Singer’s book would not learn that Santayana had once articulated an immensely influential critique of American culture whose key term, the “genteel tradition,” became the enemy against which a

¹ Irving Singer, *George Santayana, Literary Philosopher* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000). Future citations from this text will be identified by page numbers in the text. This paper was presented to the Santayana Society at its annual meeting in Atlanta on December 29, 2001.

generation defined itself. This would be especially regrettable because Santayana's thesis might help the student come to understand why his professors in literature, philosophy and cultural studies had failed to acquaint him with a philosopher and cultural critic of Santayana's stature. Having noted Santayana's point that adherents of the genteel tradition employed skepticism to disprove the apparent materiality of the world but not to challenge the ultimate moral rightness of Protestant Christianity, the student might be ready to raise questions about the parallel willingness of adherents of postmodernism and postcolonialism — "pomo" and "poco" — to employ skepticism and relativism to "deconstruct" the very possibility of disinterested moral or factual judgments while still claiming the moral high ground on the basis of their condemnation of Western culture and all its works. The student might notice parallels between the taboos once enforced by the "genteel tradition" and those currently required by what has become known as "political correctness."

Even more regrettably, a reader who knew Santayana only through Singer's little book would not discover that Santayana, despite all his reservations about American culture, celebrated the United States as a home for "English liberty" even more hospitable than England itself. Santayana's dispassionate judgment on the superiority of English liberty over "primitive liberty" or "fierce liberty," despite the emotional and aesthetic attractions of the latter, has a permanent value, but its relevance to contemporary events is especially striking. The outstanding weakness in Santayana the cultural critic in my view is his occasional willingness to judge moral and political matters by aesthetic criteria. In his advocacy of "English liberty in America" Santayana rejects this impulse and formulates judgments that are both immediately relevant and permanently valuable.

In the wake of the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon and the attack repulsed in the air over Pennsylvania one of the questions asked repeatedly is "Why? Why do they hate us?" The question is especially anguished because the United States has not acquired territory after the pattern of previous superpowers like the empires of ancient Rome, Victorian England or pre-World War II Japan. We claim to seek only peace and democracy, and we work through the United Nations on most occasions. Why then do they hate us? More than eighty years ago Santayana provided an explanation. In *Character and Opinion in the United States* Santayana wrote:

Enthusiasts for democracy, peace, and a league of nations should not deceive themselves; they are not everybody's friends; they are the enemies of what is deepest and most primitive in everybody. They inspire undying hatred in every untamable people and every absolute soul.²

For Santayana an "absolute soul" is one who insists on having his own way, no matter what the consequences to itself and others. The "absolute soul" and "untamable people" are unconcerned with happiness, their own or that of others. As Santayana explains:

To be happy, even to conceive of happiness, you must be reasonable or (if Nietzsche prefers the word) you must be tamed. You must have taken the measure of your powers, tasted the fruits of your passions and learned your place in the world and what things in it can really serve you. To be happy you must be wise.³

² George Santayana, *Character and Opinion in the United States* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 1991). Originally published in 1920. Future citations from this text will be identified by page numbers in the text.

³ George Santayana, *The German Mind: A Philosophical Diagnosis* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1968), p. 152. Originally published in 1916 as *Egotism in German Philosophy*.

Santayana's characterization seems to apply to those, like Osama Bin Laden and his followers, who have chosen to arouse the enmity of the United States and most of the civilized world through horrific acts in an effort to impose a way of life whose severity and restrictiveness is itself at war with human nature. Yet in the chapter on "English Liberty in America" in *Character and Opinion in the United States* Santayana eloquently emphasizes the attractions of "absolute liberty," the liberty to do what you think right without compromise. This is "the freedom most fought for and most praised in the past." Absolute liberty is celebrated in song and story; it is the "liberty for which the Spartans died at Thermopylae, or the Christian martyrs in the arena" (216). Absolute liberty arouses passion and incites poetry; and yet Santayana refuses to allow the aesthetic superiority of "absolute liberty" to blind him to its destructive consequences. His analysis of the origins of the demand for "primitive freedom" rob it of its romantic glamour, revealing "absolute liberty" as finally a product of weakness rather than strength:

... the feebler, more ignorant, and more childlike an impulse is, the less it can restrain itself or surrender a part of its desire in order the better to attain the rest. In most nations and most philosophies the intellect is rushed; it is swept forward and enamoured by the first glimpses it gets of anything good. The dogmas thus precipitated seem to relieve the will of all risks and to guarantee its enterprises; whereas in fact they are rendering every peril tragic by blinding us to it, and every vain hope incorrigible. (221-2)

Santayana contrasts what he calls variously "absolute liberty" (214, 228, 233), "primitive freedom" (215), and "fierce liberty" (230) with the "English liberty" that is most fully developed in the United States. He points out that the very real political and social freedom enjoyed in England and the United States is made possible only by an underlying consensus on basic matters: "The practice of English liberty presupposes two things: that all concerned are fundamentally unanimous, and that each has a plastic nature, which he is willing to modify" (205).

The idea that the official liberties of American society are counterbalanced by a spirit of conformity has been developed by many writers, almost always in a spirit of protest and indignation. Almost fifty years ago Sloan Wilson wrote about the tragedy of the "man in the grey-flannel suit," and in the sixties Herbert Marcuse argued that the "repressive tolerance" of industrialized capitalism led to "one-dimensional man."⁴ Francis Fukuyama and others have popularized Nietzsche's notion of the contemptible "last man" alleged to be the representative citizen of modern Western civilization.⁵ Writers of the first rank, like D. H. Lawrence, and many more of the second and third ranks, like Henry Miller, Norman Mailer and Allen Ginsberg (to cite only American examples) have scorned any willingness to bow to convention while celebrating "authenticity," the more primitive, fierce and absolute, the better.⁶ Waves of neo-romantics, from the beats of the fifties, the hippies and radicals of the sixties through the multiculturalists of today, have condemned the shallowness and conformity of contemporary American culture in favor of some simpler, more authentic, more

⁴ Sloan Wilson, *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1955); Herbert Marcuse, *Repressive Tolerance, A Critique of Pure Tolerance* by Robert Paul Wolff, Barrington Moore, Jr. and Herbert Marcuse (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), pp. 81-117; Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* Boston: Beacon Press, 1964).

⁵ Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992).

⁶ For a brilliant discussion of the concept of "authenticity" see Lionel Trilling's *Sincerity and Authenticity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972).

natural way of life. The power of Santayana's analysis derives from his ability to acknowledge the attractions of the qualities associated with "authenticity" without himself succumbing to their appeal.

In my own view, Santayana's reasoned critique of the emotional attractions of Romanticism is one of his great strengths. It may be, as Singer asserts, that Santayana had an "imperfect appreciation of romanticism," but for one who remembers how the romance of revolution lent glamor to both the Nazi and Communist tyrannies, Santayana's cool dissection of the attractions of romantic intoxication seems entirely warranted. That the romanticizing of third world violence by Frantz Fanon and his epigones has provided a literary rationale for terrorism itself makes Santayana's critique all the more convincing.

English liberty, Santayana concedes, is aesthetically unsatisfying. A society characterized by English liberty lacks the passionate unity that makes for great art, the unity that is one of the sources of the intoxication of war and the pleasure of sports. English liberty, on the other hand, "moves by a series of checks, mutual concessions, and limited satisfactions ... it is a broad-based, stupid, blind adventure, groping towards an unknown goal" (216). Santayana often asserted his aesthetic dissatisfaction with the culture produced by the United States and England. He opens *Dominations and Powers* by qualifying his philosophical impartiality with the admission that "if one political tendency kindled my wrath, it was precisely the tendency of industrial liberalism to level down all civilisations to a single cheap and dreary pattern."⁷ Against its aesthetic failings, however, English liberty has one great strength, observes Santayana in *Character and Opinion in the United States*: "it is in harmony with the nature of things" (221), and Santayana the realist comments that "when living things have managed to adapt their habits to the nature of things, they have entered the path of health and wisdom" (227). Because English liberty does not demand the entire commitment that totalitarian ideologies require, it is likely to be emotionally unsatisfying. This same quality, however, lends it a universal validity:

But English liberty, because it is co-operative, because it calls only for a partial and shifting unanimity among living men, may last indefinitely, and can enlist every reasonable man and nation in its service. (232)

Santayana's commendation of "English liberty in America" is all the more convincing because he makes us feel the powerful appeal of "fierce liberty." Santayana is no apostle of progress, eager to celebrate the growth of the gross national product without regard to things of the spirit. For Santayana the "collapse of fierce liberty ... is a deep tragedy." Santayana is one of those who appreciates that "the narrower passions and swifter harmonies are more beautiful and perfect" than what English liberty looks like when it is successful, a "dull broad equilibrium" (230). The choice he makes on behalf of "English liberty" is compelling because the reader feels that Santayana is transcending his own personal taste and his instinctive distaste in drawing his final conclusion:

Absolute liberty and English liberty are incompatible, and mankind must make a painful and a brave choice between them. The necessity of rejecting and destroying some things that are beautiful is the deepest curse of existence. (233)

In *George Santayana, Literary Philosopher* Singer's major objection to Santayana, however, is that his "ethical theory cannot really meet the arguments of

⁷ George Santayana, *Dominations and Powers: Reflections on Liberty, Society, and Government* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 1995, p. xxi).

one who believes that Might makes Right" (185-6). There certainly are passages in Santayana that might lead one to believe that he is not even interested in meeting such arguments, that he looks at politics not from an ethical but from an aesthetic perspective in which the problem of "might vs. right" does not even come up. In the preface to *Dominations and Powers*, for example, Santayana writes that "In order to obtain anything lovely, I would gladly extirpate all the crawling ugliness in the world."⁸ What the political implications of that sentiment might be are unclear, and perhaps it is just as well. In *The Genteel Tradition at Bay* Santayana teases Irving Babbitt and Paul Elmer More about their moralistic criticisms of the contemporary world, asking:

Why not frankly rejoice in the benefits, so new and extraordinary, which our state of society affords? ... at least (besides football) haven't we Einstein and Freud, Proust and Paul Valéry, Lenin and Mussolini?⁹

Apparently we are supposed to rejoice in "Lenin and Mussolini" because, like football, and like poets, novelists and thinkers, these dictators make life more aesthetically and intellectually interesting for observers and commentators. Santayana does not seem concerned about what their political power might mean for those whose lives they control. In the same essay Santayana suggests that "a free mind" would appreciate societies that are "in politics and morals fiercely determinate, with an animal and patriotic intensity of will; like Carthage and Sparta, and like the Soviets and the Fascists of today."¹⁰

I do not believe that passages like those quoted above should be taken to exemplify Santayana's settled convictions. *The Genteel Tradition at Bay* is a polemical work, in which Santayana sometimes seems more interested in shocking the New Humanists than in formulating a defensible position of his own. And *Dominations and Powers*, despite the comments in its preface, is based on distinguishing between political phenomena on the basis of explicitly moral criteria, as Santayana makes plain on the first page:

In other words, the distinction between Dominations and Powers is moral, not physical. It does not hang on the degree of force exerted by the agent but only on its relation to the spontaneous life of some being that it affects. The same government that is a benign and useful power for one class or one province may exercise a cruel domination over another province or another class.¹¹

A passage in Santayana's portrait of his Harvard colleague Josiah Royce in *Character and Opinion in the United States* demonstrates Santayana's criticism of romanticism on the grounds of its unwillingness to make moral distinctions and his approval of Royce's willingness to do so against the grain of his own romantic philosophy. The passage, like Santayana's discussion of English liberty vs. fierce liberty, seems directly relevant to the events of September 11, 2001. Although the condemnation of the terrorist attack on moral grounds has been almost universal, there has been in some quarters a confusion of moral and aesthetic categories. In a story headlined "Attacks Called Great Art," the September 19, 2001 issue of *The New York Times* quotes composer Karlheinz Stockhausen as saying:

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. xxiii.

⁹ George Santayana, *The Genteel Tradition at Bay, The Genteel Tradition: Nine Essays by George Santayana*, ed. Douglas L. Wilson (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), pp. 153-96, p. 163.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

¹¹ *Dominations and Powers, op. cit.*, p. 158.

What happened there is — they all have to rearrange their brains now — is the greatest work of art ever. That characters can bring about in one act what we in music cannot dream of, that people practice madly for 10 years, completely, fanatically, for a concert and then die. That is the greatest work of art for the whole cosmos. I could not do that. Against that, we, composers, are nothing.¹²

The same story reports that after making the comment Stockhausen “retracted it at once and asked that it not be reported.” On another intellectual and cultural level, Bill Maher, the host of the television program “Politically Incorrect,” aroused controversy and was almost fired for talking about the bravery of the terrorists and the cowardice of U.S. soldiers firing missiles far from any battlefield. Maher, like Stockhausen, soon retracted his comments and insisted that he had been misunderstood. It seems reasonable, nevertheless, to suspect that both Stockhausen and Maher voiced thoughts that had occurred to many others. It seems to be the case that the terrorists were acting with great intensity as they killed thousands of people and also themselves, while their victims were going to work in an unromantic, bourgeois fashion. Those influenced by a romanticism that values authenticity above all and whose strongest term of abuse is “bourgeois” might be assisted to think more clearly about the events of September 11 by consulting Santayana’s comments about a not entirely dissimilar event, the torpedoing without warning of the steamer “Lusitania” by a German submarine, in which more than a thousand died, including more than a hundred Americans.

Thomas Mann, writing in *Reflections of a Nonpolitical Man* with all the fervor of his wartime romanticism, justified the sinking of the Lusitania in terms that verify Santayana’s characterization:

When the war broke out, Germany believed fervently that her own time had come, the moment of trial and greatness. ... The German people, as a people, completely heroically attuned, prepared to take guilt upon themselves and not inclined to moral pussyfooting ... approved of the destruction of that impudent symbol of English mastery of the sea and of a still comfortable civilization, the sinking of the gigantic pleasure ship, the “Lusitania,” and they defied the world-resounding hullabaloo that humanitarian hypocrisy raised.¹³

Santayana, of course, had not read Mann’s book when he wrote the chapter on Josiah Royce that appeared in *Character and Opinion in the United States*. Nevertheless, Mann’s language provides an excellent illustration of the accuracy of Santayana’s description of the romantic worldview adopted by Royce from German romanticism:

The wickedness of the world was no reason for quitting it; on the contrary, it invited us to plunge into all its depths and live through every phase of it; virtue was severe but not squeamish. It lived by endless effort, turbid vitality, and *Sturm und Drang*. Moralism and an apology for evil could thus be reconciled and merged in the praises of tragic experience. (116-7)

According to Royce’s own Hegelian theory of history the philosophic view of the sinking would be one that renounced ordinary conceptions of right and wrong in favor of a larger perspective, as Santayana makes clear with satiric eloquence:

... here, if anywhere, was a plain view of the providential function of what, from a finite merely moral point of view, was an evil in order to make a higher good possible—the virtue of German self-assertion and of American self-assertion in antitheses to it, synthesized in the

¹² *Atacks Called Great Art*, *The New York Times*, September 19, 2001, p. E3. No news service or dateline is listed, but the article cites a report from “Agence France-Presse.” See the official website of The Stockhausen Foundation (www.stockhausen.org) for what is described on the site as “THE TRUE STORY OF Stockhausen’s Remarks In Hamburg Following the Terrorist Attacks in the USA.”

¹³ Thomas Mann, *Reflections of a Nonpolitical Man*, trans. Walter D. Morris (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1983), p. 246. Originally published as *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen* in 1918.

concrete good of war and victory, or in the perhaps more blessed good of defeat. What could be more unphilosophical and *gedankenlos* than the intrusion of mere morality into the higher idea of world-development? Was not the Universal Spirit compelled to bifurcate into just such Germans and just such Americans, in order to attain self-consciousness by hating, fighting against, and vanquishing itself? Certainly it was American duty to be angry, as it was German duty to be ruthless. The Idea liked to see its fighting-cocks at it in earnest, since that was what it had bred them for; but both were good cocks. (124-5)

That was the judgment Royce's system of romantic historicism called for, but Royce's humanity rebelled against his system. Santayana applauds Royce's denunciation of the sinking of the *Lusitania* as an evil act, at whatever cost to the consistency of his philosophical system:

A Socratic demon whispered NO, NO in his ear; it would have been better for such things never to be. The murder of those thousand passengers was not a providential act, requisite to spread abroad a vitalising war; it was a crime to execrate altogether. It would have been better for Hegel, or whoever was responsible for it, if a millstone had been hanged about his neck and he, and not those little ones, had been drowned at the bottom of the sea. (125-6)

Santayana was indeed a moral relativist, in that he considered that the morality of any action could not be decided on an absolute basis but only from the viewpoint of those affected by the action. Yet Santayana's approval of Royce's denunciation was consistent with his overall philosophy. Throughout his career Santayana warned against the romantic willingness to conflate good and evil in the name of some cosmic historical scheme. On the other hand, he argued that the Christian doctrine of a "final judgment" served the valuable purpose of impressing on the believer "the truth that moral distinctions are absolute."¹⁴ For Santayana, however, such moral distinctions are derived not from divine commandments but from a consideration of what "natural impulses" given circumstances might allow to flourish. In practice, Santayana found, commandments such as "Do to others as you would be done by" are "rules of thumb" that can be "accepted as rational in spirit."¹⁵

Santayana the cultural critic — the shrewd analyst of religion, politics and culture — is at least as important as Santayana the novelist, literary critic and aesthetician presented by Irving Singer. I would argue that it is Santayana the cultural critic who is especially valuable to us now, at the beginning of the new millennium and the beginning of another conflict between the society and civilization organized around "English liberty" and those determined to destroy it, whatever the cost in human life and suffering, in the name of their own vision of "fierce liberty."

JAMES SEATON

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¹⁴ George Santayana, *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion* (New York: Harper, 1957), p. 98. Originally published in 1900.

¹⁵ *Dominations and Powers, op. cit.*, p. 314.

Santayana's God

Santayana himself offered “apologias” and “general confessions,” and it therefore may be appropriate that I begin by confessing that I originally conceived of this paper as a defense of Santayana against the charge of atheism. I had been asked to offer a response to, or a comment on, Irving Singer’s book, *George Santayana, Literary Philosopher*; as it happened, I had just completed a review of Mr. Singer’s book for the *New England Quarterly*, and, if I may quote myself, I said: “No better introduction to its subject exists than Irving Singer’s *George Santayana, Literary Philosopher*.” I did notice, however, that Santayana was identified there as an atheist, and I did not wish to agree with that designation.¹

Was my understanding of Santayana fundamentally flawed? I do not think of myself as an atheist and I had not thought of Santayana as atheistic. I sometimes think of challenging my atheist friends by asking them, “Where did you come from?” — confident that they will at least acknowledge Santayana’s realm of matter, whether they had ever heard of it by that name or not. I have even thought of adapting Samuel Johnson’s refutation of Berkeley as an argument against atheism, kicking a rock and pronouncing: “There you are: God!” In any case, my impulse was to defend Santayana against the charge of atheism. An atheist, we commonly understand, is a person who says that there is no God, and that is not the way I understand Santayana.

At first I thought that all I really needed to do was to show that Santayana, in according all the power in the universe to the realm of matter, finding in that realm something analogous to Jehovah and to God the Father, was fundamentally as pious as Spinoza. I ended, however, by becoming convinced that Santayana is indeed atheistic, but (as so often happens with terms once they become Santayana-ized) not in the usual sense. He is atheistic in refusing to set up any gods whatever — including, as we shall see, even Spinoza’s *Deus sive Natura*. But I would still insist that one of the last things Santayana should be accused of is iconoclastic atheism; if God is dead, Santayana had nothing to do with it.

In the concluding pages of his one-volume edition of *Realms of Being*, Santayana says:

When people ask, Does God exist? The question is really verbal. They are asking whether the reality signified by the notion of God, if we understood that reality better, could still bear the name of God, or had better be designated by some other word. This is at bottom the whole question in dispute between theists and atheists.

Now in this verbal sense, and in respect to popular religion that thinks of God as the creator of the world and the dispenser of fortune, my philosophy is atheistic. It puts all substance and power into the realm of matter; and although this realm presupposes essence, creates spirit, and involves truth, yet in its dynamic procedure it takes no account of those accompaniments, and excludes the spiritual and moral vitality implied in the word God. God, at least for Jews, Christians, and Moslems, must be a power that is a spirit, and a spirit that is a sovereign power. As I place spirit and power at opposite ends of the ontological scale, and of cosmic evolution, making spirit the fruit and enjoyment of power, but no part of its radical energy, I must be pronounced an atheist in this company. (838-39)

¹ This paper was presented to the Santayana Society at its annual meeting in Atlanta on December 29, 2001.

I have quoted at some length in order to provide a generous context for the two phrases buried within: "my philosophy is atheistic" and "I must be pronounced an atheist." Santayana has always suffered from being quoted out of context, particularly because of his mastery of the finest sort of irony, an opalescent wit, an amused glitter beneath a polished surface. "I do not mind being occasionally denounced for atheism, conceit, or detachment," he had written some years earlier," adding: "I can always say to myself that my atheism, like that of Spinoza, is true piety towards the universe and denies only gods fashioned by men in their own image, to be servants of their human interests . . ." (*Soliloquies in England and Later Soliloquies* 246).

"My atheism, like that of Spinoza." It seems clear to me that Santayana is saying that if he is to be counted as an atheist, so must Spinoza. The issue then becomes, Was Spinoza an atheist? Some people, such as those who expelled him from the Synagogue, and especially the person who tried to kill him, evidently thought so. In his incredibly wrong-headed and antisemitic address, "After Strange Gods," delivered in the 1930s, T. S. Eliot may well have been thinking of Spinoza, and condemning him as a threat to Christian civilization, when he offered the view that no viable European civilization could allow the presence of too many "free-thinking Jews." When I think of what some of our contemporary American evangelists might say about Spinoza, I only hope that they may never get around to trying to read him. Without further indirection or irony of my own, may I say that I agree with all those who have seen Spinoza as overwhelmingly pious, that for Spinoza there was nothing but God, and that to speak of Spinoza as atheistic is as reasonable as to speak of Plato as a gross and worldly sensualist. The reflection on Plato brings me back around to Santayana's irony, or rather, to one of the ironic consequences of his philosophy, in that he succeeded in suggesting that Plato's theory of ideas was indeed rather too weighed down with earthly dross in comparison to Santayana's own essences, the multiplicity and ineffability of which carry him decisively away from Spinoza despite his apparently Spinozistic conception of matter.

It is certainly true that Santayana's definition, "Poetry is called religion when it intervenes on life," (*Interpretations of Poetry and Religion* v) is not likely to win over many disciples from established creeds. Where Spinoza could allow and even encourage conventional religious belief for those not equal to his own uncompromising and rigorous pieties, Santayana's easy-going formulas sound mollifying, even self-indulgent: "Each religion, by the help of more or less myth which it takes more or less seriously, proposes some method of fortifying the human soul and enabling it to make its peace with its destiny" (*Persons and Places* 420). Especially as looked at from a late-nineteenth-century perspective, this attitude sounds more appropriate, say, to Tennyson's Lotus Eaters, who were content to subside into a drugged Elysium much like Peter Alden of *The Last Puritan*, than to his Ulysses ("To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield"). As we all know, William James responded with his accusations of "moribund Latinity" and "a perfection of rottenness" when Santayana laid his thoughts out at length in *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion*. Raised as a Catholic, Santayana admitted, "I had never practised my religion, or thought of it as a means of getting to heaven or avoiding hell, things that never caused me the least flutter" (*Persons and Places* 419). Especially in the United States, where billboards admonish us, "Attend the Church of Your Choice," Santayana's refusal to make such a choice would seem to place him on the wrong side when, in the words of James Russell Lowell's poem about the

Mexican War, which became an Anglican hymn, "In the strife of truth with falsehood for the good or evil side," and, further on, "Then it is the brave man chooses, and the coward stands aside."

Some readers of *The Idea of Christ in the Gospels* have been put off by the apparent lack of commitment, even a lack of sincerity, with which Santayana analyzes Christian theology. Treating the gospels as a successful example of "poetry intervening in life" seems irreverent to the pious, and cold-blooded to the enthusiastic — even to an enthusiastic positivist like Bertrand Russell. It may seem disingenuous of Santayana to use the word "we" as if he were, or might be, a believer himself, as when he writes: "[W]hen the image of a divine monarch is softened into that of a heavenly father, more is gained than a merely sentimental comfort; for it is truer to nature to conceive that our existence is derived, that we have been *generated* from kindred sources, than to conceive that we have been created by a sudden and intentional act of the divine will. If the creator is also our father, the affinity of our nature to his must be congenital" (183-84).

And yet, for all his detachment, Santayana could be horrified at any effort to supplant God's authority in our lives with a vulgar secular humanism; he reacted with scarcely controlled religious passion and outraged piety to a scene he witnessed when an Italian, a "short fat middle-aged man," spoke to his little daughter in a way intended to disabuse her of her Christian beliefs: "I saw the claw of Satan strike that child's soul and try to kill the idea of God in it. Why should I mind that? Was the idea of God alive at all in me? No: if you mean the traditional idea. But that was a symbol, vague, variable, mythical, anthropomorphic; the symbol for an overwhelming reality, a symbol that named and unified in human speech the incalculable powers on which our destiny depends" (*Persons and Places* 452, 453).

For Santayana, the "incalculable powers on which our destiny depends" were material, and his piety toward those powers allowed him to contemplate with perfect equanimity, and even to rejoice in, the triumphs of the physical sciences in the course of his long life. In *Dominations and Powers*, he even ventured to suggest that his own method in philosophy might have something in common with Einstein's method in physics. I see no evidence at all that Santayana tried to follow and actually understand what was going on in science, as his poetic contemporaries Robert Frost and W. H. Auden did, but there likewise exists no evidence that he ever felt the least discomfort with a scientific view of the universe. In his essay, "The English Church," he argued in a way that ought to be acceptable to any good modern liberal: "[T]he sloughing off of monasticism and ecclesiasticism have put Christianity in a position to understand and express the modern world; the reduction of revelation by the higher criticism of the Bible, to its true place in human history, will involve a new change of front; and the absorption of modern science and of democracy would complete the transformation" (*Soliloquies in England and Later Soliloquies* 87).

Carrying his argument farther, Santayana enlisted a great saint in this cause — not of secularizing the sacred, but recruiting the secular to the service of the sacred:

Saint Anselm has a famous proof of the existence of God which runs as follows: God exists, because God is, by definition, the most real of beings. According to this argument, if it should turn out that the most real of beings was matter, it would follow that matter was God. This might be thought a consequence drawn in mockery; but I do not mean to deride Saint Anselm, whom I revere, but on the contrary to lay bare the nerve of his argument which if the age had given him scope, and he had not been Archbishop of Canterbury, he might have followed to its sublime conclusion, as Spinoza did after him. (*Soliloquies in England and Later Soliloquies* 87)

Santayana himself was not, at least in his later years, prepared to follow Anselm to this sublime conclusion, saying in "Ultimate Religion": "[W]hile I set up no gods, not even Spinoza's *Deus sive Natura*, I do consider on what subjects and to what end we might consult those gods, if we found that they existed: and surely the aspiration that would prompt us, in that case, to worship the gods, would be our truest heart-bond and our ultimate religion" (Edman 592). Early readers (including, of course, William James) who gradually became aware of his predilection for the Catholic church, and his view of religion as an enterprise of the imagination, sometimes recoiled in evangelical horror at what they perceived. For such persons, therefore, the accusation of "atheism" is relatively acceptable compared with what, I believe, is even more accurately applied to Santayana: polytheism.

One of Spinoza's limitations, according to Santayana, was his insistence that every essence be actualized. Speaking of Spinoza's exhilaration in identifying himself with the force of nature, he wrote: "It was the plethora of this passion, at once sacrificial and omnivorous, that carried Spinoza into the realm of essence, and made him gloat on its infinity. He found a cruel pleasure in asserting that every part of it existed, thereby putting to shame the conceit of mankind, and in that abasement finding a fanatical compensation for his own frailty" (*Realms of Being* 160). Timothy Sprigge thinks that Santayana to some extent misconstrued Spinoza in seeing him this way, and that for Spinoza the mind of God included essences that were not necessarily realized ("Religion without the Supernatural" 17). Perhaps the difference between what Santayana thought, and what Sprigge believes about Spinoza, has to do with Santayana's according the essences an identity, a self-sufficiency, totally removed from any authentication by existence. Spinoza's radical monotheism limited essences to the mental attribute of God, whereas for Santayana each of the essences was an eternal ground of identity, infinite in number but each unique in character. "The unity and simplicity of pure Being is not incompatible with the infinite variety of essences implied in it; and many things are true in the realm of essence which, if taken to describe existence, would be unmeaning or contrary to fact" (*Realms of Being* 211).

In addition to a fat folder of Santayana's references to God and religion that I collected myself a good many years ago, I have found it helpful for the present occasion to make use of the indexes in the excellent books about, and editions of, Santayana that have appeared in recent years, simply looking for "God." I could not help smiling when I found that the entry in the Santayana Project's edition of *Persons and Places* was not "God" but rather "God(s)." Where do we find hints of polytheism in Santayana? To start with, his concept of the realm of essence authorizes the possibility of other universes than the one we happen to exist in. He is quite explicit about this, summarizing the view in a subtitle from *The Realm of Matter*: "This System is Relative and Need Not Cover All Reality." The substance of our one universe, which is all we can know of existence, our realm of matter, is single and all-powerful: "[A]ny closed circle of facts in interplay with one another and with nothing else, will form a complete universe" (*Realms of Being* 214).

In the "General Review" of *Realms of Being*, Santayana tentatively works out, or at least adumbrates, ways in which his own multilayered scheme of reality might be accommodated to orthodox Christian theology. He has just finished identifying the Father: "This assault of reality, in the force of whatsoever exists or happens, I call matter or the realm of matter; but evidently this very power is signified by the First Person of the Trinity, the Father, almighty creator of heaven and earth and of all

things visible and invisible" (846). Santayana then moves on to the Son, and then to the Son as Logos, which bears somewhat the same relation to the Father as Santayana's realm of essence does to his realm of matter: "This Logos is just as much God as is the Father, since power or substance cannot exist without form" (847). He continues, maintaining the parallel with Christian doctrine, insisting that both Father and Son, or matter and realized essence, are "original features of existence itself" (847). Up to this point many Christian admirers of Santayana might experience an increasing sense of comfortable familiarity, hearing echoes, almost paraphrases, of the Nicene Creed; but then something quite unexpected occurs, and we read: "[T]he priority of the Logos is untenable dialectically, because the Logos is only a selection from the realm of essence, and nothing in pure essence could authorize the self-assertion or dominance of one feature to the exclusion of the rest" (848). To say that "the Logos is only a selection" appears, at least to me, to make way for other "selections from the realm of essence," other kinds and types of divinities, certainly in other universes, and perhaps even within our own.

Only gradually in the course of Santayana's writings did he allow it to become apparent how radically subversive they were of ideas about God commonly received in the United States. I hesitate to attribute this to diffidence, since he was always ready to mount a spirited defense both of his person and his ideas; perhaps the word I want is "prudence" — a good pagan virtue, as well as Christian. To put it in a more positive way, Santayana was always eager to accommodate as much as possible to his own point of view, to assimilate the conceptions among which he found himself much as, in his vision of Catholicism, the Church welcomed local deities and made saints of them. In the introduction to *The Sense of Beauty* he spoke of God in a way that seems scarcely likely to raise any doctrinal hackles, at least not those hackles already smoothed by Unitarianism: "It is one of the attributes of God, one of the perfections which we contemplate in our idea of him, that there is no duality or opposition between his will and his vision, between the impulses of his nature and the events of his life" (8). To speak of God as having "impulses" might even suggest to some readers that they were listening to an earnest exponent of Emersonianism. The same paragraph that the preceding quotation introduces concludes: "There is, then, a real propriety in calling beauty a manifestation of God to the senses, since, in the region of sense, the perception of beauty exemplifies that adequacy and perfection which in general we objectify in an idea of God" (8). It would eventually require a much more aggressive disbeliever, such as Bertrand Russell, to smell out the unorthodoxy in Santayana and to try to discredit him to his readers by representing Santayana as one who had reverted to paganism, or at least to a kind of corrupt Renaissance Catholicism, like that of Browning's famous Bishop. It would be many years before Santayana began to admit with increasing cheerfulness that to most people, he was indeed an atheist, while at the same time — horror of horrors — he gradually revealed — to those who cared to look closely — that in some respects he was also a polytheist.

How can one simultaneously be an atheist and a polytheist? To answer this question with respect to Santayana, we might begin by remembering how the contrarities of his views had become evident even before he left Harvard as expressed in the witticism, which Robert Lowell, in his poem about Santayana expressed in a hypermetric iambic pentameter: "There is no God, and Mary is his mother," and by those who have called him "a Catholic atheist." My own belief is that what Santayana aimed at was a restatement of Christian orthodoxy so as to place

it on a firmer foundation, eliminating both the weakness and ambiguity inherent in excessive literalism, while at the same time insisting on increasing its capacity to accommodate new perceptions.

The first step was, with the assistance of Spinoza, to dispense with the word "God" as applied to the material universe, in the sense of a divine spirit creating and governing that universe, and open to petition or to invocation from his human devotees. Under the rubric of "Cosmic Piety," in *Reason in Religion*, he wrote: "For the more they personify the universe and give it the name of God the more they turn it into a devil. The universe, so far as we can observe it, is a wonderful and immense engine; its extent, its order, its beauty, its cruelty make it alike impressive." But in dismissing God as a name for the universe, Santayana nevertheless deifies it: "Why should we not look on the universe with piety? Is it not our substance? Are we made of other clay? All our possibilities lie from eternity in its bosom" (191). The problem is that, to adapt a subtitle from *The Realm of Matter*, "positive religions involve cosmologies" (196), and to wrest the universe from the hands of a dogmatic faith seems to strike at the foundation of the faith, dismissing its convictions as superstitious errors.

Perhaps it is time to back away from theology, an area into which I have even less business intruding than I do into philosophy. Perhaps a less controversial way to represent the ontological views of Santayana might be to say that in treating matter and essence as separate "realms," he offered his solution to the problem of the one and the many — or perhaps offered a metaphor of his intuition of how the relation of the one and the many might be represented. But because Santayana insisted on venturing frequently and extensively into religious questions, and because he often employed the vocabulary belonging more properly to religion than to philosophy, we cannot get him off the hook that easily. Bertrand Russell thought that Santayana's thinking paralleled that of Leibniz, and we may see some reason for this in the occasional resemblance of the essences to monads. But Santayana was careful to distance himself from this; if we were to accept the system of monadology, "Our universe would have no souls in it, and no substances or causes; only a cloud of psychological states, existing in no medium and produced by no agency" (*Realms of Being* 585). Without the single power inherent in our universe, the material substance, God the Father, no existence would be possible — and while they themselves lack any power, and constitute no spiritual agency — the multiplicity evident in our universe must be understood in terms of the realm of essence.

In conclusion, I would like to back away even farther from controversy and make an offer to anyone who might accept it: Avoid calling Santayana an atheist, and I will refrain from using the word "polytheism" in connection with his doctrines. To many a Christian, and to some Jews and Moslems as well, he might be thought of as a pagan devotee of Lucretius or Epicurus and therefore not deserving of salvation. I once tried to explain Santayana's views briefly to the former chancellor of the university where I teach; he is a good Catholic, and when I told him that the nuns who looked after Santayana were afraid that he was going to hell, Bill Moran responded, with a good-natured smile, "That's probably where he is." As early as *Reason in Society* (1905), Santayana expressed an inclination:

Paganism was the least artificial of religions and the most poetical; its myths were comparatively transparent and what they expressed was comparatively real. (170)

My own ultimate view of Santayana is as a theologian who is too skeptical, or too modest, to try to impose any god or gods whatever on us. In a curious way, he

almost reflects the wisdom of the United States Constitution as it pronounces on religious freedom, although he would prefer that we attach ourselves to, and submit to the authority of, a great imaginative establishment such as the Catholic Church — or, at least, the Church of England, and he would rather not endorse the priesthood of all believers. Religion should be communal — neither aggressively evangelical nor mystical. His “atheism” is no more than a guarantee of the freedom of the imagination in conceiving whatever religion best suits our own hearts and ideals.

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The *Bulletin* and other Websites

The website 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 format, readable by Adobe Acrobat, which is available on most systems or is easily downloaded.

The Santayana Edition maintains a full website 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>

Santayana on Culture and Religion

I am grateful to James Seaton and H. T. Kirby-Smith for their fine papers, and for the opportunity to contribute, in however limited a manner, to this session of the Santayana Society. The two papers you have heard are noteworthy and important in ways that go beyond my book. They merit your attention on their own. I will make some comments about the suggestive thoughts each paper contains, but in the process I will also exercise an author's right to quibble about statements that seem misleading or unfortunate in view of what I wrote.¹

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In "Santayana after September 11, 2001" Seaton complains that my book "neglects" the Santayana that was a "cultural critic, [a] shrewd commentator on politics and society." Though this is true in some degree, I should point out that my preface describes the book's contents as a testament to "the part of Santayana that meant the most to me" (p. xii). I also believe that the part of Santayana that issued into his cultural and political writings was not the part of himself that meant the most to him. This does not diminish the value of studying that other part as carefully and precisely as Seaton has. But I also think that Seaton's statements may need to be modified in a few places.

First of all, I must remark that when I spoke of Santayana's imperfect appreciation of romanticism I did not ascribe it to any "willed detachment from personal ties." On the contrary I have always rebelled against the common opinion that Santayana's work is vitiated by his quasi-monastic isolation from mass movements or the daily passions of other people.

When I wrote that the Romantics, unlike him in this regard, "saw the world in terms of moral and interpersonal problems," I was not questioning the brilliance and the profundity in many of Santayana's reflections about humankind's moral and interpersonal problems. Throughout the book I cite a large sample of those reflections. In the place that Seaton refers to, I argue that Santayana's outlook differs from the Romantics because he constantly demands a clarity of thought and even systemization of belief which they found less relevant to their lives than the need to respond to whatever confronted them in nature or society by means of deep, and sometimes unfathomable, feelings they experienced at that particular moment.

My commentary occurred in a chapter about Santayana's literary criticism. In *The Last Puritan* Santayana exceeds the boundaries of his literary criticism by creatively portraying and evaluating the emotional problems of people who were different from himself. In doing so, he reveals how great a talent he had for what Keats called "negative capability." While he wrote about the world as he knew it, the joys and agonies of his characters were not identical with his own.

This phenomenon is characteristic of Santayana's writings as a whole, and it is especially pertinent to the cultural and political issues that Seaton calls attention to. If some imaginary critic so desired, he or she might easily score points against Santayana by putting side by side the different judgments he utters from book to book

¹ This paper was presented to the Santayana Society at its annual meeting in Atlanta on December 29, 2001, in response to the two previous papers. It was written by Irving Singer and read by Glenn Tiller. The paper is under copyright.

— and occasionally in different pages of the same book. If one reads him as a literary philosopher, however, one will be less troubled by these seeming inconsistencies, which occur in most great authors whose books and essays span several decades.

Seaton rightly states that Santayana's dislike of American industrialism and the "crawling ugliness" of our world did not prevent him from rejoicing in the benefits of modern society. But when he contrasts Santayana's recommendation of the compromising reasonableness of American and English liberty with his acute admiration of the beauty and perfection of "narrower passions," I feel that Seaton misconstrues the elasticity in Santayana's dialectic. Seaton treats the outcome of this ongoing tension as proof that Santayana renounced his aesthetic taste in favor of a politically preferable condition of "harmony with the nature of things." That assertion seems largely inaccurate to me. In the section of my book that discusses this kind of question, I try to show that Santayana's moral thought systematically wavers back and forth between the alternatives Seaton depicts. It does so because Santayana's pluralistic and relativistic approach presupposes the dominant role of idiosyncratic choice at the base of any and every judgment about how to live. Not only in relation to what he himself "ideally" would prefer, but also at the ultimate level of analysis in such matters he reverts to the finality of aesthetic orientations that alter from one individual to another, from one political viewpoint to another, from one culture to another.

That is the context in which I conclude that Santayana cannot really surmount the dictum that Might makes Right. Even so, I recurrently recognize and applaud Santayana's willingness to express emphatic feelings about right and wrong as they arose in him throughout his life. This enabled him to voice his point of view as the specific person that he was, and to take a stand in issues that are political, social, and moral, not merely aesthetic. At the same time, he retains the overall perspective of one who authentically seeks to harmonize a life of reason with the disparate goals that emanate from varied dispositions of the human spirit. To that extent Santayana and William James are very much alike.

The pluralistic but also self-assertive predilection that these two philosophers have in common informs most of Santayana's development, culminating in his masterful "Apologia Pro Mente Sua" as well as *The Realm of Spirit*, and in the passages from *Dominations and Powers* that Seaton's paper addresses. Santayana's pervasive melding of pluralism and personal conviction has had a great effect on me. Without it I doubt that I could have written (in the way I did) much of what I have published thus far, in particular *The Harmony of Nature and Spirit* and *Feeling and Imagination*, the two books I consider my most important.

* * * * *

In his paper "Santayana's God" Kirby-Smith explores the character of Santayana's atheism, examining it by reference to his writings about the nature of religious discourse, on the one hand, and his ontology, on the other. Though Kirby-Smith's method of approach is valid and splendidly comprehensive, I have qualms about some of what he says.

Toward the beginning Kirby-Smith claims that Spinoza could not have been an atheist, as charged by his synagogue, because he was "overwhelmingly pious" and believed that "there was nothing but God." But Spinoza was not condemned on the grounds of lack of piety in the sense of that term which applies to him as well as

Santayana. Spinoza was attacked as a "hideous atheist" because his conception of God undermined the orthodox teaching about divinity. In identifying the deity with nature, albeit *natura naturans*, Spinoza was enunciating a seventeenth-century version of the pantheism that appeared so monstrous to all three religions of the West and for which notable heretics were put to death in previous centuries. Spinoza's philosophy did not lend itself to the theistic creeds of the traditional religions any more than Santayana's does. Yet both men were piously devoted to the truth as they saw it, and they both made the concept of piety fundamental in everything they wrote.

In our attempt to understand the meaning of that notion, I think Kirby-Smith is mistaken to interpret Santayana's modern paganism as polytheistic. In his materialist philosophy of nature Santayana found no room for a purely spiritual entity, such as the Judeo-Christian God, who would infuse all existence either in its individual occurrences or in its entirety. But neither does Santayana believe in a multitude of gods in this and any other possible universe. In one place he maintains that the religion of Apollo is a perfectly good one for people who espouse it. He means only that it is one among many mythologies that enable human beings to face their finitude with sanity, rationality, humility, and even enlightened acceptance of cosmic factuality. Though Kirby-Smith's recent book *A Philosophical Novelist: George Santayana and The Last Puritan* includes an excellent chapter on Spinoza and his importance for Santayana, he does both of them a disservice in this paper by depicting them as adherents to polytheism of one kind or another. Piety, as they understand it, pertains to something else.

With respect to Santayana, I find a clue in his reporting, in a letter, that he has "a humourous animal faith in nature and history, and no religious faith." This must be juxtaposed with his speculations about our ability "to love the love in [everything]." The latter words occur in his lecture "Ultimate Religion." They do not signify that everything in existence is able to love, or even worthy of it, but instead that spirit bestows its inherent and boundless eagerness to love upon all living entities that may have a similar aptitude. Piety manifests a sustaining, tolerant, and appreciative response of this sort. Without limiting itself to any established dogma, Santayana's vision embodies a religious commitment that shows itself in his perspicacity about the poetry and humanistic import of doctrines that he himself does not accept.

The atheism in Santayana is therefore a transcendence of all types of theism rather than a consecutive or detailed attack on any of them. He may well be called an a-theist, and his attachment to Catholicism can be seen as a demonstration of the piety he felt toward the culture to which he was born and through which he perceived patterns of meaningfulness and beauty that others might not recognize. This mode of aesthetic and possibly moral piety extends as well to the realm of matter, which Santayana takes to be an ultimately physical domain propelled by force and not by anything we can identify as love. Whether or not I am right in having contested that his insight into the love of things is deficient, he saw material being as his native soil and as the grounding for realistic, undeluded and unsentimental, judgments about the world as it actually is.

In the line Kirby-Smith has quoted, that position underlies Santayana's insistence that his atheism is "true piety to the universe." There is something very Spanish in this concept of piety. When I have lectured on Santayana's philosophy in Spain and called him a Catholic atheist, my intention was quickly grasped by members of the audience. After a lecture at the University of Granada in which I

used that phrase, a Spanish novelist and professor of English there said to me: "But that is what we *all* are in Spain nowadays!" One can only hope that Santayana's wit and wisdom will eventually be studied in the country of his birth more than it is today in the United States and England.

* * * * *

I end my response to the two papers by thanking their authors again and by noting that these papers were both written by professors of English rather than philosophy. This is entirely fitting since my book was about Santayana as a literary philosopher. Their professional affiliation may also serve to remind us that, unlike many of our contemporaries and more thoroughly than most philosophers in the past, Santayana affirmed the importance of cultivating the humanities as an interdisciplinary source of creativity within science, technology, and in general all of intellectual life. May his example as a defender of that faith be a model for the present and the future!

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The Letters of George Santayana

Santayana's letters are the most beautiful I know. To scholars and other aficionados, of course, his every syllable has value. Yet I also know that not everyone reads a great thinker's "collected correspondence" and that the enthusiasm of less riveted students can be numbed by a skein of entries that stretches across four score years. The full sweep of the single writer's lifelong postings, assembled chronologically, may appear to sacrifice grandeur: too much is ephemeral; too much is dross. This is why a narrowly identified exchange often proves popular: the give-and-take of such worthies, say, as John and Abigail Adams, Freud and Oscar Pfister, or Jacques Maritain and Saul Alinsky.

The reviewer's challenge, then, is to give the reader a sense of the writer's settled mind. The case of George Santayana (1863-1952) is somewhat different from that of the "typical" genius, for he both did and did not participate in the great debates of his time. That is, after his early retirement from the professoriate at age forty-eight and his pronounced drift into semi-reclusion, Santayana removed himself more and more from the public forum and the quotidian hurly-burly. For a time during the Great War, he accepted opportunities to lecture in London and Cambridge but gradually his disengagement from even these performances became more noticeable. Yet from his workshop for the next four decades, he critiqued the ebb and flow of philosophical and religious thought and the changing standards of taste in western culture — those intellectual currents he called *winds of doctrine*. But Santayana's preference for solitude and fewer commitments did not keep him from the museums or the theater. Moreover, he cultivated his friends and relatives for long years, often through letters, documents beautifully written and alive with wit, sophistication and acute awareness of the major intellectual ground-shifts. He remained *au courant*.

Yes, psychological tensions attended Santayana's life, but they did not prevent his achieving a place in the pantheon. Still we need to know something of this "complex personality," as William Holzberger has called him, if we are to appreciate the impact of his spiritual extirpation and transplantation into what seemed to him a zone unfriendly to his Spanish soul. In this we find ample evidence of his often strong feelings of alienation. We know that he never took U.S. citizenship. And we know that he developed a bristling contempt for American intellectual vacancy, an animus that carried far beyond his student years in New England. In 1911, making his only journey to the American West, Santayana spoke at Berkeley of the lethal split between America's clanging Babbitry and its underweight feminine fastidiousness. Neither geography nor natural vistas could satisfy his demand for the blessings of civilization. As he wrote to Horace Kallen, his sometime graduate student: "California, on the whole, disappointed me, ... [T]he people are all ... from Newton Centre, Mass."¹

The Letters of George Santayana makes up Volume V of the ongoing Santayana Edition: i.e., publication of the authorized canon and approved by the Modern Language Association's Committee on Scholarly Editions. As readers of this *Bulletin* know, that enterprise operates under the general editorship of Herman J. Saatkamp, Jr., and is published by the MIT Press. Four volumes have already been issued:

¹ William Holzberger, ed., *The Letters of George Santayana*, Vol. V, Book 2 (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), pp. 59-60.

Persons and Places: Fragments of Autobiography (1986); *The Sense of Beauty: Being the Outlines of Aesthetic Theory* (1988); *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion* (1989); and *The Last Puritan: A Memoir in the Form of a Novel* (1994).

Volume V of *The Works of George Santayana* is a rather rare phenomenon: it has been scheduled for release at six-month intervals in eight separate books. Veteran scholars will not be surprised, of course, if this ambitious projection misses its deadlines occasionally. To date, Books One (covering 1868-1909) and Two (1910-1920) have been published, in 2001 and 2002, and provide the basis for this report. Each unit is designed to cover a period of intense epistolary output: several as much as a decade, others only three or four years. Book One, because it spans the philosopher's undergraduate and graduate years at Harvard and runs through nearly the full span of his professorship there, is the exception to the rule. Book Two picks up with his permanent separation from Harvard and the United States, his World War I years spent mainly in England, and his preparations for launching an introduction to and a four-volume statement of his mature philosophy (1923-1940).

In his exemplary introduction to the *Letters*, textual editor William G. Holzberger points out immediately that "George Santayana ... was one of the most learned and cultivated men of his time" (1: xxix). In both his early promise and his career performance, Santayana's letters vindicate Holzberger's observation. For it is the evidence of two met criteria that lift the philosopher's record of correspondence to a plateau of eminence: a ubiquitous adherence to noble themes; and a remarkably constant literary beauty. As he wrote to Logan Pearsall Smith "... [Y]ou know I can't very well separate style from thought" (2: 319). He was one of the twentieth century's preeminent litterateurs.

Yet his teachers and colleagues had not always been pleased therewith. As early as 1888, when his student was submitting work from various European study stations, William James chided Santayana: "This is a little too much like a poem, the merit of it too much like a poem's merit" to satisfy the philosophy department.² This output of lyric verse dates from the early 1880s through the early 1900s and shows him already to be an *homme de lettres*. Even his "academic" productions tended to confirm the perception of him as aesthete-poet-philosopher: *The Sense of Beauty* (1896) or *Three Philosophical Poets* (1910). But, of course, he was a legitimate philosopher, a fact made obvious in his overall *oeuvre*, including the letters.

Santayana knew the history of philosophy as few students ever have. This did not assure infallibility, of course, but it bolstered his confidence: "Have you read [Julien] Benda's capital book on Bergson?" he wrote Kallen.

It relieved me (*sic*) of all my qualms about my essay, which I feared might seem too severe. ... I begin to fear ... that I have taken him too seriously. (2: 128)

He was able to see contemporary doctrines against the full background of western philosophy from the Greeks through the Schoolmen to the Enlightenment. Such broad knowledge invested him with the authority to decry the waywardness and mere topicality of whole schools, whether the British empiricists or the Critical Realists.

² Ralph Barton Perry, *The Thought and Character of William James*, Vol. I (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1935), p. 405.

Man of Letters

One treasure of *The Letters* is the light they shed on Santayana's friendships with Harvard classmates and students: Henry Ward Abbot, Boylston Beal, William Cameron Forbes, Benjamin Apthorp Gould ("Bags") Fuller, Warwick Potter, some of them models for characters in his single novel, *The Last Puritan* (1935). And, because he felt deep affection for them, Santayana responded honestly to their opinions. He did not hesitate to correct a mistaken notion: "... your view of Catholicism and orthodoxy in general is pitiful. Allow me to tell you that you don't know what you are talking about" (1: 58-9). To Beal, another member of the Harvard class of 1886, he wrote with great tenderness about what we lose in the death of a parent:

... [Y]our mother's feelings and influence were like old lace and old silver and old holy days and pleasant usages; they typified and encouraged a feeling for the sanctities of life more than they confined this feeling. I think I can see how you came to appreciate and love other traditions—the English ones especially—in sympathy, rather than in opposition to your own; because what you had at home, although it was something local [and] comparatively narrow, was the right sort of tradition: it had love of fineness in it, rather than tyrannical prejudice. (2: 396)

The most fully documented of Santayana's friendships was that which he cultivated with Charles Augustus Strong (1862-1940), philosopher and psychologist. In the late eighties they shared the Walker Fellowship, an award given by the Harvard Philosophy Department to worthy graduates to pursue further studies in Germany. Over decades Strong and Santayana shared living arrangements in various European study stations: Fiesole, Paris, London, Rome. Santayana admired Strong's intellectual tenacity and integrity, even if, as he wrote to Fuller, who had taken graduate work with him, "... I have been separated from him and have missed him, for in his quiet dull way he is the best of friends and the soundest of philosophers—good ballast for my cockleshell" (2: 327). For more than a half century they kept up an amazingly spirited personal and professional correspondence. For years they argued amiably on how we may know truth, a deeply epistemological-psychological question. Endlessly each attempted to clarify for the other (and perhaps for himself) certain critical terms: *cognition*, *consciousness*, *essence*, *psyche*. The issues are subtle, but if we wish to pursue them, these letters help us to understand their positions. Tandem letters from Santayana (12 January and 25 February, 1919 [2: 338-42]) are splendid examples of this exalted exchange. The following excerpt from Santayana, 2 November 1913, is typical.

The word consciousness does not seem to me ambiguous. It means what Descartes called *pensée*, the fact that somebody is awake and having experiences that, as they differ from death, deep sleep, and psychic non-existence, constitute self-existing and indubitable facts, and have moral importance. Where there is consciousness there is a shade and a beginning of happiness or unhappiness; and there is also a shade or beginning of cognition. (2: 149)

If we seek an overview of Santayana's Harvard years, his friendships and trials, we can hardly discover a more useful summary than that rendered by Professor Holzberger in his synopsis (1: xxx-xxxii [repeated in 2: xxxiii-xl]). The philosopher never enjoyed "professing" philosophy, even though his roster of students included the names of T. S. Eliot, Felix Frankfurter, Conrad Aiken, Gertrude Stein, and Walter Lippmann. Nor did he feel at home in the world of academic conferences, required publications, and unseemly professional bickering. Even as a graduate student he had written to William James about philosophy's noble detachment from an imagined *raison d'être*:

I confess I do not see why we should be so vehemently curious about the absolute truth, which is not to be made or altered by our discovery of it. But philosophy seems to me to be its own reward, and its justification lies in the delight and dignity of the art itself. (1: 90)

As Holzberger points out (1: xlvi) Santayana saw the philosopher's *modus vivendi* as a vocation, his situation removed from workaday affairs.

President Charles W. Eliot, who was slow to promote the young instructor to professorial status (even though James defended the promotion), had taken note of Santayana's tardiness in publishing "useful" books. Santayana was not a team-player, nor had he tried to be:

My relations with President Eliot and with other influential persons had always been strained. I had disregarded or defied public opinion by not becoming a specialist, but writing pessimistic, old-fashioned verses, continuing to range superficially over literature and philosophy, being indiscriminably a Catholic or an atheist, attacking Robert Browning, a prophet of the half-educated and half-believing, avoiding administrative duties, neglecting the *Intelligentia*, frequenting the society of undergraduates and fashionable ladies. . . .³

The younger man would always see Mr. Eliot as the ultimate philistine. As for himself he wrote to "Bags" Fuller, class of 1900, that he knew he was unsuited for teaching and did not fit in.

The wonder is that I endured and was endured so long. The only Harvard that in any measure held my affections and with which I could have almost identified myself was that of the "nineties" or rather, of 1890-1895; but the awful cloud of Eliot then overhung it, and made life impossible. Before and after that, Harvard was only an accident and a temporary necessity in my life; and especially since I became a professor I did nothing but save money so as to get out of it. (2: 171-72).

It should be conceded: Santayana sometimes seems merely ungrateful to Harvard and Boston. After all, hadn't this citadel of American higher learning (and the Boston Public Latin School before it) stoked his poetic fires and encouraged his literary proclivities? Influential Bostonians, moreover, especially the powerful female patrons of the arts (among them Isabella Stewart Gardner, Sarah Wyman Whitman, and Nancy Saunders Toy), had embraced him as an exotic and refreshing sophisticate and invited him into their salons. Long after he had severed his ties to *alma mater*, Harvard made many overtures that spoke loudly of its own pride in and high regard for Santayana's achievements: an invitation to read the Phi Beta Kappa poem in the 1924 commencement ceremonies; the offer of the Norton Chair of Poetry for 1928-29 (his student, T. S. Eliot, would accept that post in 1932-33); being recommended for appointment as William James Professor of Philosophy (1931); and honorary degrees in 1935. But Santayana declined them all, seeing in them only empty and self-serving gestures. Still, it is hard to imagine that he allowed himself to display petulance in the face of these compliments. One wonders: did he offer a left-handed compliment when he wrote to Van Wyck Brooks in 1927 that "the good things [about America] are football, kindness and jazz bands"?⁴

No! Something other than mere peevishness bedeviled Santayana and surfaced more often in his letters, I think, than it did in any of his public writings. It was just this: this native of Madrid was simply not in his element in the Harvard milieu. Reflective, European, and "Catholic," he was offended by an incongruous American buoyancy before the stark reality of life's essential sombreness; by the cant that made

³ George Santayana *Persons and Places* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986), p. 395.

⁴ Daniel Cory, ed., *The Letters of George Santayana* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), p. 226.

the college just another agency created to serve “the world of business”; and by the invincible unitarian logic that seemed wholly dismissive of mystery. He saw personified in Charles W. Eliot and in Eliot’s elective system a fundamental threat to the classical curriculum. For survival, as it were, Santayana crafted a personal stratagem, fealty to another set of traditions: *Catholicism*.

The Elements So Mixed

“All roads still lead to Rome,” he wrote to Fuller in 1913 (2: 154). Perhaps, but this was not the ascendant view at Harvard in his days there. And why did he, who did not “practice” any form of Christianity, so often write to family and friends of his admiration for the Roman Church? The answer has two parts, the first connected to his regard for the institution’s ancient nobility. This esteem, for example, is articulated in consecutive letters from Santayana to classmate Henry Ward Abbot. Although they were written in the year following their graduation (1887), these entries represent the philosopher’s lifelong *afición* for traditional and chastened things, even if he could not believe in the Church’s doctrines. First,

I have never believed in God, or the freedom of the will, or immortality, or a universal consciousness, or an absolute right and wrong, except in the Orthodox Catholic sense and for strictly devotional and ecclesiastic reasons. ... Spinoza was the man I believed in always, as the alternative to Catholicism. (1: 51)

On the other hand, as he wrote a month later:

The fact is Christianity is still a possible system, seeing that intelligent men are still able to believe it. If you or I are not able, what a piece of foolish arrogance it is in us to vituperate those fortunate mortals (*sic*) whose mental kalleidoscope (*sic*) still presents the old and beautiful pattern. And how vain it is to wish to disturb them, when we know that the least shock will destroy that vision, and that probably we may turn and turn forever without finding it again. The trouble with you, my dear fellow, is that you are still a dogmatist, and believe that nobody has a right to have a picture different from yours. This seems to me the vainest of all superstitions. (1: 60-61)

He saw Catholicism, that is, as a worthy presence in the rational scheme of things. To his half sister, Susana [Sturgis] de Sastre, he wrote in 1911, “In respect to the Church, I think I am in greater sympathy with it politically than I was previously. ... The Church is an integral part of European civilization, as it has been for the last thousand years and more” (2: 63). Because he believed that Catholicism upgraded the moral and aesthetic standards of modern life, Santayana could reassure the young Daniel Cory (later to become his literary executor): “... you may be sure that, should you really become a believing and practising Catholic, it wouldn’t in the least diminish my respect for your mind or my affection for you: on the contrary ... I have ordered two of Maritain’s books, so that you will find Catholic reading here when you come ...”⁵ All this was quite sincere, of course.

Indeed, near the end of his days, Santayana asked to be buried in “neutral” Catholic ground (a difficult request). Cory arranged to have his friend’s remains interred in the Spanish Tomb of Campo Verano in Rome,⁶ even though the Spanish Embassy found it awkward to allow the burial without at least a symbolic religious gesture. But sentiment alone had not motivated this complex man: his Catholic

⁵ Daniel Cory, *Santayana: The Later Years: A Portrait with Letters* (Braziller: New York, 1963), pp. 67-8.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 325-26.

sympathies also provided him with a certain psychological armor. He could claim to stand on the side of tradition and classicism. Here then was a way to counter the unnerving Protestant uplift he knew at Harvard. (As Henry James had once observed, "It's a complex fate, being an American")

No one who knows Santayana's work would deny his consummate mastery of English prose. Nor did he seek to mute his literary voice. But, unlike Thomas Hardy (1840-1928), who, after he published *Jude the Obscure* in 1895, turned from creating novels to writing poetry, Santayana reversed the order. In the 1880s and '90s he was recognized as a poet in the ascendancy. Indeed, Jessie Belle Rittenhouse, herself a poet, included his verse in her collection of *The Younger American Poets* (1904). By this time, however, the philosopher had stopped working as poet *qua* poet. Thus he wrote to her: "I am not an American and hardly a poet. ... I pray you to reconsider your intention and to relegate me to the camp of the wingless philosophers, where I belong" (1: 261). True, a poetic presence forever animated his style. And when Santayana selected poems to be reissued two decades later, he acknowledged the importance of his young man's work to his later achievement: "... as to the subject of these poems, it is simply my philosophy in the making."⁷ Other worthy poets, his own students among them, often admired this sensibility in Santayana's work: Eliot, Stevens, Robert Lowell, the other "Harvard Poets," et al.

The story of the novel's gestation is even more compelling and will surely be amplified in letters yet to be published. Holzberger points this out:

The numerous letters referring to *The Last Puritan*, his novel begun in 1889 and completed over a period of forty-five years on 31 Aug 1934, describe the way in which a modest story of college life evolved into a major study of American culture and modern civilization. The letters incorporate a thoroughgoing statement of Santayana's own critical interpretation of *The Last Puritan*. (1: xxix)

That it became a Book-of-the-Month Club selection only enhances the story.

Santayana's relations and correspondence with family members is uneven. Brought from Avila to his mother's house, first in Beacon Street and later in Roxbury, "a decayed old suburb of Boston," he lived from age eight to seventeen with Doña Josefina and his half siblings. They knew near poverty and never entertained, even if his mother had once been married to a Brahmin Sturgis. If he respected his mother, they were not close: "[S]he was Spanish—we never spoke English together" (2: 410). Near the end of his professorial days at Harvard, when she had slipped into deep dementia, Santayana came upon a small packet: "I read my own letters to Mother before burning them. They were very impersonal and I learned nothing from them that I didn't perfectly remember" (2: 57).

If Santayana loved any woman, it was his half sister Susana, who had first acquainted the young Bostonian with the charms of English. Holzberger tells us that Santayana wrote to Cory, long after her death, that Susana was "certainly the most important influence in my life" (1: 89). A vigorous Catholic, she had taught him his catechism and had, thereby, no doubt reinforced his Spanish identity. Over the years he repaid her attentions by reporting to "Susie" from his various European travel stations. A typical and lovely example (January, 1897), posted to her in Avila, tells of his stay in the British Cambridge (1: 179-183). The reader might wish to look it up. He shared his affections and opinions with her: on family matters, to be sure, but also on friendships, politics, and religion.

⁷ George Santayana, *Poems: Selected by the Author and Revised* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1923), p. xii.

Susana had married Celedonio Sastre, an Avila widower with six children. Perhaps surprisingly, Santayana found comfort and affection among them and often spent summer holidays with them. When Doña Josefina died in 1912, he wrote what he knew only Susana would fathom: that, if he had not been close to their mother, he had admired her courage.

What a tremendous change this is! Mother was the absolutely dominating force in all our lives. Even her mere existence, in these last years, was a sort of centre around which we revolved, in thought if not in our actual movements. We shall be living henceforth in an essentially different world. I hope you and I may be nearer rather than farther from one another in consequence. (2: 70)

Holzberger's Achievement

The scholarship that undergirds the Santayana Edition is impressive by any standard. This is especially true of the *Letters*. To a large extent the notes, editorial apparatus, and introduction are the result of a collaborative effort by the staff of the Edition, especially the splendid "detail" work done by Kristine W. Frost, associate editor. Professor Holzberger has provided the groundwork for much of this scholarship, of course. Clearly he possesses a vast knowledge of all relevant documents (and how to locate them). The notes alone are a fine contribution, as they follow immediately upon letters and provide a mine of information about persons and events. Indeed these glosses often give an uncanny sense of the moment at hand. For example, Santayana stopped writing poetry in 1901. Had he achieved anything worthwhile in the view of serious students of the art? Here is a note supplied by Holzberger.

William Archer (1856-1924) was born in Scotland but worked in London as a drama critic and for various papers. In 1919 he assisted with the establishment of the New Shakespeare Company at Stratford-upon-Avon. He included a selection of Santayana's poems in his *Poets of the Younger Generation* (London and New York: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1902), 373-84. Archer's commentary compared Santayana's powers as a sonneteer to those of Shakespeare. (1: 235)

One caveat: those who read the letters of a classic philosopher can surely be expected to know the names of his predecessors and major contemporaries: Aristotle, Plato, Spinoza, Nietzsche, and John Dewey; or other luminaries: Dickens, Molière, Henry James. But no harm.

Of course, much of what the editor has done will serve readers' needs throughout the next six installments. The 26-page "Introduction by William G. Holzberger," cogent and comprehensive, will be reprinted in each number. But, appropriately, each book will also be individualized by its own preface to complement the years covered; and each will benefit from a "list of letters" contained, arranged chronologically. The cross-referencing in the very ample indices also serve well: e.g., "Columbia University/Santayana lectures at" (2: 253); and again, "speaking engagements/ Columbia University" (2: 569).

What is a "critical edition"? In the Textual Commentary we are informed: "... [I]t is 'critical' because it allows the exercise of editorial judgment in making corrections, changes, and choices among authoritative readings. The editors' goals are to produce texts that accurately represent Santayana's final intentions regarding his works and to record all evidence on which editorial decisions have been based" (1: 417). Holzberger also instructs us about a "plain-text transcription": an approach, he tells us, that was created by the editors of *Mark Twain's Letters* (Edgar Marquess

Branch, Michael B. Frank, and Kenneth M. Sanderson [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988], Vol. 1, xxvi-xxvii, and xlv):

“Plain text,” the Twain editors point out, stands in contrast to the two principal types of transcriptions of texts: “clear text” and “genetic text.” Transcriptions in “clear text” are devoid of editorial symbols; information regarding authorial revisions is provided in footnotes or in appropriate sections of the editorial appendix. Transcriptions in “genetic text,” however, through the use of arbitrary symbols (such as angle brackets and arrows), profess to show any and all revisions that the author made on the holograph. The concept of “plain text” is to represent authorial revisions by signs more natural and less arbitrary, thus making a clearer and more immediately intelligible text for the reader. (1: 431)

Holzberger’s 16-page Chronology is a fast-forward review of events that begins with pivotal moments in the lives of Santayana’s parents in the late 1840s and carries through to 1955, three years after the philosopher’s death in Rome. All this saves much searching through other sources.

Professional editors and manuscript scholars are those most likely to pore over the daunting Textual Notes. This catalogue offers many pages of specialized information, matters clearly intended for scholars who will pursue further work in the various repositories identified at the head of each piece of correspondence. One who has need and skill to go beyond what is given can follow the editor’s lead and carry forward, thus armed. (I do not stand in the ranks of that august legion.)

William Holzberger’s achievement is grounded in the supreme virtues of every top-echelon scholar: patience and persistence. I do not hesitate to predict that, when completed, this eight-book opus will stand as a very landmark of modern scholarship. *Bravo.*

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Santayana and Limited Government

Although Santayana wrote about reason in society in his early years, and about a rational political order in his last book, he was never a political philosopher in the sense of advocating one specific form of government over another. Indeed, in the preface to that last work, *Dominations and Powers*,¹ he voiced his desire to see all types of society from within with toleration and understanding. In all of them, he sees the emergence through human genius of a measure of spiritual freedom and happiness, different societies flowering in wholly different directions. It is this wonderful diversity which is at risk in the developing world economy.

In my personal contacts I found [all types of society] tolerable when seen from the inside and not judged by some standard unintelligible to those born and bred under that influence. Personally I might have my instinctive preference; but speculatively and romantically I should have been glad to find an even greater diversity; and if one political tendency kindled my wrath, it was precisely the tendency of industrial liberalism to level down all civilisations to a single cheap and dreary pattern.²

Recent discussions of limited government have of course not drawn at all upon Santayana's ideas; but at least one commentator believes that his analysis throw light on the issues. In a short but appreciative 1992 study, Noël O'Sullivan argues that *Dominations and Powers* gets to the level of the first principles of limited government without introducing an ideological bias, something nobody else has managed to do.³ Santayana, he says, "offers one of the most profound and subtle responses to the crisis of humanism that the present century has witnessed" (23). Calling Santayana's naturalism a "philosophy of modesty," O'Sullivan continues:

... naturalism enables him to provide the first completely non-ideological theory of limited politics in the history of modern political thought. Such a theory, he considered, provides the only means of rescuing the ideal of limited government from the pernicious illusions with which liberal intellectual orthodoxy has surrounded it during the past two centuries. (77)

An important theme in *Dominations and Powers* is Santayana's suggestion that a world government is needed, and that a rational world government would limit itself to ensuring economic prosperity and political stability; it would not seek to dominate religion or the arts. He points to an underlying fact here, which leads him to the moral distinction he wants to make. Different races and societies have a flair for developing in different cultural directions, a radical divergence which is harmless and in fact an intrinsic part of human morality. However, all humans survive and nourish themselves under similar conditions, so that a uniform economic regime would be advantageous. A world government ought therefore to restrict itself to the *economic arts*, and to leave the *liberal arts* undisturbed. Here Santayana touches on the topical theme of limited government, although without the latitude on economic matters usually found in today's proponents of minimal government.

O'Sullivan sees damaging incoherencies in Santayana's position, despite its promising non-ideological starting point. He feels that consistency would require of

¹ George Santayana, *Dominations and Powers: Reflections on Liberty, Society, and Government*, (Scribner's: New York, 1946). This book will be cited as DP hereafter. The author is grateful to the Liberty Fund for sponsoring discussions of this text.

² See page vii of the Preface to DP.

³ *Santayana*. Thinkers of Our Time Series. The Claridge Press, 27 Windridge Close, St. Albans, Herts. England AL34JP. References to this monograph will consist of the page number alone.

Santayana's system that no intelligent political behaviour is possible, both because no genuine knowledge is available and because of his treatment of mind as impotent. I believe but do not argue here that Santayana's substrative materialism does yield a consistent account of intelligent behaviour, if we take into account the sense he gives to his two categories of matter and spirit.

In place of such general considerations, I shall confine my remarks to two particular issues raised by Santayana's political thoughts. One concerns his advocacy of a universal government that will refrain from interference in the liberal arts. His proposal that the universal government confine itself to economic matters may appear to indicate a change from the views he expresses in earlier books; there his paternalistic approach extends to the arts. My conclusion will be that he does not expect the individual nations making up the universal economic government to give up their interest in the liberal arts; insofar as these represent a coherent tradition, they will be justified in continued leadership in these areas.

A second issue is one raised by O'Sullivan. He maintains that Santayana confuses the vacant liberty espoused in romanticism with the notion of civic liberty developed in the British tradition, and that he mistakenly condemns the latter in his critique of the former. Insofar as Santayana attacks a romantic politics based on the notion of vacant liberty, O'Sullivan is in agreement; here Santayana's analysis is admitted to make perfect sense. However, he repudiates the assumption, which he believes is made by Santayana, that liberal democratic political thinking is subject to the same criticism. In his estimation, the tradition stemming from British seventeenth century thought is based, not on the notion of *vacant liberty*, but on the different conception of *civic liberty*. The concern with the latter is only that all should be protected from arbitrary measures on the part of the state. Santayana's preoccupation with German idealism and the romantic revolt against tradition led him to misconstrue classical non-romantic liberalism and to overlook its merits. O'Sullivan feels that elected parliaments, the protection from arbitrary measures, and the rule of law, would offer the varied members of society a better guarantee of the range of rewarding activity desired by Santayana. I shall comment on this criticism of O'Sullivan, without attempting to give a full answer to his arguments. In this context, I mention some of Santayana's objections to liberalism that seem not to hang in any direct way on his concept of vacant freedom. In conclusion, I argue that Santayana is not confusing vacant and civic liberty, but opposes both to the vital liberty that is the goal of good government.

Dominations and Powers.

Near the end of his life, after the Second World War, Santayana gathered together a mass of short unpublished essays on society and politics which he had accumulated since the time of the first war, and had kept in a trunk under the heading, "Dominations and Powers." Although almost 90 years old, he laboured to thin out the materials and arrange them into a book whose full title adds to this heading the subtitle *Reflections on Liberty, Society, and Government*. At the start, he inserted several sections, including one called "Composition and Plan of This Book," where he tells of his intention to discuss society, not in moralistic terms, but in terms of the *powers* which generate and propel it. His concern is whether the members of society are able to exercise their primitive vital liberty, and to avoid *dominations* — that is to say, to avoid powers which thwart this self-realization. As might be expected, this long book is less obviously unified and concentrated than his earlier works.

Nonetheless, the theme of dominations and powers, which had come to him shortly after publishing *The Life of Reason* in 1906, serves to impose an interesting superstructure upon this accumulation of some 115 short chapters. Because Santayana treats the powers influencing politics without advocating any special course of action, O'Sullivan is justified in calling the work non-ideological. Santayana's main concern is with the spiritual fruits that spring up in different social economies, but he treats them as off-shoots of the material psyche and its setting in physical and social organizations.

Thus all political considerations must be subordinated to *powers*, material forces that arise in the realm of matter; or, as he calls it in DP, in the generative order. These powers have in themselves no moral status, and are not at all relative. However, within the array of powers, Santayana makes a division based upon the moral consideration of advantage between those powers which are harmful *dominations* and the remaining powers which are virtuous ones. It is tempting to speak — as O'Sullivan does (89) — of powers and dominations as disjoint opposites and to consider powers always to be virtuous. Moreover, Santayana often speaks of making a distinction between dominations and powers, which might further this suggestion. Nevertheless, as hostile circumstances and influences which hinder the realization of human potentialities, dominations *are* powers.⁴ Since O'Sullivan's analysis of DP does not deal particularly in these terms, it is not at all marred by this oversight. No name is given by Santayana to powers that are beneficent.⁵ Perhaps this is because he likes to speak of the benefit of working out harmonies among the various powers facing persons and societies, rather than singling out specific beneficent ones.

Government, for Santayana, should aim at achieving vital liberty for all citizens. By vital liberty he does not mean merely being free to do as one likes on the spur of the moment; persons will be vitally free only to the extent that they can realize their natural potential and draw spiritual fruit from their activities. It stands in contrast to vacant liberty, in which external obstacles are removed, but there is lacking either the material context or inner psychic consistency to exploit this relaxation of constraints. Like the notion of a domination, both these kinds of liberty have an essential moral aspect; and the quest for vital liberty consists in a struggle to avoid dominations, through wise accommodation and a clear formulation of ideals.

I make several very brief comments about O'Sullivan's general treatment of Santayana before turning to politics in the next section. About our access to genuine knowledge of the world around us, O'Sullivan attributes to Santayana a complete scepticism: "What the physicists and chemists say has no relevance" (58). However, at no time does Santayana claim that scientific theories are irrelevant. He insists that scientists do make genuine knowledge claims, so long as one understands this as the non-literal, symbolic kind of knowledge which is appropriate for animal cognition. Such knowledge is perfectly adequate for human concerns.

More serious for politics is O'Sullivan's contention that effective action is rendered impossible by Santayana's doctrines, which do not give us the capacity to deal intelligently and creatively with problems in the political arena. He sees in the text the following sceptical hypothesis:

⁴ "All dominations involve an exercise of power," he says, but "not all Powers are Dominations" (DP 1).

⁵ Santayana uses the term 'virtue' in a related sense (See DP 3).

It is the assumption, more precisely, that politics can never play a creative role in the construction and maintenance of social harmony. This assumption follows directly from Santayana's claim that the material psyche is the agent in politics. (99)

Santayana is indeed sceptical about how likely it is for a rational society to arise and to maintain itself. But O'Sullivan is exaggerating our incapacity for intelligent behaviour; for all their deficiencies, human agents can on occasion do better than this.

According to O'Sullivan's critique, if spirit is impotent and a material psyche is the agent of all change, then political thought can have no creative role in achieving social harmony. And Santayana agrees to the extent that (following Spinoza) he assigns to mind only the prerogative of understanding. *Thought* does not create changes in material events or anything else; it is the psyche which generates both the changes and the spiritual (symbolic) understanding of those changes. According to his ontology, all creative activity must come from matter, and in particular human creativity must come from a material psyche. Nevertheless, there is human creativity! A psyche can still bring into being intelligent activity, and spirit in a well-integrated psyche can still think clearly about the concrete issues involved. He offers at the beginning of *The Life of Reason* a conception of reason as an accommodation of impulses at the material level which adapts contrary impulses so as to harmonize them. Although he refrains from attributing action either to thoughts (spirit) or to ideas (essences), he nevertheless admits intelligent action as something arising in matter through psyche.

Limiting Government.

It is near the end of DP that Santayana inserts his musings concerning a universal world government which would closely control economic and political activity throughout the realm, but would permit free association of groups within society for religions, for the arts, and for other spontaneous collective activities, so long as these did not threaten the stable political arrangements and institutions. The chief focus of his proposal is the need for freedom in the liberal arts, where tastes and traditions range widely and should retain their variety, as against the economic arts, where everybody's needs are similar and no such sweeping liberties are called for.

Superficially, an ideal regime such as that described by Santayana might seem rather like that espoused in libertarian circles, where government is told to get off everybody's backs, and to keep interference in their lives at an absolute minimum. Santayana attacks the interference of a world government in religion and the arts, something libertarians would accept; but they might then point to recent discoveries about how advantageous is an unhindered free market in the economic sphere. They might argue that their libertarian persuasion could be obtained from Santayana's views merely by bringing his thinking up to date on that one point. Would not Santayana, had he today's knowledge of the virtues of the marketplace, also remove many of the economic powers of government, inasmuch as private concerns are so much better able to generate wealth? This would leave a state conforming in considerable measure to libertarian ideals.

It would be difficult, however, to find an ideal less congenial to Santayana than the libertarian conclusions of the above argument. In regard to government intervention in the economy, Santayana concedes that a free economic system will generate more riches (a fact some were unwilling to concede before the 1980's). The state-controlled economy he advocates, "will probably, and perhaps beneficently, produce rather less than was at first produced by rival capitalists and private

enterprise, since there will be less ardour both in running risks and in earning higher wages" (DP 382). But happiness rather than wealth is the aim of rational society, and Santayana is unperturbed at the prospect of reduced revenues. Nor does he show as much concern as he might for the enormous powers which the state will take on in controlling the political and economic machinery. Indeed, his respect for the authority of a stable government stands in sharp contrast to typical libertarian views. Contemporary society has too many people who are doing whatever they wish, he feels, but are not getting what they want; the open-ended freedom which is everywhere insisted on is failing to lead to a rewarding life for its citizens. He believes that a more controlled economy and a tighter more stable political regime would yield the conditions in which members of society could more effectively exercise freedom in areas where their moral and cultural choices are radically divergent and for which, therefore, liberty is needed. In these areas, characterized in DP as the liberal arts, external domination would be vicious. However, in Santayana's view, the closely regimented political economy would not be a domination, at least in principle.

Santayana's call for liberty in the arts appears to be in conflict with some of his harsh criticisms of liberalism; for he has also suggested that voluntary private societies cannot supply adequate spiritual nourishment to citizens. He argues (DP 352-355) that radical liberalism must be seen as a domination and not as a rational order. His objections here are similar to those voiced in earlier writings, although now phrased in the terminology of DP. According to a radical liberalism, official interference can only be justified to preserve the safety of persons or property. This means that the pursuit of an intellectual goal or the maintenance of some happy tradition is left to the individual alone. In the nature of things, however, this approach is destined to be sterile. Ideals and goals, he insists, must arise in the material concourse of human interactions; they are always the free expression of something arising in the material realm. Each society can be expected to reflect the material configuration of its arrangements. A political liberalism itself encourages and informs its own kind of material arrangements: Santayana lists universal competition, free trade, the right of inheritance, compulsory state education, monogamy, severe laws against libel and slander, and a science in which all share (DP 353). The critical question which arises is whether the ideals which naturally emerge in this setting are or are not ideals that are liberal in the sense of allowing the spirit to flourish. His conclusion is that they are not conducive to moral freedom or vital liberty, and sees them as generating a "social bondage that enslaves the mind."

The political order that a radical liberalism would establish is therefore a Domination and not a rational order. Any perfect social order would be excluded by it; for it demands acquiescence in the Will of the majority and in the ways of the average man. The liberty that it would leave to the private mind would be a derisive liberty. For we should be invited to make our own way through the uncharted spaces of vacant possibility; ... Liberal society is therefore compelled to form all manner of voluntary private societies to replenish the human vacuity of its political life; but these private societies, being without power or material roots, remain ghostly and artificial. (DP 353)

Private societies that arise under liberalism, he argues, "cannot fill the void in the heart of the political animal, hungry for friendship, for action, for distinction, for perilous adventures, and for rare accomplishments to be achieved in common" (DP 353).

Suppose that the universal political order advocated by Santayana prevails. Are the private societies more likely to thrive here than under liberal politics? This would

mean that the freedom he there concedes to the arts would be more congenial to them than freedom in liberal society — which is not obvious.

This brings us back to Santayana's proposal about universal government. When the central government is enjoined not to intervene in religion, the arts, and other non-commercial and non-political activities, is this not a formula for just the liberal regime being condemned, or at least a large part of such a governance? If the population of a universal empire forms private sub-societies according to cultural tastes, without any encouragement or disapproval from that world government, is there not perhaps a vacant liberty in operation here? The sub-societies or nations within the unhelping empire would sit isolated from the material concerns of its citizens; they might be unable to develop sufficiently robust cultural traditions to provide spiritual benefits comparable to those imposed upon the citizenry in earlier societies. In Santayana's earlier writings, he assumed that the society would champion the arts as developed spontaneously within that civilization, no doubt to the detriment of alternative forms of expression, and welcomed the spiritual fruits that followed. Has his proposal about universal government compromised to some extent his denunciations of liberalism?

The answer to this question, if there is to be one consistent with his other claims, must hang on the amount of official encouragement he expects to come from the remaining local governments. Although he does not bring this out at all clearly, I believe that he imagines the state governments within the political union to retain much of the sway they currently held over their citizens. Only the framework of economic and security arrangements would be regulated from above. In regard to any one of the organic societies within this political union, there is little evidence that Santayana wanted to give up the paternalism advocated consistently in his writings. He nowhere renounces his belief that the fullest cultural realisation of the individuals in a society depends upon sanctioned organisations and institutions. Inasmuch as these are legitimated by accepted tradition, they may continue to enrich spiritual life.

It seems inevitable that this larger political unit or empire can only arise when pre-existing nations come together in some kind of larger union. This would assume separate nations with their own traditions, and his plea is that the larger government shall limit its interference with the liberal side of these traditions. If carried out, this would leave in place such encouragements to the liberal arts as already existed in these nations:

Another way of making room, in a great nondescript empire, for various definite moral bodies, was accepted long ago in the East and may have a great future. A Cyrus might conquer vast regions; he would upset only their rulers, substituting his own satraps and slender garrisons; but this domination remained superficial, and little more than a tribute levied, and perhaps richly repaid, in view of the protection secured against further invasion or tyranny. (DP 452)

Implied here, although not stated explicitly, is that the authority of the institutions within member nations, hopefully benevolent authority, would continue. It would not be replaced by an open liberalism. Rather it would be, if circumstances were right, the means for encouraging a genuine freedom — a vital rather than a vacant freedom. It seems that universal government would have to be imposed from above on existing national governments, each of which maintained its own prior regulation of liberal arts. Perhaps we have here the "moral representation" Santayana has in mind, freed from the abuses envisaged by O'Sullivan (98-9). Each local regime would have its sanctions in tradition; if the global sovereign power were benign, there would be no interference from above in respect to the liberal arts; and if the local regime were sensible, it would resist liberal forces of dissolution from within.

Santayana is clear about the sort of universal government he does not have in mind. Toward international associations like the United Nations, he is outspoken in his contempt. From its inception, he heaps scorn on the League of Nations, and he transfers this condemnation to the later United Nations. The impotence of the latter, he says, is symbolized by a veto which gives to the principle of stalemate an institutional status. This does not mean that he rejects universal government, and indeed he sees an urgent need for it in today's overwrought and perilous world.⁶ However, the global regime he envisages "would have to be a particular government, rooted in the generative order of society, and not an alliance of sovereign states or a universal parliament" (DP 456). As proof that a particular government is required, he does not go much beyond pointing to these failures as confirmations. His point no doubt is that states will refuse to relinquish their sovereignty on important issues (and this is borne out by the actions of the current United States government). Moreover, in a confederation of nations or a global parliament, there will remain an option to withdraw, or at least a perception of such an option, and this would thwart Santayana's intentions.

If this reading of Santayana's concept of a universal government is correct, there would be a minimal deviation from his earlier notions. The traditional societies that he favours would have to yield their economic and political independence to a worldwide regime; but they would retain their moral traditions, that part of their lives which most concern Santayana.

The two conditions Santayana calls for are not easy to reconcile. On the one hand, the universal, all-powerful government shall be a particular administration rather than any kind of United Nations. On the other hand, this central regime is supposed to restrict itself to the exercise of economic arts, and to restrain itself from interference in liberal arts. Many will say that this is unlikely to succeed, and that the only way to accomplish the latter is to place binding constraints on the universal government. Santayana will agree that his rational configuration is unlikely to arise; still, if it does arise, he sees it as a formula for vital liberty.

Liberalism in a Thankless World

Santayana's attack on liberalism is prominent in both early and later writings. According to O'Sullivan, this attack hinges on the confusion of civic with vacant liberty (101); more on this below. However, if we look at Santayana's various arguments against liberal doctrine, the part played in them by vacant freedom is not at all clear; in some cases, these are rather different from the ones he applies to the romanticist politics of vacant freedom. One such anti-liberal argument is Santayana's claim that liberal politics leads society away from liberality in regard to the arts and from cohesion in regard to morals. A second reason for his hostility to liberals is their inclination to strip from government powers that in the long run are required for survival. Finally, he argues that liberalism can only arise in a decadent society, in which liberal reforms often lead only to further dissolution.

The term 'liberalism' is notoriously ambiguous; important for Santayana are two distinct senses of the word. His approving use of the term 'liberal arts' in DP refers to liberalism as a principle of thought, which must be distinguished from liberalism as a political doctrine. The two are quite different, and indeed his dislike of political

⁶ "... the world is positively crying for a universal government, and almost creating it against all national wills" (DP 453)

liberalism is based partly on its tendency to enfeeble the free development of humanistic arts:

The word liberalism sometimes describes a method of government and sometimes a principle of thought. If liberalism were simply a principle of thought it would throw the mind open to all alternatives. It would smile on all types of society, as on the birds, reptiles, and carnivora at the zoo. It would remember that every organic being prizes its own type of perfection and strives to preserve and to reproduce it. In so far, however, as liberalism is a method of government, it may well cause those who live under it to think any other method of government strange and irrational, or even wicked; especially well-to-do people, since liberalism protects their comfort and otherwise lets them alone. ... In this way liberalism as a method of government may end by making liberalism difficult as a method of thought. Hence the surprise and distress of so many liberals at the appearance of a Lenin, a Mussolini, or a Hitler.

This passage comes from a 1934 article which Santayana was asked to write on Italian fascism for the *Saturday Review*.⁷ In those years, it was capitalism which appeared incapable of dealing with the sick and unemployed, whereas fascism seemed to some, and communism to others, as an improvement over a failed capitalism. Certainly Santayana always felt that a people is better served when society is organized and its energies are guided in a paternalistic manner. He was attracted by some aspects of the new Italian policies before Mussolini had discredited himself as a pompous and foolish leader. About the ambitions of Germany, he had of course expressed his repugnance in 1915, and at no time changed his view that the egotism and worship of will in so many of that country's philosophers was a sign (although of course not a cause) of political immaturity or worse. Santayana was somewhat annoyed at the narrowness of the topic given him by Henry Canby from the *Saturday Review*, sensing that perhaps a vindication of American liberalism was looked for. He told his friend Daniel Cory that he wanted to write on the broader topic of order, rather than on fascism; his title would be "Alternatives to Liberalism," and it would make his point that commercial liberalism militates *against* the ideal of liberal thought.⁸

Liberalism as a system of government, then, makes liberalism difficult as a method of thought. According to his account advocates of liberal democracy betray a marked intolerance toward other types of society, something he observes is distinctly non-liberal. Modern liberal regimes see themselves as more enlightened and humane than all other forms of governance, and they are evangelical about requiring other more traditional societies to adopt their reforms. Driven by these humanitarian perceptions and by ideals of equality and rights which they take to be absolutes, they see other forms of governance as evil and intolerable, an opinion which hardly expresses a liberal stance.

Insofar as the changes required by these liberal regimes conform to the "authority of things," there should be no objection by Santayana. But on the one hand, these regimes are often not concerned to heed this authority; and on the other, they do tend to encroach on the liberal arts. In the section entitled "The United States as Leader," Santayana argues that, if in a position of authority, the U.S. would indeed interfere in education, as it did in its occupation zone in Germany after the Second

⁷ "Alternatives to Liberalism," *Saturday Review*, June 23, 1934. This essay appears on pages 108-115 of *Birth of Reason and Other Essays*, Daniel Cory, ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968); it will be cited as AL.

⁸ Santayana liked to make provocative statements on this theme. See the comment on Lenin, Mussolini and Hitler at the end of the above passage, and his approval in the citation at the outset of any society *other than* industrial liberalism.

World War (DP 459). There were good reasons for interference in this case. However, he continues with more credible reasons, and predicts "intervention in the traditional life of all other nations, not only by selling there innumerable American products, but by recommending, if not imposing, American ways of living and thinking" (*ibid*). Santayana is not as clear as he might be about what feature of liberal politics militates against liberal thought, and presents it more as an observed fact. However, it is not clear that this assertive aspect of liberalism would stem from the doctrine of vacant liberty, and indeed appears opposed to this doctrine.

In a second argument, Santayana finds fault with liberals for their tendency to rely on pious hopes rather than on viable institutional solutions to problems, and to ignore the fragility of society with its pre-eminent need to protect and strengthen itself against alien forces from outside and destructive internal changes. O'Sullivan neatly appeals to Santayana's terminology here, and describes this tendency as a failure to take into account the *powers* underlying the dynamics of society. Although Santayana's sympathies were "engaged" on the allied side in the First World War, for instance, he was appalled at the credulity of the liberal leaders of the victorious allied nations and their illusion that "peace in our time" might arise under the powerless institutions set up in Geneva. Liberals were deluded to think, in their distress over the carnage of the first war, that it was some sort of unique event whose recurrence could be averted, in virtue of this universal revulsion and of good will on the part of all members of the "debating society" at the League of Nations. He remarks, in 1922: "An ancient city would have thought this war, or one relatively as costly, only a normal incident; and certainly the Germans will not regard it otherwise."⁹ Although perhaps nursing illusions about the underpinnings of a viable society, romantics inspired by a notion of vacant liberty are not notably prone to pious hopes about human welfare.

Despite the tension Santayana notes between liberalism as a method of thought and a political doctrine, the two are closely tied in his mind; and his dissatisfaction with the credulity of the victorious democracies stems in part from their illusion that the appeal of liberal thought was too attractive to be ignored.

Another shortcoming of liberalism, in Santayana's view, is that although it passes as a method of government valid for all times and places, in fact it is only a possibility in a decadent society; and there it serves as a destructive force. This is an old theme with him, that the reforms pushed through by liberal activists are aimed at inequities and weaknesses of the institutions of a waning traditional society:

But liberalism presupposes very special conditions. It presupposes a traditional order from which the world is to be emancipated. It presupposes heroic reformers, defying that order, and armed with a complete innate morality and science of their own by which a new order is to be established. (AL 108)

Liberal reformers would not be taken so seriously in young self-confident growing nations, which see the value of their institutions compared to what preceded them, and are not likely to tear them down when certain troubles arise within them. The reformers in modern Western society often have no positive alternative to propose, and in many cases are motivated by resentment and anger. Their reform may alleviate a genuine problem, but little attention is paid to other consequences of the changes made. These can inflict damage upon valuable traditions of their society, when made with no recognition of the fragility of the community they are destroying.

⁹ See page 105 of *Soliloquies in England and Later Soliloquies*, (London: Constable, 1922).

The stability of traditions founded in solid institutions makes this destruction a slow process. But in the end, he says, "once the traditional order has been thoroughly destroyed, that kind of heroic reformer may well become obsolete. His children will have no grievances and perhaps no morality" (AL 108-9).

They do not see that the peace they demand was secured by the discipline and the sacrifices that they deplore, that the wealth they possess was amassed by appropriating lands and conducting enterprises in the high-handed manner which they denounce, and that the fine arts and refined luxuries they revel in arise in the service of superstitions that they deride and despotisms that they abhor. (DP 438)

In Santayana's estimation, liberals fight for progress in specific areas, often by attacking entrenched institutions; but they fail to see or perhaps to care that, ironically, the main consequence of their actions is to hasten the fall of an already unhealthy society. This by no means implies that Santayana himself claims to hold an easy solution to the problem; but he has no taste for radically destructive remedies, nor any faith that revolutions ever improve matters. A society will not survive if it is not strong and resilient, and if it fails to have sufficient vitality, none of the reforms will be of avail

Two points are worth mentioning here. The children of these heroic reformers, he says, will no longer have grievances, but they will perhaps have lost their morality. Now these liberals will hardly abandon their morality of humanitarianism and charity; so it is clear that Santayana means much more by morals than just this. It is a measure of the success of liberalism that, at least in the English-speaking universities, morality is largely seen in the narrow sense. Again, one may ask how liberalism has survived so well, if it is as destabilizing as Santayana implies. His answer to this is that liberalism trades on a firm well-established tradition, bolstered by institutions. As O'Sullivan puts it: "The survival of a pre-liberal heritage, then, has thus far concealed the destructive nature of liberal doctrine" (44). He calls this a skilful anticipation of an objection, but it is should not be ignored that this explanation sits comfortably in his materialist philosophy; these pre-liberal institutions are set in the realm of matter, and more than rhetoric is needed to destroy them. Verbal protests and agitation can only have their damaging effects when they eventually undermine actual existing political institutions and social practices.

Perhaps Santayana's most basic objection to liberalism is that he finds it naïve: in its zeal, it is "based on a childish simplification of human nature and history" (DP 201). In the first place, it is naïve to think that a society can thrive if its government is stripped of powers necessary for its viability and vitality. A second objection is also based on a naïve view of political reality — an over optimistic expectation of the good will of others. The virtue of liberalism, he says, is "a sort of intellectual kindness or courtesy to all possible wills." However, this kindness leaves "the inoffensive liberal helpless before unkindness" (DP 436). According to Santayana's ethic, liberality of thought — admirable in its place — should not be allowed to weaken political resolve. Sympathy toward the views of others and charity toward their persons — these are the traits of a spiritual person; but they should not be allowed to obscure the ideal of an enlightened self-interest, either in personal morality or in political life. Thus liberals are apt to miss the hard facts of politics and the value of their own traditions, due to confusion of these with the interests of others and an appreciation of other traditions and alien virtues. They allow their liberalism of thought to interfere with the rational pursuit of political ends.

Civic Liberty

To the complaint that a rational society should not coerce its members, or should at least coerce them as little as possible, Santayana responds:

And the justification of any society exercising coercion on persons born and bred in its territory, as does the government of any nation or country, rests precisely on the *necessity* of such government, which softens and controls the fatal pressure that in any case nature and savage man would have exercised on the individual. Society arises by natural instinct, occasion, and habit; it may be in turn a saving aid and a cruel domination; (DP 354)

Coercion is a given, then; even in the most libertarian of societies, he finds a pronounced level of coercion. In liberal democracies, no less than in more autocratic states, there are such pressures, even though they might not appear to be coercive. And since it cannot be avoided, the pertinent question is whether suitable institutions “soften” and “control” the pressures upon individuals, so as to allow spirit to prosper. In Santayana’s eyes, the institutions of political liberalism are pressures inimical to spiritual growth; they are dominations. Libertarians might have a problem discerning coercion in their unshackled utopian economy; but Santayana is not the first to claim that the practice of catering to the “ways of the average man” leads to a domination.

As O’Sullivan points out, Santayana believes that political liberalism fails by misconceiving the kind of freedom open to humans. Notwithstanding the variety of reasons Santayana gives for rejecting liberalism, he makes it clear that among these is its tendency to offer only a vacant liberty: “for we should be invited to make our own way through the uncharted spaces of vacant possibility” (DP 353). That liberalism is tied to vacant freedom, as O’Sullivan says, is a part of Santayana’s text (See DP 430). Of the nineteenth century liberals — “Protestant pedants in frock coats with virtues protected by wealth,” — he says that they had a certain measure of vital liberty for themselves. They were trying to raise others to their level and to foster “a strictly humanitarian morality and social decorum.” However, “they did not perceive that what they offered mankind was vacant freedom only, with no direction assigned to it.”

O’Sullivan asks: “Why does Santayana fail to notice the distinction between vacant and civic liberty?” and answers that Santayana’s focus is on “the all-pervasive influence of the romantic tradition in the modern world.” Why does Santayana overlook the fact that “the essence of liberalism is not a doctrine of *vacant* liberty but of *civic* liberty” (101)? O’Sullivan sees a “serious misunderstanding,” since “Santayana seems to assume that *all* liberal democratic politics are, almost by definition, romantic politics.” I question the suggestion of confusion. O’Sullivan is closer to the truth when he speaks of “neglect of the civic ideal.” Santayana does *neglect* civic liberty, not because he confuses it with vacant liberty, but because above all he is asking of commercial liberalism whether it affords a positive vital liberty to the citizenry — what he elsewhere calls moral freedom. It is not to confuse the civic liberty of liberalism with romantic liberty to say that neither is a good path to a genuine freedom. One might be preferable as a precondition to a positive freedom, but both are negative freedoms.

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The Santayana Edition

We are very happy to announce the publication of Book Three [1921-1927] of *The Letters of George Santayana*, which appeared in June 2002. Previously, Book Two [1910-1920] was released in mid-December 2001, and Book One [1869-1909] was published in the Spring of 2001. All are parts of the eight-book edition of Volume V of *The Works of George Santayana*. Thanks to the work of the Santayana Edition team under the leadership of Herman J. Saatkamp, Jr., General Editor, with Textual Editor William G. Holzberger and with the substantial support of Indiana University-Purdue University, Indianapolis (IUPUI), the process of editing seems rhythmical and every six months successive books may be expected. Like all the previously produced volumes of the edition, these newly published ones were also printed by The MIT Press and given the seal of approval of The Modern Language Association of America's Committee on Scholarly Editions. The work on Book Four has been practically completed and its publication may be expected soon.

Satisfaction about this progress has been reinforced by support from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). A two-year grant received in May 2002 may be seen as appreciation of the work done by the Santayana Edition and as enhancement for the future; its \$20,000 direct funds and \$60,000 matching funds will give significant and much appreciated support to the project.

Marianne S. Wokeck, Editor, was on a long-planned sabbatical for 2001-2002, and in January, Kris Frost, Associate Editor, celebrated sixteen years at the Edition; their systematic effort is a major contribution to our undertaking. Johanna Resler, Assistant Editor, and Kimberly O'Brien, Research Assistant, both of whom joined The Santayana Edition in 2001, should be thanked for their immense work on the preparation of these volumes.

For more information about the project, view The Santayana Edition web page at <http://www.iupui.edu/~santedit>.

Krzysztof (Chris) Piotr Skowronski, a Santayana scholar from Poland, has been awarded a Kosciuszko Foundation Fellowship for the Academic Year of 2001/2002. It may be hoped that his stay at the Santayana Edition at IUPUI and at Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee, as well as his meetings with top experts on Santayana, will result in better recognition of that philosopher in Poland too. Skowronski's scholarship has been focused upon three goals: firstly, introduction of Santayana's writings to Polish readers (philosophical presentation accompanied by translations); secondly, studies on its actuality and applicability; and thirdly, investigation into Santayana's system, with special attention to axiology.

KRZYSZTOF PIOTR SKOWRONSKI

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BIBLIOGRAPHICAL CHECKLIST

EIGHTEENTH 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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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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