

Overheard in Seville

*Bulletin of the  
Santayana  
Society*

No. 7  
Fall 1989



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	i	Table of Contents
	ii	Announcement of the 1989 Annual Meeting
<i>Daniel Aaron</i>	1	George Santayana and the Genteel Tradition
<i>David A. Dilworth</i>	9	Santayana and Democritus Two Mutually Interpreting Philosophical Poets
<i>George Santayana</i>	20	<i>Lucifer</i> A Holograph Note
<i>Cornel Lengyel</i>	24	In Memoriam: Santayana
<i>Angus Kerr-Lawson</i>	26	Santayana's Ontology and the Nicene Creed
<i>Herman J. Saatkamp, Jr.</i>	33	The Santayana Edition
<i>Herman J. Saatkamp, Jr.</i>	35	Bibliographical Checklist Sixth Update
<i>Angus Kerr-Lawson</i>	41	PostScript

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# ANNOUNCEMENT

The Society's annual meeting will be held in conjunction with the December meetings of the American Philosophical Association (Eastern Division) in Atlanta, Georgia. The meeting will mark the forthcoming publication of the Critical Edition of George Santayana's *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion*, Volume III of the Santayana Edition.

## **SANTAYANA SOCIETY**

1989  
ANNUAL MEETING

Chair: **Paul G. Kuntz**  
Emory University

Speaker: **Morris Grossman**  
Fairfield University  
"Interpreting *Interpretations*"

Commentators: **Henry S. Levinson**  
University of North Carolina,  
Greensboro

**Richard Lyon**  
Hampshire College

Presentation of the Critical Edition  
of *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion*:  
**Herman J. Saathamp, Jr.**  
General Editor, Santayana Edition

7:30 - 10:30 p.m. 28 December  
French Suite  
Hyatt-Regency Hotel, Atlanta

# George Santayana and the Genteel Tradition

When George Santayana delivered his lecture "The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy" to a California audience in 1911, the word "genteel" had pretty well lost its original meaning. The adjective, a derivative of the French "gentil," was for a long time synonymous with "polite," "graceful," "decorous," "refined." It distinguished the manners, dress, and tone of the well-born from those of the commonality. That is the way Jane Austen, for example, understood it. Mr. Darcy in her novel *Pride and Prejudice* is "genteel." The smug and obsequious lower-class Mr. Collins is decidedly not. But by the middle of the nineteenth century, the term had become largely pejorative. "Do you call those genteel little creatures American poets?" Whitman rhetorically asks in *Democratic Vistas*. "To prune, gather, trim, conform, and ever cram and stuff, and be genteel and proper, is the pressure of our days." (Whitman, 1982, pp. 955, 961) Today "genteel" is an epithet contemptuously applied to persons (I cite the OED) "who are possessed with a dread of being taken for the 'common people', who attach exaggerated importance to supposed marks of social superiority." (Also see Tomsich, 1971, pp. 2-3) To be "genteel" now is tantamount to being both ignoble and socially insecure.

Little of this sense of the word is implicit in Santayana's usage. For him the "genteel tradition" was a descriptive, not an abusive term. It connoted propriety, correctness, dogmatism, and conservatism (Howgate, 1938, pp. 186-7) – and flaccidness, passivity, and complacency as well. "The subject," he wrote, "is complex, and calls for many an excursus and qualifying footnote." (Santayana, 1913, p. 212), but he did sketch its outlines. Indeed, it's possible to watch his conceptions of the "genteel tradition" taking shape in his consciousness long before he gave it a name. In time he came to see it as a kind of cultural malady that had afflicted the American mind since at least the end of the Civil War. A consecutive story of its birth, dominion, and decline could be pieced together from his random pieces and casual asides. If it had been, the plot might have run something like this.

The genteel tradition originated abroad like so many other American phenomena but became pandemic in Protestant America after Calvinism had ceased to be a vital and dynamic faith and the transcendentalism of an Emerson or Thoreau had atrophied. By mid-century, the citizens of the republic were totally absorbed in building and expanding and accumulating while at the same time internalizing a "hereditary philosophy" that no longer bore any relation to their quotidian activities. The religious and secular priests of a stale idealism represented one half of the national mentality. They were

the custodians of a superannuated "high culture." The philistines, cousins of Emerson's Men of Understanding – calculating machines devoid of true emotion or "instinctive piety" – represented the other half. No third party of any size or dimension emerged to reconcile them. But science and intellectual and material progress created an inhospitable milieu for the genteel tradition, undermined its shaky foundations, and drove its proponents into academic enclaves. The consequences of this split between the spiritual and material cultures left the nation "half-formed," as Santayana put it, "and groping after its essence," (Santayana, 1986, p. 195) – a nation without a civilization.

Santayana's even-tempered if piecemeal diagnosis of a divided national mentality has been thoroughly aired, and so has the story of its aftermath: how the literary radicals in the early twentieth century made the genteel tradition the target of their antipathies just as it was about to peter out. Santayana had seen in 1911 that the Bohemian insurgents with their "poetry of crude naturalism" were the forerunners of a coming cultural revolution, but he didn't welcome them as allies. The confirmed Tory felt obliged to detach himself from the thirty contributors to Harold Stearns's *Civilization in the United States* when he reviewed that noisy book in 1922. He found the Young Turks "morally underfed" and "disaffected," and he learned more, he drily noted, "about their palpitating doubts than about America or about civilization." (Ballowe, 1967, pp. 161-2) Much of what they disliked about the United States he liked; the Americanism they deplored (the genteel tradition excepted) was "simply modernism." He even intimated that the "offended sensibility" emanating from Stearns's book was "itself genteel." (Ballowe, 1967, pp. 161-2)

Even so, he felt no hostility toward the young "barbarians," in his lexicon a term signifying "unevenly educated," "undisciplined," "rebellious against the nature of things." Barbarians were people who despised "that which exists, in language, vocabulary, or morals, and set up the sufficiency of their unchastened impulses." He wasn't put off by their rambunctiousness – that was youth's privilege – but he faulted them for expressing their demands for "self-expression" in appallingly muddy English. Still, no matter how "crude and unnecessarily wasteful" they were, (Cory, 1963, pp. 29-30) he preferred them to the New Humanists, the last flurry of the New England genteel tradition, who had no wild passions to subdue for all their talk about the "inner check." In his youth he had resisted and resented the moral absolutism of Boston and Cambridge, the essence, he thought, "of the genteel tradition in America." (Santayana, 1931, p. 28) Perhaps this accounts for a certain animus detectable whenever the genteel tradition surfaces in his books and essays. It was more than a topic for the Tocquevillian commentator on American culture; it was a personal matter. Addressing it gave him an excuse to pay back some old scores.

I mention Tocqueville here as the prototypical outsider who came to the United States less than a half-century before Santayana arrived, stayed ten months, and wrote his classic study of a democratic state, the advanced guard of what he saw as an inevitable tendency. He carried his presuppositions with him and left with most of them intact. He liked the country and its people, but American society didn't appeal to him. America had no literature, no music, and was destined by its political system and its social egalitarianism to produce

at best a diluted culture.

It would never have occurred to Santayana to make a systematic survey of American ideas and institutions, but his conclusions about American civilization, such as they were, were not all that different from Tocqueville's even though his involvement with America was far more complex and ambivalent.

Both *Persons and Places*, a novelistic autobiography, and *The Last Puritan*, an autobiographical novel, are as much the productions of the insider as outsider as they are the reverse. In the former, Santayana makes his marginality the clue to his character and career. He presents himself as the stranger in America, the uneasy guest, the exotic, the spy, the Prince in Disguise. In his public role, he plays the laughing philosopher, the bemused observer of the human menagerie, the tolerant world citizen. Hardly discernible is the not-so-disengaged social critic embedded in the society he is criticizing. Many social critics, Stefan Collini reminds us, tend to dramatize their roles by representing themselves "as 'marginal'. But such a claim," he continues, "need not be naively taken as an accurate piece of social description: it serves functions of its own, including that of legitimating the criticisms by indicating the critic's special access to some standard of authority denied to those blinkered by or imprisoned in the assumptions of their own society." (Collini, 1988, p. 427) Santayana was such a critic, I think, and I suspect that he was more affected by the genteel culture he slyly spoofed than he ever let on.

He may have shared some of the traits Thorstein Veblen in a famous essay attributed to the renegade Jew – the hyphenate's "divided allegiance" and skepticism – that made him, in Veblen's terms, an "intellectual wayfaring man" and "a disturber of the intellectual peace." (Lerner, 1970, pp. 474-5) But unlike Veblen, an authentic outsider, Santayana managed to secure his place "in the scheme of conventions" and to remain safely and comfortably ensconced in the society of the well-heeled. He could do this in good conscience, because he had no quarrel with America's political and economic institutions and accepted (if not necessarily agreeing with) the social prejudices of the establishment, but also because he conveyed his unsubversive opinions with charm and urbanity. However foreign he felt himself to be, his "insider" credentials protected him from the retribution visited upon the genuine outsider.

*Persons and Places*, at once so revealing and evasive, so clearly written and abstract, is instructively different from the autobiographical books of Henry Adams and Henry James, authors with whom Santayana has often been compared. Both belonged to Old America. Both escaped the contagion of the genteel tradition by distancing themselves from it, Adams through science and historical back-tracking, James in what Santayana called "the classic way" – that is to say, by turning it "into a subject-matter for analysis" and "by understanding it." (Santayana, 1913, p. 204) Santayana professed to understand it too, but that did not keep him from coming almost obsessively to its spirit-chilling manifestations long after its knell had sounded. Significantly, he often associated it with his Boston youth.

Two Bostons figure noticeably in his memoirs: the Boston typified by his own shabby genteel household and the Boston of the rich. He made no bones about his preference for the luxurious households of the latter ("if most things were illusions," he decided, "having money and spending money were great realities"), but the Boston he abandoned with relief – the only part of America he knew at first hand – emerges in his recollections as the quintessence of the genteel tradition: a compound of tepid refinement and blatant commercialism. "In Boston but not of it." Thus he described his adolescence. His foreignness, his Roman Catholicism (such as it was), and what he refers to tiresomely in his autobiography as his family's "poverty," didn't bar him from fashionable and intellectual circles; it did keep him skirmishing "on the borders of the polite world." At Harvard there were no borders he had to cross, but both in Boston and Cambridge he occupied a middle ground somewhere between that of a native and a "visiting foreigner." (Santayana, 1986, pp. 85, 224, 354) So at least the older man remembered his younger self.

The Boston of *Persons and Places* – Santayana's America – is reflected through a glass tinted with sentiment, malice, and humor. His fondness for the "kind and correct Bostonians," those "highly moralised and highly cultivated" types, was unfeigned. (Santayana, 1986, pp. 254, 354) But his memoirs were also punctuated with vignettes of drab people not unlike the cranks Henry James mischievously portrayed in his novel *The Bostonians*. There is something curt and a little spiteful in his recollections of Boston maidens drifting into spinsterhood and of a society left limp and exhausted in the aftermath of a civil war about which he had no feeling and little interest. He is particularly hard on Boston Unitarianism which seems to have epitomized for him the hollowness and complacency of the genteel tradition. He associated it with congratulatory sermons that neither discouraged believers nor antagonized agnostics; with solemn ill-humored and unappetizing breakfasts – "the improved Unitarian substitute for morning prayers," and bland cultural uplift. (Santayana, 1937, p. 27)

The personal note that slips into these animadversions and belies the pose of the bemused outsider he assumes in *Persons and Places* is even more noticeable in *The Last Puritan*. I read this memoir in the form of a novel as a sequel to the autobiography and a sustained soliloquy (as so much of his writing is) in which the voice of the author resounds not only in the pronouncements of the narrator but also in the conversation of the disparate characters, mouthpieces for his *obiter dicta*. Here the meaning of "genteel" is dramatized rather than spelled out. It is as if under the guise of fiction, he could touch on matters he was disinclined to probe in his memoirs and essays.

Oliver Alden, the luckless hero of *The Last Puritan*, bears a certain resemblance to the type Henry Adams labeled "*bourgeois-bostonien*." (Arvin, 1951, p. 239) He is prefigured in Santayana's *Character and Opinion in the United States* as one of those gaunt solitary American idealists who "either folds up his heart and withers in a corner" or flees to foreign shores "to save his soul – or perhaps not to save it," (Santayana, 1967, p. 170) and who exhibit, in the words of William Dean Howells, "that anti-Puritan quality which was always vexing the heart of Puritanism." (Howells, 1964, p. vii) Oliver Alden is a

throwback to his Calvinist forebears and lacks, like Captain Ahab, "the low enjoying power." Having convinced himself that it's wrong to be a Puritan, he's still unable to stifle his "agonized conscience." Neither can he accommodate himself to the "shams and mummeries" of the genteel tradition. (Santayana, 1937, pp. 6-7) Santayana admires Oliver's integrity and blames him only for not adhering "to his own standard." (McCormick, 1986, p. 329) and not breaking through to "live victoriously in the spirit." (Singer, 1956, p. 251) There's a good deal of Santayana in Oliver, but, as he wrote to a friend, the novel "gives the *emotions* of my experience and not my thoughts and experiences themselves." (McCormick, 1986, p. 330) The author was far readier to compromise "with the mixed loose world" (Singer, 1956, p. 252) than his inflexible protagonist.

Oliver's father, Peter Alden, is more a Santayan than his son. A rootless traveler – urbane, skeptical, ironic – he fancies handsome young men, good food, agreeable travel, and is instinctively the gentleman for all his unconventional habits and ideas. Peter's marriage to Oliver's mother seems out of character despite the labored authorial explanation, but the settlement he makes with Harriet Bumstead, the genteel tradition incarnate, is analogous to Santayana's strategy vis-a-vis America. Peter restores the Bumstead house to its former stateliness and gives over the arrangement of its rooms to his wife while insisting that one upstairs room – a "Chinese room," he calls it, symbolic of his world elsewhere – be reserved for himself. Peter Alden soliloquizes:

In walking up and down these dignified stairs, we shall have time to recompose ourselves for the change of atmosphere, in passing from solitude to society, or *vice versa*; I don't mean from sincerity to pretence, but from the illusions with which each probably cheats himself, to the deceptions with which he probably doesn't deceive other people. Let us endeavour to preserve our genteel traditions for one generation more. If I have a son, I should like him to start from there. God knows where he will end. (Santayana, 1937, p. 63)

As long as he lived in the United States, Santayana also lived on two floors, so to speak, with his "Chinese room" to retreat to. Like Peter Alden, he had been "thoroughly initiated in his youth into a particular native circle," had found it "too narrow and old-fashioned" to endure, and "in slipping out of it, he had also missed the general movement of national events and national sentiment." (Santayana, 1937, p. 113) Even so, he took pleasure in the company of an "inner circle" whose members retained something of the social flavor of the old merchant patriciate. He wasn't really of it, as Henry Adams was, or William and Henry James, or Oliver Wendell Holmes, Barrett Wendell, and John Jay Chapman, but he felt a kinship with Europeanized Boston cosmopolites, however "genteel" their culture, and enjoyed their cultivated talk and good dinners.

He felt much closer to the scions of these old families, especially the gifted minority among his Harvard classmates and students, and brooded over their wasted lives. Underdeveloped and dissatisfied, gasping for breath in the thin New England air, they lacked the power of mind to dominate their

circumstances. He differentiated himself from this traditionless remnant (he could fall back, he claimed, on Old World resources unavailable to them in spite of their frequent sojourns abroad), yet they all vibrated to the same aesthetic string. Santayana succeeded where they failed, because he was driven by practical necessity and more skilled in the arts of survival. He was also tougher and smarter.

Martin Green in his book, *The Problem of Boston*, has analyzed the tastes and temperaments of the aesthete-exiles with particular attention to what Santayana, Bernard Berenson, Henry James, and Henry Adams had in common: an aesthetic idealism, a marked feminine component, a preference for the society of brilliant and mutually-enriching "chosen spirits," a fascination with Roman Catholicism, and a fondness for the manners and style of the English upper class. (Green, 1966, pp. 142-63) Santayana was never more Bostonian than when playing the anti-Bostonian – ironic, humorous, gentlemanly, temperate, self-contained – observing the proprieties of dress, distrustful of the French character. The Boston aesthetes, Santayana included, were men of the world and tolerated the forbidden if it were presented elegantly and without grossness, but in shying away from the experimental, the confessional, the outré, they were no less genteel than their literary contemporaries.

Consider Santayana's life-long debate over Walt Whitman – one might almost say *with* Walt Whitman. In "Walt Whitman: a Dialogue" written in 1890, he plays the double role of defender and prosecutor. Van Tender, the tender-minded poet, hails Whitman as "the voice of nature crying in the wilderness," the celebrator of "the beauty of common things." His tough-minded friend, McStout, comes down hard on the vague and indecent pantheist, the "fashionable mountebank." (Ballowe, 1967, pp. 97-104) A decade later, Santayana grants Whitman "a wonderful gift of graphic characterisation and an occasional rare grandeur of diction" but sees him as an inspired tramp and poetic demagogue wallowing "in the stream of his own sensibility." (Singer, 1956, p. 157) He appears to have grown more critical of Whitman as he aged, if Peter Alden speaks for the author in *The Last Puritan*. Alden calls Whitman a "speechifying" rhetorician "as superficial as Rousseau," not a true poet. "He pretends (Alden continues) to turn – for it is largely affectation – only from the more refined devices of mankind to a ruder and more stupid existence. He is like Marie Antoinette playing the shepherdess." (Santayana, 1937, pp. 180-1) By disregarding the genteel tradition, he concedes, Whitman performed a valuable service, but because he was lazy and self-indulgent and indiscriminating, and because he "renounced old forms without achieving a new one," (Ballowe, 1967, p. 149) he laid no foundation for its amendment.

So Santayana pigeon-holed the patron saint of the bohemians. And they, having appropriated the "reverberant name" (as Van Wyck Brooks referred to the "genteel tradition") conducted a crusade against it and its alleged priests, unaware that they were attacking some of Santayana's cherished values – order, discipline, integration – and encouraging in themselves and others what was for him a sloppy subjectivism. Initially he had confined the word "genteel" to a philosophical tradition. The social and literary iconoclasts of the teens and

twenties stretched its meaning to cover the whole of American milk-and-water Anglo-Saxon culture and its (until roughly 1910) influential missionaries. Santayana was no democrat. He accepted class distinctions as a matter of course, along with the social prejudices and preferences of the genteel bookmen. He didn't anticipate an American renaissance. It would have seemed to him an oxymoron.

The radicals did. What is more, they advocated a melting-pot culture which to Santayana was no culture at all. Van Wyck Brook's little book, *America's Coming-of-Age*, published a few years after Santayana left the United States for good, is an expression of this cultural nationalism. Brooks is the link between Santayana and the unharnessed apostles of the New who came of age during the presidency of Woodrow Wilson. In his Harvard years (1904-7) Brooks had belonged to the company of college aesthetes, some of them Santayana's friends and protégés, and had shared (in the words of his biographer) their "weary languor and mild *fin-de-siècle* pessimism." (Hoopes, 1977, p. 47) Brooks's *The Wine of the Puritans* (1908), written in the form of a dialogue, was published one year after his graduation and three years before Santayana's "The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy." Its title and theme are embodied in the remark of one of the speakers: "You put the old wine in new bottles ... and when the explosion results, one may say the aroma, or the ideal, turns into transcendentalism, and the wine, or the real, becomes commercialism. In any case, one doesn't preserve a great deal of well-tempered wine." (Sprague, 1968, p. 6) Brooks's metaphor of a transported culture and of a country deprived of a cultural childhood is echoed in Santayana's observation: "The country was new, but the race was tried, chastened, and full of solemn memories. It was an old wine in new bottles." (Hoopes, 1977, p. 62)

Eventually Brooks discovered treasures in America's "usable past," enthusiastically espoused a cultural nationalism, and grew testy with expatriots like Eliot and Pound. Santayana never never changed his mind about a country he was delighted to leave and about which he came to know less and less. When he quit the United States in 1913, the genteel tradition was virtually defunct, doomed, he believed, by an unlovely modernist counter-culture – itself the product of a triumphant industrialism. Like Matthew Arnold, G. Lowes Dickinson, and H.G. Wells – but perhaps with fewer misgivings – he beheld America as a promise or threat of what was to come. He took a lot of America with him when he left, especially the genteel New England he had anatomized and laughed at and half despised. For this New England he retained the kind of respect and a covert affection one has for a persistent and familiar enemy.

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# Santayana and Democritus Two Mutually Interpreting Philosophical Poets

## Santayana's Interpretation of Lucretius

Santayana's fully mature, but still comparatively early *Three Philosophical Poets*, already encapsulates the main theses of his essential theory. What is of especial interest to this writer is that it achieves its theoretical end while exhibiting the clear grasp Santayana had of the basic differences between the thought of Democritus, on the one hand, and of Epicurus and Lucretius, on the other. He saw the latter two indeed as having contracted the theoretical range of the former. To state my own thesis here, I suggest that the fundamental theoretical intentionality of Santayana's symbolic naturalism, with its radical epiphenomenalism and doctrine of essences, is already essentially framed in Democritus's world view. And not to speak of other dimensions of the Greek philosopher's theory, in Democritus's very doctrine of the geometrical properties of the physical elements we find contained a postulate as to an affinity in the world's finer and rarer energies that eventuates in the higher sympathies of the human and divine minds. Democritus's ethics of imperturbable wisdom, cheerfulness, moderation, and friendship, flows from that same configuration of insights. Taking into account all the other saving graces that follow from their symbolic naturalisms, the world views of Democritus and Santayana will be seen to dovetail in other basic premisses and conclusions.

But to begin at the beginning of this subject, *Three Philosophical Poets* is pivotal in showing the essential intentionality of Santayana's philosophically soliloquizing mind. This is true of the work in general; it is especially focused in its final sentences. As self-revelatory as any passage in the series of Santayana's frequently self-referent writings are the final two paragraphs of that work. There, in the context of concluding that the three immortal poems of Lucretius, Dante, and Goethe constitute a set of distinct but complementary spiritual forms, Santayana plays them back *in modo reverso*. He writes:

*Am farbigen Abglanz haben wir das Leben;* each sense has its arbitrary quality, each language its arbitrary euphony and prosody; each game has its creative laws, every soul its own tender reverberations and dreams. Life has a margin of play which might grow broader, if the sustaining nucleus were more firmly established in the world. To the art of working well a civilized race would add the art of playing well. To play with nature and make it decorative, to play with the overtones of life and make them delightful, is a sort of art. It is the ultimate, the most artistic sort of art, but it will never be practised successfully so long as the other sort of art is in a backward state; for if we do not know our environment, we shall mistake our dreams for a part of it, and so spoil our science by making it fantastic, and our dreams by

making them obligatory. The art and the religion of the past, as we see conspicuously in Dante, have fallen into this error. To correct it would be to establish a new religion and a new art, based on moral liberty and on moral courage.<sup>1</sup>

In the sequel to this, Santayana goes on virtually to draw his own philosophical profile – both his own moral necessity and timeless *raison d'être* – in what I read as another subtle soliloquy:

Who shall be the poet of this double insight? He has never existed, but he is needed nevertheless. It is time some genius should appear to reconstitute the shattered picture of the world. He should live in the continual presence of all experience, and respect it; he should at the same time understand nature, the ground of that experience; and he should also have a delicate sense for the ideal echoes of his own passions, and for all the colours of his possible happiness.<sup>2</sup>

If all genuine philosophy is legislative, as Kant says, this dictum will be seen to apply preeminently to Santayana's own sentences here. They announce his own philosophical project in their own nomothetic fashion.

To live in the continual presence of all experiences, and respect it – as did Goethe's Faust; to understand nature, the ground of that experience – as did Lucretius; and to have a delicate sense for the ideal echoes of his own passions, and for all the colors of his possible happiness – as did Dante: the confluence of these diverse intuitions precisely constituted the theoretical intentionality of Santayana's mind, and philosophical vocation. His ensuing career-text shows that he had the moral liberty and the moral courage to carry out this theoretical project with consummate results.

In short, this ambitious resolution to combine the wisdom of Faust, Lucretius, and Dante set the direction of Santayana's symbolic naturalism, which was an ever ramifying, and yet constantly recycling, series of articulations. But still, in my judgment, in achieving the degree of theoretical generality required for this striking combination, Santayana repossessed and reenacted the world view of his spiritual father Democritus.<sup>3</sup>

An interpretive clue to this generality of Santayana's thought can already be found in the order of presentation of the three philosophical poets. Lucretius comes first, followed by Dante, then by Goethe's Faust – followed in turn by Santayana's extraordinary transmutation of the potential resources of all three into his own theory of their inner (but not outer) compatibility.

First Lucretius – then Dante and Goethe's Faust in their turns – serve the purposes of Santayana's remarkable power of philosophical soliloquy. Subtly

<sup>1</sup> See page 214 of George Santayana, *Three Philosophical Poets*, (Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1947). Unaccompanied number references will be to page numbers of this work.

<sup>2</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>3</sup> Santayana closes *Three Philosophical Poets* by saying "This supreme poet is in limbo still." And so, it turns out, was Democritus in limbo, as we find out sixteen years later in *Dialogues in Limbo*.

suggestive, for example, is such a sentence as "... the genius of the poet as revealed in his work, where we find a strange scorn of love, a strange vehemence, and a high melancholy" [19]. There abound other such obliquely autobiographical references. At the same time, they ring the changes on his doctrine of existence and essence. Thus it pleases Santayana that Lucretius's poem is itself impersonally self-revelatory – for he notes that Lucretius "is identical for us with his poem and is lost in his philosophy." That poem and philosophy profess a naturalistic conception of things, which in turn requires and calls forth a great work of imagination – "greater, I think, than any dramatic or moral mythology" [21].

Santayana proceeds forthwith in this context to amplify his own ontological orientation. He describes Lucretius's poem as exemplifying "the greatest thought that mankind has ever hit upon" [23]. It is that an elemental nature, or substrative *physis*, subtends the appearances of consciousness. Of this *mutatio rerum*, which in certain contexts of Lucretius's poem becomes a *lachrimae rerum*, Santayana himself wishes to emphasize: "All things are dust, and to dust they return; a dust, however, eternally fertile, and destined to fall perpetually into new, and doubtless beautiful, forms" [23]. Prior to this dispassionate contemplation of the physical substance of the world, he says, everything is simply barbarous, both in morals and in poetry; before that supreme theoretical achievement of renunciation of appearances a merely youthful, optimistic, and instinctively egotistic mankind "has not removed the centre of its being, or its faith, from the will to the imagination" [24].

It will be seen that Santayana's broadscaled critiques of the various forms of idealism and pragmatism are already couched in these sentences, which interweave other patterns of existence and essence.

Hologrammatically, as it were, Santayana's substantive theoretical propositions keep reappearing in this kaleidoscopic form of philosophical soliloquy. Thus it is significant that he carries his exegesis back to an appreciation of the highpoint of Greek naturalism in the philosophy of Democritus. "Mechanism as to motion, atomism as to structure, materialism as to substance, that is the whole system of Democritus." This is a system, he says, "wonderful in its insight, in its sense for the ideal demands of method and understanding, as it is strange and audacious in its simplicity" [27].

In passing, we may note that here, as elsewhere, when Santayana works his way through Lucretius's poem to the full expression of his own theory, he shows a general penchant for combining the ancient materialists with Spinoza and the Indian philosophers.<sup>4</sup> This rather unusual combination of classical philosophical resources serves to remind us once again that Santayana was elaborating a theory of very general scope.

This point can be illustrated by citing the text itself. In *Three Philosophical Poets* Spinoza enters as follows:

<sup>4</sup> See page viii of George Santayana, *Scepticism and Animal Faith*, (Constable, London, 1923), which we shall cite as SAF.

He who truly loves God, says Spinoza, cannot wish that God should love him in return. One who lives the life of the universe cannot be much concerned for his own. After all, the life of the universe is but the locus and extension of ours. The atoms that have once served to produce life remain fit to reproduce it; and although the body they might animate later would be a new one, and would have a somewhat different career, it would not, according to Lucretius, be of a totally new species; perhaps not more unlike ourselves than we are unlike one another, or than each of us is unlike himself at the various stages of his life. [56]

We observe here that Santayana incorporates the thought of both Lucretius and Spinoza into his own. He moves from the one to the other while fully endorsing neither. Rather, he rings a set of semantically related changes on the Democritean themes of cosmical indifference, non-difference, and, in a word, sameness in even this brief excerpt.

In a comparative analysis, moreover, it can be shown how Spinoza's text, though frequently coopted by Santayana's, displays certain Platonic and Aristotelian features which Santayana in fact transmuted back into Democritean ones.

But to go on, a pivotal turn in this essay on Lucretius may be said to appear in Santayana's clearcut understanding of the differences between Democritus and Epicurus. He correctly brings Lucretius's *De Rerum Natura* in tow as a version of Epicurus's. But again, in some contexts serving the philosophical soliloquy, Santayana strives to work Lucretius's poem back into the more theoretically expansive framework of Democritus. What is especially pertinent here is that Santayana takes Epicurus's philosophy to symbolize an "irrelevant moral interpretation" of his Athenian predecessor, Democritus. Epicurus, Santayana says, was a saint, an ascetic who repudiated the ways of the world, a misanthrope who retired from the interests and pleasures of the theatres, porches, gymnasiums, and above all, the agora, to his private garden, with a few friends and disciples to secure his peace of mind and body. He succeeded only in espousing an effete and decadent form of materialism.

Santayana astutely analyses Epicurus's irrelevant sanctity down to its deep-layers of psychological motivation. "Epicurus defended free-will because he wished to exercise it in withdrawing from the world, and in not swimming with the current. He denied the supernatural, since belief in it would have a disquieting influence on the mind, and render too many things compulsory and momentous" [30].

Epicurus's doctrine of free-will was from the start, in Santayana's eyes, a skewed discourse, a philosophy of negation, originating as it was "in a pure and tender, but also pusillanimous temperment" [46]. He therefore also astutely interprets Epicurus's cosmic principle of freedom in the swerving atoms – a principle deliberately designed to overcome the terrifying feature of Democritus's determinism – as another "spiritually crippled" articulation. To Santayana, most of the empiricist, pragmatist, and idealist winds of doctrine insinuate some such voluntaristic bias, thereby ringing new changes on "Epicurus's psychological illusionism" in essential contrast with Democritus's robust determinism.

It was also this kind of robust determinism that impelled Santayana to write as follows: "Any system of ethics might accordingly coexist with materialism; for if materialism declares certain things (like immortality) to be impossible, it cannot declare them undesirable" [32]. His full doctrine, we have already seen, entails his theoretical synopsis of the world views of Lucretius, Dante, and Goethe's Faust in the multifarious expressions of his own career-text. At the heart of this doctrine, with all its special formulations, there lies precisely Santayana's declaration that any system of ethics is compatible with materialism. In its form of sceptical reduction, it is a theory of spiritual liberation – a theory designed to take away the guilt and sins of the world.

In the terms of the text itself, Santayana sees Lucretius as infected with the decadent materialism of Epicurus, which foregrounds a doctrine of negative human freedom at the expense of more various, deeper causalities, and therefore of more expansive intuitions of the world. The reverse side of this critical coin, which envisions a radical doctrine of both material existence and eternal essence, is that Santayana suggests the possibility of liberating Lucretius's poetry within his own framework of a more consistent and vigorous materialism [67-68].

## Santayana and Democritus

I would now like to probe further into the semantically constitutive features of Santayana's (and, I think, Democritus's) symbolic naturalism. Santayana tended to critique and distance himself from the "geometrical atomism" of the Greek philosopher, and in this way may have confused one issue to some small degree. I should like to propose an alternative to this intertextual relationship – namely, that the texts of these two philosophers are mutually interpretive. Each sheds light on the other, because they inhabit the same essential paradigm of materialist world view.

In current perspective, Santayana's philosophy harbors this potential for our regaining access to Democritus and other classical Greek materialists. Indeed, his text, understood in terms of its own first principles, can serve an important role in illuminating an even greater variety of first principles of philosophy.

Now in *Scepticism and Animal Faith*, Santayana refers to both Parmenides and Democritus as exceptions to the general rule by which European philosophers, even when called idealists, have seldom reconciled themselves to drawing the kind of epistemic conclusions their own analyses of "experience" called forth. Instead, most philosophers have striven to accord some measure of reality to the so-called appearances. But they treat them as "dreams are treated by the superstitious, supposing those appearances to have some real powers or being at least imperfect visions of the originals resembling them" [SAF 55]. By contrast, Parmenides and Democritus go the whole route of regarding appearances as sheer illusions or merely conventional signs – as did the old Hindu philosophers whom Santayana also admired.

But still, according to Santayana, the thrust of the philosophies of Parmenides and Democritus was to re-ontologize "Being" or "atoms and the void" as underlying the appearances. The appearances thus regained a certain vicarious solidity, as certain garments of substance, so to speak, and substance itself remained underneath in its knowable support. Therefore Democritus, in this reading, contributed a rationalistic bias to the hard-body physics of the West.

Santayana's position, to the apparent contrary, was that "the sole basis of appearances was some event of the brain, in no way resembling them," and that "the relation of data to the external events they indicated was that of a spontaneous symbol, like an exclamatory word, and not that of a copy or emanation" [SAF 56]. He worked out the implications of this epiphenomenalist account in numerous critiques of idealists and empiricists alike. The latter, in their own ways, re-ontologize the particular data of experience – for example, by attributing existence to each scintilla taken separately. But in reality, according to Santayana, there are only "the tides of animal life on which the data sparkle for a moment" [SAF 57]. The "data" or "ideas" are not truly phantasms or films of external objects, but are only symbols, like words, used to mark or express certain crises in our animal careers.

In following the contours of Santayana's argument in *Scepticism and Animal Faith* it can be seen that Santayana follows Hume's analysis of "experience" in certain respects. He incorporates Hume's sceptical reduction of the rationalistic ontologies to the immediacies of existential consciousness, the moral flow and conjunctions of which are motivated by animal faith. Animal faith, in turn, presupposes some principle of the antecedent momentum of our animal natures. But as just indicated, Santayana finally turns the table on Hume's existential ontology of the vivid and intense sense impressions by his own insistence on the unknowable substrate of material existence, while transforming Hume's doctrines of both simple and complex ideas into his own doctrine of symbolic essences.

We need not pursue the sustained analyses of *Scepticism and Animal Faith* here. They are the other side of the critical coin which Santayana ubiquitously cashes out in the form of his own sort of sceptical reduction of every dogmatically moral system of the world as inevitably saying both too much and too little. The ironic thrust of Santayana's thought, however, always yields in the end to his ethics of toleration of the solipsism of the present moment – that is, of every "natural moment,"<sup>5</sup> with its specific quantity and quality of animal passion. The keynote of this is again his text's studied ethics of cheerfulness, stemming from his dispassionate appreciation of the inexhaustible abundance of the potential forms as well as energised intuitions, of the true, the good, and the beautiful.

<sup>5</sup> See Angus Kerr-Lawson, "Natural Moments in Santayana's Philosophy of Nature," *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, 16: (1981) pp. 309-328.

As is well appreciated, in manifestation of this ethics of cheerfulness, Santayana's theoretically expansive celebrations of existence and essence often issues forth in a delightful *buffo* effect in his writings. He called himself a comic moralist and bantering essayist. One instance of this comes in his *Dialogues in Limbo*, where he has Democritus sniffing around and smelling the new-fangled, but ill mixed, philosophies of his day.<sup>6</sup> This is all part of a master-scenario in which his concept of winds of doctrine is given hilarious liberty of expression. The precedent of this sort of *buffonissimo vecchio*, or good joke, may invite comparisons with some of the works of Mozart; they are also reminiscent of the comic-strip-like characterizations of the Taoist Chuang Tzu.

In the context of the new-fangled naturalisms and empiricisms of his own day, we remember, Santayana took a perverse pride in being neither half-hearted nor short-winded. In proper Boston he also remained unwashed in a way, and stinking of his European and classical roots. Thus it is not too far-fetched to read Santayana, in an ensuing context of the first dialogue, as engaging in one of his self-referential soliloquies in the figure of a he-goat browsing amidst the crags of the acropolis, with the potency to "neutralise from certain quarters the whole agora full of democrats" [DL 6].

In his "Apologia Pro Mente Sua"<sup>7</sup> Santayana produced another neutralising discharge against the various forms of "ideolatry" of the tribe, their marketplaces, theatres, assemblies, congregations, and the rest. While directly engaging some of his contemporary critics, he also works his way around to Democritus again, concerning whom he repeats his usual characterization. "Democritus would be an idealist, in believing in geometrical atoms. He was in fact a rationalist; and in this, to my mind, he was not materialist enough, because there is ideolatry and conceptual dogmatism in attributing geometrical forms to matter absolutely, simply because they are clear essences to our intuition" [PGS 508].

However, there is a considerable corpus of the Democritean fragments which cast some doubt on the accuracy of Santayana's characterization of Democritus as one who advocated a doctrine of the knowability of the physical substrate. Let us just take for example the doxographical testimony of Sextus Empiricus:

Democritus in some places abolishes the things that appear to the senses and asserts that none of them appears according to truth but only according to opinion: the truth in things that exist is that there are atoms and void. "By convention sweet, by convention bitter, by convention hot, by convention cold, but in reality atoms and void." And in his *Confirmations*, although he had promised to assign the power of conviction to the senses, he is none the less found condemning them, for he says,

<sup>6</sup> See page 1 of George Santayana, *Dialogues in Limbo, With Three New Dialogues*, (Scribner's, New York, 1948), to be cited as DL.

<sup>7</sup> George Santayana, "Apologia Pro Mente Sua," *The Philosophy of George Santayana* Paul Arthur Schilpp, editor, (The Library of Living Philosophers, Northwestern University, Evanston, 1940). We cite this work as PGS.

"We apprehend in reality nothing true, but change according to the condition of the body and of the things which impinge on it and resist it."<sup>8</sup>

Although it needs to be correlated with other fragments and doxographical reports, this sort of statement anticipates Santayana's essential philosophy *in nuce*.

There are signs, indeed, that Santayana had some inkling that Democritus's theory was not essentially different from his own. Materialism, Santayana continues, by no means entails that nothing exists save matter. Democritus, he now notes, admitted the void to an equal reality, with all their relations and events that motion in that void could involve: he therefore admitted what Santayana called the realm of truth. (In fact, such passages distinguishing truth and appearances are conspicuous in the Fragments of Democritus.) "He also admitted appearances, bred in a material psyche by contact with other currents of matter; he thus recognized the moral presence of essences in themselves unsubstantial and not forms of matter" [PGS: 509].

In this, we finally see Santayana reaching some kind of fundamental *rapprochement* with Democritus. The most telling sentences, however, are still to come:

If Democritus did not explicitly admit spirit, which is also involved in the presence of appearances, this was not because his principles forbade it but because Greek philosophy was physical and political rather than spiritual, and had not yet turned to that transcendental contrition which played so great a part in Indian and afterwards in Christian speculation. [Loc. cit.]

With that passage, Santayana brilliantly compacts his whole philosophy and, once again, positions himself up-wind to all the democrats and other ideolators in the agora. For our purposes here, it shows that, in his own power of symbolic thought, he always could have gone beyond a literalist reading of Democritus's text.

But in another respect, Santayana may not have been literalist enough. When he says that the Greek philosophers "were physical and political rather than spiritual," he can fairly be said to have underestimated a whole set of fragments of and on Democritus that reveal his doctrine of inspiration – that is, of communion between Homer and other poetic minds and the gods and daimons.

The correct interpretation of Democritus, on both the questions of spirit and of "geometric atomism," appears rather to be that he espoused a substrative ontology, in line with a century and more of pre-Socratic *physis* speculation, in essentially symbolic terms. There was Thales' "water," Anaximenes's "air," Heraclitus's "fire," and so on – symbols of an essentially

<sup>8</sup> From *Fifth Century Atomists* (unpublished MS), selected and translated by Walter Watson, with help from the translations of K. Freeman and W. K. C. Guthrie, from the text of H. Diels and W. Kranz (eds.), *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* (7th edition; Berlin: Weidmannsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1954). We cite this as "Fragments." The above is number 9 on page 4.

bottomless nature that subtends the supervenient forms of consciousness. It is still fashionable to regard Democritus as eliminating that symbolic form of articulation, but such an interpretation does not take all the textual factors into account. Democritus's atomism was no less symbolic than his pre-Socratic predecessors, and of a sort that shows a positive affinity with the pre-Socratic world views, on the one hand, and with Santayana's theory, on the other.

We repeat Santayana's apt characterization of the "whole system" of Democritus: "Mechanism as to motion, atomism as to structure, materialism as to substance." Santayana further says that this is a system wonderful in its insight and in its sense for the ideal demands of method and understanding, as well as strange and audacious in its simplicity [27]. In all of these pronouncements, Santayana is right on the money. His own doctrine of discrete essences endorses Democritus's logistic method which reduces complexes to simples. But in short, the doctrines of Democritus and Santayana dovetail here in essential respects; while the latter's charge that Democritus advocated some kind of direct knowability of the physical elements appears to be off the mark, a kind of irrelevant moralism on Santayana's part.

To follow through on one line of possible analysis here, it can be noted that Democritus's wind of doctrine is anticipated by Anaximenes, who says, for example, that "All things, even gods and daemons, come-to-be as products of air" (according to Hippolytus). This airy fragment ought to be read with the following: "Or should we, as Anaximenes of old maintained, accept neither hot nor cold as real things but regard them rather as epiphenomena and temporary states which occur in any material thing when it undergoes certain inner alterations?" (in the report of Plutarch); and with the following: "... but instead of believing that the air had been created by the gods, he held on the contrary that they themselves were products of air" (according to Saint Augustine).<sup>9</sup>

While these are only gossamer threads of an ancient doctrine preserved in doxographical forms, they still tend to constitute an essential "text," a self-consistent world view, or self-referentially complete paradigm of the world. Philosophy is always doxographical and hermeneutical; and to hesitate before these fragments is to confuse existence and essence. In the essential realm, where there are many mansions and paradigms, we can see that Democritus amplified Anaximenes's world view in one conceptual reconstruction. Santayana's writings "modernize" the fundamental theoretical intentionality of the now fragmentary texts of Anaximenes and Democritus in a fuller set of articulations. All three are pure materialists, with doctrines of air, or wind, and their symbolic forms.

Returning to Democritus, who wrote many works now lost, Santayana was in a position to know, as well as to imagine, that the Greek naturalist was in fact brilliantly "cosmopolitan" in his politics and ethics. He was a philosophical

<sup>9</sup> The doxographical reports of Hippolytus, Plutarch, and Saint Augustine are cited from *The Presocratics*, ed. Philip Wheelwright (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, Odyssey Press, 1960), T5, T7, T14, pp. 62-63.

poet, too. "We are the pupils of the animals in the most important things," Democritus says, "of the spider in spinning and mending, the swallow in housebuilding, and the songbirds, the swan and the nightingale, in singing, by imitation" [Fragments 7, #154]. In general, Democritus wrote, we should note that "animals flock together with animals of the same kind, as doves with doves and cranes with cranes, and similarly with the other irrational creatures. So it is with inanimate things, as one can see with the sieving of seed and with the pebbles on the beaches" [Fragments 7, #164]. These are all metaphors for his dispassionate observations of the variety of ways in which the substrative matter blows. It also underwrites his full ethics and politics of the perfection of human life in contemplation, inperturbable wisdom, moderation, cheerfulness (*euthumia*), friendship in like-mindedness (*homophrosune*), courage, justice, and concord (*homonoiia*). Conspicuous in the same account is Democritus's full-blown theology of the gods communicating saving graces and other inspirations to men of poetic genius.

There are many fragments-of Democritus on spirit. He is recorded as saying, for example: "Whatever a poet writes with divine inspiration (*enthusiasmos*) and holy spirit (*heiron pneuma*) is pre-eminently beautiful" [Fragments 5, #21]. In the Gnomae or Maxims, we read: "He who chooses the goods of the soul chooses human things" [Fragments 5, #37]. As for the gods, "A divine mind is always thinking of something beautiful" [Fragments 6, #112]. As for humans, "The great enjoyments come from the contemplation of beautiful works" [Fragments 9, #194].

Although in a critical mode, Cicero has one of the most telling accounts of this aspect of Democritus's teaching: "For now he deems images endowed with divinity to be included in the universe of things, now the principles of mind which are in the same universe of things, now the principles of mind which are wont either to benefit or to harm us, now certain enormous images so large as to surround the entire world from without, all of which, indeed, are more worthy of Democritus's native city that of Democritus" [Fragments 2, #75].

The more we explore these classical sources the more we are able to appreciate that Santayana reenacted, and amplified, the symbolic naturalism of Democritus in its essential respects. One important versions of that reenactment, I have argued, occurs in *Three Philosophical Poets*, where he soliloquized in conscious regard to Epicurus, Lucretius, and the larger community of classical American and European philosophers.

It would be possible to carry on here. But, in short, to do full justice to this topic, we will need to have a more pointed hermeneutical discussion of Santayana's theory of the world, and the ways it issues forth in its own metaphorically clothed intuitions of essence. As it is, I am suggesting, Santayana's works may serve as a marvelous hermeneutical instrument for our repossession of the full symbolic naturalism of Democritus, and thus shed a needed light on the broader configuration of ancient Greek philosophers – and especially on the Athenian philosophers who were Democritus's near contemporaries.

A particular strength of Santayana's text is that it points the way to exploring the symbolical and theoretical potentialities of those eternal

essences, the ancient texts, with their first principles of philosophy. Here again we are able to appreciate Santayana's power of theoretical generality in full form. His simultaneous insistence on the massive contingencies of material existence, coupled with a radically epiphenomenalist account of the intuition of essences, each only a perfectly definite form of the animal good, coupled with his sense of infinite possibilities of spiritual coloration, mark Santayana apart from most philosophers of modern intellectual history. To take the proper measure here, I would suggest that his thought be compared to Mozart's music – which is also so uniquely appreciative of and forgiving of the world in its own sort of dispassionate and yet cheerful sensuality of aesthetic and ethical intention.

By any standard of comparison, the philosophical conclusion of *Three Philosophical Poets* expresses a beautiful and morally courageous spirituality. Santayana's theoretically expansive vision of the world – of life, spirit, and essence – underwrites the sensuous and symbolic worlds just as they are, in their full colors and possibilities.

DAVID A. DILWORTH

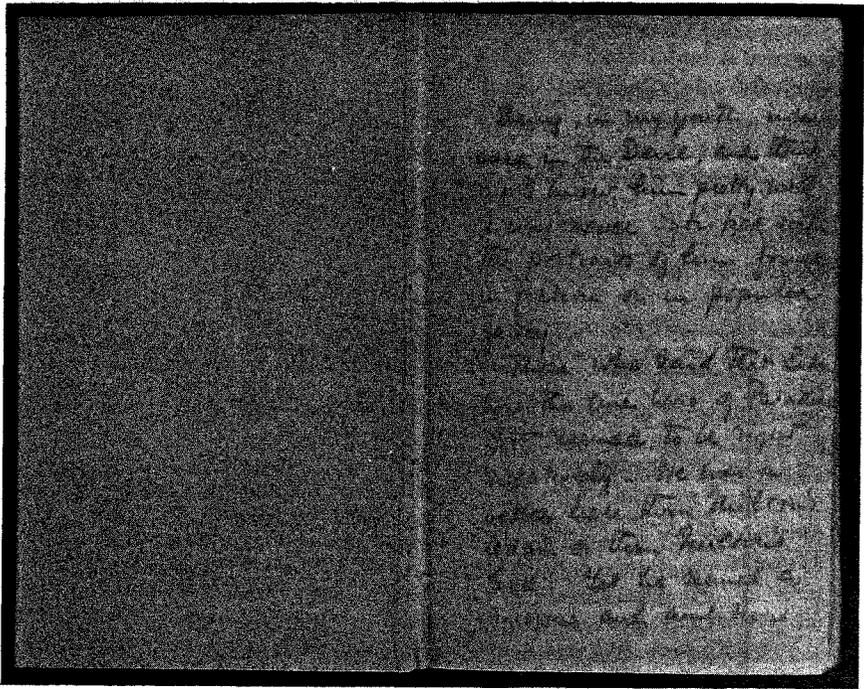
*State University of New York at Stony Brook*

#### **William James's Correspondence**

The American Council of Learned Societies, supported by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, is sponsoring the publication of the letters of William James, to include both letters by him and to him. John McDermott of Texas A&M University is the general editor, Elizabeth Berkeley, Charlottesville, Va., is associate editor. The series is to be published by Harvard University Press. Everyone is encouraged to examine libraries and private collections. Special attention should be paid to presidential and faculty papers in archives of colleges and universities. Information should be addressed to the editor, Ignas K. Skrupskelis, Department of Philosophy, University of South Carolina, Columbia, S. C. 29208.

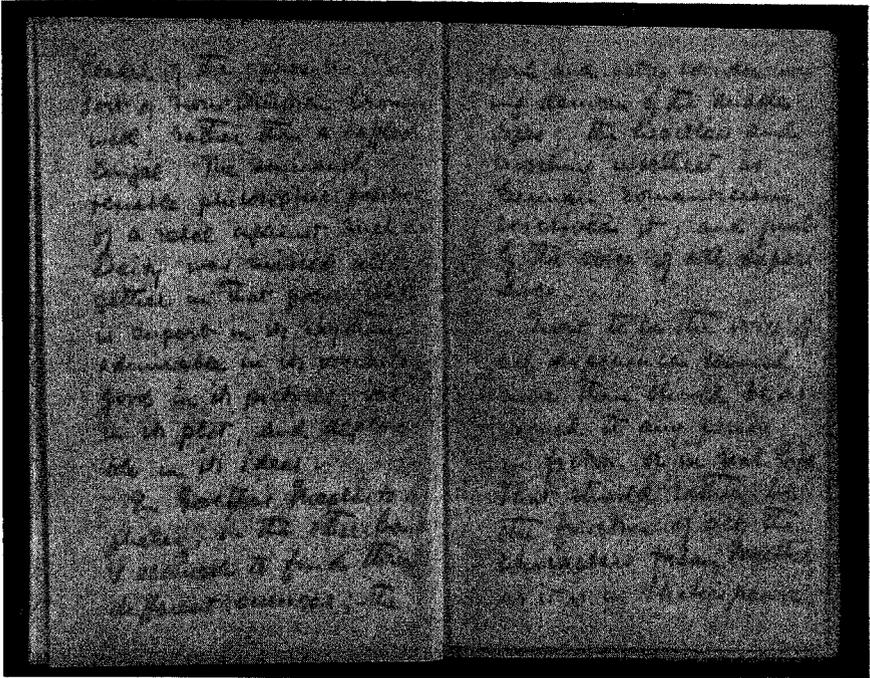
## Lucifer A Holograph Note

The following holograph note, written in Santayana's hand on seven pages of the flyleaf through page i in the copy of *Lucifer: A Theological Tragedy*, (Chicago and New York: Herbert S. Stone and Co., 1899), from the personal library of Herman Saatkamp.



Being, in my youth, interested in the Devil, and thinking I knew him pretty well, I was never satisfied with the portraits of him found in fiction or in popular fancy.

Those who said that Satan was the true hero of Paradise Lost seemed to be right negatively. He was a better hero than Milton's Adam or than Milton's God. Yet he seemed a morose and ambitious

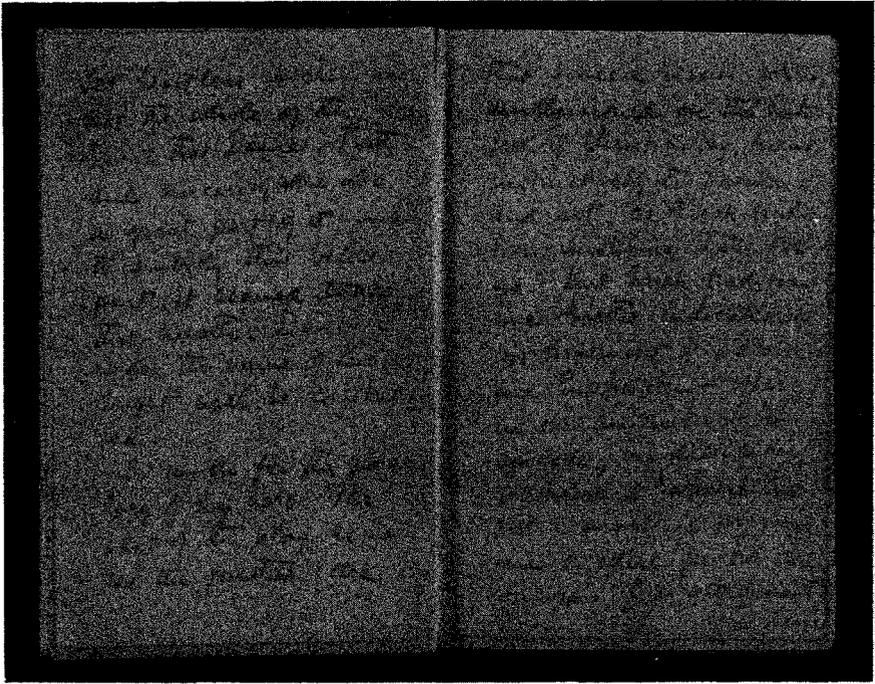


leader of the opposition, a sort of non-Christian Cromwell, rather than a baffled angel. The eminently tenable philosophic position of a rebel against such a Deity was missed altogether in that poem, which is superb in its rhythms, admirable in its vocabulary, good in its pictures, bad in its plot, and deplorable in its ideas.

In Goethe's Mephistopheles, on the other hand, I seemed to find three different essences;—the

foul and petty wonder-working demon of the Middle Ages; the heartless and mocking intellect, as German romanticism conceived it; and finally the voice of all experience.

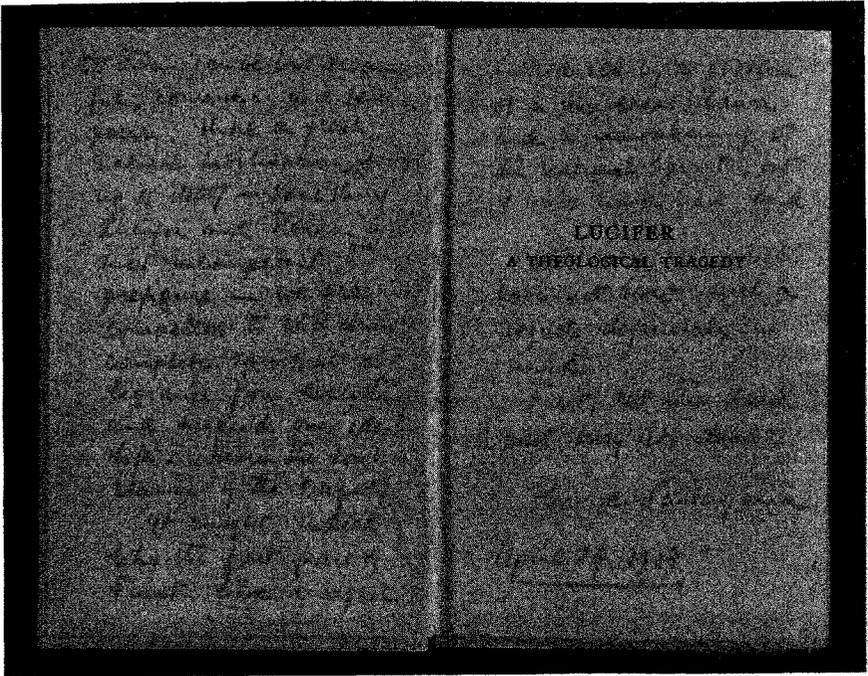
Now, to be the voice of all experience seemed more than should be assigned to any person, in fiction or in real life. That should rather be the function of all the characters taken together, as it is in Shakespeare.



Yet heartless mockery was not the whole of the Spirit that Denies. Truth and sincerity were/are/ also a great part of it: and to embody this better part it seemed to me that another Devil, under the name of Lucifer, might well be constructed.

So much for the genealogy of my hero. The plot of the play expresses the further idea

that sincere reason, when disillusioned on the subject of Christianity, turns instinctively to nature and art, as Greek traditions enshrine them for us. But Greek traditions—as Goethe indicates in his treatment of Helena and Euphorion—offer us only an instructive episode, an elementary rehearsal of rational life, not a practical programme or ideal for our own future. Our attachment



to them can be but dreamful, romantic and temporary. Until a fresh natural civilisation springs up of itself—something Lucifer and Reason are most incompetent to prefigure—we are compelled to withdraw complete spiritual allegiance from everything, and suspend our ideal life. Hence the conclusion of the tragedy.

It might, indeed, like the first part of Faust, have a sequel

introduced by a picture of a universal dawn and a reawakening of the natural spirit; but I have never had; and have not now, such a sequel definitely in mind.

First let the dead  
past bury its dead.

George Santayana

April 29, 1908

## IN MEMORIAM: SANTAYANA

Of all those with whom I shared a common sky  
none told his truth with more persuasive art  
on those high themes whose burden makes us men  
than one who spoke in dialogs from limbo.  
Far voyager in the realm of disenchantment,  
cartographer of countries of the mind,  
late messenger from the golden age of Hellas,  
ironic dreamer, skeptic saint, glad seer:

How may one thank in fitting terms the maker  
of new and taller windows for the soul?  
I turn my transient eyes without and see  
the world's great ghostly wheels of change reduce  
our mortal home to essences eternal –  
the terror and the grandeur, all within.

Cornel Lengyel

The above poem is printed with the kind permission of its author. It appears as one in a sequence of sonnets entitled *The Lookout's Letter*, which Mr. Lengyel had sent Santayana. The response is on the following page. With the above title, the poem appears in *El Dorado Forest: Selected Poems*, (Hillside Press, San Francisco, 1986).

Rome, December 8, 1949  
via Santo Stefano Rotondo, 6

My dear Lengyel

The heavy autumn rains, much wanted for public reasons, seem to be depressing me now, in my last years, and have kept me from answering your letter to me (and to yourself): [sic] for this can't be an ordinary note of thanks. You have invented, as far as I know, a new form of verse, the blank-verse sonnet; and from the beginning you have made it seem a natural and powerful instrument. The steady sure way in which you carry it through, without a hitch or any faltering in force or clearness, shows that it can be made to serve, as the traditional sonnet did in its day, almost any form of reflective or discursive poetry. In stripping the sonnet of its rhymes you have freed it from its chains and its too conventional music. It will be possible to write *modern* verse in that form. And where did you get your mastery of the single line in blank verse? You write these simple lines, almost without a lapse in tone or quality, like Shakespeare in his early plays. And you avoid obsolete or affected language without falling into contemporary commonplaces or positive colloquialisms, as the "modern" school does. The horror, for instance, of passing in Ezra Pound, who *can* write good verse, into the most vulgar journalese, and the most insolent irrelevance does not threaten your readers. In one or two places you do use technical expressions, like "to contact," which surprise a man of the old school

like me; but I think the *principle* of turning nouns into verbs or slang into good usage is good to keep language fresh; only particular instances may not be fortunate. On the other hand there is one *inexpert* quality in Shakespeare's earlier blank verse which you have retained, and that is, to compose long passages wholly of single lines. This came, I suppose, from having always formerly rhymed; but even in rhymed sonnets it was a great improvement to break the line occasionally in the middle with a full stop, and often to carry on the sentence into the next line; which was done by Racine and other poets in a way that broke somewhat the artificial monotony of their versification. Now you, in your blank-verse sonnets, ought not, I think, to neglect that improvement. You are still free to have a monumental single line stand up by itself, when it sums up a thought or contains a great truth in itself. But then the current should begin to flow again in a meandering flexible way, as the landscape and the lay of the land may require.

I indulge in these school-master reflections, because I have said enough in praise to let you feel how much I admire your performance, and what hopes and possibilities I see before you. The first "sonnet" about me is faultless, in form and in substance – much too exalted to represent my whole person, but true to what I should like to survive me of myself.

Yours sincerely,

GEORGE SANTAYANA

# Santayana's Ontology and the Nicene Creed

Santayana's love for Catholic tradition is well known. Although he did not believe in the church's dogmas, he felt that much human wisdom is embodied in its teachings and institutions. Christian charity and forgiveness, and the whole story of Jesus, are for him admirable examples of spirituality. It is the spiritual discipline of Christianity which he admires; and, at one point, he says that this is the only part of Catholicism which he respects.<sup>1</sup>

Santayana suggests, in a "General Review" at the end of *Realms of Being*, a close relation between his ontology and Christian theology:

Yet, seen in another light, religiously rather than cosmologically, my treatment of these four realms of being may be regarded as a reduction of Christian theology and spiritual discipline to their secret interior source. In particular my analysis transposes the doctrine of the Trinity into terms of pure ontology and moral dialectic.<sup>2</sup>

This suggested transposition is natural and readily granted, in the case of the father and the holy ghost, which correspond to the realms of matter and spirit. He calls the realm of matter "the assault of reality, in the force of whatsoever exists or happens"; but evidently, "this power is signified by the First Person of the Trinity, the Father, almighty creature of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible" [846]. Likewise the realm of spirit can be identified with the holy ghost: "it is the Holy Ghost that speaks to us through the prophets, vivifies us, and tells us all we know about the Son and the Father" [849].

The transposition suggested by Santayana raises a number of doubts, however, in the case of the second part of the trinity: to the son of God he assigns the realm of essence. According to this assignment, the son represents form or essence, and is essential to all creation, in that the raw power exhibited by God must always adopt some form for each earthly event or thing:

Yet all things, according to the Nicene creed, were perforce created through the Son; and this dogma which might seem unintelligible, becomes clear if we consider that power could not possibly produce anything unless it borrowed some form from the realm of essence and imposed that form on itself and on its works. Power would be annulled before it began to exert itself unless externally distinct and recognizable in its character. The Son is thus an indispensable partner and

<sup>1</sup> "The incidental esoteric discipline, which is all that I respect in Catholicism, terminates in the same inner discipline and peace that ancient sages attained under all religions or under none." See page 425 of the new edition of *Persons and Places: Fragments of Autobiography*, edited by William G. Holzberger and Herman J. Saatkamp, Jr., (MIT Press, Boston, 1986).

<sup>2</sup> See the final chapter, "General Review," of *The Realm of Spirit*, page 845 of *Realms of Being*, one-volume edition, (Scribner's, New York, 1942). Unaccompanied page references are all to this text.

vehicle for the life of the Father. [846]

This passage is troublesome; much of the vitality of the notion of Christ is lost here, when this abstract metaphysical counterpart to the living Jesus is selected. The analogy seems to fail, or to be unconvincing at this point. Of course one cannot properly call an analogy false or invalid, as one can an inference – rather it will be more or less fitting. It will either be appropriate or it will be inappropriate. I wish to consider this apparent failure, and try to see why the transposition of the second part of the trinity raises doubts which do not arise with the other two parts.

One reason for these doubts, and I think the chief one, rests on the following: with matter and spirit, Santayana's ontology sheds light upon his notion of a spiritual life; but assigning the realm of essence to the son of God seems to block any further development of the spiritual aspect of his analogy. I shall consider this point first. However, if we set aside this defect, which Santayana might well acknowledge himself, and look at the analogy only from the metaphysical side, the above passage remains troublesome. I believe that the unease caused by it can be traced to a question of interpretation – the passage is typical of ones cited by critics of Santayana in regard to the terms 'essence' and 'matter', in which an Aristotelian interpretation appears to be suggested. In the third section of the paper, I shall try both to show in outline that such a reading is incompatible with Santayana's intended ontology, and that even in the passages in question another reading is called for.

– 1 –

In respect to the father, seen as the realm of matter, and the holy ghost, seen as the human spirit, there is not only an apt analogy, but also its fruitful extension to questions about the spiritual life. For Santayana, wisdom begins with acceptance of the authority of our material surroundings, and our material seat in animal life. We must resign ourselves to these truths, before our impotent spirit can be freed from distraction. This wisdom loses none of its force, if the external authority is seen as the deity. Moreover, Santayana is content to view the spirit which arises in animal life as a divine gift, insisting only that the gift comes down to us through material agency, that is through the father. The need for submission to this authority, the view of spirit as powerless before it, but desirous of salvation, and the call for spiritual humility – all these are familiar parts of Christian discipline.

Needless to say, this analogy cannot be pressed too far, as Santayana himself says [853]. His account does not sit comfortably with human freedom seen as a separate and independent source of action, in virtue of which responsibility for evil is shifted from the Godhead onto sinning individuals. Santayana is selective, however, in the themes he prefers from the range of Catholic doctrine. For him, wisdom begins with an acceptance of the truth, and a certain resignation to the fate assigned to humanity. This is not because humans are powerless, but because they are thrust into the world with largely determined capacities and needs, and with little chance to alter these. Our

entanglement in the world is somewhat like original sin; and the resignation called for might be described, as Spinoza does, as respect for the will of God. We are responsible for our actions – as Santayana says, where else could we assign this responsibility, if not to the psyche in us? However, he holds that the spirit in us is innocent, and can only be made free by a renunciation of will, along with a recognition of that innocence.

A spiritual man may say: "Take up thy bed and walk." That is the psyche speaking to the psyche. But when he says "Thy sins are forgiven thee," the spirit is speaking to the spirit. [837]

Thus the Christian themes of renunciation and forgiveness, along with a spiritual form of charity, are embraced by Santayana. However, assigning the realm of essence to the second part of the trinity does not sustain the analogy on the spiritual side; it does not bear upon the notion of spiritual discipline, and submission to the truth, to which Santayana attaches so much importance. Clearly many of the doubts about the analogy stem from this. Of course the idea of Christ, as presented in the Gospels, does contain an important spiritual message for Santayana. The notion of God in man, and the significance to Christianity of a concrete illustration of this notion, are studied in detail in his later work, *The Idea of Christ in the Gospels*.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, he looks at the more general question of how divinity might be represented in imperfect mortals. The spiritual value he recognizes in these analyses, however, seems lost in the suggested ontological translation in *Realms of Being*.

Santayana stresses the claim of the Nicene creed that it is only *through* Christ that salvation can be achieved. Christ establishes the way to salvation. A second formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity brings out this point:

Authority thus belongs to the Father, revelation comes by the Son, and Spirit descends to those predestined by the Father to receive it. [853]

At this point, Santayana wavers between the Realm of Essence, earlier assigned to the son, and the Realm of Truth, which might appear closer to a way to salvation. However, the way to salvation is not easily identified with either essence or truth: it is not a truth in his sense of a record of some fact or event; and if "the way" is seen as an essence, it is only one essence among boundlessly many others. Neither one of the remaining two realms is appropriate here, if the analogy is to extend to spirituality and discipline. Perhaps one of the two, either truth or essence, could become the third part of a satisfactory analogy, however, when seen in a more metaphysical light, and I turn away from the spiritual question to a more abstract treatment.

<sup>3</sup> George Santayana, *The Idea of Christ in the Gospels or God in Man*, (Scribner's, New York, 1946). We refer to this as ICG hereafter.

- 2 -

Immediately preceding the passage on the Nicene creed, Santayana notes that both the realm of essence and the realm of truth are frequently taken to be objects of worship. "Unless the idea of God somehow included them it would remain a wholly mythical poetic idea without philosophic or rational warrant" [839-40]. These are developments in the idea of God "that transcend the spheres of power and of consciousness" [839]. It is not surprising that "the most concentrated and speculative minds, if not the most religious, should have regarded sometimes truth and sometimes pure Being as the supreme reality" [840].

It seems clear that these considerations are a part of his reasons in support of the analogy he gives, although this is not made explicit, except for the one brief comment just quoted, which notes that these elaborations of the idea of God transcend the sphere of power (matter) and of consciousness (spirit). What is not at all clear, however, is which of the two is the better choice. Although he begins by choosing essence, he also says explicitly that Christ is to be identified with the *logos*, where the *logos* is the realm of truth [847]. Moreover the specific reason he gives for choosing essence, that matter requires form, is also specifically applied to the *logos*. "This *Logos* is just as much God as is the Father, since power or substance cannot exist without form" [847].

I believe that this apparent discrepancy is not serious, and may be solved by treating the two realms as one for purposes of this analogy, something he appears to do without commenting upon it. The realm of truth is defined as a part of the realm of essence, compiling those essences which are realized at some times and places. That there remains a vast realm of unrealized essences is of importance in Santayana's system, and leads him to his view that all natural events are contingent. Similarly there are unrealized essences which are nevertheless intuited, which leads him to his scepticism about literal knowledge; for the class of essences realized in the physical realm is (somewhat loosely speaking) disjoint from the class of essences we intuit in perceiving and conceptualizing that realm. Thus there are many good reasons for distinguishing the realm of essence from the realm of truth. These reasons are not germane to the case in question, however. That power cannot create without creating form is a point which can be made equally well in terms of essence or truth, since every creation has an essence belonging to the realm of truth.

It seems, therefore, that one can manage here by treating essence and truth indifferently: one might use the term 'form', a term Santayana does use here on several occasions, for this merger of two realms. However I shall now turn to the second source of unease noted above, and argue that it would be a mistake to be led by such usage into an Aristotelian interpretation contrasting matter with form.

- 3 -

Clearly the doctrinal arguments of the Nicene creed are formally close to Santayana's ontology with respect to one technical complication. Christian theology must grapple with the problem of asserting the deity of Christ without diminishing the deity of God:

The Nicene creed expresses this idea by saying that "by him," that is by Christ identified with the logos, "all things were made"; a misleading phrase unless we perceive that "by" means "through" or "in terms of"; for the logos was not a second power, added to God and the Father, but a condition without which the creation could have had no consistence or character. *By identifying Christ with the Logos, the Evangelist has avoided the semblance of reduplicating the Godhead.* [ICG p. 31]

According to the analogy suggested by Santayana, this theological difficulty resembles the problem of matter and form, which can be seen to follow a similar dialectic. Matter cannot exist without taking on some form, so that essence is essential to it. All authority must rest nevertheless with matter, and an account must be given which establishes the independence of matter and essence without relinquishing the authority of the former. But how does this independence run? Quite apart from the analogy he presents, Santayana's discussion of these two realms here does lend itself to an interpretation in which matter and form are disjoint but correlative entities which combine together to yield concrete substances. When Santayana says, and repeats, that matter cannot exist without some form, one can read him as meaning by the term 'matter' a formless substratum. Indeed such a reading is not un-natural, when he says that power (that is, matter) "could not possibly produce anything unless it borrowed some form from the realm of essence" [846].

Nevertheless this is not the only possible reading, and a second one conforms better to his overall thought. He could equally well be including form as an essential part of the sense of the term 'matter' when he calls it indispensable to matter. When he announces [234-35] that matter is the substance of the universe, he is taking for granted that matter must always have a form, *as a part of itself*. He frequently affirms his allegiance to a materialism similar to that of Democritus and the ancients, a theory predating Aristotle's separation of matter and form. Nothing that I can see in his system demands a discussion of matter separated from essence, although his account does permit and require that essence can be discussed apart from matter.<sup>4</sup> There is, of course, more to matter than the unknown essence which describes it; however, I believe it is a mistake to try to separate this "other" from the matter itself with its essence.

<sup>4</sup> Many readers of Santayana find fault with his realm of essence, with the absolute separation he makes between matter and essence, by ruling out possible beings, or forms of things, as definitions of essence. A very similar difficulty arises with his realm of spirit; in current discussions of mind, it is not customary to speak of spirit or pure consciousness, but rather of hybrid mental events and mental states, in which spirit is not entirely separated from material events.

Critics, among them John Lachs, have taken issue with Santayana's account of matter.<sup>5</sup> Lachs approves of the contentious realm of essence, saying that "Santayana was probably correct in assigning a special, separate ontological status to essences." With this approval goes a sense of Santayana's need of an independent status for essences, in the sceptical analysis of knowledge, and in the notion of the spiritual life; there is also a sense 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." Lachs directs his criticism instead at Santayana's account of matter. Looking for a treatment of matter which parallels that of essence, he evaluates the notion of a matter considered independent of essence, and finds it wanting:

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.

As I read Santayana, however, one ought not to expect the force of matter to be something, independent of essence, which renders essences existent; we should not consider matter independent of essence at all. Santayana insists that matter always has form; and for him, because matter is substance, this form is conceptually a part of matter. To say that existence is a surd, as Santayana does, is not to say that matter is formless in its inner being. Santayana always takes it for granted that matter takes on a determinate nature. It is rather to say that this nature is a mystery, probably not definable in any terms known to humanity. There is no particular feature of matter, as sought by Lachs above, which is solely responsible for change; for this feature must be an impotent essence. My conclusion, as against Lachs, would be that some features of matter *may* relate to causal force, so long as we do not insist on abstracting that feature from the substratum, and asking it *solely* to be responsible for change.

Now it must be conceded that the reading given to Santayana's text by Lachs receives some encouragement from the passages on the Nicene creed. Lachs speaks of matter selecting essence, just as Santayana speaks of matter borrowing some form; matter and essence might be construed as two wholly disjoint items, one of which chooses the other. However the reading I am favouring is completely viable here also; and perhaps only an Aristotelian bias, in regard to the term 'matter', prevents this from being the apparently more correct reading.

A further point: Santayana claims that the Nicene creed avoids the reduplication problem, by identifying Christ with the logos. This indicates that he sees no conflict in the ontological setting, and believes that the theological

<sup>5</sup> See John Lachs *George Santayana*, Twayne's United States Authors Series, (Twayne, Boston, 1988). Passages cited appear on pages 137-139.

problem is solved when it is expressed in terms of matter and essence. Thus essence participates in matter, without matter losing its independent and dominant status. Thus I would insist that Santayana nowhere wishes his readers to consider matter apart from the form which it takes on, but that he does accept from Plato the merits of considering essences apart from their realization, although of course stripped of their existential weight. I conclude by considering how these two points would have to be reflected on the religious side of his analogy.

We would, first of all, not be able to consider God apart from Christ. This is interpreted to mean that only through Christ can humans have access to God, as affirmed in the Nicene creed. Christ is the logos, and it is only through the truth that salvation is possible. However, secondly, one can consider Christ apart from God. This could be taken to mean that Jesus is a man among others, and so can be thought of apart from God just as can other men. A second interpretation comes to mind here also. In our thoughts, we look to the statements and sympathies of Christ as a supreme example of spirituality, and this may be done without reference to God. However in our actions, reference must always be made to God, and to our true station in the cosmos, as in fact Christ did.

ANGUS KERR-LAWSON

*University of Waterloo*

#### Call For Manuscripts

The *Journal of the History of Philosophy Monograph Series*, published by Southern University Press, accommodates serious studies in the history of philosophy that are between article length and standard book size (35,000 to 55,000 words). Ranging from ancient Greek philosophy to the 20th century, the series includes extended studies on controversies, new translations and commentaries on them, and documentary findings about various thinkers and events in the history of philosophy.

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## The Santayana Edition

The Santayana Edition is moving forward in a deliberate fashion. We are now publishing approximately one volume per year and each of our volumes has received the seal of "An Approved Edition" from the Modern Language Association's Committee on Scholarly Editions. This is a considerable accomplishment and indicates the concerted and cooperative efforts of many persons. Furthermore we have received some very fine reviews and notices. *The New York Times Book Review* describes the edition as a "new starting point for exploring the connection between Santayana's life and ideas," and Walter Jackson Bate, Kingsley Porter University Professor at Harvard University, calls it "one of the major contributions of our generation to both philosophy and literature."

Volume three, *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion*, will be published in December 1989 or January 1990. We are somewhat late in this publication because the proofing of the volume has taken longer than anticipated. During the editing process, the editors found that Santayana requested Scribner's to include an appendix containing the original text of his translated quotations. This appendix was not included in any previous publication, but it is a part of the new critical edition. The research for nineteenth-century sources, the proofing, and the coding for the foreign languages, particularly the Greek, extended the time required for editing and printing the volume.

Published in the spring of 1900, *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion* was George Santayana's first book-length analysis of the interrelationship between poetry and religion. The central thesis is what Santayana calls the "single idea" of the book "that religion and poetry are identical in essence, and differ merely in the way in which they are attached to practical affairs. Poetry is called religion when it intervenes in life, and religion, when it merely supervenes upon life, is seen to be nothing but poetry." Contributing significantly to the debate between science and religion at the turn of the century, the eloquence and clear-sightedness of Santayana's argument continue to influence deliberations and research concerning the nature and psychology of religious belief.

*Interpretations* is a critique of Western man's irrationalism. Its themes, as Santayana later noted, are "anti-romantic, anti-idealistic, and demanded a 'life of reason'" – foreshadowing the publication of his five-volume *Life of Reason* (1905-1906). Poetry and religion are products of the imagination, and though literally untrue are ideally valid modes of interpreting experience. Imagination is the "true realm of man's infinity," and both religion and poetry are parts of this realm.

Santayana affronted the religious and literary pieties of many of his contemporaries, including his colleagues and mentors at Harvard, by placing religion in an "ideal" world of poetic imagination without force or ontological priority. Others were dismayed by his portrayal of Robert Browning as a poet of barbarism. However, in his insightful introductory essay, Joel Porte observes

that the publication of *Interpretations* was a clear sign of the courage and independence of this young Assistant Professor and that the ideas expressed in *Interpretations* had a significant influence on younger Harvard intellectuals like T. S. Eliot and Wallace Stevens. Eliot's famous "objective correlative" may well derive from this book, as does Stevens's philosophical naturalism. Joel Porte is Whiton Professor of American Literature in the Department of English at Cornell University. His writings include *Representative Man: Ralph Waldo Emerson in His Time*.

Reviews of both volume one, *Persons and Places*, and volume two, *The Sense of Beauty*, continue to be printed. And we have been fortunate to receive continued funding from NEH for 1989-1991. Part of this funding is a \$20,000 matching fund. If anyone has suggestions as to how we can raise these matching funds, I would appreciate your sending them to me. In the two previous grants, we have matched \$10,000 and \$15,000, but \$20,000 is a new challenge.

John Friedman, President of Memory Films, Inc., continues to work on the production of a film based on *The Last Puritan*. Friedman's last film, *Hotel Terminus: The Life and Times of Klaus Barbie*, last year won the Critic's Award at the Cannes Film Festival as well as an Oscar for documentary films. We have been fortunate in receiving an anonymous donation to help underwrite the scripting of 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.

Robin Baker, a research assistant with the Edition, received his Ph.D. in history from Texas A&M University this May and was recently appointed assistant professor of history at Wheaton College, Illinois.

Herman J. Saatkamp, Jr.  
General Editor

# BIBLIOGRAPHICAL CHECKLIST

## SIXTH UPDATE

The items below will supplement the references given in *George Santayana: A Bibliographical Checklist, 1880 - 1980* (Bowling Green: Philosophy Documentation Center, 1982) prepared by Herman J. Saatkamp, Jr., and John Jones. These references are divided into primary and secondary sources. Except for the book reviews, the following articles and books are classified according to their 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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"Santayana's Masquerade." *Raritan* Fall 1987: 129-142. (Joel Porte)

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## PostScript

Below is a copy of the first run of the first page of the first number of *Overheard in Seville*. The lines follow one another at a distance of one point, compactifying an entire page of text into less than two centimetres. It is possible to decipher parts at the beginning and at the end: at the top is the title "Santayana's Idea of the Tragic"; at the bottom are two footnotes, the first of which reads, "This paper was read to the Santayana Society, Baltimore, December 28, 1982."

In order to allow flexibility of font sizes, with 9-point for the main text, 8-point for long quotations, and 7-point for footnotes, where the cumbersome original program required a leading which was fixed throughout, it was necessary to set the leading at *one* point. Thus each two lines of the regular 9-point text had to be separated by eleven linespaces (when done properly!). Belated thanks to Bruce Uttley for fixing errors in my program, so as to stretch out the page size to its proper length.

The typesetting program now used is PostScript, which is a great deal simpler to deal with.

Angus Kerr-Lawson

For the structure of "Santayana's Idea of the Tragic" see "The Tragic Ideal"  
28, 1982, *Overheard in Seville*, 1982, Santayana Society, Baltimore, December