

Overheard in Seville

*Bulletin of the
Santayana
Society*

No. 6
Fall 1988



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ANNOUNCEMENT

The Society's annual meeting will mark the forthcoming publication by the MIT Press of the critical edition of *The Sense of Beauty*, Volume II of the Santayana Edition. The meeting be held in conjunction with the December meetings of the American Philosophical Association (Eastern Division) in Washington, D. C.

SANTAYANA SOCIETY

1988
ANNUAL MEETING

Chair: **Paul G. Kuntz**
Professor Emeritus, Emory University

Presentation of the Critical Edition of *The Sense of Beauty*:
Mrs. Betty Stanton, Associate Editor, Bradford Books, MIT Press
Herman J. Saatkamp, Jr., General Editor, Santayana Edition
William G. Holzberger, Textual Editor and Co-Editor

Speaker: **Arthur Danto**
Johnsonian Professor of Philosophy
Columbia University

Commentator: **Willard Arnett**
Gillespie Professor Emeritus
Chatham College

7:30 p.m. 28 December
Baltimore Room
Sheraton Washington Hotel

The Enduring Value of Santayana's Philosophy

The Task of Philosophy

That Santayana's style is literary, even poetic, is clearly true. That it is too literary is a condemnation based on an idea of what philosophy should be. Such ideas are typically controversial and ill-supported: they belong to the ultimate presuppositions of a system of thought rather than among its substantiated results. When someone says, therefore, that a person with whom he disagrees on a set of identifiable conceptual topics is not really doing philosophy, we must interpret his comments as an exercise in rhetoric. We all want to reach for the high ground, which it is easiest to do by denying the legitimacy of our opponent's enterprise.

Rhetoric apart, however, there is a real disagreement here between Santayana and his critics. Some philosophers think their task is similar to and dependent on science: they are to take the results of the scientific endeavor and, by investigation and reasoning closely akin to it, develop theories of the greatest generality. Others urge us to abandon all hope for their ancient discipline: everything of importance will be discovered by science, is already embodied in ordinary speech or has long been revealed by the Deity. Those who favor the former view want to make philosophy into a precise and technical subject, while those committed to the latter busy themselves with exploding the grand illusions of the generalizers.

Santayana disagreed with both of these groups. He thought all of language and all knowledge constitute but a tenuous, symbolic grasp of the real. Science discloses, therefore, neither the literal nor the absolute truth about the world: Familiarity with it is useful and important, but we must not suppose that it resolves all the problems of human life and of philosophy. We have also much to learn from philosophical reflection on science, common sense, religion and the most general features of reality. Even if, as Santayana clearly believed, the common sense of mankind embodies in its practices the soundest philosophy, there is need for discerning thought to raise the tenets of this animal faith to explicit consciousness, to clarify them, to distinguish them from the arbitrary dogmas which overlay them in the public mind, and to shape them into a consistent whole. Since the task of philosophy is to stimulate reflective thought, its content must be discursively defensible but its language must be evocative and rich. In this way, it can summon up those essences of great generality whose contemplation helps to make sense of our life experience.

The following passages are taken from the final chapter of *George Santayana*, (1988) in the United States Authors Series; the editors are grateful to Twayne Publishers, a division of G. K. Hall and Co. for permission to publish these excerpts. Much of this same material was read to the Santayana Society in New York in December, 1987.

This view of the contribution of philosophy appears to me to be thoroughly sensible. It avoids the absurd pretension of claiming preeminence for the field and certainly for its results. But it clearly affirms that though philosophy is not the queen of the sciences, it is also not the meaningless ravings of deluded minds. Philosophical thought plays a central role in the modest enterprise of human knowledge. It is of course, as all thought, optional. But once we embark on the enterprise of trying to understand life instead of merely living it, sound reflection on the irreducibly different features of existence, on human nature and on the good life becomes essential. Philosophers can then employ their critical skills, their ability to see connections and their imagination to devise theories about the nature of the world and about the proper place of human beings in it. Their products will lack certain truth – everything does – but they will, in varying measures, enhance our understanding of ourselves.

Naturalistic Approach to Language

There is another issue connected with language and philosophy that should be mentioned here. For many centuries, philosophy was concerned with human beings and the realities that surround them. This direct interest in persons and objects was largely replaced, in the early years of the modern world, by overwhelming worries about our cognitive apparatus. The preoccupation with thought itself yielded to primary concern with language during the present century. The belief seems to have gained currency among some philosophers that since language mediates our cognitive contact with the world, the best or the only way to discern the general features of reality is by attending to the way we articulate or shape them through our speech.

It is to Santayana's great credit that he did not fall prey to either of these unfortunate tendencies. It is not, of course, that he failed to take an interest in thought and language. But his approach to them was that of a naturalist and not of someone who thinks that they are unconditioned, foundational realities. He saw them, in other words, in their organic, historical and social context as human responses to a baffling and threatening world. He used them with an understanding of their potential and with care not to exceed their limits. He was, above all, sceptical of any panacea, any single factor that explains or determines everything, and any human activity claimed to be world-creative. Paradoxically perhaps, because he thought nearly as well as can be thought, he did not overestimate the power of reflection, and his superb command of language saved him from being overly impressed by what it can do.

The Beauty of Santayana's Thought

What, then, is the current significance and lasting value of Santayana's philosophy? Nearly all who know it would concede that it is an exquisite system of thought. The simple beauty of the conception is matched by the elegance of the writing which conveys it. The reader comes away with the satisfaction of having felt her mind soar and her soul uplifted. The very thinking of such thoughts is a source of joy: the clarity of its ideas, the interconnection of its parts, the bold sweep of its conclusions all conspire to make the system a worthy object of contemplation on its own account.

This is the sort of compliment one is inclined to pay Spinoza and the other masters of beautiful thought. And it would, indeed, constitute the highest commendation if philosophy were a purely artistic endeavour in search of ideas that are aesthetically pleasing or sublime. But the ideal of philosophy is more difficult and more complex than that: in order to achieve it, we must seek ideas that are, in accord with the classical dictum, not only beautiful but also good and true, without the Platonic assurance that whichever have one of these features must have the others, as well.

Do His Ideas Advance the Human Good?

I interpret the question of whether or not Santayana's ideas are good as asking about their value for the purposes of life. We must not take usefulness in too narrow a sense here: philosophical ideas are not meant to help us make better refrigerators or sell more cars. Their job is to advance understanding and appreciation, to guide us in leading the good life and to help us organize society along just and rational principles. It is impossible, of course, for the judgments we make about such things to be objective or certain, for the issues of what is good and just and rational, of what constitutes understanding, and of what we should appreciate are themselves always open to philosophical debate. But we should, nevertheless, be able to make some assessments that will command the assent of people of good will and sound common sense.

Santayana belongs in the naturalistic tradition of Lucretius and Hobbes. He viewed human beings as having their home in the world, as continuous with the animals and material objects which constitute a single, vast cosmos. If there is transcendence of animal status, it is not physical: we do not live beyond the time our bodies wear out and never get relocated in a safer clime. What happens to us here, moreover, is fraught with danger, and the sure solution to any of our problems constantly eludes us. A search for the meaning of life beyond the parameters of earthly existence is, therefore, pointless. And the dream of certainty in cognitive and moral matters leads only to intolerance in blind dogmatists and disappointment among the discerning.

This naturalization of the human and the concurrent rejection of the search for certainty hit exactly the right note for the advancement of our good. Even if there is a God and a life or significance in the hereafter, given our woeful and necessary ignorance it is best for us to think that this is all. We can then concentrate our efforts on achieving full potential in this life by making our days rich with everything worthwhile humans can do and enjoy. In case this sounds self-seeking or hedonistic, let us remember that Santayana took anything but a narrow view of our perfection. His sensitivity to friendship, religious feeling and the arts suggests that we should think of fulfillment as involving, at least potentially for each of us, the highest, most spiritual and most generous activities of the race. It is just that, contrary to what his teacher, William James, had thought, Santayana was convinced that we did not need to believe in a supernatural destiny in order to lead the best life and to attain full achievement. If we were cynical, we could say that it is best to act as though we were marked for extinction and then, mindful of uncertainty or in the way of insurance at the end, confess our sins and register a quick apology.

The Centrality of Individuals

Santayana espoused, once again, the most useful view in maintaining the central significance of individuals. He thought that the psyche is the source of the preferences which ground morality and that consciousness comes, at least in humans, in personal form. As subjects of feeling and centers of action, individuals constitute the ultimate units of the moral world. This position places Santayana at the opposite pole from Hegel and those others who aver that persons are but fragments of larger, organic wholes (such as the state) against which they have no legitimate claim and within which alone they may hope to attain fulfillment. Such views are scandalous in their blatant subordination of the person to supposedly higher, but in fact derivative and insentient, beings. There is really no such thing as society or the state apart from individuals and their intricate interactions. And it is pernicious to believe that there is, for such conviction leads to the restriction of liberty, to abandoning responsibility for oneself and to treating persons as though they did not matter. Santayana was in close agreement with the existentialists on this point; the shared view, when embraced, issues in self-determination with respect to both cognitive and moral matters. Adopting it makes it more likely that we take charge of our lives, choose what to believe, how to live and what to do, and bear without complaint the consequences of our decisions.

Celebration of the Present

An aesthetic and contemplative attitude is reinforced by the clear identification and acknowledged omnipresence of essences. Consciousness of the present form of things enables us to detach them, at least in thought, from their history, context and consequences. The resulting immediacy, in the sceptical reduction and in the spiritual life, is without ulterior meaning or use. But precisely because it appears unconnected to anything else, it can be enjoyed without reservation and for its own sake alone. This discovery is by no means unique to Santayana: even Aristotle spoke of the sort of activity in which means and end collapse and we take spontaneous pleasure in what we see or do, and Santayana himself credited Proust with discerning the bittersweet beauty of essences in his wonderful reflections on past experience. But no one before Santayana had made the realm of essence the centerpiece of his thought and no one before him had succeeded in developing the systematic ontological foundations of wholesale appreciation.

The insight that we can celebrate the present is of particular significance in a society devoted to results and to the future. Our urge for improving our condition and for eventual outcomes sets us at risk of losing the only sure satisfaction available to us. The impatient pursuit of what is yet to be tends to blind us to the formed magnificence of everything that surrounds us. This restlessness results in dissatisfaction with everything: although we cannot stop competing in the rat-race, we know it is not one we can ever win. Santayana's reminders that the world is here to enjoy, that anxiety can be lifted by attention to the immediate, that the form of anything is intrinsically delightful to behold are potent antidotes to the tumult and haste of our ways. A measure of indifference to the future and firm concentration on what is at hand yield

internal peace. They help us recapture the playfulness and beauty, the very soul we lost.

The clear definition of the realm of essence has the additional value of showing the continuity of literature and the fine arts with mathematics, the works of private imagination and logic. All of them are explorations of the infinite reaches of essence by the human mind in its disciplined or playful moments. The essences and their relations may differ from case to case, but it is a major step toward enhanced understanding to realize that, throughout them all, we deal only with qualities and relations, that is, with forms. If we keep this in mind, it becomes much easier to appreciate the contemporary arts. For the shape of existing things reproduced on canvas, for example, are not preferable as forms to unfamiliar, abstract color patches. In presenting us with non-representational shapes, the artist may want to draw our attention away from the physical things that evoke a penumbra of emotions and ideas of ulterior use. Only in this way, she might think, can she focus our mind on the intrinsic qualities of the painting alone. Once practical interest in physical objects is removed, we can begin to take truly aesthetic delight in the pure forms of color, shape, structure, rhythm and sound. Ideas such as these, which help us understand and enjoy otherwise unappreciated portions of our experience, are not without social usefulness and personal value.

A Comprehensive Scheme of Concepts

There is a final issue about what good Santayana's philosophy might be or do that I want briefly to mention. Many of us seek an understanding in cosmic terms of our place in the world. Religions and ideologies have always gained adherents for their ability to give a simple and clear general account of human nature and prospects. It is unfortunate that, for the most part, philosophers have abandoned the effort to develop such comprehensive conceptual schemes. For, in this field, it is primarily to them that we must look for novel ideas of scope and critical sophistication. Dispassionate reason is unlikely to rein in those looking for converts or political supporters.

I began my discussion of the value of Santayana's philosophy with comments about the virtues of his naturalism. I now want to add the less controversial point that, even if there is disagreement about the details or orientation of his metaphysics, the fact that he presented a fully articulated system is of significance. For such an edifice of ideas encourages people to think boldly, yet carefully, about the great problems of human existence. And reflection that is imaginative, systematic and critical might enable us to come to terms with, perhaps even to gain intellectual dominion over, our fate.

Not only does Santayana's systematic thought stimulate reflection, it may itself be wholly or partly acceptable to a number of intelligent people. In a world in which ultimate questions cannot be resolved with certainty, there is some advantage to be gained simply from having a variety of plausible alternatives readily available. So long as choice in such matters is not foreclosed by religious or political oppression, Santayana's vision will always exert a powerful attraction over urbane minds. Those who remain dissatisfied have everyone's best wishes in their quest to "clean better," as Santayana says,

“the windows of their soul,” even if their success at that is quite improbable.

Santayana and Positivism

Let me warn at once that neither truth nor correctness is, for Santayana, a matter of verification. Logical empiricists have made much of the supposed need of propositions to be testable by sense experience in order to have any meaning. But they have not been able to render their own principle of verification meaningful in terms of the criterion it enunciates and, in any case, they have far too restrictive a view of human experience. It is not that Santayana is without the positivist tendencies of which logical empiricism was a natural outcome. He maintained, for example, an inflexible distinction between facts and values, and surrendered to science final authority in the knowledge of nature. But while such commitments clearly separate him from phenomenologists, they do not set the ground tone of his philosophy. And he specifically eschewed the narrow empiricism and the antimetaphysical excesses of the positivists of his day. One could well say that he adopted only the sensible tough-mindedness of positivism without falling victim to its sweeping, self-destructive dogmas.

Most of those who object to the realm of essence do so on account of rigid commitment to a parsimonious, empiricist view of reality. Occam's razor admonishes us never to postulate entities unnecessarily; this is taken by some thinkers as the warrant for rejecting whatever is not an object of science or ordinary belief. Now, admittedly, the notion of an infinity of forms appears to go against our normal intuitions. But this is largely because unreflective common sense lacks conceptual sophistication and people tend, in any case, to be inattentive to their ontology.

Reality and Power

Our practical orientation makes us suppose that anything real must in relevant respects resemble the physical objects with which we deal every day. This general conviction was converted into hallowed dogma by Plato when he identified reality with the possession of power. Even those who say, more cautiously, that in the last analysis every difference must make a difference, rely on this dubious and unsupported principle. Santayana is among the very few philosophers in the history of Western thought who recognized its arbitrariness and he may well be the only major one who framed his system in specific defiance of it. The reason people object to his powerless, eternal essences is not because he is incorrect in distinguishing them from other sorts of beings, but because they misunderstand the nature of this type of reality.

In fact, essences easily meet Occam's rigorous demand. To the attentive person, their recognition is as inescapable as the admission of the existence of water and umbrellas on a rainy day. The difference is in the sort of being we claim to have identified and the evidence for our finding. Since essences are not physical things, we do not encounter them in our actions. They are not full-bodied objects whose potentialities hold threat or promise and whose existence is a matter of belief. Their being is that of temporally indeterminate qualities and relations considered in isolation from the context in which we

find them in the world. Each is simply and timelessly itself, a specific reality ready to be conceived or to be adopted to give form to some existence.

Are Essences Properties of Objects Only?

We might say that essences are minimal realities in that, although they may become the properties of objects, they themselves have no properties. Accordingly, to speak of them in propositional terms is to distort their nature somewhat: our proper approach to them is through the inwardness of pure intuition. This should make it clear that, though their recognition has profound philosophical consequences, we do not commit ourselves to anything controversial about the furniture of the universe by embracing the claim that essences are real. For Santayana was emphatic in denying that essences exist; they are, he claimed, merely the forms of definiteness without which nothing could gain a foothold in the flux.

Someone might object here that all this means simply is that essences are the results of abstraction. Their role is to serve as the qualities of things or as the relations which connect them; when we wrench them out of the context they may appear to have independent being, but they are in reality only aspects or features of natural objects. This argument would carry some weight were it not for two obvious replies Santayana can make. First, it is easy to focus on essences which are not and will perhaps never be embodied in the physical world. And there are some forms, such as that of the square circle, the good and the Deity, which can in the nature of the case never come to characterize anything in the flux. If this is so, essences must have some status other than that proper to the features of material things.

The second reply takes us back to the centrality, for Santayana's philosophy, of the sceptical reduction and of the spiritual life. For, in both, we encounter essences in their purity, unattached to anything existent. There is nothing abstract about such experiences, or else we would have to say that the piccolo is abstract when it plays without the rest of the band. To be sure, the essences present in pure intuition can become components of richer wholes. But that does not imply that they must be understood as intrinsically belonging there or as having no independent status. To argue for these latter claims, the critic needs the principle of the ontological primacy of physical objects, and it is extremely difficult to make that proposition more than an ungrounded dogma. I conclude that, the disagreement of a large part of the philosophical establishment notwithstanding, Santayana was probably correct in assigning a special, separate ontological status to essences.

Matter as an Ontological Category

Santayana's conception of matter fails to share the success of his view of essences. He was certainly right in not adopting any particular conception of the nature of matter; philosophy should leave such issues for exploration by the sciences. But looking to science for the empirical details does not absolve Santayana of the need to give an account of matter as an ontological category. If we take the role matter plays in his system seriously, however, it is intrinsically impossible to meet this requirement. For the force of matter is simply that

factor which, without intelligence and purpose, selects certain essences for embodiment and summons them into existence. If we look for the feature of matter that makes this remarkable feat possible, we are sure to be disappointed. Each characteristic is an essence and essences, being impotent, are unable to accomplish their own actualization. As a result, there can be nothing specific in matter that is responsible for existence. And, since matter is simply that which renders essences existent, it can itself have no nature, not even the nature of giving embodiment to forms.

From time to time, Santayana saw this consequence clearly and thought that it was equivalent to saying that matter is a groundless force and that existence is absurd. At other times, however, he did not hesitate to give elaborate descriptions of what he said was the realm of matter. In fact, of course, these accounts were not of matter as an ontological category but of what we might call the material world or, in his language, substance. It is perfectly appropriate to discuss the nature of substance because it is a compound of matter and form; but such disquisitions do not in the least advance our understanding of the material, that is, the faceless and natureless, component of existing things. The reason they do not help is that, if matter has no essence, intellectual grasp of it is impossible. Even symbolic knowledge is beyond the pale: the use of any essence to shed light on the formless is both hopeless and radically misleading.

Existence a Surd

We may well sympathize with Santayana in his conviction that the world, existence itself, is at bottom an unintelligible surd. But since the work of thought is to increase our understanding, it is not easy to incorporate such a belief into one's philosophy. It might be possible as a conclusion of sustained inquiry. But it is suspect if built into a fundamental category of the system. The greatest problem, of course, is that a concept of what is truly unintelligible can itself not be understood. The notion of a breakdown of reason, as we find it in a contradiction, is easily grasped. The idea of the formless, however, is a thought of something without content, hence the thought not even of a something, an empty thought. It is odd that we seem, nevertheless, to have some inkling of what Santayana had in mind. But it is dubious that whatever this subjective feeling comes to is adequate for purposes of philosophy.

The difficulties Santayana had with the conceptualization of matter may appear minor when measured against the truth his position suggests. If we think of matter as an arational force restlessly actualizing set after set of essences, it is natural to view the world as perpetually changing. All the processes of material substance will then appear as finite and contingent, and we will have to embrace the idea that nothing *must* exist and probably nothing will endure. Our expectation of uniformity in the physical world is just that: nature's hands are not tied by its past. It is also not bound by devotion to a law or love of some worthy result. No master plan is being actualized in what takes place and, if there is development in some particulars, it may last awhile or else may be soon reversed.

All of this appears to be just right. By saying so I do not mean to imply that it is uncontroversial or that it can be established conclusively. If anything, the preponderance of philosophers in the history of thought have rejected these ideas. But the advance of science and the secularization of the modern world have made them attractive to a growing number of people and they now constitute the indispensable core of what perhaps the majority of intellectuals maintain. A natural corollary of these views is the belief that indubitable knowledge of existence is impossible and hence the very quest for certainty is ill-conceived and inappropriate. Here again, Santayana appears to be right on the mark, championing an idea that is in line with current intuitions and which in the long run is likely to prevail. His rejection of wholesale scepticism as a view incompatible with the beliefs on which we happily act did not leave him altogether glib or insensitive to the limits of the human frame.

Science and Ordinary Experience

Every modern philosopher since Descartes has been confronted with the need to reconcile the worldview of science with the facts of direct experience. Physics, the most advanced of the sciences, offers us a picture of nature as a spatially extended continuum of matter and energy. Each event in this world-process can presumably be explained by reference to physical entities alone, along with the laws that govern their operation. This means that science has no need of, and leaves no room for, the feelings, moods, purposes, perspectives and mistakes that are the staple of private experience. The stationary desk which I perceive as solid and smooth is, for science, a jagged collection of whirling atoms separated by empty space. The brilliant sunset that fills my soul with joy is but an astronomical and atmospheric configuration resulting in a stream of photons striking the retina; my joy itself is simply the electrical activity of cells in the brain. Although we use the same word to denote them, even the space of physics and the space of ordinary experience are different: the former is a centerless, boundless continuum, while the latter is centered on the body and is limited by the changing horizon. Physical time is uniform and regular; the time of subjective experience pulsates, speeding up and slowing down in accordance with our moods. The recurrent and pressing problem that has occupied philosophers for hundreds of years is how these apparently incompatible conceptual structures are related to each other or how both can be accommodated in a philosophical system.

Reductive materialists have generally supposed that the scientific view is true and experience is understandable illusion. Phenomenologists, by contrast, have taken direct experience as fundamental and limited the truth of the scientific world picture to that of a useful abstraction. Comprehensive thinkers have attempted to give each conceptual framework its due, but only at the expense of bizarre dialectical principles or verbal sleights of hand. Santayana's major philosophical achievement may well lie in the remarkable way in which he managed to do justice to both science and experience without invoking a specious dialectic. The scientific enterprise, he held, gives or will at some point in the future give an adequate account of the material world. But this leaves religion, art and subjective experience paramount in their own sphere: they

are the highlights in the life of mind.

The Philosophy of Mind at the Center

How can the two different enterprises and their divergent conceptual results be compatible? By having as their objects distinct realms of being. Science focuses on physical reality and phenomenology on consciousness: separate but equally real subject-matter assures diverse methods and results, along with shared legitimacy. How are the two realms that serve as differentiating objects related? They are ontologically irreducible, even though, from the standpoint of origins, matter grounds the existence of consciousness. This makes it clear that Santayana's philosophy of mind is at the very center not only of his account of the nature of man, but also of his attempt to accommodate both the austere findings of science and the enriching dimensions of personal and social experience in a single, sensible system of thought. Epiphenomenalism is the price he had to pay for retaining both of these important elements of human life and for assuring autonomy to each.

Admittedly, the view that mind is an impotent by-product of organic processes sounds odd and appears to conflict with our everyday intuitions. We seem, after all, to experience consciousness as a participant in intelligent actions and we believe that, in the form of will, it is a direct cause of a variety of effects. Yet if science can account for the occurrence of every event, there is neither need nor room for the casual efficacy of private consciousness. The impotent mind hypothesis is, therefore, the penultimate stage in developing the implications of the adequacy of science in the explanation of the world-process. The final conclusion, which Santayana vigorously resisted, is that consciousness as a subjective phenomenon does not exist at all. To be able to evaluate epiphenomenalism, it must be seen in this context: it is a compromise position designed to salvage what is viable in mind-body dualism and to avoid the absurdities of the reductive materialist.

Those who maintain the impotence of mind do so not because their view recommends itself as the most plausible on first analysis. They tend to adopt it as the position which is the least costly and the least improbable once all the facts are taken into account. For of the classical mind-body theories, interactionist dualism is incompatible with well-established facts of science, and the unconnected parallel development of consciousness and the physical world strains all credulity. Moreover, the counter-intuitiveness of epiphenomenalism pales beside the materialist's audacity in supposing all of the colored life of mind to be a stinging illusion.

Is Mind Impotent?

None of this means, of course, that the impotence hypothesis is without its budget of difficulties. Its initial implausibility, its apparent conflict with some of our most firmly held beliefs and our palpable experience of the involvement of consciousness in such activities as reasoning all bear against the view. The greatest difficulty resides in providing a theoretically adequate account of how physical events can give rise to ontologically unconnected and causally inert moments of consciousness. The difference between the substantial processes

of nature and thin, transcendental, synthetic intuitions is so momentous that Santayana's repeated comment about the unintelligibility of all generation leaves us, particularly in this case, baffled and dissatisfied. His attempts to relate matter and mind in terms of the connection between Aristotle's notions of potentiality and second act remained undeveloped hints and as an old man he felt obliged to remark that on this point he has "not see much new light."¹

Our view of the success of much of Santayana's system depends on our evaluation of epiphenomenalism. Yet precisely because the theory is so central and because the issues are so complex and so broad, it is impossible to pass a judgment which could command even majority assent. Here arguments do not appear compelling and personal taste and philosophical predisposition come to the fore. I shall leave the matter with my own reasoned assessment. So long as the mind-body problem is cast in the traditional terms developed by Descartes, epiphenomenalism is the least inadequate solution. A reconceptualization of this entire field would be welcome and perhaps not impossible to achieve. But, short of that, both the weight of the evidence and the theory's compatibility with a rich collection of established views and human activities favour the impotence hypothesis.

His Individual Relativism

Ethicists are, for the most part, an intolerant lot: many of them feel that no action which fails to conform to universal rules can belong in the sphere of morality. Such insistence on uniformity concerning what is right or good tends to be based on intuitions acquired in a liberal society and is reinforced by the silent thought that universal morality is the last and highest stage of human development. The more abstractly we formulate this principle, the more irresistibly right it will seem; its groundlessness cannot be seen so long as we suppose that morality is unrelated to the predicaments of human life.

Aristotle and others who recognized the organic connection between who we are and what we value would have been relativists in ethics had they not been committed, for independent and altogether inadequate reasons, to a universal, fixed and normative human nature. If we take the testimony of history seriously and reject this fictive identity of the human essence, the temptation to think of ethics in absolute and in pandemic terms evaporates.

In spite of the shrillest chorus of professional moralists, therefore, Santayana was surely right in insisting on the relative and context-bound nature of all value judgments. We may indeed feel that some actions are more, others less humane, that the good some embrace is rigid and impoverishing while our own is inclusive and generous. But all such thoughts, feelings, intuitions and judgments presuppose a standard, tacit perhaps but firmly held, by which we measure what we see and what befalls us. These standards can, of course, themselves be evaluated, though not without references to yet other, possibly broader or more satisfying, criteria. Both values and valuations are, therefore,

¹ George Santayana, "A General Confession," *The Philosophy of George Santayana*, P.A. Schilpp, ed. (La Salle, Ill., 1940), p. 17.

conditional: they depend on our commitments and preferences which, in turn, are products of the individual nature heredity, social circumstances, chance events and personal choices create for each of us.

Santayana is right, moreover, that much, though not all, of absolutistic morality amounts to the demand that others be like us and to their satisfying condemnation when they are not. From this standpoint, to adopt relativism is to outgrow the childishness of parents, which is the comfort of supposing that we know the right course for everyone. It is worth stressing that on this view values are relative not to how we feel or what we think, but to our individual nature embodied in the structure and dispositions of the psyche. There is a great deal, of course, that human psyches share; these similarities make social life possible and are, in turn, fostered by it. The important point is, however, that the differences are not negligible and they are reflected in permanent and sometimes irreconcilable divergences in our commitments.

Spirituality for All?

Had Santayana recommended spirituality and the detachment it involves as a form of life, and the highest form, at that, he would have been both wrong and inconsistent. The impartial readiness to welcome whatever comes along is an ideal for consciousness alone, and presupposes continued severe selectivity on the physical level of the psyche's operations. And given his commitment to the relativity of values, no pattern of actions and satisfactions can constitute *the* best life, only the best for persons of a certain nature. In fact, of course, Santayana was careful not to make either of these claims: he thought that pure intuitions are momentary fruitions of organic process and can be called a life only in the commendatory sense in which we stress the quality or highlights of an existence, instead of the full dimensions, the breadth, depth and length, of it. Moreover, he maintained that such spirituality is of value only to those whose inclinations demand the quiet pleasures of understanding at cognitive distance from the fray.

These more limited claims are unobjectionable in substance. We can fault them only for emphasis: his frequent celebration of it makes Santayana appear to stress contemplation to the exclusion, or at least at the expense, of other possible perfections. The engaged life so deeply admired by Dewey, for example, featuring commitment to the transformation of nature and society, received virtually no attention, and certainly no plaudits, from Santayana. This does not mean that, should the question have been raised, he would have denied the legitimacy or relative value of such a life. What disappoints is that in his mind, or at least in his writings, the issue did not much arise. Although his persuasive account of the symbolic nature of cognition saved Santayana from the spectator theory of knowledge, his deepest sympathies always remained with the spectator theory of fulfillment.

Final Assessment

Persons who take a literalistic religious view of reality are not likely to accept much of Santayana's philosophy. But they tend also to reject nearly all thought that is preoccupied with modern concerns: with a search for the foundations of knowledge, the challenge of established values and the attempt to accommodate the findings of science. Those with a sympathy for religious values but uncommitted to doctrinaire views, on the other hand, may find that their best hope lies with Santayana or a system closely similar to his. For, though he declined to believe that religion and theology give us the literal truth about the world, he nevertheless retained their essential insights as deeply accurate symbolic indications of the human condition.

From the philosophical point of view, it is clear that Santayana's system does not have the profound originality of the thought of such early masters as Plato and Aristotle, on which he so heavily relied. It is a late product in the history of human consciousness, which makes striking and wholesale novelty difficult to achieve, but offers in its place the possibility of a vision that is rich, balanced and mature. This is exactly what we find in Santayana. His system, at its best, represents as high a level of thought as we have attained in the twentieth century. It is sensitive to the full range of human experience and responsive to the most stringent demands of consistency, comprehensiveness and good sense. In spite of current neglect, it will stand as a major achievement of thought, one of the great philosophical systems and, in private reflection, a permanently attractive home for many minds.

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Santayana's Pragmatism and the Comic Sense of Life

Pragmatism and the Religious Demand

In 1970, Sidney Hook wrote a widely noted essay called "Pragmatism and the Tragic Sense of Life." Ostensibly, Hook's essay was an effort to set the historical record straight. He argued that it had become commonplace to accept a "European" view of pragmatism as "a superficial philosophy of optimism, of uncritical adjustment and conformity, of worship of the goddess success."¹

On the contrary, Hook said, pragmatism was not superficial because it was a method of criticism that was concerned with settling disputes that arose in response to conflicts between good and good, good and right, and right and right. It was grounded, he concluded, "in a recognition of the tragic sense of life," [Hook, 1970, p. 172]

Now this Hookian characterization of pragmatism hits the mark in some ways. Certainly Hook had championed the centrality of method in moral and social criticism.² Time and time again, he had declared that our fundamentally tragic situation demanded the kind of method for social resolution that pragmatism made available. He noted that James had set the mood and motivation in this regard by declaring that "ineluctable noes and losses for part of [life], that there are genuine sacrifices, and that something permanently drastic and bitter always remains at the bottom of the cup." [Hook, 1970, pp. 171-172]

Still, it is important to realize that Hook read James and the other classic pragmatists selectively; that his emphasis on the tragic sense of life was an effort to steer pragmatism one way rather than others; in particular, that he wanted to sever pragmatism from its religious roots in order to maintain its later Deweyan focus on social policy formulation.

The pragmatisms of Peirce and James and Dewey had been grounded in Protestant sensibilities, viewpoints that presented an alternative to the tragic sense of life.³ Along with other descendents of Protestantism, the classic pragmatists searched for redemption from the drastic and the bitter. While

¹ Sidney Hook, "Pragmatism and the Tragic Sense of Life," in *Contemporary American Philosophy*, ed. John E. Smith, Humanities Press: New York, 1970, p. 171. Hereafter cited in the text as Hook, 1970.

² See Richard Rorty, "Pragmatism Without Method," in *Sidney Hook: Philosopher of Democracy and Humanism*, Prometheus Books: Buffalo, 1983, for demonstration of this point.

³ See, for example, Henry Samuel Levinson, "Religious Philosophy," *The Encyclopedia of the American Religious Experience*, Scribner's Sons: New York, 1988, for a discussion of the links between pragmatism and Protestantism.

remaining open-eyed to tragedy, their aim had been to seek out ways to heal wounds, mend breaks, dry tears. More particularly, along with Protestant forebears, they had emphasized the finitude and final impotence of humankind, on the one hand, while characterizing human joy as gratuitous on the other. They insisted that the well-being people demanded outran human assertion.

If James had noted how much life hurts, he had also attempted to account for this "religious demand": the demand for a full well-being that inevitably outstripped human assertion.⁴ All our well-doing, he said, was but "the shallowest substitute for that well-being" that we demand – "a demand so penetrating and unassuageable that no consciousness of such occasional and outward well-doing as befalls the human lot can ever give it satisfaction." [James, 1982, p. 62]

Such talk gives no hint of shallow optimism, uncritical adjustment, or the worship of success. But neither does it bind reflection by the tragic sense of life. It highlights a religious demand for a human joy far more inclusive than moral action could promise to deliver. This pattern of thinking is highly visible throughout James's writing, in Santayana's, and even Dewey's as well.⁵

To be certain, James, Santayana, and Dewey spoke the language of social policy formulation for all it was worth. But they were too interested in addressing the religious demand to limit philosophy to intellectual statesmanship. While they differed when it came to fleshing out appropriate ways to explicate this demand and its satisfaction, they each showed ways in which attendance to matters of moral duty fell short of fulfilling life at its best; and they each explored the limits of human assertion and the gratuitous character of life in its most divine episodes.

Here, I want to suggest, there is a telling parallel between these classic American thinkers and the writers constituting the great comic tradition in English literature from Austin to Joyce.⁶ James, Santayana, and Dewey were to their Philosophical traditions what the British comic writers were to their Anglican and Dissenting pasts: First, they both took joy as seriously as meanness. That attitude sits at the heart of comedy rather than tragedy, and it shaped pragmatic reflections on human finitude. Thinkers as diverse as James, Santayana, and Dewey aimed to release thoughtful people from the constraints

⁴ See William James, "Introduction to *The Literary Remains of the Late Henry James*," in *The Works of William James: Essays in Religion and Morality*, Harvard University Press: Cambridge, 1982, p. 62. Hereafter cited in the text as [James, 1982].

⁵ *The Varieties of Religious Experience* is James' most sustained reflection on the religious demand. See Henry Samuel Levinson, *The Religious Investigations of William James*, University of North Carolina Press: Chapel Hill, 1981, for a discussion of this. Dewey's response to the religious demand is best expressed in *Art as Experience*. For more reflection on Santayana in this regard, see Henry Samuel Levinson, "Santayana and the Possibility of Secular Spirituality," *The National Humanities Center Newsletter*, Winter, 1987.

⁶ I rely heavily on Robert Polhemus, *Comic Faith*, The University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1980, for my view of the British comic tradition. Hereafter cited in the text as [Polhemus, 1980]

of wornout orthodox theologies that dressed earthly life in the drab colors of depravity, saving the brilliant ones for afterlife. But second: they also aimed to highlight the pretensions of human self-assertion, all the while discerning happy endings. Put another way, along with the comics, they were very much concerned with celebrating earthbound and mortal delight, humor, and laughter, rather than some more unearthly and ineffable bliss.

The comic vision, as Polhemus has put it "does not give to suffering and to evil a dangerous romantic grandeur or an inevitable dominance. Instead it makes suffering mean and seeks to transcend it ... it seeks more joyful life in a lasting world." [Polhemus, 1980, pp. 22-23.] This, I suggest, is quite precisely what the classic pragmatists aimed to do. But, more contentiously, I want to argue, it gives us new insight into Santayana's family resemblances with the philosophical movement called pragmatism that he often disavowed.

Santayana's Pragmatism

I make no claim that Santayana *must* be characterized as a pragmatist.⁷ Surely he departed from James's understanding of truth and whatever predilection James had towards idealism; just as surely he opposed Deweyan moralism. But there are four prominent pragmatic strands in Santayana's mature work, *Realms of Being*, none of which are undercut by his criticisms of James or Dewey.

First, it happily abandoned foundational metaphysics and epistemology for reflection on the promises of human finitude. Second, it accepted the Romantics' claim that philosophy, the arts, and the natural sciences, were alternative vocabularies with which to manage life's difficulties, not revelations of the really real. But it rejected the Romantics' own vision of poetry, rather than natural science or philosophy, as the key to metaphysical disclosure. The Romantics still clung to the hope for a vision that would let them break through history to some vision of the eternal structure of things. But there was no such privileged language or vision, because there was no such structure of

⁷ There is some precedent for characterizing Santayana's sense of life as comic. See, for example, Horace Kallen's "The Laughing Philosopher." *The Journal of Philosophy*, 61, (1964), pp. 19-35. Both John McCormick, *George Santayana: A Biography*, Knopf: New York, 1986, and Richard C. Lyon, "Introduction" to Santayana's *Persons and Places*, ed. Saatkamp and Holzberger, MIT Press: Cambridge, 1987, oppose this interpretation.

My contention that Santayana can count as a pragmatist, despite his own disclaimers, is argued in "Religious Criticism," *The Journal of Religion*, January, 1984, "Santayana's Contribution to American Religious Philosophy," *The Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, March, 1984, "Meditations at the Margins: Santayana's Scepticism and Animal Faith," in *The Journal of Religion*, July, 1987, and "Santayana and the Possibility of Secular Spirituality," in *The National Humanities Center Newsletter*, Winter, 1987. A book-length argument that Santayana provides us with a variation in pragmatism, *Another World to Live In: Santayana and Religious Naturalism* is forthcoming.

I am using the one-volume edition of *Realms of Being*, Scribner's Sons: New York, 1942. Let me note that the best commentary written to date on this work, *Santayana: An Examination of his Philosophy*, by T.L.S. Sprigge, Routledge & Kegan Paul: London, 1974, accepts Santayana's own explicit rejection of the title 'pragmatist.'

things. Indeed, it was a mistake to consider metaphysical disclosure a privilege; it was simply a vicious dream.

Third, Santayana asserted that things were historical all the way down. He accepted contingency in every philosophically relevant respect: the contingency of language or thought, the contingency of material circumstances or things, the contingency of distinctively human life, including the contingency of moral action and the contingency of spiritual well-being.

Finally, then, Santayana rejected any hard and fast distinction between knowledge, or the one view of the way things really are that is never subject to the ravages of time, and sound opinion, or the kinds of belief people maintained the better to satisfy their desires and achieve their goals in a strictly historical world. Rather, he accepted belief as subject to revision in principle. But perhaps even more significantly, Santayana transposed old epistemological problems in ways that made them moral and spiritual ones. The opportunity confronting people was neither the chance to build up knowledge in a self-grounding way nor some path linking them up with being itself. Knowledge was important, but not because it permitted some ultimate disclosure of the truly true. On the contrary, the opportunity confronting them was a process of spiritual transformation, involving an allegiance to truth-telling, that could displace a drab sense of being with a joyful one.

On the first score, Santayana said that the aim of *Realms of Being* was to discern the resources for human joy and to identify the things that impeded it. If the title suggested metaphysics or cosmology to some readers, he said, they would be disappointed.

But in the second place, *Realms of Being* was not intended to describe the universe [Santayana, 1942, p. 829]. Rather, Santayana's aim was to confess the vocabularies he could not get along without as a person seeking spiritual fulfilment. The realms of essence, matter, truth, and spirit that he explored were not "separate cosmological regions, separately substantial, and then juxtaposed. They [were] summary categories of logic, meant to describe a single dynamic process, and to dismiss from organized reflection all unnecessary objects of faith." [Santayana, 1942, p. 831] They served the properly "poetic and religious" functions of philosophy by positing a "grammar of the spirit," [Santayana, 1942, p. 835], "a kind of rhetoric," [Santayana, 1942, p. 90] "based not on inspiration but an analysis, and meant only to render articulate the dumb experience of the soul." [Santayana, 1942, p. 853]

On this view, in fact, both metaphysics and epistemology were simply wornout attempts to escape from the problems of human finitude rather than confronting them in adequate ways. They were two sides of the old wish for omniscience, the effort to secure well-being by finding a way to think things through in the manner of the gods. "Possession of the absolute truth," Santayana suggested, "is not merely by accident beyond the range of particular minds; it is incompatible with being alive, because it excludes any particular station, organ, interest, or date of survey." Indeed, he said, mind "was not created for the sake of discovering the absolute truth," but rather functioned to "increase the wealth of the universe in the spiritual dimension, by adding appearances to substance and passion to necessity, and by creating all those

private perspectives, and those emotions of wonder, adventure, curiosity, and laughter which omniscience would exclude." [Santayana, 1942, p. xiii]

This was a world without metaphysical comforts, then. But it was not one without spiritual delights. No other pragmatist so firmly accepted the physical character, and hence the contingency, of human life, even at its best. But no other pragmatist offered such extensive reflection on the delights of spiritual life either. [Santayana, 1942, p. 239]

Humankind, Santayana wrote, was challenged to meet necessities at nearly every turn, but "in a contingent world, necessity is a conspiracy of accidents." [Santayana, 1942, p. 291] The "crucial point," he said, was this: "that not only are all particular truths and facts contingent, but the very categories of fact and truth, like all other essences, if they are exemplified at all, are exemplified unnecessarily and by a groundless chance." [Santayana, 1942, p. 422]

The fact that such categories were "convenient, or even absolutely true in describing the existing world, is a cosmic accident." [Santayana, 1942, p. 424] "Nature and law," he concluded, "are never logically safe. Their antiquity is mere old age, their respectability, limitation. Contingency signed their death warrant at their birth. The sentence may be indefinitely postponed, the time may never seem to come for execution; yet the guillotine is always ready to drop." [Santayana, 1942, p. 728] Claims to the contrary "foolishly parade[d] the helplessness of the mind to imagine anything different." [Santayana, 1942, p. 417] "Man and his moral aspirations are only incidents in the universe." [Santayana, 1942, p. 419]

In such a world, the old vision of fixed mind knowing fixed nature according to fixed principles made no sense. To the contrary, changing mind knew changing nature according to changing principles of understanding. The root of thinking was animal bias, dispositions to welcome or fear, and these postures in turn, Santayana said, were known for their "zoological variety." [Santayana, 1942, p. 482] Under such conditions, knowledge was "not truth, but a view or expression of the truth: a glimpse of it secured by some animal with special organs under special circumstances." [Santayana, 1942, p. 469]

Knowledge was like "a war-map in which nothing is set down but what touches the campaign of the season." [Santayana, 1942, p. 469] "Far from rendering knowledge impossible," all the biases of interest pervading human views, supplied "instruments for exploration, divers sensitive centres and divers inks, whereby in divers ways the facts may be recorded." [Santayana, 1942, p. 469] Knowledge, in sum, was no less instrumental than "any language or telescope." [Santayana, 1942, p. 418] Indeed, knowledge, on these grounds, was a kind of historical self-assertion on the part of human cultures, offering suitable ways of solving problems that stood in the path of progress toward the fulfilment of their diverse aspirations.

But that made knowledge part and parcel of wilful life and, so, an activity that fell short of securing the spiritual well-being that people craved. Knowledge was an expression of human finitude. It was a sort of power, but not a sort that could overcome inevitable human impotence. All the knowledge in the world never cured a person of creatureliness. Obsession with knowledge, therefore, did not adequately respond to the *religious demand* for

consolation in the winter light of human finitude.

That demand was quite precisely the one that informed the rhetorical narrative of Santayana's *Realms of Being*. Spiritual transformation dominated its pages from first to last, because its central motive was this: To acknowledge the realms of being that permitted spiritual revitalization: to avow the ways of being that let people who felt morally weightless, anxious and fearful in the face of their misery-prone finitude and eventual death, become people who loved life in the full consciousness of impotence.

Thus the heart of Santayana's *tour de force* was neither a description of the universe nor an effort to ground knowledge on itself nor an exercise in the formulation of realistic social policies. Rather, it was "worship," [Santayana, 1942, p. 62] a mode of reflective being that could begin "only when we have thoroughly renounced self-assertion and thrift." [Santayana, 1942, pp. 62-63]

Comedy

I am pointing out here some things that Hookian pragmatists simply could not abide for several reasons. First, they embraced an Enlightenment emphasis on the self-assertion of humankind without qualification. Santayana to the contrary, suggested that spiritual redemption eventually depended on the suspension of self-assertion.

Second, philosophy for Hookian pragmatists was social policy formulation. Philosophy for Santayana was ultimately "festive, lyrical, rhetorical," [Santayana, 1942, p. 349] providing a "holiday or holy day in a religious sense," [Santayana, 1942, p. 423] a point at which "the play-life of childhood is restored to the soul." [Santayana, 1942, p. 12] It did not come "to repeat the world but to celebrate it."⁸ It was an exercise of the imagination, a way of "conversion or *metanoia*, a true education and discipline," [Santayana, 1942, p. 778] "a discipline of the mind and heart, a lay religion." [Santayana, 1942, p. 827] Philosophy responded to the "question of being reborn into another life;" [Santayana, 1942, p. 804] it was a kind of gratuitous time out from informed political mediation that had no particular "earthly or even moral benefit." [Santayana, 1942, p. 746]

Third, Hookian pragmatists pictured philosophy as a social labor performed and endured under the conditions of inevitable tragedy. It let people bargain and plot with a modicum of intelligence. For Santayana, philosophical meditation was a ritual process of spiritual transformation that individuals underwent in order to redeem their "labouring world," society, polity, and all, "by bringing joy into it." [Santayana, 1942, p. 185] Philosophy was a way of letting people momentarily break out "of the shabbiest surroundings" in laughter and understanding. It was a set of disciplines for appreciating others, expressing gratitude, and taking one's self with a grain of salt. [Santayana, 1942, p. 746] These are the things that made it a way of

⁸ *The Philosophy of George Santayana*, ed. Paul Schilpp, Northwestern University Press: Evanston, 1940, p. 29. Hereafter cited as Santayana, 1940.

attending to the "great problem" of the human spirit, which was "salvation, purification, rebirth into a humble recognition of the powers on which it depends, and into a sane enjoyment of its appropriate virtues." [Santayana, 1942, p. xxxii]

There was, then, a comic spirit in Santayana's thinking rather than a tragic one, a disciplined play of mind bent on taking joy as seriously as meanness; one offering "a spiritual gift, a gift of grace," "a culmination, a release, a transport beyond distraction." [Santayana, 1942, p. 746] "We are caught," Santayana had said, "in the meshes of time and place and care; and as the things we have set our heart on, whatever they may be, must pass away in the end, either suddenly or by a gentle transformation, we cannot take a long view without finding life sad, and all things tragic."

The vanity and self-annihilation of things was "not to be denied or explained away." But to take this long view was by no means inevitable, because actually and intrinsically, things were not tragic or sad, but rather "joyful, hearty, and merry." "In the jumble of existence," Santayana suggested, "there must be many a knock and many a grief; people living at cross purposes cannot be free from malice, and they must needs be fooled by their pretentious passions. But there is no need of taking these evils tragically. At bottom they are gratuitous, and might have been avoided if people had not pledged their hearts to things beyond their control and had not entrenched themselves in their illusions."⁹ Hookian pragmatists placed people under an obligation to reconcile conflicting social policies. Santayana quite sincerely wished them well. But for him, "in the spiritual life, there is nothing obligatory." [Santayana, 1942, p. 65] Spirit, he said, was "an act" which, from a moral point of view, was irresponsible, socially marginal, and gratuitous. "For the Will in spirit," Santayana said, was "precisely not to will, but to understand the lure and sorrow in all willing." [Santayana, 1942, p. 731] That made philosophy a free play of the imagination that permitted departure from the obligations and duties of normal social life, with its hierarchical rules, roles, and relationships. It made its function "relief" [Santayana, 1940, p. 532], a sort of comic relief, highlighting or clarifying things that bound humankind together in delightful ways by establishing a sense of the beauty, the loveliness, the lovable character, of beings - a sense of beauty that made life worth living.

Christianity

So far, then, we know this: we know that Santayana's *Realms of Being* is a pragmatist text that is comic in two ways. First, it takes joy as seriously as meanness. Second, it exemplifies philosophy understood as a festive and ritual process of spiritual transformation geared to displace despair with delight. That alone gives it a family resemblance to exercises in some traditional forms of Christian meditation, for example, Ignation meditation. But of course, if

⁹ George Santayana, *Soliloquies in England and Later Soliloquies*, Scribner's Sons: New York, 1922, pp. 140-141. Hereafter cited as Santayana, 1922.

Santayana's *Realms of Being* gives voice to a Christian understanding of spiritual predicament and joyous fulfilment, it is a Christian understanding that few others have shared.

For one, Santayana abandoned supernaturalism. The whole point of his writing *The Realm of Essence* was to show the powerless character of immaterial beings like words, ideas, qualities, and forms. The whole point of writing *The Realm of Matter* was to show that the only powers around are physical, that indeed psyche is physical, and that spirit is a consequence of psychic configurations. Supernaturalism posits that matter and spirit constitute two different worlds. But a clear upshot of Santayana's meditations was his bald assertion that "there is only one world, the natural world, and only one truth about it; but this world has a spiritual life in it, which looks not to another world but to the beauty and perfection that this world suggests, approaches, and misses." [Santayana, 1942, p. 833]

Secondly, Santayana's commitment to the contingency of things in *The Realm of Matter* disrupted Christian pretensions to provide metaphysical comfort, while his characterization of *The Realm of Truth* as describing the character of transitory matters upended Christian quests for metaphysical disclosure.

Finally, Santayana's acceptance of death as the end of life – period, the end – departed from every variety of Christianity understood as an everlasting life insurance policy. Christianity embraced this way was a "fundamental lie." [Santayana, 1922, p. 99] "Death, in every instance [was] the end of life." [Santayana, 1942, p. 326] There was no way to beat it, though there was a way to overcome the despair that came from fearing it. There was "no cure for birth and death save to enjoy the interval." [Santayana, 1922, p. 97] by manifesting the good without attempting to retain it. [Santayana, 1922, p. 94]

"Death," Santayana said, "does not say to life that life is nothing, or does not exist, or is an illusion." What it teaches us, he said, is "merely that life has such and such limits and such and such a course, whether it reflects on its course or not, whether it recognizes its limits or ignores them. Death can do nothing to our lives except to frame them in, to show them off with a broad margin of darkness and silence; so that to live in the shadow of death and of the cross is to spread a large nimbus of peace around our littleness." [Santayana, 1922, p. 99]

So if Santayana's pragmatism abandoned supernaturalism, metaphysical comfort, metaphysical disclosure, and the denial of death, it did not abandon Christ or life lived under the Cross. It did not abandon a Christian understanding of meditation or practice, Christian spiritual transformation, or interior pilgrimage. The change of heart enacted in *The Realm of Spirit*, indeed, was an imitation of Christ for the sake of overcoming the things impeding human joy: a turning away from the flesh, the world, and the devil; and an affirmation, by way of a suspension of self-assertion, of piety, spirituality, and charity. These preoccupations made Santayana's comic pragmatism distinctively Christian.

The things that made people distraught, according to Santayana, were kinds of personal, social, and cultural assertion that obstructed the spontaneity of human joy by chaining being "to the rack of care, doubt, pain, hatred and

vice." [Santayana, 1942, p. 673] But it was wrong to mistake "the flesh" with physical life itself, "the world" with social institutions at large, or the "the devil" with some external malevolent power.

"The flesh" did not name the physical limitations of spiritual life, which were inseparable from it, nor bodily interest per se but "the false promises that nature sometimes gives and then betrays," [Santayana, 1942, p. 676] as for example, the promise of perfect health. To be sure, physical misfortune, calamity, or disaster could be mighty impediments to human joy. Far worse, however, were obsessions to avoid or even void physical helplessness. Physically unfortunate people could still practice the Christian virtues of piety, spirituality, and charity. Physically fortunate people could too. People obsessed with triumphing over physical limitation could not. Their cure for finitude was itself a disease.

Then again, "the world" was not tantamount to the "transpersonal machinery of language, custom, and industry" which made up the body politic. [Santayana, 1942, p. 693] Rather, it named conditions that occurred "when institutions subject[ed] the spirit to forced and useless labor, and pledge[ed] it to hideous passions." [Santayana, 1942, p. 694] Or, in other words, "human slavery to labor, war, politics, morality, and imposed religion" made people far more spiritually distraught than physical suffering, [Santayana, 1942, p. 704] when these things caused, as they did as a matter of course, bifurcation, division, alienation, and conflict.

But finally, if physical and social interests could run amok, the greatest enemy impeding human joy was deceit and self-deceit. It had been no coincidence that the devil's nickname was the Father of Lies. Deceit was the enemy within spiritual activity itself, the one vice "internal to spirit." [Santayana, 1942, p. 718] The experience of spiritual well-being came in moments of wisdom, facility, and love. But the worst impediments to joy were activities that distorted such practices. They were delusions of omniscience, omnipotence, and perfect benevolence. It made no difference whether somebody identified these things with himself, his body politic, or his deities. They were webs of deceit no matter what, arrogations of power based on false pretense.

The idea of Christ in the gospels was so crucial, Santayana thought, because his figure pointed *away* from the arrogance of power, *away* from pretensions to the one right view of things, and *away* from claims of exclusive or inclusive moral propriety. The figure of Christ pointed *to* a kind of self-surrender, a willingness not to will, that accepted the limits of self-assertion, gave humble thanks to the powers on which this life depended, embraced impotence when potentiality had run its course, and gracefully suspended moral laws when they impeded the love of others as they understood themselves. Christ renounced the projects of omniscience, omnipotence, and perfect righteousness, the projects of human assertion, in order to exhibit a love of life in the consciousness of impotence, a love that, from time to time, vaporized despair and inspired feelings of well-being.

"Liberation, as the Christian should desire it," Santayana said, could not be "liberation from fortune or domination over it." [Santayana, 1942, p. 757]

Christian salvation "could not consist in pretending to be independent, that is, in becoming mad." [Santayana, 1942, p. 759] Christian piety gave thanks to the material sources of spiritual being. Christian spirituality rejected arrogance for aspiration for a devoted allegiance to the good, to a responsiveness and responsibility one to another. Christian charity perceived and loved the "possible perfections in all other things," [Santayana, 1942, p. 759] letting people simultaneously take themselves with a grain of salt while appreciating others who were different. This thanksgiving, this hope, this love, gave point to social policy formulation and made life, even for the most impotent among us, a little more divine so long as it lasted.

Santayana's Religious Pragmatism and Comic Faith

Long before Santayana wrote *Realms of Being* he had argued that religion gave people "another world to live in."¹⁰ This had come in the book on which Sidney Hook and his whole generation had cut their naturalistic teeth, *The Life of Reason*. But in that piece, Santayana had been careful to note that this "other world" was an unrealistic world that broke away from the realistic demands of pressing social concerns for the sake of worship and spiritual communion. Here, Santayana was prefiguring an understanding of the place of religious practice that now is mainly identified with the investigations of Victor Turner: He was insisting that without the weight of socially marginal religious festivities and celebrations, without the play of religious imagination, the center collapsed. Marginal spiritual practices offered relief from the constraints of hierarchical and conflicted social life. They taught people how to imagine their common humankind in joyful ways. They provided holy days of communion in the midst of inevitable realistic social dissension. They let people give thanks for the past, express the ideals towards which they aspired, and avow a trust in other people deeper than the deepest social division.

Nowadays, I think, those of us who are philosophically pragmatic live with Hookian legacies, including the excision of worship, celebration, and festivity from the concerns of reflective life. For Hook and for those within his sphere of influence, wornout metaphysical and theological projects must be satirized, as Santayana had done for a previous generation. But for Hook this is so because metaphysics and theology obscure the important work of human self assertion. So at bottom, for Hook, philosophy is no laughing matter. How could it be, under exclusive conditions of tragedy? Santayana saw things another way: "The young man who has not wept is a savage," because life is mean. But "the old man who has not laughed is a fool."¹¹ Laughter was in order, but not because self-assertion always worked its wonderous ways. On the contrary, laughter was in order because there were practices that released us

¹⁰ George Santayana, *Reason in Religion*, Charles Scribner's Sons: New York, 1905, p. 6.

¹¹ George Santayana, *Dialogues in Limbo*, Scribner's Sons: New York, 1926, p. 57.

from our paltry little egos, whether personal, national, or cultural, and let us take joy in things that bound us together with our kind.

The point is this: The formulation of social policies worked out in the midst of tragedy is a realistic concern never to be abandoned. But it is not the be all and end all of thoughtful discourse or practice. It need not circumscribe the concerns of pragmatists. Indeed, pragmatists might do well to recall the religious roots of their movement and heed Santayana's warning when he says that "where the spirit of comedy has departed, company becomes constraint, reserve eats up the spirit, and people fall into a penurious melancholy in their scruple to be always exact, sane, and reasonable, never to mourn, never to glow, never to betray a passion or a weakness, nor venture to utter a thought they might not wish to harbour forever." [Santayana, 1922, p. 138]

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Beauty's Ballad and the Colors of the Gown

Greek Paganism There was once a young Prince who had come to study the thought of the Greek Pagan tradition. Two elements of the tradition failed to interest him. One, the rituals of sacrifice to local gods and celebration of ancestors, had survived among the Greek by "inertia" (IPR 41). Another, the practices of the priests, soothsayers, and magicians, was private and eclectic. Neither element seemed to reflect the creativity of the people among whom he had come to live. The third element, however, was different.

Greek Mythology Greek polytheistic mythology was the view of gods as supernatural forces, superhuman powers, and as beings interacting socially and emotionally with one another (IPR 40-43). Within the structure of this mythology, the Prince watched the Greek people become poets, extrapolating from their own experiences in their natural world of mental events and external objects. Every individual, as a poet, "might follow without scruple the suggestions of experience; he might attribute to the god various activities, beneficent and maleficent, observable in the element" in nature over which he saw the god presiding (IPR 43). Since the truth of a god lay in his existence in the natural lives of the people, his role as a symbolic representation of individual, natural experience (IPR 43-44), a god that someone had painted in entirely beneficent colors was not necessarily as valid or valuable or "true" as one that portrayed both the good and evil of a natural element (IPR 43).

Gods in Cosmos The gods of Greek mythology were real; they were poetic inventions that united ideas of things internal to the mind with ideas of things outside the mind. Every god stood ready to "return to Nature," to return to the natural experience of the persons who had inspired it, in spite of, or, as the Prince thought, because of, its ideal and perfect nature (IPR 44). Greek mythology presented the Prince with a Cosmos operating under conditions not unlike the conditions that he found in Greek society. As the Cosmic world of the gods gave order to the conflicts, opinions, and feelings among the gods, it gave order to the conflicts, opinions, and feelings among the Greek people. These virtues of Greek mythology, the Prince found, kept Greek beliefs "from passing into a mere idealism and [kept] God [from

The following is an extract, being Chapter 3 of *Beauty and the Beast: A Critique of Santayana's Aesthetic Theory*, an undergraduate thesis in philosophy submitted to Harvard University. The author expresses her thanks to Professors Joel Porte and Israel Scheffler, and to the Harvard Philosophy Department "for accepting an unorthodox thesis on an unorthodox subject." Abbreviations for the works cited in this chapter are: IPR for *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion* (Scribner's, New York, 1900); RR for *Reason in Religion* (Dover, New York, 1982).

passing] into the vanishing point of ... [the peoples'] thought and endeavour" (IPR 43). Greek mythology had symbolic validity as a harmony of ideas and perceptions that involved natural experience.

Decay of Mythology The Prince lived happily among the Greeks, until one day when a sorcerer, the "irresponsible" imagination, appeared. The sorcerer turned the Cosmos that the Greeks had built so carefully into a world inside his crystal ball. He took the ball from the natural world and brought it back to his castle, where he placed it on his desk. He studied its detail, wrote a book of "arbitrary fictions" (IPR 45) based on what he saw, and then ignored it everafter. The book was a far cry from the "natural interpretation of facts" that the Cosmos had once been, although, as "an artificial addition to" those facts, it was quite a nice collection (IPR 46). The intricate details inside made his crystal ball a lovely paperweight.

Idealists The Prince had been left unharmed by the sorcerer, but the Greek people had not been so lucky. Under his spell, they could not reconstruct their Cosmos. The great teachers who once had enlightened the Prince had split into two camps. Some of the people created gods as pure "principles" of intelligence, of "beauty", of "civic discipline," and of "art." These teachers, who included Aristotle and Plato, were "mythologists of the Ideal" (IPR 52). Their deified principles were far too abstract to suggest a harmony, Cosmos, or order in the natural world. They divorced themselves from the nature of the experience that had brought the gods into existence. Their gods bore no resemblance to the natural world in which the people lived. Their gods had no symbolic validity.

Stoics Meanwhile, another group of people, the Stoics, let experience grow to be its own ideal god. Failing to remember that gods had "symbolic," rather than "literal," value, they reasoned that, as experience altered their ideas of natural elements, the gods would have to change. The Stoics could not longer see intrinsic value in the existence of a god when the element associated with the god seemed to bring dissatisfying experiences. They tried to explain away what would have been unsatisfying by conceiving gods as masters of more and more elements. Finally, there was but one "single god whose body was the whole physical universe, whose fable was all history, and whose character was the principle of the universal natural order" (IPR 48). As an all-encompassing being that glorified the chaos of nature, rather than ordering the natural world, this god could not be improved. Consequently, no demands were placed on it. The deity was a "moral nothingness" in that it presented no order and brought no satisfaction (IPR 48).

Prince Journeys to Rome In general, the Prince found that the spell of the old irresponsible imagination had left the Greeks unable to find satisfaction in a natural life. On the one hand, the newly created gods were harmonious among one another but did not approach the chaos of the natural world. On the other hand, chaos had become its own god. Symbolic validity was a forgotten virtue. The Prince, realizing that he did not have much to study in these new gods, decided to journey north to Rome. The Romans, he had heard, had escaped the spell of the "irresponsible" imagination.

Gods in History The Prince found that The Romans, like the early Greeks, valued their mythology for its symbolic validity. But, whereas the Greeks had created gods in a Cosmos, the Roman people had created gods in a history that then implied a Cosmos. The sorcerer had had no problems snatching up the Cosmos as an entity in itself, leaving the Greeks in chaos. The advantage of a history was that it was not so easily snatched from its creators. The Romans, through their mythology, had given "the highest honour to a man who could lead his fellow-men to perfection" (IPR 68). The core of their story was a man who was linked to the divine, rather than the divine in isolation. The man was the bridge between the moral world, the world of beings who see themselves as working for pleasure, and the supernatural world, the world of beings who play, experiencing pleasure. The man was the bridge between the idea of the natural world, under which objects outside the mind are means to perceptions, thoughts, and feelings, and the idea of the mind, where thoughts are their own ends. Through Roman myth, or Christianity, the life of man in nature became "the argument and purpose of the whole creation" (IPR 68). Christianity introduced the potentiality of an "ideal meaning" into individual, natural activity. Every person conceiving Christian myth had the possibility of achieving divinity through experience (IPR 73). The ideal was a symbolic construction that gave order to the chaos of the natural world.

Virtue in Christianity The attribute that gave Christianity its symbolic validity was the doctrine of the last judgement (IPR 73), the doctrine of eternal rewards and punishments. Every individual was a bridge between the human and the divine because, according to the myth, every individual could achieve heaven upon his death. Yet, no individual was excused from the activity of judging his natural experiences to be satisfying or unsatisfying. That is, natural experiences involved value. Inevitable union with the divine did not dismiss the good or bad quality of an individual's life because the paths to the divine that men could choose varied in their degrees of unpleasantness and pleasantness. Christianity offered a symbolic ideal, a mental idea that did not pretend to alter the natural course of perceptions and also, did not pretend that the activity of judging natural perceptions was superfluous. Christianity offered "another world" to the Romans, an imagined world that was symbolic of the world of experience and "almost as vast and solid as the real [or natural] one." In it, the "soul" could "develop" (IPR 66). Christian myth was a consistent, complete system that engaged the gift of intelligence in the project of seeking satisfaction in the natural world.

Renunciation The "Pagan Christianity," the Christian myth as it retained the virtue that Greek myth had once had, gave value to "the faculty of expressing spiritual experience in myth and external symbol." The Romans conceived natural objects in an immortal, eternal, supernatural context, a "posthumous and metaphysical sphere" (RR 108). As a satisfying end in itself, it included the idea of thought as a satisfying end in itself. In other words, Christianity involved the "experience of disillusion," the experience of the individual will placing itself in a submissive, powerless position in relation to the divine force. Thought had no power over the natural course of man's

perceptions. Christianity, for the Romans, began with a “renunciation” of control, a humbling before deities (RR 117).

Adoption The Prince came to love the Romans, as they related their beautiful myth to this young student. He felt so at home in their society and they felt so at home with him in their society, that the Prince adopted the Romans as parents, and the Romans adopted the Prince as their son. The Prince was content to spend the rest of his days with his people, until one day, when the Romans received news of the Barbarians, or Protestants, in the North.

Barbarians The Romans had offered their lovely myth to the Barbarians some years ago, with the hope that they too would be able to see the natural world in a satisfying way. It appeared that the Barbarians had misunderstood the Christian myth, recreating it not as a symbolic ideal in which thought was its own end, but as a literal description of their natural existence. The literal quality of Barbarian myth was the idea that thoughts and judgements could affect the natural world’s activity of stimulating perception. The Barbarian myth, or thought as it was conceived Barbarian-style, was considered as means to pleasurable ends, rather than as a pleasurable end in its own right. The Romans knew that their religion was free enough to be misleading. It could “falsely represent” itself as “reality,” a literal description of the natural world (IPR 197). But even so, the idea that their myth was being abused was somewhat disturbing. After all, their creation did not deserve the bad press that the bastardization of it might bring.

Thoughts The Prince, sensing the dissatisfaction of his people, set off for Barbarian country to find out what, exactly, was going on there with Roman myth. Indeed he found that, among the Barbarians, the attitude was hardly the Roman ideal of symbolic expression and experience of disillusion. A “confidence in one’s own impulse and destiny” (RR 123) made thought efficacious in the northern forest. The Power attributed to deities, forces or powers conceived in the individual imagination, actually appeared to the creative individual as the power and force of the self. The powers in the imagination pointed to the power of the imagination, which was, from the Protestant perspective, a power acting on and creating the natural, unthinkable world from which perceptions received their stimulus. The Protestants concentrated on the ideal power that conceived the idea of unthinkable reality, rather than on the unthinkable quality of what had stimulated their mental activity.

Optimism In contrast to the Roman, “Pagan Christian” ideal, the Protestant ideal revolved around a kind of optimism, where the “habit of self-control and practical devotion and steadiness” was a means to conventional wellbeing (RR 124). Ill-fortune in the natural world led not to defeat and submission, but served as a “stimulus to this fidelity,” a challenge against which the will strengthened itself (RR 124). The Barbarian myth made judgement of satisfying or unsatisfying perceptions irrelevant to natural experience. It failed to distinguish between failures and successes, since all experiences were satisfying as means to well-being. In other words, natural perceptions had no intrinsic value. The Protestant ideal was “a kind of lovely vapid music or a parasitic dream” that went along with the chaos of the natural world, rather

than presenting a symbolic order for it (RR 19).

Experimentation of Soul The Barbarians had not abused the Christian myth of the Romans entirely. Their creations were related to human emotions and experiences. Their myth did not stand independent of individuals' perceptions and desires. Their emotions and perceptions determined the attributes of the imagined ideal (RR 123). Divinity received its power from an individual "soul" (RR 123), rather than from some rigid, fixed institution. Divinity grew and changed as the "soul" experimented with new tradition. But, because the Protestants had forgotten the ideal of renouncing the will's power to change the course of perceptions, the soul's realm of experimentation was reduced to a minimum (RR 125). The Protestants had excluded their creative activity from the spiritual realm, since their thought was for the sake of literal description and natural change, rather than for the sake of itself, symbolic validity, and intrinsic pleasure. The will had foregone the inner harmony of its principles and was, instead, in the chaos of nature.

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Turning to Santayana

- I -

From those who have recently turned their attention to Santayana, some of the more appreciative and sensitive criticisms have come from scholars of literature, rather than of philosophy. To a large extent, this stems from the republication of his autobiography, along with the major biography by John McCormick, both of which appeared simultaneously, and which have been widely reviewed.¹ The focus of the reviews has understandably been upon his life and surroundings, with less attention to his technical philosophy, although of course these two are especially difficult to separate in his case. This focus on Santayana as man of letters is likely to continue, since the next books slated to appear in the Santayana Edition are his early work on aesthetics, on poetry and religion, his novel, and his letters.

A welcome aspect of comments from the literary quarter is the opportunity to read phrases combining elegance and precision in a manner fitting for a commentary on Santayana: John M. Robson speaks of "Santayana's wary and astonishing powers of observation and expression"; McCormick tells us that, at Harvard, Santayana stood out like "a ripe mango among jonathan apples"; "Santayana's style of unhurried contemplation demands an attentiveness that our frenetic age is loath to embrace," says James J. Thompson, Jr.; and Daniel Aaron writes: "For a philosopher he wrote indecently well, incurring suspicion by the very felicity of his language." My favourite is the opening sentence in a hostile *Village Voice* review, which reads like an echo distorted after a thousand repetitions: "Those who forget Santayana this year are doomed to be reminded."²

Another excellent book on Santayana has turned up from an entirely unexpected source – the department of English of the University of Witwatersrand. Anthony Woodward's *Living in the Eternal: A Study of George Santayana*,³ will of course not receive the attention given to the two simultaneously appearing tomes, but I hope that it does not go unnoticed.

¹ *Persons and Places: Fragments of Autobiography*, edited by William G. Holzberger and Herman J. Saatkamp, Jr., (MIT Press, Boston, 1986). John McCormick, *George Santayana: A Biography*, (Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1987).

² Robson's review is "Persons and Places – Hold the Events," in *Overheard in Seville: Bulletin of the Santayana Society* 5, Fall 1987; See pages 32-33. See page 441 of Thompson's review, "A Philosopher's Life and Death," in *Book World*, February, 1988. Daniel Aaron's review, "Pilgrim's Progress," appears in the May 18, 1987 issue of *The New Republic*; See page 33. And Carlin Romano wrote the review "Say Goodnight, George," in the *Voice Literary Supplement*, May 1987. I shall refer to these reviews by the name of the author.

³ This is brought out by Vanderbilt University Press, Nashville, 1988.

Any turn towards Santayana on the part of professional philosophers, although it is being looked for, has been much slower in coming.⁴ Apparently Santayana's philosophical position differs on too many points from a certain range of widely accepted views, for it to be readily assimilated. Philosophers in the analytic, empiricist camp have difficulties on all sides, in trying to come to terms with Santayana's thought. They have no way of coping with essences, short of admitting them as objects, which is to say assigning to them the same status as material substances. But this is to destroy Santayana's crucial separation between matter and essence. Their difficulties with spirit are no less severe, and not unlike the difficulties with essence; for they are likely to equate moments of spirit with mental events or mental states, which are as much matter as spirit in Santayana's system, being in his eyes a hybrid notion. Given this confusion, it is to be expected that the epiphenomenalism espoused by Santayana will be incomprehensible. Truth also is detached from events and dehumanized. It is not just a property satisfied by certain sentences, with a dependence on some natural or ideal language; rather there is a realm of all truths, definable in terms of the essences which are realized in the course of events. Once again, it is not easy to assign a place to the realm of truth in the ontology of experience. Finally, with the realm of matter, of which one might anticipate a better understanding, a grasp of Santayana's substrative sense of existence seems even more elusive. I shall return to this point at the end of the paper.

Moreover, even if we set aside these difficulties, and assume a full understanding of this philosophy, the number willing to accept such a position would perhaps remain small. Santayana himself concedes that only a few people in each generation seem inclined to adopt a thorough-going materialism.

- II -

Santayana's career as a philosopher, says Jonathan Lieberson,

fell roughly into several parts, first an early Harvard period in which he wrote books on aesthetics and religion, including *The Sense of Beauty*. In the second period, he wrote *The Life of Reason*, which appeared in 1905 and 1906.⁵

End of list! There follows a long discussion of Santayana's contribution to naturalism at the turn of the century, with *The Life of Reason*, taken to be his masterpiece. Lieberson does discuss and dismiss Santayana's later thought

⁴ One long anticipated book, written by a philosopher, has just appeared: John Lachs, *George Santayana*, Twayne's United States Authors Series, (Twayne, Boston, 1988). See the first article above on page 1.

⁵ Jonathan Lieberson, "The Sense of Santayana." *New York Review of Books*, 31 March 1988: pages 49-55. Citations in this section giving only page numbers will refer to Lieberson's review.

afterwards, but, significantly, never reverts to this numbered list. This omission obviously conforms to his view that there began in 1906 a steady decline in Santayana's philosophical merit. We have here, at best, a half-turn to Santayana. Still, this discussion of Santayana's work is a welcome one, considered as a version of the view long held by a relatively large sub-class among the small number who are familiar with this work; in the many reviews elicited by the appearance of both biography and autobiography, this view has for the most part been supplanted by fresher readings.

Many Americans championed the naturalism they found in *The Life of Reason*, but were appalled by subsequent writings emanating from the philosopher secluded in Europe, with their "essences and disinterested spirituality" [55]. This view is prominent among the critical papers in the Schilpp "Living Philosophers" volume on Santayana in 1940⁶ and I shall take Lieberman's critique as representative of this general reading, insofar as the aspects of his criticism, on which I wish to fix here, conform exactly to earlier criticisms in PGS. He also shares with them an unconcealed animus towards Santayana.⁷

Santayana explains in "Apologia pro mente sua," a response to his critics in PGS, that he expects and allows differences in principle between honestly held philosophical positions; at the radical level of basic principle, a point can be reached where further argument is wasted. However disputes are often based upon misunderstandings, in which philosophers fail to see the extent to which their objections depend upon their own assumptions. What is called for here is sympathetic understanding:

My first care in replying to these numerous criticisms was to acknowledge their legitimacy, when once any element of misunderstanding should have been removed from them. So now the last word of my apology must be to beg my critics in turn to remove from my reply any elements of misunderstanding that it may contain, and for the rest to acknowledge the legitimacy of my defence. As to the contrary principles or preferences that dictate our different views, it would be chimerical and ill-natured to argue, You cannot refute a principle or rebut a preference, you can only indicate its consequences or present alluringly the charms of a rival doctrine. [PGS p. 604]

I quote this passage at length, because it seems to me a sufficient answer to the objection made by Lieberman [54], that Santayana never explains his dislike of disputation and distrust of proofs. At the level of fundamentals, proof and argument are futile if the two sides are clear and candid; and if this level has

⁶ *The Philosophy of George Santayana*, Paul Arthur Schilpp, editor, (The Library of Living Philosophers, Northwestern University, Evanston, 1940). See especially the papers of Milton Munitz, p. 183, Irwin Edman, p. 293, and Eliseo Vivas, p. 313. This work will be cited as PGS hereafter.

⁷ Thompson neatly enumerates the various schools of writers under whose skin Santayana manages to get. "He also evinces a marked propensity for rubbing most everyone's *partis pris* the wrong way" [Thompson 441]. This is especially a problem for the sincere admirers of *The Life of Reason*.

not been reached, through misunderstanding or lack of clarity, it is sympathetic understanding which is wanting, not refutation, in order to expose radical affinities or conflicts.⁸

I shall try here, as much as possible, to follow Santayana's exemplary approach to criticism, and point out some spots where Lieberson appears to have gone astray, without at all suggesting that the correction, if accepted, would necessarily lead him to sacrifice his disapproval. For there surely are fundamental differences between their views.

One suspects a misreading the instant one meets the phrase "leap of faith." Animal faith is the stable relation maintained by an animal life towards external reality, the locus where its fate is determined. This faith is primary; but in humans it may be destabilized by a secondary philosophical criticism. Santayana studies in detail the extent to which reasoning can answer this criticism, which nevertheless remains secondary, sporadic, and academic. What is needed is not a *leap*, in Kierkegaard's sense of a transfer of belief – only that the already existing belief in a thing must be detached from the gnostic view that our ideas literally characterize that thing. Of course the distinction makes little sense if 'belief' and 'faith' are given readings no more robust than 'choice of one idea and rejection of another', or 'affirmation of a proposition'. Belief must be understood as something running deeper than the play of ideas; the term 'faith' must be prefixed by 'animal', not by 'leap of'.

All this is tied to a not unusual misreading of Santayana's doctrine of essence:

If I feel nauseated by the meal that I have just eaten, how could Santayana claim that what I feel has existed from the beginning of time and persists into the infinite future and may even be experienced by someone else? [53]

When seen from the viewpoint of verificationism (or of one of its many offspring), it would indeed be incoherent to say that two people could have the same pain in the stomach; for there is no empirical means of comparison. However the case against the unnecessary assumption of the verificationist, with its unwise hobbling of intelligent thought, has been advancing step by step in today's philosophical journals. If we concede that a bat may have different experiences from humans, do we not also suggest that humans may have the *same* experiences as other humans? Santayana does not require that my nausea must have *existed* for all time; the event of its existence is, hopefully, only a momentary one. But the particular unpleasant sensation has a quality different from the taste of honey, and differences like this are not confined to a single moment, nor are they without a certain significance. The difference is not temporal but eternal, and the realm of essence is merely Santayana's way of recognizing such differences.

⁸ I take the term 'sympathetic understanding' from McCormick, who stresses its significance for Santayana. Lieberson notes Santayana's "talent for being able to express, and to feel his way into" opposing positions [49], a talent which goes undeveloped in anybody whose sole concern is unsympathetic refutation.

Santayana writes in 1914, praising Germany's "brave and heroic determination" Lieberman [54] cites this passage, claiming that it betrays a sympathy with Germany, which Santayana retracted a short time later only because he was offended by one or two German actions. The word "heroic" does not suggest irony to him, surprisingly. Of course, Santayana would (and did) say that Germany *deserved* to win, in the hard Spinozistic sense that it was stronger and more resolute. But I do not find in this the slightest sympathy for the German cause – only bitterness that the liberal democracies should be so irresponsible in letting down their guard. I see here his usual harsh attack on liberal society, with its unconcern for the institutional development of safety and happiness for its citizens, and concern only for an empty freedom; the liberals are getting what they deserve.

Santayana shocks or chills us with his composure and apparent indifference in the face of tragic events. Lieberman offers an extended list of examples, and others are added in other reviews. But is he correct to call this composure a sham? [54] The truth of the matter is surely more complicated, and several of the reviews are helpful in providing explanations. Aaron notes that Santayana was generous and caring in his personal relations (something well established by McCormick); and that if he became exceptionally disengaged in his later life from political commitments, this detachment was his chosen ideal, and was not easily won. His stance "followed logically from a Lucretian belief in nature's inexorable and impersonal processes" [Aaron 30]. It is this seeming acceptance of the inevitability of evil which exercises Lieberman:

He lived long enough to convey to a visiting American philosopher, who condemned the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki because innocent people were killed, the cruelly fatuous idea that these bombings were "disasters, no doubt. But so is the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius a disaster." This assimilation of human warfare, deliberately undertaken by statesman and military men, to the forces of "nature" is only one of many instances in McCormick's book of Santayana's celebrated detachment and *sagesse* [Lieberman 54].

It is indeed Santayana's contention that decisions to wage war ought to be considered as natural events with natural origins; only by looking beneath the surface reactions and emotions to real causes in anyone likely to improve matters. Such is his theme in *Dominations and Powers*.⁹ Nor does he seize the opportunity for moral outrage at the American use of nuclear weapons, probably suspecting that among those so outraged, many would have found persuasive reasons to justify a like decision, were they in like circumstances. He does not find moral outrage an ideal motivation for a wise governor; and a part of his objection to liberal society is its need to generate universal outrage before action will be taken.

Spinoza was tough-minded too: "Pity, in a man who lives under the guidance of reason, is in itself bad and useless" [Ethics IV-50]. Here Santayana

⁹ This was published by Scribner's in 1951. Although much of the material had been written earlier, it was put together with additions after the war.

differs:

We may say with better reason of pain what Spinoza said of remorse and pity, that it is bad and useless. The *pain* in remorse and pity is futile, but not the spiritual or tragic *perception* of the evil in question: for this perception indicates no impediment in the psyche now, but on the contrary an enveloping synthesis by which the old calamity and its neutralization in the vast context of truth are present to the spirit, and radically present for ever. Such tragic insight, such pity and remorse are parts of the highest good. That which is bad and useless is to protract or repeat pain, physical or moral, at its original level, where it still indicates not synthesis but distraction.¹⁰

Such was Schopenhauer's reaction to suffering, in contrast to the romantic cruelty of Nietzsche:

... æsthetic cruelty, which was Nietzsche's delight, would have revolted Schopenhauer. He thought tragedy beautiful because it detached us from a troubled world and did not think a troubled world good, as those unspeakable optimists did, because it made such a fine tragedy.¹¹

Santayana seems not to have achieved his "celebrated detachment" in the case of romantic criminals, who bring a futile suffering not tied to an inevitable clash between genuine interests. In any case these passages are not the reflections of indifference; and when he speaks of the tragic synthesis, Santayana is surely speaking for real sufferers. Moreover he always insists on the rational authority of society to rid itself of evil and suffering; only he prefers it to stamp out evil without self-righteousness and an unspiritual fanaticism.

- III -

Why ever would a mathematician turn to Santayana? This question I have heard many times, and perhaps a response is of interest. All recognize an affinity between mathematics and philosophy, as exemplified by Russell and many others; but the mathematical philosophy of Russell is remote from Santayana's text. Indeed does the latter not concede his lack of knowledge of mathematics? "For good or ill, I am an ignorant man, almost a poet, and can only spread a feast of what everybody knows."¹²

I consider two quite different answers to this question: most obviously, the realm of essence allows for an excellent account of mathematics; and, broadening from mathematics to physics, there is a deep affinity between

¹⁰ See pages 680-681 of George Santayana, *Realms of Being*, One-volume edition, (Scribner's, New York, 1942).

¹¹ See page 119 of George Santayana, *Egotism in German Philosophy*, (Scribner's, New York, 1915).

¹² See page ix of *Scepticism and Animal Faith*, (Constable, London, 1923).

Santayana's materialism and the attitude of many of today's scientists (although of rather fewer of today's philosophers of science). A third answer is personal and perhaps idiosyncratic, and I mention it in passing. In applying the precise techniques of mathematical logic to philosophical problems, as it has always seemed to me, analysts were using techniques far too powerful and exacting for the subject matter at hand. How could anyone acquainted with the sensitivity of mathematical proof to the slightest discrepancy, countenance this misapplication? It hurts the mathematical sensibility. In contrast Santayana has a knack for finding the level of discourse appropriate to the problems he deals with, following more traditional philosophers. Needless to say, those who find merit in the mathematical approach cannot but find Santayana imprecise and unsatisfactory.

Santayana's doctrine of essence is congenial to the foundational view of many practising mathematicians, in that it offers Platonism, but Platonism of a form which blocks the hypostasis of universals into existential and efficacious beings. It fully acknowledges the joy of intuiting these essences, and does not seek to reduce mathematical objects to linguistic or verbal entities, or to private thoughts, or to marks on paper. But it maintains that essences play no dynamic part in physical change, unless they are realized as the form of some material existence. This appreciation of essences by the mathematician is one with the intuition of essence proper to the artist or musician, and shares with these an intrinsic goodness.

This doctrine is disarmingly simple; it claims about mathematics little more than that it is a study of forms. In spite of its simplicity, many have difficulty with this conception, often because of a preconceived ontology making them suspicious of anything so detached from actual occurrences.¹³ It may moreover seem that essences would serve no better than various other available notions, like ideas, concepts, or propositions. This is not so. Ideas are too psychological, as usually conceived; the realm of essence is not a mental realm. Concepts, too, could stand in for essences, as far as mathematics is concerned. However concepts are understood traditionally to be complemented by entirely different sensations, while for Santayana essences (rather like the ideas of Locke) encompass both. Propositions, as understood by Moore and Russell, are much closer. However those who accept propositions often accept at the same time some ideal language in which these are expressed, and maybe some being asserting or merely understanding the proposition in that language. This tacit connection to natural language and human expression may be the saving grace, for them, of propositions; but only if these connections are stripped from the notion of proposition could it begin to fill the part played by essences.

Physicists must know mathematics; and many mathematicians are interested in physics. To some of these latter, the second answer will apply, especially if they are acquainted with relativity theory and quantum mechanics, doctrines which lead to rude shocks to our common sense views of the geometry of space,

¹³ Santayana believes that part of the difficulty is the simplicity of the theory.

of the nature of time, and of the texture of material reality. One is pushed by these results to a fallibilist view, and although these theories offer new accounts of matter, time, and space, one is rather left sceptical on the possibility of an entirely convincing and final such theory. More radically, one may be led to question whether any of our representations or theories are at all commensurate with the reality being represented or theorized about. This is Santayana's opinion, although he traces it to the ancient materialists, and not to modern science.

One traditional approach of philosophers to this dilemma, espoused by empiricists and dating back to Kant, is to direct our attention at the concepts or ideas of physical things, instead of at the things themselves; and some eminent physicists have also been led to such a doctrine. This approach has taken on myriad forms, many of which do not follow the classical empiricist identification of things with our ideas of them. In a recent version of this approach, for instance, philosophers ponder the difficulties posed by theories incommensurate with each other. But they are prevented by their ontology from seeing how the presence of incommensurate theories is clarified and explained by the incommensurability of *any* theory with the facts, when these facts are given a substantial setting in a realm of matter, radically disconnected from all theories about it.

I think that creative, practising scientists do not usually follow the approach laid out for them by these philosophers. As investigators of the external cosmos, the scientists must continue to consider facts, things and events, rather than our ideas of them, or words referring to them, or 'objects' taken in the subjective philosophical sense; and their creative explanations arise through and are nourished by the continuing faith they have in those remote unknown elements. Here Santayana has it right, at the point where mathematically sophisticated philosophers of science often go astray. Scientists must often carry on their work outside any detailed theory – when they are replacing one theory with another, or comparing two incompatible theories, or seeking an entirely new explanation of experimental results. They must back off from the precision imposed by any one theory, and discuss phenomena in terms vague enough to make sense within a variety of explanatory accounts. They seek precision, but do not use it in discussions where it would be misleading. But their faith in the underlying reality, whatever it is, does not waver.

Thus Santayana's doctrine of essence and Pure Being, kept apart from existing things, can appeal to the pure mathematician; and mathematical scientists can respect the notion of a realm of matter as a substrative, existential universe, kept apart from the essences they use to offer their best descriptions of that realm.

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The Santayana Edition

This has been another significant year for the Santayana Edition. *Persons and Places* was published in 1987, and it has received widespread reviews in popular and professional publications: *The New Republic*, *The New York Times Book Review*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Boston Globe*, *The London Times*, *The Financial Times*, *The New York Review of Books*, *The Village Voice Literary Supplement*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, *American Literature*, *The London Review of Books*, *Book World*, *The New Criterion*, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, *The Whig-Standard Magazine*, *Harvard Magazine*, and *Dallas Times Herald*. This fall a number of professional reviews will appear, e.g., one by Nathan Houser in *Documentary Editing*. Overall, the attention to the volume as well as the sales of the volume have been excellent.

It is of particular importance that this publication has brought renewed interest in Santayana scholarship. The General Editor and the staff at Texas A&M have been corresponding with a growing number of scholars who are working on various aspects of Santayana's philosophical and literary contributions.

Volume Two, *The Sense of Beauty*, will be published this fall. Arthur Danto has written the introduction which he calls "a philosopher's tribute to a philosopher." The Modern Language Association's Committee on Scholarly Editions recently awarded us the seal of "An Approved Edition" for the second volume. Hence, our first two volumes have met the highest standards in critical editing, and I am particularly grateful to the Textual Editor, William Holzberger, and the Associate Editor, Donna Hanna-Calvert, for the careful and diligent work that assured the successful editing of the first two volumes. *The Sense of Beauty* should be published by mid-fall, hardback first and then a paperback edition later. I am waiting for the last check of the "blues" (the sheets from which the printed volumes will be produced) before I give the final OK for publication.

Volume Three, *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion*, is scheduled for spring publication. Joel Porte has written the introduction, and this volume like the preceding two, should prove quite a success.

The General Editor is working with John Friedman, President of Memory Films, Inc., in an effort to produce a film based on *The Last Puritan*. Friedman's last film, *Hotel Terminus: The Life and Times of Klaus Barbie*, recently won the Critic's Award at the Cannes Film Festival. John and I are preparing a grant proposal for NEH to support the scripting for this project.

I am grateful for the support of the Editorial Board, NEH, MIT, and the many persons who have made it possible for the Santayana Edition to come into existence and to succeed. Thank you.

Herman J. Saatkamp, Jr.
General Editor

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL CHECKLIST FIFTH UPDATE

The items below will further 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 year of publication. Readers with further information or corrections are invited to send these to Herman J. Saatkamp, Jr., Santayana Edition, Department of Philosophy, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas 77843-4237.

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