

Overheard in Seville

*Bulletin of the  
Santayana  
Society*

No. 22  
Fall 2004



*Bulletin*  
*of the*  
*Santayana Society*

No. 22 FALL 2004

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## ANNOUNCEMENT

### *The Santayana Society*

2004

#### ANNUAL MEETING

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

#### Speaker

*Joel Porte*

Cornell University

"Artifices of Eternity: The Ideal and the Real  
in Santayana, Stevens, and Williams"

#### Commentators

*James E. Seaton*

Michigan State University

*David A. Dilworth*

SUNY at Stony Brook

#### Chair

*Angus Kerr-Lawson*

University of Waterloo

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

*Brandeis* (Third Floor)

Boston Marriott Hotel

# A Free Man's Worship: Santayana and Russell on Transcendence

In "A Free Man's Worship," a very interesting and in some ways uncharacteristic essay originally published in 1903 and reprinted in *Mysticism and Logic*, Bertrand Russell sets out what he takes to be a bleak picture of the world that we inhabit and offers an account of how we might best live in that world.<sup>1</sup> His account bears a certain similarity to Santayana's own vision of the world and, at the same time, what he calls a "free man's worship" might be thought to overlap with Santayana's "spiritual life." Both are concerned with "eternal" things. As Russell puts it, we are "to burn with passion for eternal things ... this is the free man's worship" (ML 53). It is my purpose in this discussion to investigate those apparent similarities and to argue that, on careful examination, they vanish.

Not only is Russell's vision very different from Santayana's but it is not, in the final analysis, a coherent account. At times we are enjoined to "burning with passion for the eternal" so as to be lost to the world of change and, at others, it seems that such passion might just be a way to improve the temporal. But if I so burn, why will I care for the temporal at all and why is this passion not itself a bit of the temporal and thus temporary? Russell can't seem to make up his mind. Santayana sees Russell's moral view, on its substantive side, as "impetuous" at worst and romantic at best. It is impetuous because it counsels abandoning the world but without a clear justification. It is romantic because when it seems to abandon the world it actually remains tied to it. As a version of the spiritual life, Russell's position is only half-hearted. In the final analysis, it offers us no guidance. As Santayana complains, "It leaves us quite in the dark." At the same time on its theoretical side, it is confused in a most fundamental way for it reads as an unconditional property of an object what is in fact a projection of the subject.

In preparation to write this essay, I decided to consult Santayana's correspondence for the period in which Russell's essays were published (1910-1920).<sup>2</sup> There I found a letter to Russell in which Santayana announces that he will be publishing a review of Russell's *Philosophical Essays*, a collection published in 1911, but he makes no reference to *Mysticism and Logic*. Imagine my pleasure when, while consulting a Russell bibliography for another matter, I accidentally discovered that *Mysticism and Logic* was originally published as *Philosophical Essays*. I would have Santayana's comments to guide me and to compare with my own assessment of the work. I will first lay out Russell's basic argument and then develop some key points of Santayana's criticism and my own.

Russell begins with a story about creation, attributed to Mephistopheles, in which the creator looks on as humankind becomes aware of the madness and cruelty of this world. In a desperate attempt to hide the true, we humans conclude that all is for some greater purpose and that only renunciation of what little the world offers can ever

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was presented to the Santayana Society at its annual meeting in Washington, D. C. on December 29, 2003. Russell's *Mysticism and Logic* (Garden City, Doubleday Anchor Books, 1957) will be referred to in the form (ML ...).

<sup>2</sup> Santayana, G. *The Letters of George Santayana*, Vol V of *The Santayana Edition*, Book Two 1910-20, ed. William G Holzberger MIT Press 2002.

improve our lot. For all this we are profoundly thankful. Having renounced all but the worship of God, humankind is destroyed and God decides that this was indeed a good play that should be performed again. Russell concludes "Such in outline, but even more purposeless, more void of meaning, is the world which Science presents for our belief" (ML 45). This is a very strange comparison, for the world of the fable is purposive, if only in terms of the grotesque purposes of the playwright, while the world presented by science is devoid of all purposes. However, perhaps we should not put too fine a point on matters here, for Russell wants us to see that in the scientific world, all human achievement "must be buried beneath the débris of a universe in ruins" (ML 45). Death will not only take each one of us but ultimately all of us. As Russell says, "no heroism ... can preserve ... life beyond the grave" (ML 45). It is only in such a world of "unyielding despair" that "the soul's habitation" can be built. What sort of habitation might that be?

Suppose that we grant, for a moment, that the sort of vision Russell has outlined is broadly correct — I think that Santayana would do so — what follows from this? Why is there "unyielding despair?" What is it about this picture that should imply such despair? Well, nothing that we do will last. Finally our very existence will be lost in the universe. Even if we flourish it will only be for a moment, so to speak. But again, what follows from this? Why are temporary goods any the less good? Russell seems to recognize this himself. He says, "Man is yet free, during his brief years, to examine, to criticize, to know, and in imagination to create" (ML 46). But if we are free why limit the domain of creation to the imagination? A hearty meal may not last forever but it is nonetheless a wonderful thing to enjoy. The excitement of the winning touchdown loses its luster after a few days and will be forgotten long before I am dead but it is, in the moment of its occurrence, an exquisite gem. Even the creations of the imagination are temporary. Much of Greek literature is lost to us, but some of its buildings are still standing. These too will be gone in time. Certainly not much time will pass before no one remembers me or this essay but the pleasure and interest of its creation are undeniable. What then is the problem about value that resides in the world that Russell imagines we inhabit? That the natural world will not preserve and cares not for the goods we love may strike us as sad but it does not imply that we are foolish for pursuing them, especially if the pursuit is itself such a good.

Let us return now to Russell's own proposal. History here is none too pretty. The earliest humans found nothing "worthy of worship"<sup>3</sup> but power itself and in that light generated a long record of "cruelty, torture ... and human sacrifice" (ML 46). But surely only that which is good is worthy of worship and the world of fact, contrary to the best accounts of Christian theologians, is not good. From all this Russell concludes:

If power is bad, as it seems to be, let us reject it from our hearts. In this lies man's true freedom: in determination to worship only the God created by our own love of the good, to respect only the heaven which inspires the insight of our best moments. In action, in desire, we must submit perpetually to the tyranny of outside forces; but in thought, in aspiration, we are free, free from our fellow men, free from the petty planet on which our bodies impotently crawl, free even, while we live, from the tyranny of death. (ML 49)

What can it mean to say that power is bad? Here the curious story with which he began may loom larger. We have seen that Russell mis-describes the relation between the story and the scientific account. Perhaps that is no accident! It may be a symptom of Russell's own misunderstanding. If the world of science is like the world described in the story it is a very bad world indeed. Thus the story provides the essential

<sup>3</sup> Russell nowhere in this essay offers us a definition of "worship."

psychological setting for his argument. The important point here is that in the story we are treated very badly and intentionally so. Our lives merely serve to entertain a tyrant. This is clearly bad and the agent of such an action is bad as well. So when Russell tells us, "Such, in outline, ... is the world which science present for our belief" (ML 45), we are lead to believe that that world is bad. But this conclusion is without justification, for the world of science is devoid of purposes and agency in the sense required by the judgement.

The powers that be are the conditions of our existence and our successes. Of course, when we do not exist, they will be the conditions of our non-existence and they will often thwart our efforts. Power in itself, like everything else, is neither good nor bad — it just is. Herein lies one of the deepest differences between Santayana and Russell. Santayana agrees with Russell and Moore<sup>4</sup> that good is an indefinable property — an irreducible essence on Santayana's account. However, he contends that it is, nonetheless, a property, when it is a property and not simply a timeless essence, whose presence is conditioned. Russell and Moore somehow reason from its indefinability to its unconditionality. But Santayana says:

My logic, I am well aware, is not very accurate or subtle; and I wish Mr. Russell had not left it to me to discover the connection between these two propositions. Good is an indefinable predicate, and the specific quality of it can be given only in intuition; but it is a quality that things acquire under certain conditions.<sup>5</sup>

In other words, Santayana is as much a non-naturalist as Russell and Moore are about the status and definition of the good, but he is a through naturalist about the conditions under which that property attaches to the objects and states of affairs in the world around us.<sup>6</sup>

For Santayana, power will be good when it furthers our interests and bad when it thwarts or, at least, does not support them. This claim is not an attempted definition of the good but a statement of the natural conditions that obtain when that indefinable quality characterizes an object or state of affairs. Russell confuses the fact that the forces which created us had "no prevision of the end they were achieving" (ML 45). — a fact with which Santayana agrees (JPPSM 432) — with the contention that these forces are bad. That there is no prevision does not foreclose the possibility that natural forces sometimes produce circumstances in relation to which humans can flourish. In such circumstances why should we not speak of the good? Since this force

is the source of all our energies, the home of all our happiness, shall we not cling to it, and not praise it, seeing that it vegetates so grandly and so sadly and that it is not for us to blame it for what, doubtless, it never knew that it did?<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See *Principia Ethica* by G.E. Moore, Cambridge University Press, 1960. At this stage of his philosophical career Russell was in agreement with Moore's view on the Good.

<sup>5</sup> Santayana, G. "Mr. Russell's Philosophical Essays" *Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Method* Vol III nos 3 pp. 57-63, 5 pp. 113-124, 16 pp. 421-432, 1911. Further references will be in the text as (JPPSM ...). A part of this material appears in *Winds of Doctrine* under the title "The Philosophy of Mr. Bertrand Russell." Some citations will have a second reference (WD ...).

<sup>6</sup> Russell seems to have accepted this criticism, at least in 1940. See his essay in *The Philosophy of George Santayana*, Library of Living Philosophers Vol.II ed Paul Arthur Schilpp Northwestern University Press 1940.

<sup>7</sup> Santayana, George, *Reason in Religion* Vol III of *The Life of Reason* Collier Books (New York) 1962 p.133. Future references will be in the text as LR3.

Santayana identifies the sense of dependence and appreciation we experience as one form of religious response which he calls "piety" which "may be said to be man's reverent attachment to the sources of his being and the steadying of his life by that attachment." (LR3 125). Santayana surely agrees with Russell that such "concern" for the forces (social, physical and biological) that condition our existence may seem problematic:

Piety is in a sense pathetic because it involves subordination to physical accident and acceptance of finitude but it is also noble and eminently fruitful because, in subsuming life under the general laws of relativity, it is meeting fate with simple sincerity and labors in accordance with the conditions imposed. (LR3 129)

Here we have a very different response to the thoughtless conditions of our existence. Is it any the less a "free man's" response?

Once we separate the claims of the indefinability of the good from its unconditionality, we see that Russell's response to the scientific image of the world is not justified. It is the natural world itself that provides the conditions for both goodness and badness. Things and state of affairs are good in so far as they serve or attract our interests and not otherwise. Thus a living morality can do no more that to clarify what we find good and seek the means to it. Russell is simply wrong to infer from the fact that nature cares nothing for us because it does not care, that wisdom consists in abandoning the world of practical affairs as he seems to suggest in a number of places. Stoic resignation may be a good strategy on those occasions when the world and our best efforts produce little or nothing that serves our needs and desires but it is a foolish pride in the rosy glow of plenty. In this light we can certainly agree with Russell when he says:

It is the part of courage, when misfortune comes, to bear without repining the ruin of our hopes, to turn away our thoughts from vain regrets. This degree of submission to power is not only just and right: it is the very gate of wisdom. (ML 49-50)

But such a piece of wisdom does not support the whole scale abandonment of the world that Russell recommends.<sup>8</sup> This is what Santayana means when he says at the end of his essay, assessing Russell's position:

What a pity if this pure morality, in detaching itself impetuously from the earth, whose bright satellite it might be, should fly into the abyss at a tangent, and leave us as much in the dark as before! (JPPSM 432 and WD 154)

An example of the darkness that surrounds Russell's proposals can clearly be seen from the passage following the one quoted above in which power is declared bad. From that recognition he says, "Let us learn, then, that energy of faith which enables us to live constantly in the vision of the good; and let us descend, in action, into the world of fact, with that vision always before us" (ML 48). What does Russell mean here? What he is claiming seems to come to nothing more than the injunction to always act with a view to the good. This is certainly sound advice, but it leaves us very much "in the dark" about what to do.

Perhaps this injunction to steadfastly maintain a vision of the good seems to bear fruit when we are told:

From the submission of our desires springs the virtue of resignation; from the freedom of our thoughts springs the whole world of art and philosophy, and the vision of beauty by which, at last, we half reconquer the reluctant world. (ML 49)

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<sup>8</sup> If that is what he is recommending. It is none too clear as will be pointed out shortly.

There are, at least, two distinct themes here. One deals with resignation and the other with the freedom of thought that takes center stage in art and philosophy. Let us consider each in turn.

Freedom from the world comes only to those who "no longer ask of life that it shall yield them any of those personal goods that are subject to the mutations of time" (ML 49). But what are "those personal goods that are subject to the mutations of time"? Are we to read this as implying that it is only the mutable personal goods that we should give up, or are we to suppose that all personal goods are mutable and that is why we should give them up? This latter would seem to be the general lesson of the text so far but does this suggest that there are non-personal, non-mutable goods that we might pursue in good faith? Certainly all goods that are personal in the sense of belonging to me are, on Russell's view, mutable — my health, my pleasures, my wealth, my philosophical abilities; all come and go and will one day be gone. Russell might simply be reminding us as he does in various places not to hold on too tightly to such things. But then would there be any personal goods that are not mutable. If, as Russell contends, we all die, and I have no reason to deny that, will there be any? Russell does say that there are "real goods" and that other things "ardently longed for do not form part of a fully purified ideal" (ML 49). So apparently there is such a thing as a "fully purified ideal" which contains "real goods" but much of what we actually desire is not part of it. Now none of these real goods can be personal ones that are mutable so they must be either impersonal ones that are mutable, impersonal ones that are immutable or personal goods that are immutable. But are there such goods at all? All goods are subject to the mutations of time or perhaps it is better to say that the goodness of all good things is open to mutation. Let us be clear. Every state of affairs or things is mutable and if it is good it is a mutable good, personal or impersonal. There are, of course, eternal things and Santayana is the first to insist on them — essences. Whatever character or relation imagination or intuition lights on, taken in itself, and out of relation to its temporal existence, is an "eternal essence," but none of them is good — save but goodness itself — and even that is not a good thing but merely the essence of goodness. The *goodness* of any thing or essence is a function of the interests of a living animal and the attention that such interest trains upon it but such interests and attentions are unfortunately "subject to the mutations of time." This means that every thing that might be good is mutable or its goodness at least is mutable for it will no longer be good when it sinks back into the infinity of the realm of essence and is no longer highlighted by thought or matter. If, therefore, we are no longer to ask life to yield us any good that is subject to mutation we can ask nothing at all of the world. Again it seems that Russell's moral theory leaves us in the dark.

Perhaps we can make this point clearer by considering the second part of Russell's proposal articulated above. Remember that along with resignation on the negative side, a positive possibility opens up. That is art and philosophy. Russell seems to believe that the creative arts offer some sort of escape from the powers of the world. By way of the creation of beauty "mind asserts its own subtle mastery over the thoughtless forces of nature" (ML 51). But what is the nature of this mastery? Russell continues, "The more evil the material with which it deals, the more thwarting to untrained desire, the greater is the achievement in inducing the reluctant rock to yield up its hidden treasures" (ML 51). But how does the achievement of the sculptor in producing the David differ from the farmer's transformation of the field into a feast? Each achieves a satisfying good — each is a temporary victory. The feast will end and the David will fall apart. Each transforms "the thoughtless forces of nature" to serve human needs. Are some of those needs "higher" than others? By what standard and

for whom? There seems to be no reason why we should pursue an aesthetic or philosophical ideal rather than a technological transformation of the natural order. Either is corruptible by time and each brings to us satisfactions.

Perhaps we have considered the matter from the wrong angle. There are at least two other moments that we might focus on in the creative process of the artist. Not only is there an actual work of art created when Michaelangelo carves "The David" but there is what might be called a moment of aesthetic imagination in which the work is conceived or envisioned. Perhaps it is this moment that Russell is referring to as the truly artistic moment. We might also say that it is the moment of philosophical insight that is the truly valuable moment. Suppose that we grant this point — that the actual object is merely the byproduct of the real creative moment. Even so, such a moment is not an immutable good. As an occurrence in the actual history of an individual, such moments come and go and there will come a time when there are no such moments for the likes of us at all and I suppose for all thinking creatures. Certainly so Russell would have it. There seems no difference here between the artist's moment of creation and any other episode in our personal histories.

There is another possibility. Sometimes Russell seems impressed by the eternity that comes from the "immortality of the past" (ML 52-53). After all, the past is unchangeable and once an event has "achieved" passedness it seems beyond us. We can but contemplate it. But, of course, this is true for all past events and certainly does not single out the artist's creative moment from others.

Perhaps what Russell wants to direct our attention to is not the moment of awareness, itself a part of the passing flux, but to the content of that moment. If Russell means to refer to what is imagined in the artistic moment or in the moment of philosophical insight or to past events as objects of contemplation, he certainly has finally identified what for Santayana are eternal objects. These, taken in themselves and apart from the role they play in the flux of nature, are Santayana's essences and Russell has stumbled on a small corner of the realm of essence. However, even here what impresses him is their relation to actual human life. He says,

To take into the inmost shrine of the soul the irresistible forces whose puppets we seem to be — Death and change, the irrevocableness of the past, and the powerlessness of man before the blind hurry of the universe from vanity to vanity — to feel these things and know them is to conquer them. (ML 52)

What attracts Russell to such ideas is the irony involved in taking what is the very territory of the enemy and making it over into our own land. This is what I refer to as his romantic embrace of the eternal. This becomes clearest in his discussion of tragedy. He says that it

is the proudest, the most triumphant; for it builds its shining citadel in the very centre of the enemy's country, on the very summit of his highest mountain; from its impregnable watchtowers, his camps and arsenals, his columns and forts, are all revealed. (ML 51)

What excites Russell is the transformation of the enemy into an object of aesthetic appreciation. As such, what he seeks is triumph, if not actual then ideal, but this is not what we might not call a "fully purified ideal" for it is shaped by human will and intent and in relation to the power of the world. It is as much a romantic response to the power of nature as is the "Promethean" indignation and revolt that Russell identifies as the first response to the awareness of the indifference of nature to our goods. (ML 48). When we first realize that nature is not governed by ideals, we may revolt and refuse to acquiesce, filled with indignation. "But indignation is still bondage, for it compels our thoughts to be occupied with an evil world." Russell's so called "free man's worship" is also a reactive response which compels our thoughts to be occupied with the very

world from which we are supposed to be free. Its focus on the things that signal the power of nature — death, change, and intolerable pain — clearly marks it as a reactive position. In so far as there is an appreciation of quality for its own sake the field of such appreciation is still limited and controlled overtly by the interests of the engaged active person. In this sense, a free man's worship is a romantic and thus passionate reaction to the world. In it, there seems to be no awareness of the infinite domain over which such appreciation might range.

Russell comes closest to the sort of pure apprehension or contemplation that marks Santayana's spiritual life late in the essay when he reflects on the past. He says that the past has a magical power just because of its unchanging character.

The Past does not change or strive; like Duncan, after life's fitful fever it sleeps well; what was eager and grasping, what was petty and transitory, has faded away, the things that were beautiful and eternal shine out of it like stars in the night. (ML 52)

So we are confronted with a scene that invites contemplation and appreciation. All the flux and flow is gone and there is an eternal scene laid before us which we can but view. The very pastness of the past cancels our eagerness to see things as they might serve us, to read every quality as a sign of what might be on the way. The past reframes the flux as frozen and places us outside of the flow in a field of essences.

On this reading Russell does indeed approach, in a limited way, the pure vision of the spiritual life, but there is another reading of these very lines that leaves the matter more unclear; and I think that it is just such a reading that Santayana himself puts on Russell's approach to the realm of essence. When Russell refers to the beautiful and eternal things that shine forth from the past he may have in mind a mere selection of characteristics which previously "clothed" the flux of our busy existences. The transitory and petty *things* fade away and those that were always eternal and beautiful are thus able to shine forth. Thus the past would allow for a selectivity and provide the "right" perspective from which to see things as they are. This sort of view is far from Santayana's own understanding of the realm of essence which is an utterly democratic view. Every character has a place and is considered in and of itself; without reference to its possible place in the flow of change, every character is as eternal as the next. Santayana points out:

But ideal necessity or, what is the same thing essential possibility has its excuse for being in itself, since it is not contingent or questionable at all. The affinity which the human mind may develop to certain provinces of essence is adventitious to those essences, and hardly to be mentioned in their presence. (JPPSM 60 and WD 119)

Green is as much an eternal essence as goodness is and of course so are the mathematical and logical relations that so fill Russell's mind. As Santayana puts it:

Mr Russell happens to have a mathematical genius, and to find comfort in laying up his treasures in the mathematical heaven. It would be highly desirable that this temperament should be more common; but even if it were universal it would not reduce mathematical essence to a product of human attention, nor raise the "beauty" of mathematics to part of its essence. (JPPSM 63 and WD 123))

Here we have the heart and soul of Santayana's criticism. Russell's approach to the realm of essence is always limited and governed by his own very individual and parochial interests. This leads him to confuse the accidental with the essential — what Russell finds interesting with the field of possible objects of attention. Note Santayana's comment that, were Russell's turn of mind more common, would be quite desirable. There is a lovely irony here for the very thing that could make a temperament desirable — that it might serve some human interest — must be completely external and foreign to essence considered in and of itself. Russell's

*interest* in mathematics makes no contribution to its standing as “eternal truth,” however useful that temperament may be to Russell or the rest of humankind.

Perhaps we can begin to bring our discussion to a close by discussing what, in my view, Russell gets right and what in that leads him astray. What Russell rightly sees is that art and history, as well as theoretical and mathematical knowledge, place us (in our contemplation of them) outside the practical flux of time. History, when not examined for the moral insight it might provide, also offers objects frozen. As Russell puts it “The Past does not change or strive.” The past is no field of action. Rather it presents us with a play that we can view as from without enjoying all the irony and pathos but without subjecting ourselves to danger. With the contemplation of art, we abandon the attempt to bring about change — to control things — we merely apprehend. The work of art is not presented as a field of action or engagement but as object of contemplation. This distancing of ourselves from our usual utilitarian interests frees us, if only momentarily, from our normal concerns. So when the playwright presents us with the spectacle of death in a way that cannot reach us, we are free to reflect, to contemplate, to stand outside of death and examine it. We are as gods with regard to such objects of reflection.

Here we do have an approach to essence but one that has not yet freed itself completely from the concerns of our practical natures. Russell’s approach is still colored by the underlying facts of the human condition as he has set them out. This, as we have seen, is why death is such a powerful example for him. But, at the very same time, it means that Russell cannot appreciate the range of “objects” he has stumbled on. It is not art, history, or mathematical truth that should concern us except accidentally. Each of these presents characters, relations and qualities freed from the temporal flux and thus open to contemplation. It is such characteristics wherever they are to be found that Santayana calls “essence” and the contemplation of essence is the spiritual life which has none of the romantic irony of “a free man’s worship.” Santayana says:

The most trivial truths of logic are as necessary and eternal as the most important: so that it is less of an achievement than it sounds when we say we have grasped a truth that is eternal and necessary. (JPPSM 62)

As a moment in the spiritual life each such moment is an achievement in its own right, but any importance it might have must be a matter of some external standard of measure. Here Santayana measures them by the “importance” of what is grasped in terms of a certain light that it seems to cast on our condition. He says:

as Mr Russell was telling us, it was only the other day that Cantor and Dedekind observed that although time continually eats up the days and years, the possible future always remains as long as it was before. This happens to be a fact interesting to mankind. ... Many other things are doubtless implied in infinity which, if we noticed them, would leave us quite cold; and still others, no doubt, are inapprehensible with our sort and degree of intellect.” (JPPSM 61)

When Russell advises us to “burn with passion for eternal things” (ML 53) we cannot but think that he has a particular “eternal” in mind, one that particularly strikes his fancy:

Eternal truth is as disconsolate as it is consoling, and as dreary as it is interesting: these moral values are, in fact, values which the activity of contemplating that sort of truth has for different minds: and it is no congruous homage offered to ideal necessity, but merely a private endearment, to call it beautiful or good. (JPPSM 60 and WD 118)

Throughout, Russell confuses a feature of the subject — interest, passion, or excitement — with a feature of the object apprehended. The “goods” that we are to worship are not of our own making and they are not, but accidentally, goods.

There is perhaps one final criticism which concerns the “moral” that Russell seems to derive from a free man’s worship. Somehow this form of worship is supposed to unite us with our fellow man, by way of “the tie of a common doom” (ML 53). We are supposed to be moved not to “weigh in grudging scales their merits and demerits, but to think only of their need” (ML 53). How we might enact this advice in a world of limited resources and time is a point about which Russell is none too clear. However, even more unclear is how such fellow feeling follows from what he has described. Why might we not be indifferent to the temporal fate of our fellows, in light of the story Russell tells? In short, how does any worldly wisdom spring from Russell’s vision? I thought that the moral of the story was that in the world of things temporal all is temporary and that we must not store our treasure there. Surely the petty pleasures of our fellows are just as temporary as our own and must be dismissed for that reason; or if it be argued that they are by no means temporary once they “have become eternal by the immortality of the past” (ML 53), the same can and must be said for our own. In short there is no principle of decision here and as Santayana says we are left “as much in the dark as before!” (JPPSM 432).

MICHAEL HODGES

*Vanderbilt University*

## The *Bulletin* and other Websites

The website for *Overheard in Seville* is:

<<http://www.math.uwaterloo.ca/~kerri/laws/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.

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

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

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

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

# And We Didn't Even Get His Name: Santayana's Existential Stranger

I met my first existentialist when I was a small boy. While my father and siblings did other things on winter Saturday afternoons, my mother and I liked to watch movies on television, and in those days our favorites were westerns.<sup>1</sup> I especially enjoyed the films in which a mysterious stranger comes to town, on his way to nowhere in particular. The stranger's first stop is the livery stable, followed by the saloon. His laconic manner of speaking and his rather detached but intimidating disposition invites curiosity, but the stranger shares nothing, wanting only a bath, a meal, a drink and his own company. Though nothing is known about him, one suspects that he is a former lawman or outlaw, or both. He is lean and hard, and gives the impression that he is highly skilled with a gun, and not to be messed with. The stranger usually arrives during a conflict, sometimes between equally powerful forces, but more often between the strong and the weak. He is content to mind his own business and tries to avoid taking sides, but is eventually drawn into the dispute.

What I did not know then, but understand now, is that my western stranger is an existentialist. It was for good reason the Camus titled his novel *The Stranger*; but when I say existentialist, I do not wish to be too closely tied to the specific philosophy, or philosophies associated with late nineteenth century and early twentieth century French and German thinkers. The Western is the most American of film genres and my overarching thesis is that it represents a form of existentialism developed in the United States with little, if any, connection to developments in Europe. There remains some controversy over the definition of existentialism, and whether it is a systematic philosophy or more of a shared mood. We shall not argue that here. If we accept the definition of existentialism as a philosophy (or attitude) that emphasizes the uniqueness and isolation of the individual's experience in an indifferent universe, regards human existence as unexplainable, and stresses freedom of choice and responsibility for the consequences of one's acts, we will be free to explore this strain of American existentialism without undue emphasis on the European model.

Santayana's *Dialogues in Limbo*<sup>2</sup> presents a Stranger who is remarkably similar to the western stranger. An examination of these characters will establish the existentialist credentials of both, and to the extent that Santayana's Stranger represents essential themes of his philosophy, we can conclude that a significant dimension of Santayana's philosophy is existential. Santayana's Stranger, like his western counterpart, respects the contingency of the world, stresses the concrete over the abstract, asserts the priority of the individual over the collective, and most of all values freedom and responsibility.

If existentialism features the uniqueness and isolation of the individual experience, what appellation could be more apt than "stranger"? The stranger is the permanent outsider. He is homeless, living among others, but not really with them. The Western stranger's outsider status is demonstrated by his peripatetic existence. He does not actually live anywhere, but passes through, always to a different town, and therefore remains the unknown alien. There are no references to origin or family, and his wanderings seem to have no final destination. His allegiances are purposeful and

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was presented to the Santayana Society at its annual meeting in Washington, D. C. on December 29, 2003.

<sup>2</sup> *Dialogues in Limbo* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1957). To be abbreviated as DL.

temporary. When his business is finished he moves on without looking back. Santayana's Stranger's status is marked by his existence outside the domain of the living. He is still a member, but has voluntarily separated himself. He temporarily resides among the dead, just passing through, but is not one of them. He is between two worlds, and therefore homeless. Italian director Sergio Leone is famous for his "spaghetti" western trilogy starring Clint Eastwood (and a fourth starring Charles Bronson) which emphasized the stranger as the "man with no name." Santayana's character, referred to simply as "The Stranger," is also nameless among the named, and his permanent outsider status is distinguished by his title.

European existentialism tends to emphasize this disconnection from others in terms of conflict. "Hell is other people." The individual is "condemned" to freedom. The terms are generally interpreted as negative, so much so that Sartre was moved to respond with his "Existentialism is a Humanism" essay. American existentialism more often describes this detachment as independence, compatible with its cultural ethos of rugged individualism. The stranger's outsider status is invaluable despite his isolation because it preserves his autonomy. Existentialists value freedom and choice, which requires a certain freedom from others. By remaining alone the western stranger maintains the liberty to come and go as he pleases, to act or withdraw as he deems necessary. In westerns the stranger may form limited bonds with those he has come to respect, but he fears those connections would become literal bonds were he to take roots in the community. Better to move on than risk losing independence.

In western movies and in *Dialogues in Limbo* the setting involves a dispute that precedes the stranger's arrival. In the western the battle is typically a range war over territory that has arable land, valuable water, and ample land for grazing for cattle. The stranger listens to both sides, or it might be more accurate to say that he hears both sides, but attempts to remain neutral. As the conflict escalates each side attempts to recruit the stranger who, now forced to respond, expresses his resolve to mind his own business. In *Dialogues in Limbo* the Stranger appears during an argument over philosophical territory between Democritus, Alcibiades, Dionysius and Aristippus. When Democritus tries to draw him in, the Stranger asks whether there might be a "kind of harmony in non-interference."

Existential strangers are reluctant to choose sides since they tend to view the universe as indifferent rather than purposeful. Democritus asserts that "nothing can be contrary to nature," adding that "the diseases which destroy a man are no less natural than the instincts which preserve him." It is only human passion that applies values to natural events. The Stranger extends Democritus' insight to human desires, contending that we would do well to emulate nature's neutrality and limit our judgment of others. If the universe has no telos, but is indifferent as existentialists claim, then no set of ideas, values or beliefs are inherently superior. How could a stranger fairly choose sides? He realizes he cannot and prudentially refrains.

Many moral philosophies are built upon a foundational theory of human nature which tells us how to live in accordance with that nature. If the universe itself will not support transcendent claims, then perhaps a theory of human nature will. The search for the telos is moved from the cosmos to the human subject. Santayana, like most existentialists, does not accept such theories that result in a single, universal human nature.

Existentialists generally regard human existence as unexplainable. Attempts to understand human nature, whatever that may mean, must be drawn from our experience with concrete men and women, and there we find great variety. The Strangers asks

What other standard of human nature, Socrates, can you propose except the nature of actual man? If you are a friend of humanity, should you not cultivate all mankind, accept all types, share all their pleasure, and be pleased with all their oddities? (DL 126)

Existential strangers are pluralists. While acknowledging that there are certain general qualities and values that human beings share, Santayana contends that the specifics and details that comprise those generalities are determined by individuals. As much as we are alike, we are in so many ways different. Natural endowments and constitutions combine with psychological and social influences to make each person unique. The Stranger explains that "human nature in actual men is an unstable compound." Since there is no single human nature by which values and beliefs can be judged, only our individual natures can determine what is good. A healthy respect for human beings includes tolerance for their unique differences and choices.

It should be added that any policy other than non-interferences would also undermine the Stranger's respect for autonomy. Since he values independence for himself, the Stranger's sense of fairness obligates him to recognize and defend the same quality of life for others. To interfere in the conflict would mean judging the beliefs of the disputants, inserting his values in place of theirs. The Stranger instead practices a policy of tolerance.

In the movies the western stranger eventually intervenes, but only when his personal sense of fairness and justice demand action. Sometimes non-combatants such as women and children are slaughtered, or one group bribes the sheriff to protect its interests. Most often the stranger joins the fray when one side hires professional gunmen. Even then his decision to intercede is not indicative of which side he believes is right in the dispute; his issue is with their methods. The stranger's resolution to act is fueled by his own values about right and wrong. If pressed to explain himself he would not offer some universal statement about the injustice of killing women and children, or hiring professional gunmen to battle ranchers and farmers. Instead he probably wouldn't say anything, and one would be wise not to ask. A decision that is made on purely personal convictions is not easily explained to others, and the stranger would probably think that anyone who has watched such a slaughter and needs a philosophical explanation is incapable of understanding his actions.

Santayana's Stranger is also slowly drawn into the dispute, and like his western brother he intensifies his participation when his sense of fairness demands action. In the *On Self-Government* chapter of DL, Socrates mocks the principles of democracy practiced by the Stranger's people. Socrates presents the eternal as the realm of perfection and the Stranger feels compelled to come to the aid of those who must continuously struggle in the imperfect realm of the living. The dispute resembles the western contest between the strong and the weak. The existentialist is marked by the commitment to the concrete over the abstract, and the stranger's moral attitudes are not based on abstract principles. The western stranger and Santayana's Stranger draw their wisdom from experience in the concrete living world with actual human beings, and develop different conclusions than those drawn by abstract thinkers. Santayana's Stranger is dismayed by much of his experience with other people. He expresses the tension of his existence as the "adoration of mankind killed by contact with actual men and women," but will not allow himself to be seduced by the promise of human perfectibility. Abstract man and God are capable of perfection, but we have never met an abstract man, so concrete man is our only standard and must be accepted as he truly is. The Stranger has sympathy for his fellow human because he recognizes that as imperfect mortals we are bound to fall short of the idea.

The moral philosopher often claims to be motivated by his professed love of mankind. The Stranger counsels Socrates that the true philanthropist's love cannot be restricted to the strong, but must be extended to the weak as well. The imperfect "are none the less present for ever to the mind of God, and a part of his glory." They too are His creations. We should have empathy for each other because human existence, whatever it may achieve, will inevitably pass away, for "the torrent is too mighty for any swimmer." All will ultimately fail, including those who attempt to hold others to their impossible standards.

Santayana's Stranger takes Christ as his model for the true philanthropist. Socrates argues that the god cannot value human imperfection, and is incapable of human love. But we can make the connection to the Christian God when the Stranger explains that a godlike philanthropist would have to "be a spirit made flesh, who himself suffers." Like the existentialist, God must descend from the lofty abstract to the material and concrete. He adopts the form of concrete man as Jesus, and walks the earth among ordinary mortals. Once God as Christ experiences actual pain and suffering, He has greater love and compassion for His creations who must contend with what the Stranger calls the "blind throw of existence." The Stranger explains that, "He has enough sympathy with blind life to understand it, to forgive it, to heal its wounds, to cover its shames, and even to foster it when innocent ... ." The Stranger tells Socrates that consequently:

the assurances of this divine love, so surprising and inexplicable, became to many the only warrant of their worth, and lent them the courage not wholly to despise themselves, but to seek and to cleanse the pure pearl in their dung-hill, on which his own eye rested, and not without reason to call him the saviour of their souls. (DL 146)

His tender concern is clearly with the sinners, the outcasts, the downtrodden. The direct experience with these most imperfect people is reflected in the marked change in tone from the Old Testament to the New. The language is considerably gentler, and extends itself and teaches as much as the Old Testament commands and reproaches. The morality of the true philanthropist is not marked by its aim of perfection, but by its sympathy for those imperfect beings who must inevitably fall short.

Socrates still insists that perfection is the natural goal of men. Human beings are endowed with reason, and "the privilege of reason, where reason exists, is to turn us into philosophers by teaching us to survey our destiny and to institute, within its bounds, the pursuit of perfection." The Stranger counters that perfection is actually contrary to the constitution and wishes of human beings as we find them in the concrete. The Stranger argues that we mortals "prefer not to know our destiny and not to have any perfection set before us which we are not free to elude." He adds that "beneath what may seem to you our blind expedients in government . . . I think there is a profound instinct of freedom."

The Stranger's examination of concrete human beings leads him to conclude that freedom is the key to understanding human natures. Freedom serves as the connecting principle that defines us as human beings, but also recognizes and accounts for our uniqueness as individuals. Sartre makes this distinction with his (borrowed) categories of being-in-itself and being-for-itself. The chair is simply and forever what it is, it is being-in-itself. Human beings have both characteristics, but it is being-for-itself that explains the capacity for self-determination that the chair lacks. The existential theory of human nature claims that man has no essential nature that must be fulfilled, and individuals are therefore free to make their own choices and determine their own fates.

The Stranger offers an existential theory of (no essential) human nature with his assertion of the profound freedom impulse. Instincts are inborn patterns of behavior

that are responses to the environment. The Stranger explains that there is automatism in nature, but nature also adapts to change and is prepared for it. The freedom instinct is a natural human adaptation to the living world. The Stranger asks, "When change is inevitable, why should we not live by changing?" The freedom instinct will therefore reject absolute values and resist attempts to use them as the basis for action in a world filled with contingency. A philosophy developed from the living encounter with the concrete world anoints freedom as its highest value.

An existential moral philosophy built on freedom begins by valuing people as we find them in the concrete. It is not ethical because it does not establish universal rules of conduct. It respects autonomy, and the ability of individual persons to determine their interests and act accordingly. The western stranger has chosen a different way of life for himself but tolerates, appreciates, and sometimes envies the lives of the folks he temporarily visits and then leaves behind. He never negatively judges the quality of their lives. Perhaps there are moments when the stranger would prefer to settle down and the farmer would like to be free. One can never be certain that the "right" choice was made, but with freedom one always has the opportunity to reevaluate and change. The stranger feels his freedom is maximized by remaining unfettered. He is clearly his own master, and the farmers and ranchers may appear to have tied themselves to spouses, land and law. But if that is the case they have freely chosen to do so, and that makes all the difference. The stranger understands that freedom even means valuing different definitions of freedom. The western stranger perceives his liberty to wander as best for him: the farmer values roots, love and warmth of family, pride of ownership, and a sense of accomplishment. Each is free to satisfy his desires without meddling interference. It is not so much what one chooses, but the freedom to choose that makes life worth living. Even the most pleasant activity is likely to become a chore if one is forced to perform it. The Stranger reminds us that "compulsion is degrading in itself, and there is an intrinsic dignity in freedom."

The western existential stranger understands that since no authority restricts his freedom, no authority is available for justification. He alone is responsible for the consequences of his acts. He operates without sanction of law, and is not accountable to it, but must be careful not to become an outlaw. He must resist the temptation to be as corrupt as those he finally decides to fight, and must be worthy of those he chooses to defend. The stranger is not ethical, but if he is to be honorable his actions must be principled in a world where the official rules are not applicable. The chosen principles will not be established or confirmed by others. Even the people he aids often cannot understand what motivates him. He seems unmoved by what others perceive as injustice, does not appear sentimental or compassionate, and prefers to live apart from others. The stranger's inability, or unwillingness, to explain himself contributes to his enigmatic persona as the existential loner. This situation often leads to his being misunderstood and mistrusted, which reinforces his alienation. It is because he recognizes no authority but his own principles that the stranger takes his responsibility so seriously, and holds himself to the highest personal standards.

Santayana's Stranger also feels responsible for his fellow mortals, even though his "adoration of mankind [was] killed by contact with actual men and women." He shares the western stranger's sympathy for the weak, even if he does not always agree with them. He chooses to defend the ways of imperfect mortals against criticism from those freed from the burden of actual living. The Stranger's sense of responsibility has been forged by the experience of living among them as one of them. He remarks about the death of his adoration, but a sharp eye detects his sympathy for ordinary people who go about their business without harming others. In this regard he is like his western brother who chooses not to live among farmer and ranchers, but admires their integrity

and perseverance in the wild west. As he rides away he appreciates that these people are not at all weak.

Santayana's Stranger exhibits the existential outlook, and his character is the personification of Santayana's existentialism. Like his creator, the Stranger harbors no illusions. The world is here and we are in it, and little more can be said without exaggeration. He is content to live in the present with his modest understanding. The Stranger's solitary life represents Santayana's recognition of the uniqueness and isolation of the human experience. His refusal to develop and express an abstract philosophy demonstrates Santayana's existential attitude that this indifferent world is without transcendent meaning, and human existence is unexplainable. Under these conditions each individual is the generator of meaning and responsible for the consequences of his or her actions. The Stranger's policy of tolerance and non-interference demonstrates Santayana's respect for that responsibility, and the autonomy of individuals who must be permitted to find their own way.

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# The Pathetic Fallacy in Santayana

In this paper, I bring to the forefront a set of issues linked to the *pathetic fallacy*, in order to show that this is the bond underlying Santayana's work as a whole.<sup>1</sup> These issues involve many doctrines to which he takes exception, such as Pantheism, Moralism, Egotism, Subjectivism, Transcendentalism, Platonism, Puritanism and Utopianism. Because these doctrines are each linked to this one fallacy, each can be seen as an instance of a general "false step" in philosophy. One of his unfinished essays is named just "On the False Steps in Philosophy" (BR 147-174). On the positive side, the rejection of false temptations opens the door to a spiritual way of life. Critics of Santayana have called attention to the pathetic fallacy only with regard to *The Life of Reason*, and have assigned it only a limited theoretical relevance. However, I will gather together the most significant passages that explicitly mention it and analyze the contexts in which they appear. In this way, its critical philosophical implications are revealed, and these prove to go beyond a simple psychological mechanism that has been known to poets for ages. In Santayana's treatment, the ontological and epistemological assumptions of the pathetic fallacy are interpreted from the perspective of materialism.

Santayana mentions the pathetic fallacy for the first time in the chapter "The Elements and Function of Poetry" of *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion* (IPR):

The poet is himself subject to this illusion, and a great part of what is called poetry, although by no means the best part of it, consists in this sort of idealisation by proxy. We dye the world of our own colour; by a pathetic fallacy, by a false projection of sentiment, we soak Nature with our own feeling, and then celebrate her tender sympathy with our moral being. (IPR 158)

The pathetic fallacy is a return to that early habit of thought by which our ancestors peopled the world with benevolent and malevolent spirits; what they felt in the presence of objects they took to be a part of the objects themselves. (IPR 159)

In this chapter, he studies how poetry can turn into an interpretation of life, instead of being a mere "aestheticizing" journey into the realm of fantasy. The polemical context consists on the overcoming of aestheticism, which dominated the literary scene at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This was Santayana's effort in *The Sense of Beauty*. Another aspect of this polemical context was the balance of his position with regard to the delimitation between poetry, religion and science as a way to avoid the confrontation fostered by positivism. Although the pathetic fallacy appears in the context of literary criticism, Santayana's distinctive contribution is the shift of interpretive level achieved by widening and enriching his statements with references to his own philosophical system. Poets are perceived as being subject to illusion, are criticized because in the idealization of nature they *project* their own feelings upon it, and because they *confuse*, in an aberrant way, vision and feeling — two faculties that modern thought tries to keep apart. On the other hand, Santayana claims that this is a natural confusion, a return to the old habit of animistic thought. In that sense, the poet complements the scientist: the poet does not want completely to part with ancient ways of thinking about

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is an extract of the second chapter of the doctoral thesis *La falacia patética: una pieza clave en el pensamiento de George Santayana* defended at the University of Salamanca (Spain) in September 2003. The translation is by Daniel de Santos Oriente. I am very grateful to Angus Kerr-Lawson for his encouragement and comments.

nature; for these ways, despite their lacking any pragmatic utility, might touch the human heart.

The philosophical environment for Santayana's writings is, unavoidably, modern idealism: nature offers us a wide number of lively impressions that the intellect must select, arrange and name. Modern philosophers agree with this activity and celebrate it. The Santayanian text is slightly different because for him the poet's function consists in: (i) disintegrating those prosaic fictions of perception; (ii) reassembling them again briskly, according to the genius of the poet; (iii) pointing to the background of chaos and unquietness that underlies our daily logical thought; (iv) in short, making a new selection based on sentiment rather than practical interest.

In this way, the exaltation found in modern thought of the activities of the subject is questioned; it is the source of the risk informing the pathetic fallacy. When humans project their feelings, it is easy for them to "flood" nature with emotions that are alien to it, to believe that nature itself likes or dislikes human beings and, out of nature's animation, to conclude that nature shares with humans a moral life. Drawing on E. B. Tylor's hints about primitive cultures, Santayana considers that long ago human beings saw the external world bathed with the colors of their own feelings, and their internal world expressed in the shapes of things. However, from the point of view of reason and gnoseologic realism that are implicit in Santayana's text, this confusion is an aberration and a fallacy that not only pertains to poets but also to "a certain kind of metaphysics" (IPR 159) that is proud of this sort of identifications. On the contrary, Santayana states: "Subjectivity should be discounted, not idolised" (DL "Preface to the New and Enlarged Edition").

In the chapter entitled "Discovery of Fellow-Minds" of *Reason in Common Sense*, Santayana discusses a different use of the pathetic fallacy, now within a classical philosophical problem: the problem of solipsism. According to Santayana, this problem can hardly be solved if we start from the assumptions of modern idealism or modern skepticism. A radical solipsist, a subject assuming itself as the only non-dubious reality, cannot ever be forced through purely logical or rational argument to accept the reality of the world or of other people. The only way out of this dilemma is the questioning of the idealist presuppositions. One must have recourse to an old and very human habit, not fallacious in this case because it provides the necessary, prelogical "miracle of insight" (LR1 152), inherited from the moment when human beings did not distinguish emotions and things, ideas and real objects. Only if we start from an instance that is previous to reason — later named *animal faith* — can we bridge the gap that separates one human being from the world and from other human beings, a gap that otherwise remains unbridgeable:

There is evidently one case in which the "pathetic fallacy" is not fallacious, the case in which the object observed happens to be an animal similar to the observer and similarly affected, as for instance when a flock or herd are swayed by panic fear. The emotion which each, as he runs, attributes to the others is, as usual, the emotion he feels himself; but this emotion, fear, is the same which in fact the others are then feeling. (LR1 149-50)

By means of experience and education and with varying degrees of success, human beings learn to separate the emotions that things provoke from the things themselves. An exception arises when the object is another human being, for in this case it is proved that success is almost complete. Of course, this is not success in the sense that a human being can exactly perceive the emotion reflected in another's face or faithfully understand the thought of others. Here, the meaning of "success" is that, as far as human beings are human animals, they are not mistaken when projecting upon

other human being emotions like the ones that they feel. However, this projection is certainly fallacious when poets apply it to flowers, beasts or celestial bodies.

In his article "The Coming Philosophy", published in 1914 in *The Journal of Philosophy*, and reprinted in (IW 179-203), Santayana writes a devastating review of the new American philosophy on the occasion of the release of E. B. Holt's *The Concept of Consciousness*. According to the Santayanian interpretation, the new North-American realism: (i) is a fusion of transcendentalism, pragmatism, immediatism and logical realism; (ii) identifies the definitions of things with the things themselves, and so cannot be considered realist; (iii) infers existence from dialectics, which is a clearly idealist principle; (iv) and makes up material things from immaterial elements since it places pain, color and object at the same ontological level. Explicitly, Santayana states that "the pathetic fallacy is obvious and sober truth for this system" (IW 187), thus pointing to the root of the mistakes of neo-realism.<sup>2</sup>

In *The Realm of Truth* Santayana places the pathetic fallacy at the same level as mistakes, illusions and poetic myths: imagination interpolates essences among facts in a mistaken way, for there is no real foundation for this.<sup>3</sup> At the end of the chapter on conventional truths, Santayana mentions the pathetic fallacy again and detects the psychological mechanism it is based on:

We are condemned to live dramatically in a world that is not dramatic. Even our direct perceptions make units of objects that are not units; we see creation and destruction where there is only continuity. Memory and reflection repeat this pathetic fallacy, taking experience for their object, where in fact everything is sketchy, evanescent, and ambiguous. Memory and reflection select, recompose, complete and transform the past in the act of repainting it, interpolating miracles and insinuating motives that were never in the original experience but that seem now to clarify and explain it. (RB 463)

This is a fundamental text. Here, the reading of the pathetic fallacy from a philosophical viewpoint is evident, and so also are the connection with and the distance from transcendental idealism. The unity of objects is imposed by the subject's vision and memory. This same mechanism makes human beings perceive destruction, creation, motivations and drama in nature, when actually there is nothing of the kind there. The unities that the subject ascribes to objects are fallacious, and placed at the same level as poets' inventions when they make animals talk: they are the product of human imagination. Human truths are conventional, they are *added to*: although they seem a reflection of reality they are not *the* truth. Human dramas are not real. Reality is evanescent and ambiguous.

The above texts show how Santayana's philosophical and literary training allows him to imbue his poetics with questions that usually are outside its range. We accept that poets personify nature and create metaphors, and readers enjoy such effects, but we know that flowers do not smile. Santayana accepts this enunciation and distinguishes between nature on the one hand, and on the other the attempt to grasp the

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<sup>2</sup> Duran Drake uses the term 'pathetic fallacy' in the same environment: "Do these 'subjective' elements, then exist also in the object independently of perception? That seems a flagrant case of the pathetic fallacy. Some naïve realists do indeed, for consistency's sake, declare that 'affectional' qualities really belong to the life of the object" ("The Approach to Critical Realism" in Duran Drake, ed. *Essays in Critical Realism: A Comparative Study of the Problem of Knowledge*, London, Macmillan, 1920, p. 11).

<sup>3</sup> "All the errors, illusions, pathetic fallacies, and poetic myths with which the human mind disguised the truth are so many borrowings from outlying regions of essence; characters interpolated in lieu of characters undiscovered, or extensions of the characters actually found." (RB 451-2)

truth about nature. Human beings try to do this by means of their imagination and their other faculties; except that the latter do not reflect nature passively as a mirror. By means of an unconscious and automatic mechanism, they blend the material that comes from nature and change its qualities in two ways.

a. The material received by us is axiologically neutral, and we add value to it, *project* value upon the material. In this way, human beings turn a sensational element into the existing quality of an object.

b. The material received by us is physical, and we transform it into sense-data, content of consciousness, idea. Thus, human beings can *confuse* the plane of reality with their representations, breaching the ontological distinction that makes each plane legitimate in its own level. Santayana does not question that nature possesses a definite structure, nor the legitimacy of the human attempt to understand it. His critiques aim at the confusion between the two.

Therefore, *psychological projection* and *categorical confusion* are the two main lines with philosophical consequences<sup>4</sup> that stand out in the pathetic fallacy. They are mutually implicated in the following way: because human beings confuse reality with the product of their imagination, they can take their own projections as real; because of the very strong animal impulse to project the way the world affects them upon the world itself, human beings change inadvertently from one categorical level to another. By suspending the animal projection, the philosopher can distinguish between the categorical realms of essence and existence and, therefore, open a way for the discovery of essence, which is one of Santayana's greatest contributions to philosophy. His position about this issue is that once we admit the necessity of the pathetic fallacy it is possible for us not to yield to it, that we achieve moments of ecstasy and trance when human beings suspend the psychological mechanism. This is what Santayana calls *spiritual life*. In other words, the most important aspect is not the characterization of the pathetic fallacy as illusion and confusion between appearance and reality, but the philosophical and vital consequences that follow its rejection. The background issue, which eventually constitutes Santayana's ultimate message, pivots around the fight between the animal, human thing on the one hand, and the divine, spiritual one on the other; between thinking that logic dominates the world and the humble acceptance that this is not so; between not being honest, that is, believing our own lies, and being honest, meaning that we take for granted that human projections are fallacious; between feeling that the universe is a home created for us and feeling that we are mere guests in it; in short, between fighting for revolution or social progress and trusting only in personal salvation.

During the Great War Santayana publishes in *The Journal of Philosophy* his essay "Some Meanings of the Word 'Is'".<sup>5</sup> There, he reveals the ontological presuppositions of the question at stake, by distinguishing up to seven different meanings in the word "is": identity, equivalence, definition, predication, existence, actuality and derivation.

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<sup>4</sup> And religious consequences too. See, for instance, an early example in (IPR 169): speaking about the doctrine of transubstantiation, which is so important in the dialogue between Catholics and Protestants, Santayana declares that it is a case in which a metaphor becomes the base for a dogma, real facts — bread and wine — are considered accidents, appearances, whereas the ideological charge, the interpretation of the facts, is considered the real thing, the truth.

<sup>5</sup> This paper is reprinted in *Obiter Scripta* (OS). Santayana states the relevance of this essay in his December 3, 1934 letter to Justus Buchler and Benjamin P. Schwartz, the editors of OS: "I am also glad that you have rescued the "Meanings of the Word 'Is'." On re-reading that article, I feel that it contains my whole philosophy in a very clear and succinct form (*The Letters of George Santayana, Book Five*, 158).

The contrast between two of these is pivotal: the differentiation between identity (essence) and existence. Identity, in a radical sense, only asserts about something that it is what it is, and does not add descriptions or circumstances to the object, nor claim its existence. When we understand identity in this sense, it becomes the principle of essence and opens an infinite realm: the realm of essence. Santayana is aware of the fact that for a practical mind the assertion of identity between a thing and itself will seem a futile exercise; but it is not so for himself.<sup>6</sup> Other identities, maybe more interesting for other philosophers in spite of being less radical, are those of people or things, but these imply belief, not just contemplation, and therefore are troublesome and less crystalline than essences. The completely opposite pole is the sense of “*is*” as existence in order to name that which human beings *meet*, that which is imposed on subjects before they begin to know, that which enables them and their functions, that which forces subjects to believe in the substantiality of their surrounding world. Existence is another realm, infinite too — the realm of existence.

Unfortunately, in English two meanings and two very different scopes are contained in the same term “*is*”. His bilingual condition allows Santayana to remind us of the philosophical advantage of the Spanish language in an important footnote:

The Spanish language is comparatively discriminating in this matter, having three verbs for “to be” which cannot be used interchangeably. “To be or not to be” must be rendered by *existir*; “That is the question” requires *ser*; “There’s the rub” demands *estar*. Existence, essence, and condition or position are thus distinguished instinctively. (OS 153, footnote)

The confusion between “to be” as essence and “to be” as existence is exactly the core of the pathetic fallacy and the foundation of the paradoxical conclusion reached by G.E. Moore in his “The Refutation of Idealism.”<sup>7</sup> Moore rejected the identification established by M. Taylor between *real* and its *presence* as “an inseparable aspect of a sentient experience” (438), and the traditional idealist identification between *blue* and *experience of blue*. According to Moore “blue is not a part of the content of the image or sensation or idea of blue” (p. 449) because blue is the sensation’s *object*, not the *content* of a sensation. The daring, although paradoxical, conclusion is that “blue is as much an object, and as little a mere content, of my experience, when I experience it, as the most exalted and independent real thing of which I am ever aware” (p. 451). While he accepts the general refutation of idealism, Santayana refuses to consider that “blue” exists in the same sense as “blue flower”. Actually, both *are*, but “blue” is an essence, and the flower is an existence. Moore confuses both senses and this leads him to fall into the pathetic fallacy.

Two passages from Santayana’s writings, which belong to two fundamental works and dates, show how this problematic traverses his whole work. The first text appears in the preface to *Scepticism and Animal Faith*. There, Santayana claims that his philosophical system is grounded in the orthodoxy of common sense, and is not a new system for the universe or a new, fashionable metaphysics. At least, if “metaphysics” is understood as follows:

Metaphysics, in the proper sense of the word, is dialectical physics, or an attempt to determine matters of fact by means of logical or moral or rhetorical constructions. It arises by a confusion of those Realms of Being, which it is my special care to distinguish. It is neither physical speculation nor pure logic nor honest literature, but (as in the treatise of

<sup>6</sup> “In reality, to a simple or to a recollected spirit, the obvious often is enough.” (OS 143)

<sup>7</sup> *Mind*, vol. XII, 1903, pp. 433-453.

Aristotle first called by that name<sup>8</sup>) a hybrid of the three, materialising ideal entities, turning harmonies into forces, and dissolving natural things into terms of discourse. (SAF vii)

Few questions are so helpful in order to classify a philosophical system than the way this relates to the problem of metaphysics. Santayana keeps the term "metaphysics" for the categorical confusion that tries to establish questions of fact starting from logical, moral or rhetorical constructions. As long as reality as such is unknowable and foreign to logic, the philosopher can only perform speculative physics, pure logic or honest literature in order to avoid fallacy. Neo-realistic physics, applied logic and German philosophy are beyond reach of human beings. Harmonies and relationships established by logics neither move the world nor yield more than an ideal description of reality. Our logic can be trusted as pure logic; but it is a mistake to take as literally true a dialectical physics, which can only interpret natural things from the point of view of human, too human, discursive categories.

The second text cited above comes from the closing chapter of *The Realm of Spirit*, which is a general review of his own philosophical system. There, Santayana states that his aim has been the rejection of superstition, understood as the confusion between the manifest power — named *the realm of matter* — and the ideas, images or appearances that such power produces in our mind — named *the realm of essence*. Santayana presents himself as a critical philosopher whose task has been the analysis of that confusion with an eye to dissolving it:

This simple dissolution of superstition yields three of my realms of being: matter, as the region and method of power; essence, as the proper nature of appearances and relations; and spirit as the witness or moral sensibility that is subject to the double assault of material events and of dramatic illusions. (RB 834)

Psychologism is superstitious when it makes use of both categories without distinction, and attributes the actions of the body to the ideas of the mind. Poetry is superstitious too, when it believes in its own metaphors and personifications. So also science, when it believes that the world can be transparently known, that the sense-data and scientific theories are anything but mere symbols. Once we reject these superstitions, the spirit is emancipated.

Santayana not only analyzes the categorical mistakes of the pathetic fallacy, but also recognizes the psychological mechanism that underlies it. In this way he reaches the psyche, the true agent of the process. The term "psyche" appears in *Soliloquies in England and Later Soliloquies* and acquires prominence in his later works as an alternative name for conscience and soul, two terms that Santayana considers to be excessively charged with psychological or spiritualist connotations. He begins with the Greek sense of "breath that gives life", although he broadens the original meaning by including the vegetative, sensitive and part of the intellective functions from the Aristotelian classification. The human psyche is the pulse of the organism beating beneath human experience and making it possible. Humans are not conscious of its generating power, which steers them to look around to the exterior and not inside themselves. The ontological implications of the activity of the psyche are given by the acknowledgment that elements such as pleasure, pain, hunger, fear, color, sound, pictorial space, sentimental time and sensations of motion do not inhabit external objects but live within the psyche itself (RM 351). In Santayana's system, the subject's activity, conceived by modern thought as almost a replica of the divine creative activity, remains intentionally under the control of the animal part of human beings. The philosophical paradigm of reference is not modern idealism, but rather the manner

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<sup>8</sup> *Metaphysics*, VI, 1, 1026a, 19-24.

of an author such as Francis Bacon, who warned in his *Novum Organum* against the false notions and images that take hold of the mind: for instance, the tendency to presume that there is a higher order in Nature than the actual one, or to let words stand in for reality.

In *Scepticism and Animal Faith* Santayana presents the psyche not only as the source of sensitiveness and selection, but also as the origin of the categorical confusion and the psychological projection that conform the pathetic fallacy:

What appears (which is an ideal object and not an event) is thus confused with the event of its appearance; the picture is identified with the kindling or distraction of my attention falling by chance upon it; and the strain of my material existence, battling with material accidents, turns the ideal object too into a temporal fact, and makes it seem substantial. But this fugitive existence which I egotistically attach to it, as if its fate was that of my glimpses of it, is no part of its true being, as even my intuition discerns it; it is a practical dignity or potency attributed to it by the irrelevant momentum of my animal life. (SAF 38)

Every part of experience, as it comes, is illusion; and the source of this illusion is my animal nature, blindly labouring in a blind world. (SAF 52)<sup>9</sup>

Our animal life turns the appearance of the object, which is an essence, into a contingent, existent object. The psyche acts in an egotistical way, is fallacious, and moves blindly, because it lacks the light brought in by the spirit. Only in those few moments when there is harmony among the different impulses that usually keep the psyche busy, is the psyche able to see, know by intuition, play, laugh or meditate. The psyche itself is the source of the spirit, which depends on the psyche because its roots are buried deeply within it. Without this base the spirit would be nothing, although its function is not the work, which is the very task of the psyche, but the enjoyment of feelings and thoughts. The spirit entertains itself with essences and looks for the truth. In this sense, it suspends the psyche's judgments and deviations, and frees human beings from the pathetic fallacy. Santayana's spiritual corollary applies here: if we are "disintoxicated" from the pathetic fallacy, if we control our animal side, we will leave room enough for the manifestation of the spirit, which will be free from material and animal adherences. This is Santayana's well-known *metanoia* or "change of heart," and his message: "I can identify my self heartily with nothing in me except with the flame of spirit itself" (rw 20).

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<sup>9</sup> See also: "The animal mind expresses a reaction, a presumption, and therefore *projects* its data, and takes them for things" (*The Letters of George Santayana, Book Two*, 286).

# Santayana's Lectures on Aesthetics

George Santayana was a reluctant professor; not indifferent to his role, but willing to play the role only on his terms. The "professor's chair," according to Santayana, was one of the "traps that strangle philosophy" and "as soon as possible [he] got out ..."<sup>1</sup> Santayana became a lecturer in 1889, shortly after taking his Ph.D. from Harvard, and was given the task of teaching a class on aesthetics in 1892–93, which had not been offered at Harvard previously. "I was a kind of poet, I was alive to architecture and the other arts, I was at home in several languages: 'aesthetics' might be regarded as my specialty" (PP 393). From his experience teaching the course he would write *The Sense of Beauty*, which not only established him in the faculty, but established him as an original thinker in philosophy. Previously Santayana had published cartoons, reviews, articles, and poetry for the *Latin School Register*, *Harvard Lampoon*, *Harvard Monthly*, *Mind*, and the *Atlantic Monthly*. His only published book before *The Sense of Beauty* was an 1894 collection of poems entitled *Sonnets and Other Verses*.

In 1950 Santayana was interviewed by Catherine Casey and said *The Sense of Beauty*: "was prompted not by the Holy Ghost, but by being told by good friends that it would be better to write something if I wanted to stay on at Harvard."<sup>2</sup> Pressed by friends and professional pressures, Santayana chose this overlooked subject to make his appearance as an innovative voice in the philosophical world. "My sham course in 'aesthetics' had served its purpose and so had my little book. ... I was reappointed year by year ... with ... a seat in the Faculty, which I seldom occupied" (PP 393).

The publication of *The Sense of Beauty* brought Santayana together with the publishing house of Charles Scribner's Sons. *The Sense of Beauty*, according to Santayana, "established pleasant relations between [him] and Scribner which have lasted for fifty years" (PP 393). The immediate benefit of this relationship for Santayana was that the editors encouraged him to revise and be more aware of his writing style. Santayana wrote the following to Scribner's regarding *The Sense of Beauty*, "I am conscious of my inexperience in writing, and value your suggestions very much."<sup>3</sup>

The importance of this book for Santayana's professional career stretches beyond establishing Santayana's status on the Harvard faculty and his relationship with Charles Scribner's Sons. *The Sense of Beauty* was a philosophical treatise on aesthetics at a time when the subject was not talked about widely, let alone written and published on. According to John McCormick "*The Sense of Beauty* was the first American treatise on [aesthetics], and among the first in Britain or on the continent" (MCCORMICK 127). And as Arthur Danto points out it remains solidly in "the thin canon of aesthetics."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Maxims," Columbia Manuscript Collection, IX: 12, copyright 1967, Daniel Cory. Cited in *Animal Faith and Spiritual Life* edited by John Lachs (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1967, p. 168).

<sup>2</sup> Catherine Casey, "Philosopher Lives in the Nun's Nest," *Continental Daily Mail*, 19 July 1950, p.4. Cited in John McCormick's *George Santayana: A Biography* (New York: Paragon House, 1988, p. 127), to be abbreviated as MCCORMICK.

<sup>3</sup> Letter to Charles Scribner's Sons dated 26 July 1896 from George Santayana.

<sup>4</sup> "Introduction," *The Sense of Beauty*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press Critical Edition, 1986, p. xv.

In writing a book based on his aesthetics course, Santayana had the good fortune to obtain the notebook of a former student. Horatius Bonar Hastings, who graduated from Harvard University with an A.M. in 1893, was a student in Santayana's 1892–93 aesthetics' class. Hastings's detailed class notebook proved to be invaluable for Santayana.<sup>5</sup> Santayana wrote to Mr. Hastings regarding the notebook because he wished to use it as a guide in writing *The Sense of Beauty*. "Mr Henshaw showed me yesterday the very careful and full notes you took in Phil. 8. Might I borrow them long enough to have them copied? They will be very useful to me as they are much more full than the brief headings from which I lectured[.] I am thinking of publishing a little book based on these discussions, so that your notes will be invaluable to me."<sup>6</sup>

The use of the term "notebook" is prompted by the internal attributes of the lecture notes rather than the physical appearance, which consists of boards covered in marbled paper with a red leather spine. On the spine is printed, in gold lettering, "Aesthetics" and Santayana's last name appears under the class title. Also printed on the spine is the course number, "Phil. VIII." The book itself is approximately 8½ by 7 inches and comes from McNamee Binder in Cambridge, Massachusetts. There are 161 pages numbered by Hastings, which do not fill all of the blank pages of the notebook. The letter cited above from Santayana to Hastings's was pasted into the front of the notebook, presumably by Hastings. The lecture notes are written in black pen and in pencil with marginalia that is written in red and black ink, and pencil (the Edition is unsure whether the marginalia can be attributed to Santayana even though he is known for habitual jotting of marginalia). John Cummings, a fellow student, wrote the notes for the 21 October 1892 lecture, and for the 24 October 1892 lecture Hastings borrowed Geo. Turner's notes to copy into his notebook. There is also a copy of a test that Santayana gave to his class that has been pasted in towards the end of the notebook. Throughout the notebook there are pictures depicting certain topics and themes discussed in class. The provenance of the pictures, which range from building façades to angels, is most likely from Hastings, due to the fact that a majority of them have been pasted in, in relation to particular lectures.

The lecture notes share an organization with *The Sense of Beauty* and correspond to the four main divisions of the published work. The notes for the four lectures of 30 September through 7 October treat the nature of beauty, the notes for seven of the eight lectures of 10 October through 2 November treat the materials of beauty (the lecture of 26 October is an exception), and the notes for the 13 lectures of 4 November through 7 December treat the topic of form. Only one lecture, the final one of 16 December 1892, treats the topic of expression, which is dealt with in the fourth and second-longest part of the published work.

While the lecture notes and the book are similar in structure, the notes reveal how the aesthetics course differed in content from the subsequent published work. The notes record Santayana's references to specific thinkers and philosophical works, diagrams he used in lectures, and detailed discussions which are eliminated in the

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<sup>5</sup> The Santayana Edition received the notebook as a gift from the Hastings family in the late 1990s when the edition was housed at Texas A&M University. Brenda Bridges transcribed the first half before the edition moved to Indianapolis. Johanna Resler finished the transcription and is in the process of proofing the work with Kristine Frost. Horatius's son, John, received the notebook from his father, which enabled the family to later pass on the treasure to the Santayana Edition via the grandson, Paul. There were two other notebooks that Horatius Hastings passed on to his son at the time, Fine Arts I and II (two notebooks) from the 1891–92 class with Professor Charles H. Moore.

<sup>6</sup> Letter to Hastings dated 14 April 1893 from George Santayana.

published work. A further feature of the lecture notes is the inclusion of illustrations of specific art works along with notes of Santayana's comments on these works. The largest collection of such comments is found in a lecture on works that depict angels, a trace of which appears in *The Sense of Beauty*, only in an extremely attenuated form.

Notes for the lectures of 30 September and 5 October record the texts for Santayana's course along with recommendations for term papers. The primary texts appear to have been Gustav Theodor Fechner's *Vorschule der Aesthetik* (1876), Sully-Prudhomme's *L'Expression dans les Beaux-Arts* (1883), and Grant Allen's *Physiological Aesthetics* (1877). Further texts discussed include various articles by Allen, Jean-Marie Guyau's *Les Problèmes de l'Esthétique Contemporaine* (1884), Edmund Gurney's *The Power of Sound* (1880), Hermann von Helmholtz's *On the Sensations of Tone as a Physiological Basis for the Theory of Music* (1875), Herbert Spencer's *The Principles of Psychology* (1855), and Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757). The mention of Guyau and Spencer confirms part of McCormick's speculations about what Santayana had read in aesthetics at the time of his course (MCCORMICK 127-2).

Other thinkers were discussed in lectures on pleasure and pain, where Santayana engaged the theories of Augustine, Plato, Schopenhauer, and Locke, as well as contemporary work of Münsterberg and James (whose *Principles of Psychology* Santayana had reviewed the previous year for the *Atlantic Monthly*). Santayana also discussed contemporary evolutionists' theory of pleasure and pain and objections to their position. In lectures notes on perception of form, discussions of Wundt, James, Fechner, and Kant appear. Discussion of apperception and Kant's theory is more prominent in the course notes than in the published work, where it is scattered and without direct reference to Kant. In his lectures on materials of beauty and color, Santayana made passing reference to Goethe's work on color, but in *The Sense of Beauty* the several mentions of Goethe all concern his poetry.

Santayana went into great detail in his lectures about the physiology of the ear and the eye, and Hastings has included in his notes diagrams presumably used in lectures. Notes for 21 October show a drawing of an ear and auditory nerve perceiving sound. Notes for 4 November have a couple of drawings of the anatomy of the eye as part of an explanation of color perception. The detailed physiological explanations certainly date the lectures in terms of the science of the day, and perhaps dispensing with this material in the published work came from a sense of what would most quickly become obsolete (though references to the ether in a discussion of a theory of vision can be found in *The Sense of Beauty*).

In addition to the physiological diagrams there is a diagram more relevant to Santayana's own ideas that appears in the notes for 10 October. In this lecture Santayana summarized the preceding lectures on the nature of beauty and presented a diagram of his classification of perceptions (this classification is key to the notion at issue in Altman's article, "Santayana's Troubled Distinction: Aesthetics and Ethics in *The Sense of Beauty*," which appears in the Fall 1998 edition of *Overheard in Seville: Bulletin of the Santayana Society*). It graphically represents the distinctions Santayana draws between perceptions of fact and perceptions of value. The latter perceptions are further discriminated into perceptions of pain and perceptions of pleasure. The latter are again distinguished as perceptions of extrinsic and intrinsic pleasures; and finally they are divided into perceptions of positive value in a thing objectified (that is, perceptions of beauty) and perceptions of positive value consciously subjectified.

Other notable material found in Santayana's lectures includes criticisms of Whitman and American culture that are harsher compared to what appears in the published work. The lecture notes for 16 November correspond to section 27 of *The*

*Sense of Beauty*, "Aesthetics of democracy," in which democracy is cited as a case of unity in multiplicity through uniformity and Whitman is acknowledged as the poet of democracy. In lecture Santayana characterized Whitman as a great force though not a great poet and said that he was "at heart a very uncouth [poet]." Santayana characterized contemporary American life as narrow and lacking in noble interests, and he commented unfavorably on American modes of dress. In contrast, Santayana seems to have taken greater pains in his book to find the virtues of Whitman and democracy even as he acknowledged the difficulty of doing so. Santayana's views are not surprising, of course, but it is interesting nonetheless to observe his restraint in print made explicit in the comparison.

The notes also contain, as one may expect, local wit and well-crafted expressions for which Santayana has a deserved reputation. His discussion of color included a comment about the objective ugliness of Yale blue; and his fondness for football appeared in his lectures and elicited laughter (according to the notes taken) when he remarked on the "rough sort ... of somber beauty" of football (7 October 1892). The notes record several interesting general observations on philosophy in connection with his discussion of metaphysical explanations of pleasure and pain. Santayana discussed the connection between morals and metaphysical claims (which figures in his later criticism of Dewey) and made the claim "we are rationalists or irrationalists in our philosophy as a whole if we believe the world is good as it is or bad" (17 October 1892). And when he discussed the ultimately disadvantageous character of indefinite form in relation to the flaws of Emerson he flatly stated: "Better a definite wrong view than an indeterminate view that is neither right nor wrong" (23 November 1892).

The lecture notes come with a collection of photographs of works of art including buildings, paintings, drawings, and a mosaic. The photographs of buildings go with lectures in which architecture is discussed (9 November 1892 and 30 November 1892). The majority of examples are European cathedrals, though the Eiffel Tower is included in the illustrations and mentioned in lecture. About half the photographs are loose in the notebook, but many are pasted into the notebook with the corresponding lecture. This is, for the most part, the case with the works discussed in the lecture of 26 October 1892.

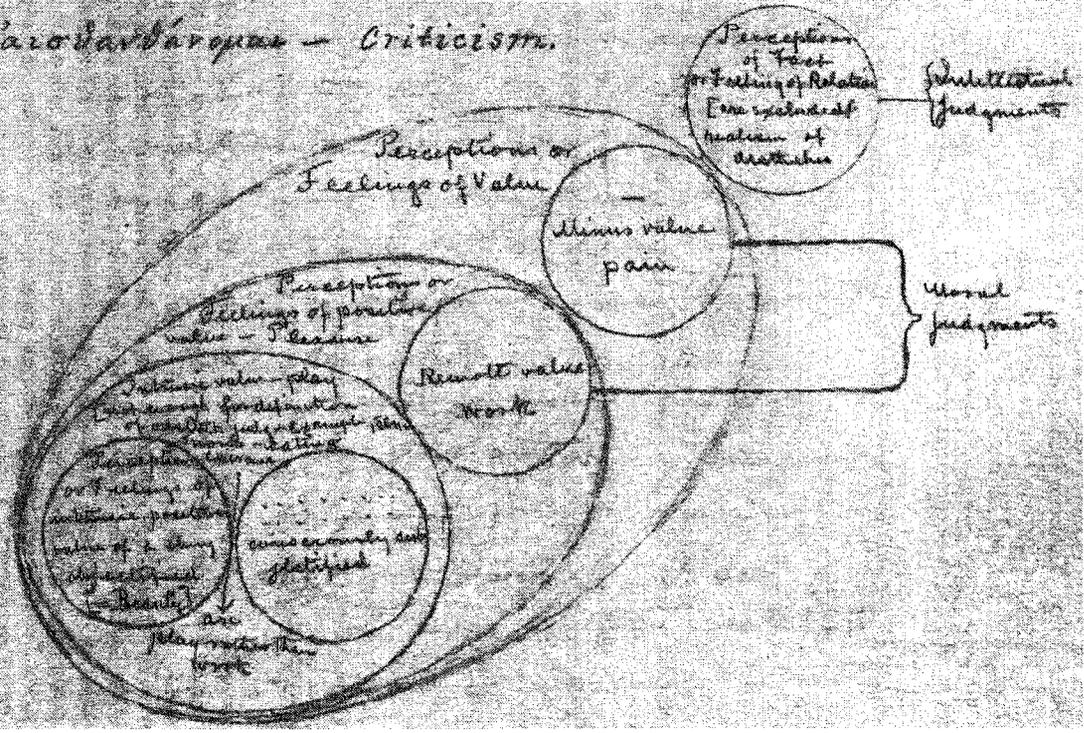
#### OPPOSITE

is a diagram of types of perceptions discussed in Santayana's course on aesthetics. The course is labeled:

Aesthetics, Philosophy 8  
George Santayana

(25)

# आलोचनात्मक - Criticism.



On 26 October Santayana gave a lecture for which there is no counterpart in *The Sense of Beauty*. It is atypical of the lectures in that it bears a title: "A lecture on Angels." It is a survey of works by the artists Filippino Lippi (Italian painter, 1457–1504), Pietro Perugino (Italian painter, 1450–1523), Donatello (Italian sculptor, 1386–1466), Sir Joshua Reynolds (English painter, 1723–92), Carlo Crivelli (Italian painter, 1430/35–1495), Tintoretto (Italian painter, 1528–94), Titian (Italian painter, 1485–1576), Bartolomé Esteban Murillo (Spanish painter, 1617–82), Carlo Dolci (Italian painter, 1616–86), and Michaelangelo (Italian painter and sculptor, 1475–1564). The lecture notes record Santayana's comments on these artists and their work concerned with angels, and these comments are supplemented with pictures of many of the works mentioned.

This lecture falls toward the end of his lectures that correspond with Part II of *The Sense of Beauty*, "The Materials of Beauty"; however, the only obvious trace of the lecture to appear in the published work is found in section 46, "Ideal Characters," a section in Part III, "Form." In this section of *The Sense of Beauty* there is a paragraph about imaginary forms that takes as an example the form of a "winged man." Santayana characterizes Michelangelo as one whose appreciation of the actual human form was so deep that such an imaginative form was uninteresting. This characterization appears rooted in an observation recorded in the lecture notes where Santayana is reported to have said, "Angelo never painted angels with wings" (26 October 1892).

The main interest of the lecture notes is the picture they provide of Santayana's preparation for writing *The Sense of Beauty*. Specific thinkers and works of art are discussed thereby recording influences on Santayana's book. Because it is known that Santayana himself inspected the notes and used them in writing *The Sense of Beauty*, as attested to by his letter to the student, they carry added reliability as a source of the published work. Included with this discussion of the lecture notes is a brief outline of the notebook. It is intended to make apparent the correspondence of the notebook with *The Sense of Beauty* and to situate lectures and topics mentioned in this discussion.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> His course outline, not included here, will appear on the webpage for this article, to be posted on the *Bulletin* website.

# On the Absence of Argument in Santayana

Although this has been claimed more than once, it would be incorrect to say that Santayana never puts forward arguments in support of his positions. Consider his onslaught against transcendental idealism and his savage critique of empiricism. Were these compiled, they would run to hundreds of pages. What is the case, however, is that he passes over numerous occasions where other philosophers might insist on some further investigation and justification, and passes over them without acknowledging any gap in reasoning. I point to examples and comment on what appear to be his reasons, within the context of his developed system of thought. One is his treatment of justification in epistemology, where animal faith becomes the dominant feature. Other examples turn on the definitions he gives to his ontological realms of being. In some cases, these definitions assist him to bypass some standard philosophical puzzles, which are consigned to the scientist. As well, his realms of being are meant to be starting points for his systematic philosophy, and do not have definitions in terms of something else; this means that his reasoning with them cannot have the form of deductions from strictly defined formulae, and consequently may appear lacking in rigour.

Santayana downplays or ignores the task of justification so much emphasized in contemporary epistemology. In the second reconstructive half of *SAF*, he considers what objects animal faith requires him to posit, based only on an instinctive assurance of their existence (*SAF* 106). But this comes close, one might say, to unsupported justification by faith alone. In *SAF* and in the continuation of his argument in the first three chapters of *RM*, his concern is more with limiting his posits to those required to account for human action than it is with justifying those he does make. In his eyes, the most important constraint is an internal one: the agent's posit must be a serious one, reflecting self-knowledge and radical sincerity. No line of reasoning is offered for an objective evaluation of sincerity; but he is prepared to argue at length that the tenets of some philosophers (for instance those who avoid the category of substance) are incompatible with the assumptions they make in everyday activities.

Where today's focus in epistemology is on justification, Santayana stresses belief and faith in his theory of knowledge. His treatment of justification is a meagre one, and seems deficient on occasions where he appears to advance the thesis that knowledge is merely faith. Here is one example giving this impression, with my italics added: "All knowledge, *being faith* in an object posited and partially described, *is belief* in substance, in the etymological sense of this word" (*SAF* 182). Thus knowledge is faith; it is belief; however, he never says that it is *only* faith, and in fact his account of knowledge conforms in outline to the standard tripartite one. While knowledge is indeed belief, it is "true belief grounded in experience, I mean, controlled by outer facts" (*SAF* 180). Still, a closer look reveals divergences between his and a more standard account. For him, a knowledge claim must make an assertion of existence in his narrow sense of material existence: there is "an object posited and partially described." The partial description must be true in a weak sense, for it will be symbolic rather than literal truth. It must be "grounded in experience," but he is more concerned that the knowledge be grounded in outer facts than that one can give an overt justification. I deal only with this latter point.

Thus Santayana emphasizes the belief rather than the descriptive part and its truth; and in regard to justification, he occasionally says outright that the *depth* of a belief is the determining factor. Critics might see in this a doctrine of justification by faith, which would be a religious dogma rather than a philosophical doctrine. Some light can be thrown on this issue by noting that Santayana often has in mind examples one is not apt to find in an epistemology text. His critiques often centre on what he sees as false presuppositions, and he says of presuppositions that what matters is the depth of the faith rested in them. These are the assumptions on which other justifications rest; the challenge is not to give external proofs of validity, which would have no grounds on which to rest. Instead, one must search out within oneself what are in fact the deeper presuppositions. As it is with moral issues, self-knowledge is the key. This is his definitive statement on the question:

The deepest presuppositions, for a naturalist, are the most trustworthy, since they express the primary adjustment of the psyche to the world; but for a critic looking for demonstration the deepest presuppositions are the most arbitrary. (PGS 517)

No demonstrations are forthcoming for these deeper presuppositions; they are not justifiable in any obvious way from superficial observations. No doubt one must gauge the plausibility of a belief in relation to other beliefs, in giving credence to it. However, there is no suggestion that coherence is the criterion: a consideration of the other beliefs could, perhaps at a hidden level, lead to changes in that belief, but so long as the belief is held, its justification rests in a "primary adjustment of the psyche to the world." It is assumed that the depth of the belief is a good sign for such an adjustment.

An obvious question arises: what can serve as a corrective to a deeply held false presupposition? For Santayana, our belief in presuppositions depends on internal and largely hidden comparisons with other items of animal faith. As with other knowledge claims, presuppositions are confirmed in a general pragmatic manner from their fruits. A belief that leads one astray is ripe for change. Obviously such corrections do not come easily; he sees the issue in terms of self-knowledge. For instance, we all believe in substance, to the extent that we assume we have knowledge; and this is inevitable, at least during action. However, we might be persuaded otherwise, perhaps by doubts about the nature of substance and our inability to describe it fully, doubts put forward by "critic[s] looking for a demonstration." He tries to wheedle his readers into a realization, through their own assertions or assumptions or actions, that they indeed place their faith in substance and indeed in matter. We all believe in substance at a visceral level, he quite correctly claims, and self-examination should allow this to overcome shallow arguments to the contrary, or more especially devices that cloud over this fact. Santayana thinks that philosophers may sometimes be relying on justifications of knowledge claims that appear sophisticated and definitive, but that in reality conflict with true belief. In place of these, he argues that animal faith is inevitable and should not be denied philosophical respectability.

If the notion that the deepest beliefs are the most trustworthy has some plausibility in the special case of presuppositions, there is an obvious case where the notion has no plausibility whatsoever. Such a doctrine fails radically for propositions in mathematics and in logical theory. An appeal to the depth of belief is of no help here. Suppose I believe that there exists a constructive proof of the consistency of arithmetic, and another of the decidability of first-order logic. Since both claims are false and known with certainty to be false, these beliefs can scarcely count as cases of knowledge, however much conviction they carry with them. The truth is not a function of the strength or the depth of belief. Santayana has a response for these two examples and for other like ones. According to his notion of knowledge (and of truth) theorems of

mathematics and of logic do not count as known (or as true), at least in the primary sense of the terms. Nor would the mathematical "existence proofs" mentioned above generate existences in Santayana's sense of the word 'existence', despite the familiarity of this usage in mathematics. A knowledge claim must make some assertion of material existence, perhaps at a somewhat removed level, and must assign some sort of description of that existence. Assertions of logical validity may "posit" a kind of existence, but this will only be an essence; the assertion cannot qualify as a truth that might be known.

Certainly, his account of knowledge and truth in this special case is unusual and indeed counter intuitive; and he is left with a separate problem of explaining what passes for formal knowledge and truth. I pass over this issue, noting only that his approach to this challenge follows principles he has already used and is not a makeshift position. In his account of knowledge, what is known is always absent from intuition, although it is partially described or named by intuited essences. Intuition never yields knowledge. He sees a proof of a priori proposition as a development or elaboration of the essence from which the proof starts. The final result is an enrichment of that original essence, showing properties not before seen. The proof does not yield knowledge of some absent existence, but merely an enhanced intuition. This approach conforms to his general outlook and is consistently maintained throughout his discussion. As elsewhere, his sharp distinction between essence and existence (matter) comes into play, with truth only applying to propositions that at some level depend on matter.

Santayana holds, I think, that the standard account of knowledge is too much tied to such logical and mathematical examples. There, a candidate for knowledge or truth is a proposition in which some particular configuration is described. If this configuration is realized, and we have found good reason to assert this, we are then justified in asserting knowledge of the proposition or allocating belief to it; otherwise not. He has something rather different in mind. When we perceive a physical object we have in the first instance faith in the existence of that object. This is animal faith, and is not bestowed voluntarily. We formulate, on a secondary level, descriptions in terms of essence, and can through experience improve this description; but the faith comes first and is stable throughout.

Santayana's discussions of knowledge are usually not concerned with presuppositions of the kind discussed above, and certainly not with a priori claims. For the most part, he deals with perception and derivative claims to knowledge of an external object. In this case, the measure of validity, as is held by pragmatists, depends on the fruitful consequences of belief resting on one description as compared with others. He is concerned with replacing a description with a better one, rather than finding and justifying the best description.

Puzzles that he thinks are philosophically unsolvable and lead only to endless debate are often skirted by Santayana. Many of these he consigns to the scientist. This does not mean he turns over all of epistemology to science; for his scepticism about the possibility of literal knowledge of the external world is derived prior to scientific enquiry. However he leaves for the scientist, for instance, the problem of finding the relation between mind and matter, and the problem of identifying the real constituents of matter. This is not unusual, of course. Worth noting, though, is the manner in which his chosen categories allow him to proceed easily with other issues, despite the absence of any solution to these problems; he manages to bypass them without detriment to his philosophical goals. This appears to

turn on the scope and conspicuous generality he assigns to his four basic categories. I consider the two examples of mind and matter.

Santayana does not care to dispute the notorious problem of how mind is tied to body, conceding that he has little to offer by way of solution. If any light is to be thrown on the manner in which spirit emerges in animal life, this would surely require further investigations by scientists. One must harbour doubts whether science as presently constituted can make progress in this direction; perhaps the problem calls for a wholly new approach to scientific method itself, or perhaps the human mind is inherently beyond reach. Santayana himself leans to just such doubts. However, spirit has emerged and continues to emerge where there is a certain level of animal life. His view is well illustrated by his response to Charles Strong in PGS. Strong, he says, found "a most grave problem in what has never troubled me, namely, in the origin of consciousness within an unconscious world" (PGS 596). Santayana could not agree with the solutions Strong presented for this problem, which "were rationalist arguments applied to matters of fact," and instead leaves it an unexplained miracle:

... it seems to me that, since nature has found some means of eliciting mind out of matter, this mind may live content without dictating, out of its own resources, how nature could or could not have done it. The miracle recurs in us every morning and at the birth of every child; and the difficulties we find in conceiving it arise from our prejudices, not from the miracle itself. Everything is a miracle, until we call it natural, and everything is equally natural that actually happens. (PGS 597)

Thus mind, for him, is something elicited by matter, which philosophers are not competent to explain and must leave to a science that may or may not have better luck.

Santayana usually avoids the term 'mind', and uses it rather loosely when he does appeal to it. His favoured category is that of spirit, and when reasoning more precisely he invariably juxtaposes it with psyche. For him, spirit is merely consciousness, awareness — the difference between being awake and being asleep. A plausible explanation of how consciousness arises in animal life will involve matter. Indeed, it *must* involve matter, in virtue of his definitions, because the realm of matter encompasses all causal agency: a discussion of origins will turn on mental *events* arising in the material psyche. In his system, the difficult (perhaps unsolvable) problem of how spirit emerges in the realm of matter is not at all the concern of the realm of spirit. In short, spirit is defined in such a way as to avoid questions about the relation of mind with body; it is entirely impotent; and any claim that spirit can influence events is ruled out in advance.

Those who find the notion of impotent spirit incorrect or incoherent, he says, are not taking into account his definitions (PGS xxx). I think he is correct on this point; however, some will question the definitions themselves, and ask whether they capture the true situation. His readers might have difficulty with the notion of a pure consciousness that is divorced from effective will and action, and may be unwilling to separate out a feeling of active will from the agency that carries out an action. For Santayana, conscious will is self-evidently an effect rather than a cause: "It has no magic powers and its supposed effects are the effects of its causes" (RB 635). The true causes rest in the psyche. Here he can allege of his critics that they are too much influenced by a Cartesian heritage, and would find some support in today's philosophical community.

On a second question, however, his position would occasion less support. The notion of spirit, it will be said, lacks a clear, exact definition; and without such a definition, one cannot make the requisite deductions of a satisfactory theory. A definition, perforce, must be a definition in terms of something else. But Santayana does not conform to this ideal, and this is perhaps the main obstacle to the

understanding of his later thought. For him, the realm of spirit is not definable, in the sense that it can be elucidated in terms of alternative concepts. In his view, we know well enough what it is, without any resort to complex definitions. He means it to be awareness in act — nothing abstract. The trouble with more precisely formulated definitions that have been offered is that in many cases the peculiar nature of live consciousness is lost.

Santayana manages to retain the special character of awareness in his discussions of spirit by quite simply purging everything other than awareness from his understanding of what spirit is. While it might be thought that little of interest can be done with such a thin notion, in fact some of his most important themes are taken up in *The Realm of Spirit*. There, he develops the concept of spiritual freedom and discusses intuition in detail. In the final three chapters, entitled "Distraction," "Liberation," and "Union," he presents his account of a good life from the restricted point of view of spirit. Nowhere does he concern himself with the question of how spirit might arise, and how one might strive to attain liberation and union — important questions but not the concern of his investigation of spirit. It not be impossible, but surely be more difficult to carry out such an enquiry in terms of active mind *without* something neutral like the concept of spirit.

A similar problem arises when a precise definition is sought for the concept of truth. Santayana gives us a general notion of what he means by truth:

The truth, however nobly it may loom before the scientific intellect, is ontologically something secondary. Its eternity is but the wake of the ship of time, a furrow which matter must plough upon the face of essence. Truth must have a subject-matter, it must be the truth about something; and it is the character of this moving object, lending truth and definition to the truth itself, that is substantial and fundamental in the universe. (RB 405)

This and eight somewhat longer but still short passages from earlier writings are cited in the preface of his *The Realm of Truth*; and it becomes clear that not much further is forthcoming — this is to be his definition.

For analytic philosophers, this would seem unsatisfactory, and they would be led to seek something more precise. They would look for something from which exact consequences might flow. This is a laudable goal, but experience shows that efforts in this direction often generate more problems than they solve. The most important characteristics of truth for Santayana are its independence from mind and its eternally unchanging nature. But precisely these two features seem to be destroyed by the more typical putative definitions. These tend to turn on language — and what could be more natural? Still, as soon as we introduce a natural or formal human language, we relinquish the first of these critical features of the notion of truth. The second feature, which Santayana also sees as an essential part of our common sense notion of truth, tends to lose out with the definition offered; and in any case, critics may find it too "metaphysical." He sees "the truth" as something that arises directly from the physical events that constitute the realm of matter. These events take one form rather than another, and the truth is merely the record of these. No doubt there are difficulties with Santayana's account of truth; Sprigge finds it the least convincing of the four realms. However, I believe that any satisfactory account must reckon with the two characteristics mentioned above.

The example of truth illustrates my point that definitions of his basic categories can distort the sense he wants to assign to them. However, it is not a good example of my suggestion that his categories cannot be defined in terms of something else; for a case can be made that truth is indeed expressible as a function of two of his other realms. Although truth is one of the four fundamental concepts, it appears definable,

or almost so, in terms of essence and matter: truth, he says, is “a furrow which matter must plough upon the face of essence.” He might perhaps manage with only three realms, and indeed originally planned to do so. However, it clearly plays a fundamental role in his thought; and it uniquely expresses the instability of matter in the static terms of essence. I set aside this question, noting only that, under a definition in terms of essence and matter, truth retain the above two required features.

The situation with the realm of matter is rather similar. Matter is the central concept of his natural philosophy, and he deals with it at great length. However, a clear definition of the nature of matter is not available; and the empiricist option of dealing only with experience of matter is for him one of the false steps of modern philosophy. He acknowledges a genuine and profound problem. What are the elements of matter? Which properties of matter are primary and which secondary? He feels that philosophy can contribute little to the solution, and turns over to science “the mooted question concerning the primary and secondary qualities of matter” (SAF 82). That philosophical analysis is not suited to finding a solution, of course, is accepted by today’s philosophers. However, he takes exception to a traditional approach to this subject, dating back to classical empiricism and widely retained in his day.

Santayana is a dedicated critic of classical empiricists and their later followers for dropping substance from their discourse and replacing it by moments of experience. More recently, appeal is made to other reductive substitutes: I think that his same objection might be levelled at those who replace talk of substance by talk of propositions and theory in their discourse. This too has the fault that he finds of replacing things by ideas of things. Despite his lack of expertise in science, he feels a certain rapport with modern scientists when he insists on admitting matter as his paramount realm of being, and keeping it in the forefront of his discussion of action. Physicists formulate theories about matter, and their research papers concern these theories; but I think that the actual matter, as distinct from the theory, is never far from their minds.

When he rejects any use of reductive substitutes for matter, Santayana introduces for himself a rather different problem: in their absence, he must find a viable alternative way to speak of substance or matter. This problem is made more difficult by his sceptical position about literal knowledge of facts. The substance he introduces, matter, is vaguely defined, and hard to deal with effectively. According to his sceptical position, matter is an unknown thing-in-itself; it is not possible for the senses aided by scientific theory to penetrate to its depths. However, in order to appeal to matter, as he does continually, he must have more than this utterly indistinct notion. What he fashions is a workable concept of matter by making assumptions about RM just sufficient for him to explain human action, without encroaching at all on the scientific domain. He asks: What are the minimal assumptions that must be made about matter allowing a fruitful interaction with the world? In answer, he offers five “indispensable properties” of matter. In brief: “A world in which action is to occur must be external, spatial, and temporal, possessing variety and unity” (RB 202 marginal note). These are not at all scientific and are not meant to be. He carries these assumptions in all later discussions involving matter. As well, he goes on to list five “presumable properties” of matter, and appears to treat these in a similar fashion.

It is not obvious how to deal with these privileged properties. Are they meant to be the really real properties of matter? Are they essential to matter in his theory? I do not think they can be, given Santayana’s sceptical stance. The real properties of matter are hidden from human enquiry, and only science can approach them. Nevertheless, he treats them as essential to matter throughout subsequent discussions. I think that they have to be treated as assumptions, but assumptions with almost the same force as the

animal faith we have in matter. This latter is a posit or assumption, but one that is forced on us in action. From the point of view of logic, we are not forced to believe in matter, but we believe in it anyway through animal faith. These “indispensable” properties must remain assumptions, but he will carry them whenever he speaks of matter in a context of action, and in this sense they are essential.

This account of matter closely follows his treatment of knowledge, which for him is always an assertion that some thing exists with certain properties. When we claim knowledge, we are invariably assuming substance of some kind; this is not a rational assumption, but is based on irrational animal faith. Thus substance is presumed in any knowledge claim. In like fashion, in our interactions with substance we are led to assume further that our actions take place in a material world of space and time. Although Santayana frequently makes incidental arguments in favour of a materialist philosophy, the closest he comes to a formal proof of materialism surely lies in these first three chapters of *RM*.

In dealing with matter, Santayana’s arguments may seem ad hoc and incomplete; often he suggests that something has no explanation other than the fact that *RM* makes it so — it is the way of matter. Those for whom matter is replaced by something more specific will look for a more thorough and forceful explanation of why the particular fact occurs. But when they insist on a further explanation, he believes, they often introduce extraneous and misleading assumptions. If a philosopher seeks to go further, there is the ever present danger of inserting ideas a priori into the equation. On this issue, Santayana follows the ancient materialists, and criticizes Aristotle as too much influenced by Plato’s idealism and the Socratic view of knowledge of the world. Aristotle disparaged Democritus and other materialists for failing to explain why things happen as they do; but for Santayana the sorts of explanations given by Aristotle impose at the outset a faulty bias upon the Western tradition, and set off its compromise of the autonomy of matter.

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# BIBLIOGRAPHICAL CHECKLIST

## TWENTIETH 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 Kristine Frost, Santayana Edition, School of Liberal Arts, IUPUI, Indianapolis IN 46202–5140.

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#### 2004

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## The Santayana Edition

We are extremely pleased to announce that in August 2004 the Santayana Edition was awarded a grant by the National Endowment for the Humanities. This is a renewal grant for \$100,000 in outright funds with an offer of up to \$50,000 in federal matching funds, which carries NEH funding for *The Works of George Santayana* through July of 2006. With this critical support from the NEH, together with continued financial commitment from the Indiana University School of Liberal Arts, the project is committed to publish volume seven, which consists of the five books of *The Life of Reason*, and volume eight, *Three Philosophical Poets*, in the next two years. On the basis of this internal and external support and with generous help from foundations and private donors, we were able to hire a third full-time person to the Santayana Edition staff. David Spiech, who has an educational background in German, journalism, and editing, joined us in March 2004 as an editorial assistant.

In October 2004, the Santayana Edition is to relocate in a different building on the IUPUI campus. The new offices of the Edition are part of The Institute for American Thought suite, which includes shared space for the library and archival resources of the Peirce Edition Project and the Santayana Edition. These special research collections may be of particular interest to scholars:  
(<http://www.liberalarts.iupui.edu/iat/>).

*The Letters of George Santayana, Book Six, 1937–1940*, was published in June, and we anticipate that *Book Seven, 1941–1947*, will be available in late fall of 2004.

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## *Overheard in Seville*

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