

Overheard in Seville

*Bulletin of the
Santayana
Society*

No. 9
Fall 1991



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1992 SANTAYANA CONFERENCE - AVILA, SPAIN

The first international conference on George Santayana is scheduled in Avila, Spain, for May 27-30, 1992. This conference is part of the Columbus celebrations of 1992 and is being sponsored by the Spanish Cultural Foundation in Avila, the University of Salamanca, and Texas A&M University. The conference will include scholars from the United States, Spain, Germany, France, Italy, eastern Europe, the U.S.S.R., Great Britain, South Africa, and Canada.

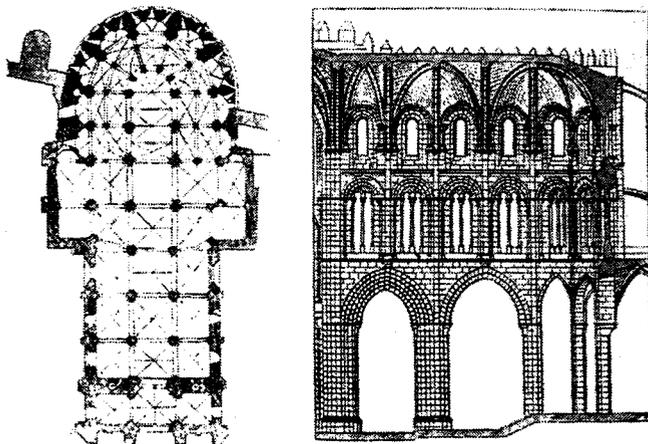
Any who wish to participate in or attend the conference are asked to write to Herman J. Saatkamp, Jr., Department of Philosophy, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas 77843-4237.

* * * * *

AVILA CATHEDRAL. The Gothic building was larger than the Romanesque one and extended across the city wall, so that the periphery had to be construed as part of the system of defence (plate 69a). Within the heavy perimeter, however, Master Freuchal, the architect, placed a ring of shallow chapels around a double ambulatory much like Suger's St. Denis. The slender columns, composed of several monolithic shafts, confirm St. Denis as the model for Avila, although the more domed vaults and the rectangular arch section interrupt the continuity of the spaces. This is underlined by the separate vaulting of the chapels, and of course the very small windows, with deep splays, destroy the extraordinary effect of light that Suger's church had achieved. While this was occasioned at Avila by the thickness of the city wall, it was also a reaction to northern aesthetics, one which can be found in later periods of Spanish Gothic; for great windows were not essential in the bright Mediterranean sun.¹

69a. Avila, Cathedral. Plan.

69b. Avila, Cathedral. Longitudinal section of choir.



¹ These lines, and the plates copied below them, are taken from *Gothic Architecture*, by Robert Branner. We wish to thank George Braziller Inc. of New York for permission to copy the citation.

Santayana and Goethe

“William James est un réformateur, un pasteur de l'énergie humaine; Santayana est un poète et un sage, doublé d'un physicien cruel.” Thus Jacques Duron, in the course of an extended comparison between the two philosophers.¹ The comment situates William James in a Faustian line of descent, and accounts for Santayana's being so unresponsive not only to James, but also to the restless strivings of Faust, in his essay on Goethe's play in the early *Three Philosophical Poets*. Santayana's view of Goethe himself, in a section of the polemical *Egotism in German Philosophy*, written shortly after the beginning of the First World War, was also less than flattering: “(Goethe's) love-affairs were means to the fuller realisation of himself Every pathetic sweetheart in turn was a sort of Belgium to him; he violated her neutrality with a sigh.”² It is one of these Santayana pieces where the iron claw thrusts most vigorously from behind the velvet glove. Yet was his view of Goethe, let alone his account of Faust in *Three Philosophical Poets*, a fair one? Fair not just to Faust or to Goethe, but to that element of Santayana's own self which had a kinship with Goethe, if not with Faust.

“Un poète et un sage, doublé d'un physicien cruel” – “A poet and a sage, twinned with a cruel physicist”; perhaps “one who stresses the natural or material context of all things” would be an acceptable gloss of Duron's “physicist.” It is a description that in all crucial respects fits Goethe as well as Santayana. It may set us thinking of the irony that governs the structure of *Faust*, establishing a distance between Goethe and his creation. The play is framed in a divine perspective, tricked out with some of the panoply of a Baroque ‘Auto Sacramental’, and Faust's career of glorious yet erroneous striving is framed by the structural equivalent of an all-encompassing speculative gaze. Goethe's is a God's-eye view. He is the puppet-master supreme. It would, however, be barely convincing to maintain that any orthodox religious viewpoint was being upheld. Goethe is not the interpreter of divine transcendence, but rather an ironic naturalist with a penumbra of religiosity, and an Olympian human being. Not unlike Santayana, in fact. Goethe told Eckerman, concerning the religious apotheosis of Faust at the end of Part Two, that “the conclusion, where the redeemed soul is carried up, was difficult to manage Amid such supersensual matters about which we scarcely have an intimation, I might easily have lost myself in the vague – if I had not, by means of sharply-drawn figures and images from the Christian

¹ *La Pensée de George Santayana: Santayana en Amérique* (Paris, 1950) 75. The European sequel of this masterly work was, sad to say, never written.

² *The German Mind: A Philosophical Analysis* (Originally published under the title, *Egotism in German Philosophy*) (New York, 1968) 49-50.

Church, given my poetical design a desirable form and substance.”³

Such cool and lofty appropriation of Christian symbolism is very much in the spirit of Santayana’s conclusion to *Realms of Being*, where he too brings into service key elements of Christianity to act as symbols for his own secular theology: “The presence and pressure of existence confronts us, the unfathomable mystery of the actual This assault of reality, in the force of whatsoever exists or happens, I call matter or the realm of matter; but evidently the very power is signified by the First Person of the Trinity, the Father, almighty creator of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible.”⁴ Santayana then proceeds to rationalise the God the Son, the Logos, as a symbol of the realm of essences, upon which God or Matter seizes in order to produce the articulated forms that actually exist. Finally, he presents us with the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Trinity: Spirit – the Holy Spirit, if you will – derives existentially from God or Matter, but can equally be said to “give life in the sense that life nowhere would be morally worthy of the name, if spirit were not actual there It lives in moments and spots; yet from any station it may survey everything, rescuing its causes from ignorance of themselves Passion is therefore inseparable from spirit in its actual existence, and exposes it to perpetual obscuration and suffering.”⁵ There is of necessity strife and incompleteness in the career of *incarnate* spirit; yet it may be saved by the glimpses of ultimate good that are the spur of its strivings:

Das Unzulängliche
Hier wird’s Ereignis⁶

An analogy between the career of Faust, particularly its ‘religious’ culmination, and elements of Santayana’s mature philosophy, begins to dawn upon the mind. Each was a ‘mystic without faith’. The phrase was coined for Goethe, and it fits Santayana too.

An element of imaginative sympathy had entered into Santayana’s discussion of Goethe’s characterisation of Faust even in the early *Three Philosophical Poets*, despite what might seem a steady crescendo of disparagement. In the concluding section of that early essay Santayana concedes thus much to Faust and the romantic attitude to experience:

... The spirit of nature is itself romantic The veering of life is part of its vitality, – it is essential to romantic irony and to romantic pluck The great merit of the romantic attitude in poetry, and of the transcendental method in philosophy, is that they put us back at the beginning of our experience. They disintegrate convention,

³ J. P. Eckermann, *Conversations with Goethe* (J. M. Dent and Sons, 1930) 414.

⁴ *Realms of Being*, One-Volume Edition, (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, 1972) 845-6.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 849, 850, 851.

⁶ “The unattainable/ Here is attained”: the third last couplet of *Faust, Part II*.

which is often cumbrous and confused, and restore us to ourselves, to immediate perception and primordial will. That, as it would seem, is the true and inevitable starting point.⁷

“The starting-point.” For Santayana it could never be the finishing-point. His official stance, early as well as late, was that of detached sage surveying from on high the moulds of reason into which the energies of matter settle, and evaluating their consistency by means of a blend of Greek and Catholic teleology adapted to a naturalistic *Weltanschauung*. Nevertheless it is worth noting that reference to “primordial will”: it reminds us that Santayana, for all his courtly and civilized airs, was indeed a “physicien cruel,” for whom the tropes provisionally assumed by ultimate Substance – which Schopenhauer had called Will, and which Santayana called Matter, of which human polity and civility were phenomenal appearances – had no teleological prerogatives. Some of Santayana’s most eloquent passages are precisely those where he celebrates the blind, resistless fertility of matter, dark symbol of the divine and elemental. They call to mind Goethe’s “Erdgeist,” as evoked near the beginning of *Faust, Part One*:

In the floods of life, in the storm of work,
In the ebb and flow,
In warp and weft,
Cradle and grave,
An external sea,
A changing patchwork,
A glowing life,
At the whirling loom of Time I weave
The living clothes of the deity⁸

Concerning that “Erdgeist,” or Earth-spirit, the literary critic Eudo Mason has written that it “is indeed daemonic, restless, destructive, beyond good and evil, and consequently also sinister. It is not a person with a consciousness or a conscience or a sense of responsibility; it is nature, and does what it has to do with a magnificent indifference.”⁹ Was not Santayana himself, with his disillusioned detachment and scornful incisiveness, also a trifle sinister? Despite the urbanity, the charm, the civilised graciousness. One thinks of his not wholly impish pleasure in adopting the Mephistopheles rôle. (“He distrusted me for being a materialist ... He feared me. I was a Mephistopheles, masquerading as

⁷ *Three Philosophical Poets*, (Doubleday Anchor Books, 1956) 170, 175.

⁸ *Goethe's Faust*, tr. Louis MacNeice and E. L. Stahl, (London 1965) 23.

⁹ *Goethe's Faust: Its Genesis and Purport*, (University of California Press, 1967) 164.

a conservative. He saw behind me the dreadful spectres of truth and death.”¹⁰ How much of a rôle was it? The prose in a passage such as this is eloquent with a cold, calm exaltation in face of the amoral cycles of dissolution and change:

... Matter is no model devised by the human imagination, like Egyptian atoms or the laws of physics, but is a primeval plastic substance of unknown potentiality, perpetually taking on new forms; the gist of materialism being that these forms are all passive and precarious, while the plastic stress of matter is alone creative and, as far as we can surmise, indestructible Matter, as if ashamed at the irrationality of having one form rather than another, hastens to exchange it, whatever it may be, for some other form, and this haste is its whole reality; for it can add nothing to the essences which it successively exemplifies except just this; that they are enabled to be exemplified in succession, to be picked up and abandoned. Matter is the invisible wind which, sweeping for no reason over the field of essences, raises some of them into a cloud of dust: and that whirlwind we call existence.¹¹

With due allowance made for the *Sturm and Drang* afflatus of Goethe’s “Erdgeist” passage, as compared with the calmer prose-periods of Santayana, do not both share a similar vision of the natural world as an arena of unpredictable ever-changing energies? Both writers, in the perspective of humanism, must be deemed “physiciens cruels.” As too must Spinoza who, with his chilling denial of all teleology, was important to both of them. In his novel, *The Last Puritan*, Santayana attributed to Mario and Lord Jim an appropriate response to the maelstrom of change and metamorphosis: dauntless, adaptable insouciance. Jim himself endorses such a response, with specific reference to Goethe:

... What could be friendlier than this invisible, indefinite, all-permeating ether, that perhaps fed the stars and certainly fed the spirit within you? Here Goethe had been in the right; he had breathed in the ether freely, and had breathed it out again warmed; breathed it out completely, fearlessly, joyously. He had obeyed every vital impulse; had shaken off every chain not forged by nature in putting us together, every bond not itself a fibre in our vital organism. Life as it came seemed to him divine – not happy, happiness was not the test – but such life as you were primed to live and couldn’t be yourself without living. Goethe was at home in nature and at home in himself.¹²

Amidst the Peacockian diversity of view-points so engagingly put on display by Santayana in *The Last Puritan*, where no viewpoint entirely cancels out another, such endorsement of Goethe is not without significance for our theme.

¹⁰ *Persons and Places. Fragments of an Autobiography*, ed. William G. Holzberger and Herman J. Saatkamp, Jr., with an Introduction by Richard C. Lyon, (Cambridge, Mass., and London: MIT Press, 1986) 387.

¹¹ *Realms of Being*, 292, 286.

¹² *The Last Puritan*, (London: Constable and Co., 1935) 250.

Santayana of course would have been the first to concede that he aspired to no literal knowledge concerning the Realm of Matter poetically evoked in that passage of *The Last Puritan*, as in many another more overtly philosophical passage of his writings. He could only convey by sympathetic evocation, and in the terms of his own brand of 'literary psychology', what he took to be the deep truth of things. Strictly, we only know by means of essences, or units of meaning, which the currents of matter suggest to the dreaming psyche, and whose adequacy is confirmed by their more or less happy conformity to the drift of material substance. All our knowledge resembles what Santayana called "cloud-castles"; it strains toward the constancy of essence, but is subject to the changefulness endemic to the material substrate of existence. The character of intuition is intrinsically momentary and fleeting:

Certainly life and nature, when they produce thought, turn from themselves towards the eternal, but it is by a glance, itself momentary, that they turn to it; for if they were themselves converted into something changeless, they could neither live, think, nor turn They are fertile only like the clouds, in that by dissolving they give place to some other form, no less lovely and elusive than themselves; and perhaps if we took a long view we should not feel that our own passage through existence had a very different qualityIntuitions may be likened to soap-bubbles. Soap-bubbles are impossible to synthesize; if they touch they vanish; yet the surface of one may repeat the iridescence visible on the surface of several others. These colours are not taken from the smaller bubbles, and transferred and rearranged on the larger one: they are reborn in each instance, in each degree of complexity, according to the circumstances of that more or less similar moment. Of those lights, of those spheres, nothing endures; but the soap-suds and the air remain available for bubbles *ad libitum*, and the colours of the rainbow may be drawn upon for ever for decoration without being exhausted.¹³

Cloud-castles, soap-bubbles, the iridescence of rainbows The last image may well now remind us of the turn that Goethe gave to Faust's journey through existence at the beginning of Part Two of the drama.

Faust, having experienced the vicissitudes of the private realm in Part I, and having allowed himself to be tossed to and fro by the Erdgeist amid a tumult of passion and criminality, is discovered at the beginning of Part II waking from sleep in an enticing landscape, just before dawn. He is not shown as repentant. (Can one imagine Mario of Lord Jim as repentant?) Faust's recovery is part of a purely natural process, a stage in the resurgent energies of natural existence. When he awakens at length to the full glory of the rising sun, in the vicinity of a rushing waterfall, he has a speech that signals a growth in awareness of the qualified status of human knowledge and experience. He is not repentant but he is chastened – for the time being:

¹³ *Soliloquies in England and Later Soliloquies*, (London: Constable and Co., 1922) 20-21. *Realms of Being*, 654-5.

And so I turn, the sun upon my shoulder,
 To watch the water-fall, with heart elate,
 The cataract pouring, crashing from the boulders,
 Split and rejoined a thousand times in spate;
 The thundrous water seethes in fleecy spume,
 Lifted on high in many a flying plume,
 Above the spray-drenched air. And then how splendid
 To see the rainbow rising from this rage,
 Now clear, now dimmed, in cool sweet vapour blended.
 So strive the figures on our mortal stage.
 This ponder well, the mystery closer seeing;
 In mirrored hues we have our life and being.¹⁴

The coloured rainbow appears when the sun reflects itself in the waterfall. In this image there is on the one side the sun, from which Faust is part turned away, the ideal realm of light and timeless essences; on the other side is the rushing waterfall, the emblem of the material realm. The rainbow arises from the coalescence of these two. It is an image conveying that the divine is not behind the world, but within the material world of appearance The coloured rainbow in the glancing droplets of the waterfall is an image of metamorphosis as well.¹⁵ It is not possible – I continue to transpose the Faustian epiphany into Santayana's terms – to dwell solely in the realm of essence and light; one cannot gaze directly at the sun. Nor should one be subject wholly to the rush of material existence that carries one along. One has one's being amid the constantly fleeting coalescence of light and water, matter and essence, in iridescent rainbow intuitions.

Goethe, in good Aristotelian fashion, would allow of no distinction between form and matter.¹⁶ His naturalism rejected all dualism. So too with Santayana. It is misleading to insist too much on the Platonic or dualistic nature of his essence-existence distinction. To do so diverts one from the mystery being conveyed. There are not two existent worlds, even though his metaphor of 'Realms' can understandably confuse. There is a symbiosis of meaning and fact, of essence and matter, integrating within a single process of intuition. Labels like 'naturalism' or 'materialism' have their limitations, with their overtones of positions being taken up, of polemical claim and counter-claim. Santayana, a poet and a sage, aims to convey the nature of existence in its encompassing singularity:

There is only one world, the natural world, and only one truth about it; but this

¹⁴ *Faust, Part II*, tr. P. Wayne, (Penguin Books, 1959) 26. Santayana's translation of the last line, used as epigraph in *The Realm of Spirit*, reads: "Light, coloured in refraction, makes our life."

¹⁵ Translated and slightly adapted from Dorothea Lohmeyer, *Faust und die Welt, Der Zweite Teil der Dichtung* (München: Verlag C. H. Beck, 1975) 28-29.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 19.

world has a spiritual life possible in it, which looks not to another world but to the beauty and perfection that this world suggests, approaches, and misses It is so simple to exist, to be what one is for no reason, to engulf all questions and answers in the rush of being that sustains them. Henceforth nature and spirit can play together like mother and child, each marvellously pleasant to the other, yet deeply unintelligible; for as she created him she knows not how, merely by smiling in her dreams, so in awaking and smiling back he somehow understands her; at least he is all the understanding she has of herself.¹⁷

Those last sentences sound the note of part-playful profundity that we associate with Goethe, in the vein of Olympian serenity which he shared with Santayana.

What first alerted me to a possible shift in Santayana's attitude to Goethe was his use of the final line of Faust's speech at the beginning of Part Two of the drama, ("Am farbigen Abglanz haben wir das Leben," "Light, coloured in refraction, makes our life") as one of the epigraphs for the culmination of *Realms of Being*. Surely Goethe's Faust would not have figured there in the exalted company of Plotinus, Spinoza, and one of the Upanishads, if Goethe's Faust still meant for Santayana the thoughtless *énergumène* depicted with some scorn in *Three Philosophical Poets*. Finally, I ask myself – perhaps a few others are asking too – was what Santayana would appear to derive from Goethe, by the use of that phrase as epigraph to the final volume of *Realms of Being*, really there in Goethe? Was Santayana, as I have tended to suggest, a kind of spiritual cousin of Goethe? Can we find in Goethe any further and deeper hints of an essential kinship between the two poet-sages? Let part of the answer be suggested to us by the sensitive and discerning Ilse Graham, in her reflections on Faust's waterfall and its rainbow-hued droplets:

Here is being in time; a force that does not exhaust itself in its downward rush, in that it is ever renewed; and a force which, for all its dynamic movement, seems to hover in mid-air, in its own cloud of spray. The infinite in the finite, stillness in movement, being in time, yet not devoured by time; this is how Faust now perceives himself Like the perception of the phenomenon of the rainbow in its evanescent *Gestalt*, true 'having' presupposes distance, and the renunciation of all possessiveness from the start. When Faust says:

Ihn schau'ich an mit wachsendem entzücken

his words are expressive of that disinterested perception of pure being, in all the frailty that attaches to this as to any other *Gestalt* in Goethe's world¹⁸

As too in Santayana's world.

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¹⁷ *Realms of Being*, 833, xix.

¹⁸ *Goethe: A Portrait of the Artist* (W. de Gruyter, 1977) 334, 335-6.

Oliver's Last Soliloquies

You will recall that some years ago a small group of professional philosophers who had had personal acquaintance with Santayana met at the New York home of Corliss Lamont to exchange reminiscences and their impressions of the man. That almost uniformly patronizing exercise in the higher gossip generated several suggestive comments, and none seems to me so penetrating as Horace Kallen's remark that *The Last Puritan* may be seen as autobiographical. In Kallen's view Santayana's novel yields a truer, a more authentic picture of the man and his career than does his autobiography, *Persons and Places*, which he termed "a shield and a deception." It is only in the novel, he asserted, that we may find "the true image of the man."¹ Since Kallen does not venture to say *why* he concludes that Santayana conceals or misrepresents himself in his autobiography, that debate cannot be joined. Surely the adequate apprehension of Santayana's life requires a careful reckoning with both the autobiography and the novel. Yet no one has, to my knowledge, attempted a sustained exploration of *The Last Puritan* as a crucial text for the right understanding of Santayana's circumstances, his history, and his philosophy. The question which I want to propose for discussion tonight is this: In what ways might the novel serve as a key to that understanding?

Answers to so large a question may lie, of course, in diverse quarters: psychological or psychiatric, sociological, historical, philosophic. My own purpose tonight is to consider the character of the novel's protagonist, Oliver Alden, and to propose that Oliver is the young Santayana. I think that in Oliver's reflections we may find an exact and candid portrait of the artist as a young man, and in the achieved wisdom of Oliver's last soliloquy a point of view correspondent to the mature philosophic outlook of his creator.

Of course I travel here a perilous course. We grant to novelists a boundless freedom to transform the materials of life into fiction, but warning cries are sounded when a critic attempts to reverse the process. Especially is this the case when the critic attempts to identify the writer with one or another of his characters, for this seems to deny to the writer the impersonal power to be, through his characters, what he is not and has not been, to say what he would not say in his own person, or, in Mr. Darnley's language, to sing what he has not felt.

In his letters Santayana often sought to discourage readers who he felt were too ready to identify characters or incidents in the novel with his own life. In this vein, for example, he wrote to Daniel Cory in 1938, "It is pleasant and curious that you should assimilate me to Oliver," protesting that Oliver, like Mario, "represents rather what I liked than what I was. They are both [he

This paper was read to the Santayana Society, Boston, December 28, 1990.

¹ *Dialogue on George Santayana*, ed. Corliss Lamont (New York, 1959), 52.

wrote] distilled from my friends, taken in the mass, trampled like grapes, and turned into my private vintage, white wine and red."² Insisting on the synthetic and projective powers of the imagination, he often had to defend his characters' right to be themselves and no one else. Thus, to a former student, Bob Barlow, Santayana wrote, "As to the novel, and the originals of the characters, you are really almost in a better position to judge than I am myself. I have lived so long with Oliver and Mario and the rest that they have an automatic existence within me. They do and say what they choose, and I merely take note, as in a dream."³

This is the fiction writer's ancient retort to those who would tether the imagination: the characters of his fiction exist on a plane of being other than the merely historical; they spin out their lives under impulses of their own; they are born of an imperial imagination which, if it is imperial enough, sets them free to be what they must be. Yet when Santayana says to Barlow that his characters are the stuff that dreams are made of, it is a reminder that fictional beings are, after all, children of their creator's psyche. Thus he continues his letter, "Naturally, this probably makes them all versions of myself; not only am I the substance of their being, like the author of a play, but I am also the actor who speaks their lines." The fiction writer lives in all his characters; they are so many masks for himself – for alternative possible selves unrealized beyond the pages of his ardent feignings. Still, he will always be a quantity something more than any one character taken alone, or all of them together. That something more is what John Updike has called "the space whereby you hope still to be creative."⁴ and is indicated by Santayana in a further remark to Barlow: "Even in assuming the most different characters, something of the ventriloquist remains his own."

Though we grant these axioms, we must add the observation that fictions will vary widely in the degree and kind of their relatedness to the writer's own history. The roots of any fiction will run more or less deep into the soil of autobiography. That the roots of *The Last Puritan* run deep into Santayana's personal experience is indicated clearly by his novel's subtitle, "A Memoir in the Form of a Novel." Nor was he reluctant to name the sources of his fiction in his own circumstances and character and in the persons and places he had known. For example, Mario (he once remarked) "is the person I would have liked to be but could not be – seeing things as the gods, sure of his heart."⁵ Oliver's father, he observed, is "what my own father would have become if he had been rich."⁶ Lord Jim, we know, was closely modeled on his friend, John

² Daniel Cory, *Santayana: The Later Years*, (New York, 1963), 197-8.

³ *The Letters of George Santayana*, ed. Daniel Cory (New York, 1955), 308.

⁴ John Updike, *The Boston Globe*, September 25, 1990.

⁵ In conversations with the author, August, 1948.

⁶ *Ibid.*

Francis Stanley, Lord Russell.

But what of Oliver? In the course of our conversations in August of 1948, Santayana turned one afternoon to the subject of his novel. (And here I quote from my notes of that conversation, written in the evening following my visit.) "He spoke of *The Last Puritan* as a more complete, a more personal and revealing record of his life than *Persons and Places*, and said that Oliver's feelings were his own as a young man – 'except that at Harvard I was a grind'."⁷ And he then called my attention to the novel's epigraph, an observation from "Alain": "It is truly said that experience speaks through the mouths of the old, but the best experience which they can convey to us is what they have preserved from their youth." During the forty and more years of his writing of *The Last Puritan*, Santayana had sought to salvage his youth by giving it form, and in the feelings of Oliver one might, by implication, find it.

I recall my surprise and bafflement in hearing that testimony. How possibly could one identify the suave, sceptical Spaniard, the materialist and the Catholic in sympathy if not in belief, with the wealthy football-hero scion of New England Puritans? a late-coming exemplar of Protestantism in its most austere mood? A tenacious Calvinism, still clouding the skies of Santayana's turn-of-the-century New England, had been, after all, the target of his relentless attack. That oppressive atavism he named "the genteel tradition."

Yet it was not only in my talks with him, as I have since learned, that he spoke of Oliver as a mask of his young self. In reading subsequently a letter to William Lyon Phelps in which Santayana observes that his novel "gives the emotions of my experiences, and not my thoughts or experiences themselves..., I inferred by his own later testimony in Rome that the emotions in question were Oliver's."⁸ In writing to Barlow about his protagonist, he again resists the imputation that "I am he," but with an interesting reservation: "you say Oliver is most like *me*: he was meant to be most unlike me, but only in his physical and moral character: in the quality of his *mind*, he is what I am or should have been in his place."⁹ With this observation, Santayana seems to ally himself with Oliver's thoughts, not with his feelings or emotions. Yet to distinguish sharply between them is at variance with his often-expressed conviction that a genuine philosophy is "a way of thinking and feeling" simultaneously.¹⁰ In any case it is clear that Oliver repeatedly arrives at his insights under the pressure of emotion, nor can those insights once achieved be divorced from a particular way of feeling about things as they are.

Testimony of this kind may at the least suggest an affinity of temperament and point of view between the young Puritan and Santayana. It cannot prove it. A writer's declared intentions are one thing; the performance is another.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Letters*, 282.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 308.

¹⁰ *The Later Years*, 199.

Ignore, we say to the novice student of fiction, ignore what a writer may say about his characters *ex cathedra* – beyond, that is, the bounds of the story itself, and observe their life only within the enacted drama. Conforming to that counsel, I propose that we ignore all that Santayana has said about Oliver in his letters and conversation, in the novel's prologue and epilogue and in his Triton introduction, in order to catch his hero in act. Since Oliver-in-act is for the most part Oliver in the mode of response and reflection, it is in his many soliloquies, short and long, that we may best discover his nature – and, if I am right, the young Santayana's.

I am afraid that at this point another alarm bell may be sounded. It may be granted that a close and energetic attention to a dramatic text can lead us to a sure sense of a character's identity, yet on what grounds may we proceed to say that the character is a mirror of his creator? Was Stephen Dedalus the young Joyce? Or was Joyce steadily ironic at Stephen's expense? The debate will continue, nor will it end. This difficulty, endemic to the novel, or to would-be biographers of novelists, is obviated in the case of *The Last Puritan* by two circumstances. The first is the nature of the book itself. All of the inhabitants of Oliver's world are philosophers *manqué*. At the drop of a hat or a name, any of the novel's characters, young or old, male or female, are ready – some readers would say too ready – to philosophize, and to philosophize often in the cadences and diction of their creator. But do they speak his sense? Are their feelings and judgments his? In this extraordinary case the means of reply are at hand. For surrounding the novel on all sides – and this is the second and crucial circumstance – are the copious philosophic writings of the novelist. In these Santayana spoke his own mind indefatigably, and in these we may find a control for the hypothesis that Oliver repeats in himself the intellectual and emotional history of the young Santayana.

I cannot hope to convince you that this is so in the course of my brief comments tonight. But I would like to make a beginning by tracing a recurring and expanding metaphor in Oliver's thinking, the metaphor of sun and shade. I want then to notice Oliver's grapplings with a moral problem, the status of the good. And I will end with a few side glances at Oliver's final liberation.

You will remember that under the tutelage of Irma, the boy Oliver "soon found, as he afterward used to put it, that there was a sunny and a shady side to the road of knowledge" (113). On the sunny side lay the natural sciences; on the shady side were philosophy and religion, languages, literature, and history. It seemed to the young Oliver that the geographer, the natural historian, the astronomer were engaged in happy explorations of the non-human – studies "open, friendly, and rewarding." In the study of nature's ways "you were honestly challenged by your problem, and could work your way honestly forward until you came to an honest solution or an honest difficulty" (114). The humanists, on the contrary, seemed to Oliver mere opinion-pushers, contentiously urging views which were arbitrary and accidental. More than that: they often seemed intent on passing off their fictions as fact. Fabulations infected by individual passion or prejudice were to be granted the status of literal or metaphysical truth, and to flatter mankind seemed their aim: "The

human world was so horrible to the human mind, that it could be made to look at all decent and interesting only by ignoring one half the facts, and putting a false front on the other half" (114). Thus did the positivistic Oliver conclude that "only non-human subjects were fit for the human mind" (114). All else was adventitious, presumptuous babel.

Oliver's contempt for the merely human is above all a response to and a function of his steady sense of trans-human, omnificent Nature, the true seat of power. If he prizes physical exercise, it is because in the open air he knows "a genuine communion with nature ... : the confident active sympathy of man with things larger than himself, and with a universal reptilian intelligence which was not thought, but adaptation, unison, and momentum. That groping labour which had produced the trees, the rivers, the meadows, which was piling up and dissolving the clouds, seemed then to engage his inmost being in its meshes and to turn him for the moment into the gladdest, the most perfect, yet the most dependent of creatures. And he could accept joyfully this dependence and this fugitive strength, feeling at the same time the immense promise of a thousand other perfections sleeping in the womb of nature, into which the strong soul of this moment must presently return" (115). Oliver may be the positivist in his reaction against theorizings which show man too partial to himself; he is a transcendentalist and mystic in the presence of nature, the powers in relation to which all human thought seems impertinent.

This nascent philosophy – inarticulate still in the boy but made articulate by Santayana – is confirmed and gains resonance as the book proceeds. Oliver soon learns to include in the company of those who live in a daylight world not only scientists but all those who study and master the ways of things. In his own household "all was a matter of discussing opinions, and feeling bitterly how superior your own opinion was," but Mr. Murphy, Oliver's sculling master, must reckon not with opinion but with imposed external circumstances and forces – wind and waves, the body's capacities. "Bodily skill," Oliver reflects, "was something unmistakable: the proofs of it were material, and so were the forces with which you had to count, material and sure" (120). The lesson which Oliver's father hopes his son will learn, that "the great, the trusty educator of mankind was matter" (123), Oliver does indeed learn. Seeking to educate the sentimental Edith, he writes to her, "There's no real authority except the authority of *things*. We run up against things, we must work with things, we must study things if ever we hope to change them: but apart from the authority of things, we are free, and there is no authority but our own reason" (499). Our young transcendentalist is also a materialist.

Oliver's sense of dependence on powers which are not man's deepens as he grows older. Nature becomes his one great companion and source of inspiration. His exaltations in its presence are not just responses to pretty landscapes or to the publicly designated wonders of the natural world; he feels rather nature's "steady flow, the inevitable equilibrium of her sustaining life" (226). He begins to move in the world with a "secret and almost malicious sense of alliance with the unseen" (225). "Malicious" because his impassioned sense of nature's omnificence brings with it contempt for the world and for worldlings. Society, in its self-preoccupation, is inconsequent and blind. "It

would be enough," Oliver reflects, "if one-fourth of our time and of our hearts were given to human affairs and the other three-quarters to – what? Nature, truth, God, call it what you will: that larger inhuman something that surrounded humanity, sustained it, and made it ridiculous" (359). Under the stars or at sea – for these come to supplant the sun and woods as emblems of "that larger inhuman something" – he felt how unnecessary, how absurd were the bustle and rancor of social man. It is not surprising that near the end of his short life, Oliver should think of becoming a lumberjack or sailor: at sea, he observes, he would be "far from the world of men, with only the wind and the sea to wrestle with, honest and useful enemies" (573).

Was Oliver's contemplated retreat from society escapist? For Oliver the reverse was true: those who are immersed in affairs blind themselves protectively to the human condition and their own poverty. Contemplating his father's drug habit, he asks (and implicitly answers) this question: "Could it be that life, as the world understands it, was the veritable dope, the hideous, beastly, vicious intoxication? Was obedience to convention and custom and public opinion perhaps only an epidemic slavery, a cruel superstition ... ?" (171) Much later, on his voyage around the world, he will note how much better the ocean's emptiness "represented the true condition of a living spirit than did the constraints and compulsions and falsehoods of human society!" (501) Among the escapists, in Oliver's eyes, are all those who refuse to recognize the disproportion between the trans-human powers of nature and the powers of man, and therefore invent tales of a beneficent Providence designed to comfort man's infirmity. Thus had his Cousin Caleb, for example, condemned society with a dogmatist's insistence that his own sense of the good must and will prevail. In this way, Oliver reflects, the crippled man compensated for his deformity and served his private need: "He wanted the whole world to be sick, in order that he might pretend to be well. As if in the health of the world his own sickness were more than a fleabite! What was the use of having a mind at all, if not to recognize this disproportion, and live, as far as your spirit can, in sympathy with the health of the universe? But people were cowards. They were so frightened at the truth that they shut their eyes and kept saying their prayers ... " (203).

It should be apparent by now that the boy Oliver's sharp distinction between the sunny and the shady roads to knowledge yields several bipolarities: the metaphor of sun-and-shade, like the kindred metaphor of sea-and-land, divides the sciences and the humanities, the practical and the theoretical, the non-human and the human, nature and the world of men, solitude and society, contemplation and opinion, piety and *hubris*. These were, for Oliver, deeply felt oppositions, and although he would in the course of his reflections qualify in many ways the "versus" which lay between them, he would always be sure that his own affinities might be found in the first term, not the second. Of course he was not himself a scientist or ship's captain – although these remained in his view admirable and privileged beings by reason of their ties to matter. No, Oliver was first and last a philosopher, seeking to locate and name on his cosmological map the nature and worth of humanity's miscellaneous strivings. To his dismay – and this is no small part of his tragedy – he was to discover that

his own map usually extended well beyond the terrain inscribed on the maps of his earth-bound fellows.

That is no small part of Santayana's tragedy in the first half of his life – the tragedy, I mean, of being steadily misunderstood by those of the world, worldly, of not finding in his fated environment a way of thinking, a tradition, to which he might wholeheartedly subscribe – that is a thesis I do not propose tonight. But I hope that in my tracing of a few of the implications for Oliver of his sun-and-shade metaphor, you will have heard the voice of Santayana in his own person. Let me suggest a few of the ties that bind him to his young Puritan in these directions.

In August, 1911, at Berkeley, California, in an address to the Philosophical Union, Santayana gave his valedictory to America. He must have reflected that these would be perhaps his last words to an American audience. He would try to make them count. He would attempt to summarize his sense of the American mind, past and present, and venture a word of counsel. That counsel, in the event, was a moving plea to all those yoked to the still-dominant genteel tradition, a summons back to thoughts of ultimate things, a counsel that we raise our eyes from our planted gardens to the wilderness beyond:

When you transform nature to your uses ... you cannot feel that nature was made by you or for you, for then these adjustments would have been pre-established. Much less can you feel it when she destroys your labour of years in a momentary spasm. You must feel, rather, that you are an offshoot of her life; one brave little force among her immense forces. When you escape ... to your forests and your sierras, I am sure again that you do not feel you made them, or that they were made for you. They have grown, as you have grown, only more massively and more slowly. In their non-human beauty and peace they stir the sub-human depths and superhuman possibilities of your own spirit. It is no transcendental logic that they teach; and they give no sign of any deliberate morality seated in the world. It is rather the vanity and superficiality of all logic, the needlessness of argument, the relativity of morals, the strength of time, the fertility of matter, the variety, the unspeakable variety, of possible life It is the irresistible suasion of this daily spectacle, it is the daily discipline of contact with things, so different from the verbal discipline of the schools, that will, I trust, inspire the philosophy of your children.¹¹

Surely it inspired Oliver's. Is there a word of this that he might not have written himself, had he lived? The sense of disproportion between the powers of nature and the powers of man, the tribute to the authority of *things*, that innocent and crucial axiom of Santayana's materialism and an axiom which, as Oliver says, liberates the reason, the salute to protean nature's fertility and a courageous acquiescence to her changes, contempt for opinion and argument, for logic and language when these are apprehended in the full light of the sun, and a skepticism about anthropomorphic metaphysics at least as great as that of Hume's Philo: these are motions of Oliver's mind – and also of Santayana's in

¹¹ *Winds of Doctrine* (New York and London, 1913), 213-4.

the articulation of his own first principles.

Midway in the novel, Santayana gives a striking delineation of Oliver's thoughts after his conscientious return to Williams College. It is striking (for one reason) because what the novelist says of his protagonist repeats what Santayana said of his own frame of mind during his "somnambulistic" period at Harvard early in the century. He writes of Oliver: "A curious film of unreality and worthlessness now seemed spread over his daily life. Even school work, when he took it up again, occupied him only north-north-west. When the wind was southerly there was a strange void in his bosom. He understood now the old notion that the soul had had previous lives, and was not really at home in this world. The routine of the day seemed a fiction to which he condescended, as if he were playing in private theatricals. The characters were assumed, and not very well done; yet, you must pretend to be in dead earnest, till you actually forgot that you were not" (227). How very close those words lie to Santayana's account of his own submission to professional routine.

But reasons are not wanting for Oliver's feelings of alienation, and I would ask you to notice how exactly they conform to the circumstances of the Spanish professor of philosophy surrounded on all sides by the practitioners and adherents of the genteel tradition. For Oliver, we're told, "a trap door had opened into the cellarage of this world's stage, which other people seemed so strangely to tread all their life long as if it were the bedrock of nature. Yet every step you took on those shaky boards revealed some old folly, some ramshackle contrivance which once may have produced conviction in children watching a Christmas pantomime – children who long since had died of old age" (227). These words, couched in the metaphor of the theatre which Santayana so often invoked when he spoke of the relation of experience to nature, can well serve to define the genteel tradition. Wholly absorbed in appearances, preoccupied to the exclusion of all else by the social drama of which they found themselves a part, or lost in the fog of self-consciousness, its adherents had forgotten the subterranean ground and reference of experience. American philosophers were declaring experience to be the only reality, and the dominion over our lives of the human foreground an inescapable necessity. Religious thinkers, for their part, continued to look to the sky but found there only the countenance of man. Calvinism, systemic transcendentalism, philosophic idealism, pragmatism: "these systems," Santayana said to his California audience, "are egotistical; directly or indirectly they are anthropocentric, and inspired by the conceited notion that man, or human reason, or the human distinction between good and evil, is the centre and pivot of the universe." And then he added, "That is what the mountains and the woods should make you at last ashamed to assert."¹²

What does Oliver oppose to the genteel tradition? Not the mountains and woods but the sun and sea – in either case, nature. Oliver's first voyage on the *Black Swan* once and for all widened his horizon: "a ray of sunlight had pierced" the "torn hangings and dingy backdrops" of his American theater.

¹² *Ibid.*, 214.

The sun "had gilded a beam of atoms in the thick dust he had been unconsciously breathing: it had disenchanting the pasteboard castles and daubed forests of his artificial world. But it was not romance that was shattered; it was slavery, drudgery, superstition. That vital air outside, that freedom, that simpleness, that natural light – how much more romantic they were than any moral melodrama invented by the frightened dreams of mankind! ... It was enough to go to sea" (227).

Is this exalting of nature and the consequent derogation of man's workings a Puritan perspective? In one essential, central respect it is. Crucial in Puritan feeling, and a recurring theme for Puritan sermons and meditation, was the greatness of God and the littleness of man. Submission, acquiescence in the ways of inscrutable power, humility – these were the constant admonitions of those early Protestants, and in them Santayana found a sensibility accordant with his own. In his *Apologia* he notes that his philosophy is religious "precisely in the Protestant sense of religious faith; for if in other respects Protestant sentiment often seems to me a religious cloak for worldliness, as to the nature of faith it seems to me admirable and profound. For whereas faith among Catholics (except for the mystics) means intellectual assent to traditional dogmas, among Protestants it means an unspoken and sacrificial trust in an unfathomable power ...",¹³ In this light, as Santayana had observed earlier in his *Apologia*, "materialism coincides with pantheism, or even with theism of that Islamic and Calvinist kind which conceives God as omniscient."¹⁴

If Oliver and Santayana were alike Puritans in this sense, did they also share the faith that universal might makes for right? that the Good shall one day triumph? that if we align ourselves with the powers that make for righteousness we shall, with them, prevail? Santayana, of course, did not. His naturalism posits nature, or matter, as the ground of all moralities, but it guarantees the victory to none. How did Oliver stand on this question? In his "Prologue" to the novel, Santayana observes that the old Calvinists, in the face of rampant evil in the world, "cut the Gordian knot by asserting that since the Fall, the spirit had ceased to rule over the world and over their own passions, but that nevertheless it was secretly omnipotent, and would burn up the world and their passions at the last day." Oliver, he notes, "suffered from no such delusion." (10). Or, as the novelist says of his hero in the Triton "Preface," Oliver's "late birth relieved him of any horrid uncertainty about the truth of traditional myths and dogmas. Like the Stoics and Spinoza he found his moral demands face to face with a universe that inspired but did not sanction them."¹⁵

Oliver's story does in fact bear out these pronouncements. In his conversation and in his soliloquies we discover Oliver returning repeatedly to thoughts of the mythical and symbolic status of Platonism and Christianity and

¹³ "Apologia pro Mente Sua," in *The Philosophy of George Santayana* (Library of Living Philosophers, New York, 1940), 588.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 509-10.

¹⁵ *Dialogues in Limbo*, (New York, 1926), 44.

all religions. He sees that such systems make intelligible and are deeply expressive of man's moral nature, yet in transposing that nature to the cosmos, humankind transparently seeks to placate its fears, underwrite its aspirations, insure success for its local ideals. Such systems, Oliver observes in one of his late soliloquies, express "mythically the revolt of man's moral nature against the actual world." And he protests, "Why nurse this unhappy moral rebellion with all sorts of fables and sentimental regrets?" (520) Better, much better, he thinks, to confront courageously the truth about the human condition: "True religion must recognize the power actually at work in the world and study its workings honestly" (427). Such study will yield no reassurance that the ways of nature are the ways of moral man. The study of history freed from moralism, study of the natural sciences, or simply honest daily observation go in the sun; "Christianity," Oliver says, "walks in the shade ... , sees everything from the point of view of the soul, and not as it really happens and has to happen" (447).

Oliver often feels the *danger* of religious presumption, of moralism become militant, as in this reflection: "It wasn't religion, in any sober or manly sense, to run amok over some passionate fancy of your own, and be ready to torture yourself and other people rather than admit it was all froth" (427). His sense of absolutistic religion "as a reforming political force" ready to dominate others in the name of the Good is central to Oliver's "purification of Puritanism." And since his rejection of a deity with moral attributes is in part carried out on moral grounds, it may be called a rejection of Puritanism on Puritan grounds. But if we call it that, we should add that just do did Santayana reject Puritanism, and for a like reason. Too often, he observed repeatedly, the hypostasis of the good had masked "a secret aggressive worldliness" which brought oppression in its wake.

Obvious to Oliver is the work of impassioned fancy or a merely momentary inspiration in the religions of the world. His refusal of their comforts is an instance of what Santayana calls his "metaphysical austerity." That austerity is apparent in Oliver's frequent contempt for all the works of mere imagination. The dreams and transports, the epiphanies and visions of the poets, philosophers, and artists – aren't they, lock, stock, and barrel, "all froth"? "mere escape and delusion"? (413) Perhaps if men were willing to face the facts, renouncing fictions, they would be happier, for "if men had no imagination they could feel no discouragement. Perhaps all this religion and philosophy and poetry and art were a disease to be killed off presently by natural selection" (413). May we say, then, that here, at least Oliver and Santayana part company? After all, the Spaniard, from his boyhood on, found wonder and delight in stories and poems, the pageantry of the church, art and architecture, philosophy and criticism.

Several things may be said in reply. Oliver is by no means impervious to works of the human imagination, despite his occasionally ruthless positivistic moods. He attentively absorbs the German songs and prayers and verses which Irma teaches him; he shows himself keenly responsive to Plato, Shakespeare, Goethe, Schopenhauer, Whitman; and while he cannot share the Vicar's faith, he understands deeply the spiritual wisdom of his message. When Oliver expresses contempt for the imagination, his complaint almost invariably

registers his sense that imagination too easily and too often exceeds its proper bounds, takings its fables for fact. And I needn't remind you of how often Santayana in like vein protested against the incursions of *la fonction fabulatrice* into the territories of science or a sober philosophy, against all theories in which the universe is made to dance to the tune of the poet's or the philosopher's personal music box. Sometimes, in his war against the worldly, Santayana imagined a world without imagination: from the vantage of the unnameable ultimate *X*, of the atoms and void, man appears as the conceited popinjay whose "chief and most lasting illusion ... is the illusion of [his] own importance."¹⁶ We will in our dreams and babblings concoct a thousand fictions – featherings of our precarious human nest – but all are alike the works of normal madness – normal, to be sure, but mad, still.

Perhaps you will grant that Santayana's mature philosophy is coherent in these ways with the young Oliver's philosophic gropings, yet deny any likeness in the moral complexion of the fictional son and his novel-writing father. Did not this last of the Puritans have a severe case of conscience, of moral cramp? If by conscience is meant a dutiful subservience to social values and expectations – responsibility to friends, teammates, mother and father, or commitment to the idea of being married, serving the public good, or the democrat's wish to be commonplace – I think it can easily be shown that Oliver moves from an unquestioning commitment to these to a clear-eyed questioning of them all. He rejects some on examined grounds, accepts others as imperatives of his own sympathetic nature. And, in Santayana's case, is it possible to imagine a greater dedication than his to personal social ties and responsibility? As a son he attended his mother faithfully despite his resentment of her coldness; as a brother he was steadily attentive and loving; to friends he was touchingly loyal – even to the egregious Stanley, even to Strong; his hospitality and kindness toward students have been remarked in a hundred reports; and as a teacher he maintained to the end a scrupulous commitment to the task which Oliver would wholly understand.

Not what others expect but his own integrity is what counted most for Oliver. To be true to his own deepest nature, to his own sense of the just and the good: this becomes his credo. But there is a worm in this apple: in Oliver's proud self-reliance lies the danger of egotism and the seed of moral absolutism. Santayana tellingly sketches his young Emerson/Oliver: "Living, real, and self-justified" in the boy's eyes "was only ... the inner spring of his being, the centre and judge of all that unaccountably went on. ... Though almost everything might be wrong, the inner oracle that condemned and rejected was sure of being itself right ... " (77-8). An older Oliver can still feel, when confronted by alien virtues, "how inevitable and right his own practice was" (412). Oliver's moral intensity, his resolute "integrity of purpose and scorn of all compromises," threatens to become at any moment moral ferocity. Or so we are told in the "Prologue," where Santayana observes that Oliver "would have been capable of imposing no matter what regimen on us by force. ... 'Be like

¹⁶ *The Later Years*, 168.

me, or die'" (8). And then we are told that Oliver's is "the tragedy of the spirit when it's not content to understand but wishes to govern" (10).

These hard judgments I find incomprehensible, and propose here to enter for litigation the case of Alden vs. Santayana on grounds of slander. It is as if two Oliver's were present to the mind of the narrator, incompatible beings. The first Oliver, perhaps the Oliver of Santayana's first conception of him in the 1890's, "demanded some absolute and special sanction for his natural preferences" (320), and presumably after finding it would be perfectly prepared to impose his preferences on others. The second Oliver is a young man with a radical spiritual vocation who refuses the intoxications of will and all partisan heats. Can the two Oliver's be understood as one? I think not.

When Oliver condemns his Puritan forbears as narrow, vengeful moralists sure of their own rightness, he discerns shrewdly that their need to be on the winning side was parent to their metaphysical claims (318-19). And he goes on to rebuke them for their wilful blindness to virtues other than their own. Jim and Mario especially, by their steady demonstration of attitudes and views foreign to Oliver's nature, have led him to see the many forms in which the good may come – the divergence and incommensurability of human virtues. "You know," Santayana said to me, "a good boy does need correction."

Charity, sympathy, openness of mind become, for Oliver, the counsels of reason and truth. What he vaguely calls his pursuit of "higher things" centrally involves this resolute hospitality toward others, a recognition of the diversity and relativity of human ideals. It also becomes clear to Oliver that his relativist stance entails a dogmatic social and political prescript: the good society will accommodate the largest number of different, even rival, goods, and bring them into harmony. Believing that man's "general stupidity and cruelty and disorder" are correctable, he concludes in one of his later soliloquies that "the right direction for a moral man would always lead to ultimate order and kindness; an order itself kind; an order harmonizing all sympathies, as far as such a harmony was possible ..." The man of reason as social engineer will not suffer "the ignorant energies of men to waste themselves and neutralize one another" but will know how through his political arts to canalize human nature (514).

Note how close these suggestions lie to the young Santayana's sympathy in *The Life of Reason* for a meritocratic form of government, a Platonic oligarchy of the wise. But my main purpose here is to ask whether our young Puritan would indeed be willing – as the "Prologue" says he would be willing – to put a gun to our heads to enforce order and kindness. I do not believe it.

I do not believe it for several reasons, but I will cite only one, which seems to me decisive. Oliver's story, as that story came finally to be told, is in its main outline the story of a budding transcendentalist's advance toward the discovery of his true position as an exile in the world, able to live happily only in the spirit, in what Rose calls "a rapt dedication to impersonal things." As a boy the dreamful, solipsistic Oliver presciently recognizes his affinity to Schopenhauer – he learns by heart a passage, as Irma describes it, about "how everything becomes beautiful and as it were enchanted when we suspend our Will and see the whole world merely as Idea ..." (132). Many years later, following the

successive shocks of the deaths of his father, Jim, and the Vicar, and in immediate response to Rose's refusal of marriage, he achieves in his last soliloquy his impassioned transvaluation of values, sublimates his loves, abandons the ways of will. It is Oliver's *metanoia*, strikingly akin to Santayana's own *metanoia*, at about the same age. In and through that "change of heart" both gained spiritual freedom, which Santayana once defined as "liberation from all allegiance to what is private to each psyche, and love in perfect sympathy with the truth."¹⁷

Oliver's anxious moral dialectic was often driven by his need to feel that his feelings of being right were right. In the end he abandons that egotist's quest and vows that he will be nameless – of no party's color. Listen to his last words: "Shall I decide what ought to be the world's business? Shall I get up an imaginary programme, and say ... that the world's real business is something that the world neglects and has never heard of, something miraculously revealed only to me or to the sect I happen to belong to? ... Enough if on occasion I practice charity, and keep myself as much as possible from complicity in wrong" (582-3). This Puritan will put no one in the stocks.

The cautionary moral of my story is this: Listen to Oliver, follow his dialectic, note his gradual discovery of his own nature; do not listen to what Santayana says about him in prologue or epilogue, preface or letters. Don't believe the novelist, for example, when he says that a part of Oliver's tragedy was his inability to stand alone. Oliver was always the self-reliant individualist by any ordinary measure, and in the end achieved an autonomy and a distance on the world very like his creator's

Such contradictions might be explained by saying that Santayana wished to deflect attention away from the sizeable autobiographical cargo his fiction carried by calling attention to deficiencies in his hero. I doubt it. It must be rather a result of the desultory, piecemeal nature of the novel's composition: Santayana was not wholly aware of how much the character of Oliver turned under his hand over the span of forty years. In Oliver's later soliloquies especially his ever greater and greater sympathy for his protagonist led him to infuse more and more of himself into Oliver's musings – so that in the end we may find the maker in what he made.

Yet there is one great difference we would do well to mark, after all, between the philosopher and his last Puritan – or, I would prefer to say, his last transcendentalist. Santayana, not Oliver, tells Oliver's story. Santayana was the artist; Oliver was not. The medium of fiction, more tellingly than autobiography, enabled Santayana to explore the form and meaning of his own story. Fiction has this wonderful enabling property: precisely because the teller of the story is all of his characters and yet none of them, it allows him repeated

¹⁷ *The Later Years*, 168.

forays into uncharted regions of his nature. The novelist is under cover, and it is just this self-forgetfulness which enables, which breeds out of itself, self-discovery. That path was closed to Oliver. Lacking the power to dominate his circumstances by giving them verbal form, lacking the power to frame his world in life-giving words, Oliver lacked the irony and humor, the satiric distance, the quiet contentments of artistic closure so conspicuous in the man who could tell his story, and so discover his own.

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A Soliloquy in Limbo

Dick Lyon has had the rare privilege of discussing Oliver Alden's character with Santayana himself. Such an advantage being impossible to counter, I resolved to visit Limbo, and seek a dialogue with Santayana. The visit was arranged, although not without difficulty, but I was soon disappointed to learn that Santayana was not prepared to discuss personalities. Many times he had said that only his philosophy was worth preserving, if indeed anything at all should be saved. Because this view in fact reflected his innermost character, only this eternal part of his being had been admitted, after the custom in Limbo.

I was astonished to learn, however, that Oliver himself was to be found there, along with a host of other persons from literature whose characters were sufficiently definite and complete to permit their entry into Limbo. An occasion to meet him, and to engage in dialogue, was quickly arranged; but the dialogue with Oliver was not very satisfactory either. As he learned of Lyon's opinions, he lapsed somewhat into himself: the dialogue passed into monologue, and the monologue into soliloquy.

Oliver was quick to deny that he was to be identified with Santayana, even the younger Santayana, in the novel: sounding rather like a professor of philosophy, he dismissed the thesis as "sufficiently refuted by the fact that he and Santayana occupy different parts of Limbo." While conceding that he frequently expressed Santayana's opinions, he nevertheless insisted that this was true of all the characters: each is used as a foil for the ironic expression or exploration of these opinions. Somewhere Santayana had said that, once having attained his own solid philosophy, he liked to test out its maxims by inserting them into different philosophical settings. According to Oliver, Santayana was putting his own views into the mouths of his protagonists, yes; but in each case the person's different character or philosophy or situation would bring about interesting changes in that opinion.

What I repeat now is taken from my notes of Oliver's one further soliloquy.

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The last puritan: one might anticipate for the hero a sour puritan who eschews all forms of enjoyment and pleasure, in favour of hard duty. Many of my relatives were like this. But my life was a quest for happiness, at least in my own mind; and yet I seemed unable to define or achieve my happiness. Perhaps Santayana was unhappy in his younger days, but this seems to have been due to externalities – he was entirely *capable* of it. In my case, I somehow lacked the

capacity for being happy, although I came to acknowledge its value.

Mr. Lyon flatters me, when he says that I attained spiritual freedom shortly before my death. Notice, however, that in my last soliloquy, I make no mention whatsoever of renunciation, which is the heart of the matter for Santayana. My quest for happiness was to continue, or so I thought, and I was free only in the sense of escaping commitments. There was a relief, a change of outlook. But I see it as similar to a programme for himself which Santayana describes, some years prior to his *metanoia*, a “pretty programme” which was “easy for a boy to draw up.” However, “Genuine detachment presupposes attachment. What can it signify for you to say that you renounce everything if as yet you have loved nothing?”¹

This was Mr. Lyon’s thesis, was it not? that I represented Santayana’s youth. There is surely more truth to this, than in the claim that in my few years of life below, the struggle for spiritual freedom was successful.

Often I ask myself if a longer life would have brought me spiritual freedom – some contentedness if not happiness. Certainly I had no doubts about this at the time; had not my special vocation for the spirit been the Vicar’s prophecy? However, I think now that this was only my youth speaking. Here I have been stripped of this boyish confidence, and am unclear on this point. Of the author’s intentions, however, I have formed some opinions.

Santayana, I think, would have denied me this freedom and enlightenment, even if I had lived a long life. At least, his original ideas about me would have excluded this. Luckily, he allowed my character to develop over a long period of gestation, according to the inward dictates of his psyche, rather than following any prearranged superficial plan. Otherwise I should not be here, for no complete person could emerge from rearrangements of a thin veneer of ideas, without allowing free rein to the deeper formative parts of the material psyche.

But how much I am sounding like Santayana, and at the same time seeming to concede Mr. Lyon’s point.

Of course Vanny achieved the free expression of his potential. He was open-hearted, ready to kiss all the girls; gallantry in him passed easily into chivalry, and chivalry into religion. Vanny mastered life in ways in which Santayana would have wished to do himself. My potential was towards a spiritual life – or so I think. Such a life was greatly admired by Santayana, although he seems not to have wished it for himself. Nor, I think, did he feel that I was constituted to achieve it.

His overt view on this, so far as I can reconstruct it, left little chance of my consummating a settled and tranquil freedom. My natural bent for nature, for mastery over material things, could not ground a satisfactory life of contemplation outside society, for I lacked his epicurean contentment. And I lacked the ability to break away from convention and earlier bad decisions. As Jim said, I would dip one toe in the water and then draw back; I dared not call

¹ See page 421 of *Persons and Places*, Critical Edition, edited by William C. Holzberger and Herman J. Saatkamp, Jr., Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1986.

my mind my own and have the courage of my conviction. Or as my father said, I abandoned the things which I admitted loving, while I clung to my old resolution, although I hated it. Not only did I cling to an environment which was stifling me, but I did so with pride and the defiance of youth.

Was this failure due to my feebleness? my belonging to a declining race? My father's weaknesses are well-known; but my mother too, although she thought herself superior, had lost the physical courage which is the foundation of morality and intelligence. Yet surely this physical decadence in my stock, in my genteel or commercial forbears, signalled moral failings in Santayana's eyes. These stemmed from detaching duty and rightness from its sources in preference and urgent need. With my mother, with my uncle Nathaniel, this led to hypocrisy and the substitution of blatantly false justifications. For in them, the will to have their own way overwhelmed any tendency toward self-knowledge. My hatred of any kind of hypocrisy forced me in a different direction, and I found myself discrediting my own innocent desires, when they could not be construed as duties.

Such is a straightforward account of Santayana's intentions. In my thoughts, I managed to rebel against an oppressive heritage, and to espouse views closely akin to those of my author. I was nevertheless unable to cast aside this burden in my actions. I remained puritan, notwithstanding my rejection of puritanism. However much my proclamations might reflect the ideas of Santayana's youth, I remained unable to shape my actions towards liberation of my spirit, in conformity with these ideas.

If Mr. Lyon finds fault with this interpretation, and prefers to see me as a hero rather than a failure, I cannot object. I too think that, had my life been permitted to continue, my spirituality and Santayana's love for this side of me would have led to surprising results. For spirituality is not easily found in the utterly selfish Lord Jim's of this world; rather the ability to share vicariously in a wide range of ideals often springs up in persons whose own ambitions are less clearly developed. And Santayana was always more interested in spirituality than in puritanism.

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My notes stop at this point. Although the monologue and further dialogue continued for some time, the topic shifted. Oliver's interest in his own person seemed to flag, and to be no more important than any other subject.

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William James and George Santayana

The Extent of a Philosophic Vision

Santayana writes to William James on December 18, 1887:

If philosophy were the attempt to solve a given problem, I should see reason to be discouraged about its success; but it strikes me that it is rather an attempt to express a half-undiscovered reality, just as art is, and that two different renderings, if they are expressive, far from cancelling each other add to each other's value. The great bane of philosophy is the theological animus which hurries a man toward final and intolerant truths as towards his salvation. Such truths may be necessary to men but philosophy can hardly furnish them. It can only interpret nature, in parts with accuracy, in parts only with a vague symbolism. I confess I do not see why we should be so vehemently curious about the absolute truth, which is not to be made or altered by our discovery of it. But philosophy seems to me to be its own reward, and its justification lies in the delight and dignity of the art itself.¹

James responded on January 2, 1888:

What you say of philosophy and your expectations therefrom, interests me. Neither do I expect absolute illumination from human philosophizing. At most you can get arguments either to reinforce or to protect certain emotional impulses. In any minute of moral action where the path is difficult, I believe a man has deeper dealings with life than he could have in libraries of philosophizing.²

William James would say that truth is about experience. It is about a fact of nature, George Santayana argued. Both agreed that truth describes the range of relations binding a fact with other facts or one experience to the next. Since James and Santayana considered that knowledge of truth must involve a description of an array of relations and since we are creatures of finite reach, living for a brief time in a world of constant change, any such knowledge must involve a sharing of perspectives. We think and feel and are usually aware of our thoughts or feelings. Truth cannot be settled individually, rather it is decided only as the relations or meanings of an idea are accounted for completely. Different perspectives, describing relation after relation, have to be tried to draw ever nearer to truth.

The pragmatic rule is that the meaning of a concept may always be found, if not in some sensible particular which it directly designates, then in some particular difference in the course of human experience which its being true will make. Test every concept by the question "What sensible difference to anybody will its truth make?" and you are in the best possible position for understanding what it means

¹ See pages 27-28 of Cory 1955.

² See page 403 of Perry, 1935a.

and for discussing its importance. (James 1898)³

The word truth ought, I think, to be reserved for what everybody spontaneously means by it: the standard comprehensive description of any fact in all its relations. Truth is not an opinion, even an ideally true one; because besides the limitation in scope which human opinions, at least, can never escape, even the most complete and accurate opinion would give precedence to some terms, and have a direction of survey; and this direction might be changed or reversed without lapsing into error; so that the truth is the field which various opinions traverse in various directions, and no opinion itself. (Santayana 1923/1955, p. 268.)

The troubles we have in knowing the world truly are the result of ideas we form that are as difficult to define as clouds and breezes are to measure exactly, and of experience that is like a stream in terms of continuity and change. It is a matter of the degree to which we are able to understand and appreciate perspectives that are different from our own. If ideas as they are felt are fields of indefinite measure, mixtures of sensations, memories, emotions and will, and if there is inevitably a distinctive or singular quality about every stream of experience, it would seem that we can know the world only in many ways. Every way of knowing must be singular; no individual way counting, except accidentally, for more than a part of what is true. We might argue that there is a "persistent" world of skies, seas, soils, cells and organizations of cells, also there are fleeting fields of ideas about these things. We well might hold there are as many *worlds* as the persistent one that will survive our knowing it, and all the distinct fields of ideas in stream. We might even hold that there must be an over-arching realm of "spirit," an absolute intelligence to bind thoughts to things or bind someone else's thoughts to ours.

There is comfort but no surety in the idea of an overarching spirit, an absolute, that cares to bind thoughts to things, and measure your feelings against mine. Instead of positing an absolute, James and Santayana gave common sense answers to the question of how "worlds" of unlike substance are related. Both held that the stuff of thoughts does not have to be *identical* to the stuff of things. Sensations or conceptions, our ideas, are only the reflections or symbols of substances other than themselves. That nature is multi-textured,

³ 1898/1975, p. 259; paraphrased 1911/1979a, p. 37.) "Slightly edited" will be used in footnotes to mark the separate writings by James in which an idea has been expressed in terms that are quite similar. James often worked with the same ideas year after year, as he carefully tried to build them into a philosophy that would be increasingly more coherent. James is, of course, the editor in question. Painstaking efforts by which he shaped a philosophy have seldom been credited.

"Paraphrased" will note those writings in which an idea is to be found not only in a changed context, but restated in terms that are far different.

Concerning the extended quotations in the essay, James often wrote in this vein and Santayana strongly recommended it to intellectual historians (Santayana 1923/1955, p. 253). Readers will be able to use the texts I consider most important and include in the body of the essay, to argue much more easily with the philosophic interpretations. Use of dual dates in citations, it is hoped, will allow readers to set the citations in historical context, as well as trace a particular research resource, without distracting.

that textures can be symbolically differentiated, was enough of an epistemology for Santayana. To claim that we might learn of all nature's textures "in themselves," is but a dream, or conceit, and for scientists is unnecessary. Our idea of a knarred old pine tree is not the tree itself; no more are we the idea of the blue jay perched upon a thin branch of the pine, watching us. The stuff of our thoughts is *symbolically like* the stuff of the pine tree, and herein is uncovered a most wonderful quality of consciousness. We can represent things, such as weather bent pine trees with laughing blue jays sitting on the branches, without being those things.⁴

The ordinary absolute God is only a description of the fact taken after the fact, and then placed behind the fact as its ground. The only absolute thing so far as the intellect goes is history, ... process.

A restless moralistic world:
 Yet philosophy's only world.
 Peremptorily rejected by many.
 (James, 1898)⁵

But what possible advantage is it to the world to be held together by a mental synthesis, rather than by space or time or the truth of its constitution? A synthesis of worthless facts does not render them severally better, nor itself a good. A spirit whose essential function was to create relations would be merely a generative principle, as the spider is to its web; it would be no better than its work, unless perhaps it was spiritual enough to grow weary of that vain labor. (Santayana, 1922, p. 202.)

In the essay, I refer to several philosophical writings by James and Santayana. The uncommon boldness to the philosophical visions that interests me, rests on a willingness to make quite modest claims about the extent and the "truth" of their visions. While it may seem that modesty has little to do with boldness, it is the other way round with modesty in philosophy. Reading either philosopher, there is always the sense that a sharp contrast is lined between individual and general perceptions. Individual perspective we usually expect to be blatantly idiosyncratic. What else can it be? Sometimes if our inclination is to be tolerant we will find a certain charm or attraction in what is idiosyncratic, but more often there is a strong competing belief that there is somehow to be gained an enveloping perspective of life and of the absence of life. Nature surely must be laughing at us for such a feeling. The world is too much and too many for us.

The element of indetermination which James felt so strongly in this flood of existence was precisely the pulse of fresh unpredictable sensation, summoning attention hither and thither to unexpected facts. Apprehension in him being

⁴ Santayana, 1911/1926, pp. 213-215.

⁵ 1898/1988b. See page 267 of James, 1988b; *paraphrased* 1909/1977.

impressionistic – that was the age of impressionism in painting too – and marvelously free from intellectual assumptions or presumptions, he felt intensely the fact of contingency, or the contingency of fact. This seemed to me not merely a peculiarity of temperament in him, but a profound insight into existence in its inmost irrational essence. Existence, I learned to see, is intrinsically dispersed, seated in its distributed moments, and arbitrary not only as a whole, but in the character and place of each of its parts. Change the bits, and you change the mosaic: nor can we count nor limit the elements, as in a little closed kaleidoscope, which may be shaken together into the next picture. Many of them, such as pleasure and pain, or the total picture itself, cannot possibly have pre-existed. (Santayana, 1930/1936, p. 15.)

It has long struck me that one of the more important of recent contributions to philosophical theory has been little noticed. Santayana and James have suggested that systems of philosophy can be fashioned solely from the particular perspectives, or vantage points of time and location, that are held by philosophers. Imagine that some artists can walk round a model looking after a “most” promising easel placement. Not that there needs to be a most promising setting in any absolute sense, but we are prone to search for one. There must come a time when every artist does begin working. No matter the end site reached on the circle’s circumference, perception from the site will be strictly confined. Thus, analogously, the system that is fashioned by a philosopher will of necessity be built upon a singular makeup, memories and imaginings, a press of immediate experiences, that have to confine perspective.

Thoughts and feelings do not simply stream metaphorically, they are not separable as so many pebbles on the shore; they mark us in a physical manner that alters marks left previously, our memories, and these in turn alter thoughts and feelings that follow. Not only do conscious events leave their traces, but they have the peculiar quality of seeming to flow, one into another, rather than passing us by in file with their beginning and end lines clearly defined. To an extent words measure our thoughts. Word meanings also reflect thought’s streaming. Each word we use has a meaning only as it is understood to have been called forth by prior words and will be followed by others. It is as though we must speak in unending sentences to be precise in meaning. Again, nature is always playing us tricks. In a single field with its lone stack, Monet could find as many haystacks as he could ever paint. Indeed, there must always have been too many stacks for him to paint. Life, experience, philosophy, is that way. Life could be said to have a beginning, middle and an end to it. Experience could be considered complete, when we are in the midst of it. Yet, the fullness of a life, the completeness of an experience, can never be caught or expressed. Whether an inner or outer landscape, or the mix of the two, is meant to be written into any philosophy, ideas therein will be but subjective abstractions of a world of feeling and a world of clays and sands. Such worlds are surprise ridden. They can never be adequately recorded; they are endured in the course of a lifetime, or experienced. Philosophy is limited as the reach of men and women is limited. It is subjective, as the stances taken up in circling a model allow for partial views that are each considered subjective and together incomplete. To the splashing colors of a moment, a philosophic portrayal is

static, pale, and abstract.

Philosophy lives in words, but truth and fact well up into our lives in ways that exceed verbal formulation. There is in the living act of perception always something that glimmers and twinkles and will not be caught, and for which reflection comes too late. No one knows this as well as the philosopher. He must fire his volley of new vocables out of his conceptual shotgun, for his profession condemns him to this industry, but he secretly knows the hollowness and irrelevancy. His formulas are like stereoscopic or kinoscopic photographs seen outside the instrument; they lack the depth, the motion, the vitality. (James, 1902)⁶

The naturalist will begin by marvelling at the forms and habits of the lower animals, while continuing to attribute his own to their obvious propriety; later the heavens and the earth, and all physical laws, will strike him as paradoxically arranged and unintelligible; and ultimately the very elements of existence – time, change, matter, habit, life cooped in bodies – will reveal themselves to him in their extreme oddity, so that, unless he has unusual humility and respect for fact, he will probably declare all these actual things to be impossible and therefore unreal. The most profound philosophers accordingly deny that any of those things exist which we find existing, and maintain that the only reality is changeless, infinite, and indistinguishable into parts; and I call them the most profound philosophers in spite of this obvious folly of theirs, because they are led into it by the force of intense reflection, which discloses to them that what exists is unintelligible and has no reason for existing; and since their moral and religious prejudices do not allow them to say that to be irrational and unintelligible is the character proper to existence, they are driven to the alternative of saying that existence is illusion and that the only reality is something beneath or above existence. (Santayana 1922, pp. 142-143.)

I would not have a reader think the last comments about philosophy leave a view of it that seems to me, or seemed to James or Santayana, discouraging. It is quite the other way round. If a philosophy ought not to be taken for experience itself, rather for a partial reflection and selective interpretation of experience, then poetry and sculpture, and song and dance and the like, have much the same expressive limit and impressive potential as a philosophy. Some will choose to live without either poetry or song, most understand that they are necessary for the thorough enjoyment of life. Art and philosophy are alike in that both are partly suggestive of inner and outer landscape, neither is essential to life, but within the bounds set by birth and death they can add a benign sense of purpose to our lives. That “purpose” lying in the possibility of representation. We have the ability to produce mental images of all sorts of objects or forms, without becoming them or even imagining that we can become them. It may be that our odd species, quickened by nature without the advantage of especially fine sight and hearing as birds have, without the strength and the speed of large cats, the sheltering bulk and furs of bears, the fertility of mice, survived primarily because of its ability to play on mental

⁶ 1902/1985, p. 360; *paraphrased* 1909b/1977, pp. 105-106.

images.⁷ Shapes or objects can be mentally represented, ideas are formed anticipating the different ways in which the sensible stuff of the world may be ordered to our liking. What, after all, are the most accurate of our scientific formulas but artful symbolic representations of the most narrowly repetitive occurrences? By means of the manipulation of symbols we have long sought to gain, and no doubt will ever expect to gain, varying degrees of security and an enduring contentment.

If all data are symbols and all experience comes in poetic terms, it follows that the human mind, both in its existence and in its quality, is a free development out of nature, a language or music the terms of which are arbitrary, like the rules and counters of a game. It follows also that the mind has no capacity and no obligation to copy the world of matter nor to survey it impartially.

At the same time, it follows that the mind affords a true expression of the world, rendered in vital perspectives and in human terms, since this mind arises and changes symptomatically at certain foci of animal life; foci which are a part of nature in dynamic correspondence with other parts, diffused widely about them; so that, for instance, alternative systems of religion or science, if not taken literally, may equally well express the actual operation of things measured by different organs or from different centres. (Santayana, 1923/1955, p. 98.)

That which is necessary for our survival and can afford us contentment, may not actually assure either. That we can form mental images does not mean the images we form will not play out in ways that become highly destructive. It is just that the benign possibilities of imagination, of representation, are so extensive that it should not be surprising when we are taken with the several arts or that we may be equally fascinated by philosophy. Stripped free of all pretension, philosophy appears to be a concern with and appreciation of men and women thinking along lines that bring order to what has been vague and chaotic.⁸ In this sense it embraces the study of the arts and sciences, of religion and ethics. So it appears a philosopher ought to feel as much at work on a walk through a crowded market place, listening to the cross currents of talk and chasing after the interests of market-goers, as pouring over yellowed library manuscript. Nature may play us tricks with its unending changes. Philosophers can appreciate the tricks, since they are ever representing the changes, mentally undoing and redoing them, sorting out those that are most representative of inner nature from ones more remote, and tracing relations between what proves to be fancy and fancy's intimate natural well-springs. Philosophy being born and schooled of wonder, there is wonder enough in many of us.

To every natural form, rock, fruit or flower,

⁷ See Santayana 1911/1926, pp. 205-207 & 212-215 on imagination, and learning to "be content to live in the mind." See Perry, 1935a, pp. 4-5 for a letter by James in 1882, in which he recalls his father as "finding more and more of the truths he finally settled down in."

⁸ Santayana, 1905/1953, pp. 3-8; and James, 1911/1979, pp. 10-25.

Even the loose stones that cover the highway,
 I gave a moral life: I saw them feel,
 Or linked them to some feeling: the great mass
 Lay embedded in a quickening soul, and all
 That I beheld respired with inward meaning.
 (Wordsworth, 1805/1850)⁹

I have put my hand into the hand of nature, and a thrill of sympathy has passed from her into my very heart, so that I can instinctively see all things, and see myself, from her point of view: a sympathy which emboldens me often to say to her, "Mother, tell me a story."

Not the fair Sheherazad herself knew half the marvelous tales that nature spins in the brains of her children. But I must not let go her hand in my wonder, or I might be bewitched and lost in the maze of her inventions. (Santayana, 1922, p. 252.)

If a philosophy is not sham then it is the reflection, the estimate, of a philosopher's experience. To the degree that experience is owned by each of us in a unique way, the recollected and coherent representation of experience seems simply a solitary comment about nature. To the degree that experience is at all shared the comment becomes rather more persuasive or forceful, as though nature might become self-concerned, and reflect on itself, then react to what it has discovered.¹⁰ In its expression of individual experience, a philosophy may be creative. Expressions that draw sympathy are creative of relationship or are the start of community. Because a philosophic system must portray human cares, any system is bound to extend feelings and thoughts of men and women to nature's other creations. Trees and frogs do not write philosophy, and to the extent that they are included in our philosophies they must be portrayed in anthropomorphic terms. But, it is not given to us to authoritatively voice wishes of other animal or vegetative life forms. We have difficulty coming near to seeing from the odd stances that were chosen or stumbled on by our neighbors, though at least in a need for understanding, of a fear of loneliness, we may try to trade perspectives and reconcile philosophies with them. With alien life forms it is quite impossible to trade perspectives. Tolerance may be the issue here, as it is at issue for neighbors, as in communities however large. So, we have again come to the problem of the possible scope of a philosophy, the problem that James and Santayana tried to solve by working on philosophic systems modest in scope. A solution of historic importance.¹¹

The facts and worths of life need many cognizers to take them in. There is no point of view absolutely public and universal. Private and uncommunicative perceptions always remain over, and the worst of it is that those who look for them from the outside never know *where*.

⁹ pages 60-61; quoted by James, 1899/1983b, p. 139.

¹⁰ James, 1908/1977, pp. 143-145; and Santayana, 1922, pages 122-124 and 249.

¹¹ James, 1909/1977, pp. 7-23; and Santayana, 1922, pp. 207- 216: on the tendency of philosophers to claim their systems applicable universally.

The practical consequence of such a philosophy is the well-known democratic respect for the sacredness of individuality – is, at any rate, the outward tolerance of whatever is not itself intolerant. These phrases are so familiar that they sound now rather dead in our ears. Once they had a passionate inner meaning. (James, 1899)¹²

Santayana and James were both philosophical realists or naturalists. That is to say, they claimed that nature owned a separate existence from their existence yet was knowable. Stars will not flicker on and off as people think and cease thinking of them, as children might pretend in covering and uncovering their eyes, but persistence does not necessarily make it a simple matter to distinguish private fancies from independent fixity or flow. Walk about and the winds are everywhere surrounding. Why it is difficult then, even for artists, to mark vantage points objectively? Frequently we have marked off places in nature as though so many theater-goers watching a play unfold, a play happily performed just for us. Though we may not be producers, the actors must be ever wary of our criticism. Awareness of nature is no more than part collection of sensations or impressions, and part extension of intuition and memories to the thin slice of it that has caught the attention. There is a dreamful quality about sensations. For this reason it is easy to understand that we may describe the various forms and forces of nature as reflections of our ideas rather than frames of reference useful in searching how far dreams can extend. Not content with philosophy's inherent anthropomorphism, we must claim ourselves the beloved of creation. We have long fashioned our philosophies as though the skies might brighten at the bid, and the seas become calm. The trick is only a matter of the proper bidding. It is as though the stars had need to be "anthropocentric." Describing winds, waves, tigers, and daisies, using terms that are a measure of human cares cannot be avoided. Wishing for the care of skies and seas and such is surely understandable and perhaps a proper way to appreciate a personal frailness. Arguing that we alone *have to be* the adored focus of creation's gaze, is only an absurd conceit. Were human kind in its entirety referred to, not as is usually the case a preferred and exclusive group, the conceit would be as immense.

Well, we are all such helpless failures in the last resort. The sanest and best of us are of one clay with lunatics and prison inmates, and death finally runs the robustest of us down. And whenever we feel this, such a sense of the vanity and provisionality of our voluntary career comes over us that all our morality appears but as a plaster hiding a sore it can never cure, and all our well-doing as the hollowest substitute for that well-being that our lives ought to be grounded in, but, alas! are not. (James, 1884)¹³

Death is the background of life much as empty space is that of the stars; it is a deeper thing always lying behind, like the black sky behind the blue. In the realm of existence death is indeed nothing; only a word for something negative and merely notional – the fact that each life has limits in time and is absent beyond them. But in the realm of truth, as things are eternally, life is a little luminous

¹² 1899/1983b, p. 4; *paraphrased* 1910/1978, pp. 189-190.

¹³ 1884/1982, p. 62; *slightly edited* 1902/1985, pp. 45-46.

meteor in an infinite abyss of nothingness, a rocket fired on a dark night; and to see life, and to value it from the point of view of death is to see and to value it truly. The foot of the cross – I dare not say the cross itself – is a good station from which to survey existence. In the greatest griefs there is a tragic calm; the fury of the will is exhausted, and our thoughts rise to another level; as the shrill delights and the black sorrows of childhood are impossible in old age. (Santayana, 1922, p. 98.)

There are as many ways to look up at the stars at night as there are those who chance to look. For much of recorded history, the stars have been held to shine for us. That we might want it to be so, gives away our frailties. It gives away our sense that alone we can never be complete. We are profoundly social animals. Out of the need that we have to build relationships we would see ourselves the focus of all nature. The stars, the winds or the waters, we ask to keep a watch over and care for us, to grow troubled when we grow troubled and joyful should we become content. Few feelings appear to be more fearsome, than the idea that we are to be left alone, uncared for, unneeded. In the midst of excited crowds we may feel alone and dispirited. How discomfoting to walk the night, and think the stars have no wish to keep us for the object of their watch. Though an expanse of sky is pleasing when we take it for a protective wrapping meant especially for us, the same expanse can be terrifying if it should occur to us that we are *only* under it. Under it are found all sorts of nature's creations, and none of them may be meant or preferred. Perhaps, we are as so many art students circled about a model and more or less well situated only in respect to our several desires to take up some one perspective or another. After all, we do have our notions of better or worse perspectives but there are a great many of us and our notions fall out in ways that differ. There is no reason to believe that nature favors any of its creations. About a meadow it may plant as many daisies as it can, but on the near side the ground is somewhat sandy and here the daisies do not take, while the light is less than needed where the meadow runs against a file of young birch trees. Insects and birds and winds scatter pollen of some of the daisies, but not of all. Countless skies have been created already, countless others will be, but none of them may have more of a relation to the rest than gravity's tug.

We are practical beings, each of us with limited functions and duties to perform. Each is bound to feel intensely the importance of his own duties and the significance of the situations that call these forth. But this feeling is in each of us a vital secret, for sympathy with which we vainly look to others – the others are too much absorbed in their own vital secrets to take an interest in ours. Hence the stupidity and injustice of our opinions, so far as they deal with the significance of alien lives. Hence the falsity of our judgments, so far as they presume to decide in an absolute way on the value of other persons' conditions or ideals. (James, 1898)¹⁴

In the heights and the depths, we are all solitary, and we are deceived if we think otherwise, even when people say they agree with us, or form a sect under our name. As our radical bodily functions are incorrigibly selfish and persistent, so our ultimate ideals, if they are sincere, must for ever deviate from those of others and find their zenith in a different star. The moral world is round like the heavens, and

¹⁴ 1898/1982, p. 99; *slightly edited* 1899/1983b, p. 132.

the directions which life can take are infinitely divergent and unreturning. (Santayana 1922, p. 48.)

Creatures who are given over to emotion, though we may not choose to admit it, we tend to be more partial to "our" skies than to any of the rest, and worry about our own conceived interests before looking after the needs and joys of others. Emotions do blind. But, beyond the blind response to emotions there is memory and with memory there comes the possibility of conscience. After we are well satisfied, we ought to look round in our fields as if we were but chance-strewn flowers and wonder at how many we are, how extensive the limits of the field, and how much else there is beyond. Are we so exceptional that all of nature has to be centered on our wishes or excitements? To the extent that we feel a certain specialness, yet know that each of us must feel the same way and are not brazen enough to assert that the whole of nature has to know and nurture our peculiar specialness, then it is likely a greater respect will be born in us both for each other and for nature with its strict impartiality. If nature does not insure that its creations do not interfere with each other, settling them into fixed patterns of benign relations, then we must be about the forming of such relations. It is in this sense that we are "moral" beings, and view life as shot through with responsibility. Yet, in accepting such a responsibility we will have given over the delusively comfortable belief, if not the hope, that nature must be for us. The belief lends itself to an intolerance, while the hope born of apprehension of our frailty can mark a faith profound as it is tolerant.

In the world of natural "things" the final word is death. In the world of thought it is death's reversal, death's defier, it is life. Only through supposing a world beyond natural things, an unseen world, can life be imagined to enjoy the final word. Then comes the function of religion. The soul, pining and palpitating in the overmastering prospect of universal natural death, gains relief through faith in an overlapping world of supernatural life – such faith in brief is what is meant by religion. (James, 1899)¹⁵

After renouncing the world, the soul may find the world more amiable, and may live in it with a smile and a mystic doubt and one foot in eternity. Vanity is innocent when recognized to be vain, and is no longer a disgrace to the spirit. The happiness of wisdom may at first seem autumnal, and the shadow of the cross the shadow of death; but it is healing shadow; and presently, in the hollow where the cross was set, the scent of violets surprises us, and the crocuses peep out amongst them. (Santayana, 1922, pp. 98-99.)

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Santayana on James: 1891

In 1891, Santayana published his review¹ of *The Principles of Psychology*, and offered his very favourable reaction to the naturalistic underpinnings of James's thinking. In later years, Santayana was often to mention these early flirtations with materialism, in his opinion the most free and original thoughts of James's career. What delights Santayana in *The Principles of Psychology* is the insistence by James that psychological explanations must in the end rest on physiology.

The most striking characteristic of his book is, perhaps, the tendency everywhere to substitute a physiological for a mental explanation of the phenomena of mind. Psychical for him is only the result, the product, the total consciousness of the moment. The machinery by which this is produced and explained, the links by which it is connected with other conscious states, are entirely physical. He will have no mentality behind the mind. (IW 102)

If anything from his distinguished professor left a permanent mark on the young Santayana's mind, it was surely this raw sense, in James, for the material basis of experience, and for the *Rausch* of existence. James had a "profound insight into existence in its inmost irrational essence."²

At the same time, Santayana notes in passing the tension between the materialist tendencies of these ideas, and James's moral position:

But Professor James, to whose religious and metaphysical instincts materialism is otherwise so repulsive, has here outdone the materialists themselves. He has applied the principle of the total and immediate dependence of mind on matter to several fields in which we are still accustomed only to metaphysical or psychological hypotheses. (IW 103)

Years later, Santayana argues that this tension in James's philosophy did become resolved, but only when the metaphysical and religious instincts came to dominate, and to stifle the almost instinctive naturalistic bent of his thoughts, which had generated those brilliant earlier insights. Had he pursued this bent, says Santayana, this

would have led him to admit that nature was automatic and mind simply cognitive, conclusions from which every instinct in him recoiled. He preferred to believe that mind and matter had independent energies and could lend one another a hand, matter operating by motion and mind by intention.³

¹ Entitled "James on Psychology," this review appeared in *Atlantic Monthly* 67 (April 1891), pages 552-556. It is reprinted in *The Idler and His Works*, edited by Daniel Cory, New York: Braziller, 1957, pages 97-107. Citations from the review are taken from this book, abbreviated as IW.

² See the above paper on James and Santayana, on pages 27-28, for the complete citation.

³ See page 70 of *Character and Opinion in the United States*, New York: W. W. Norton, 1967.

Santayana also applauds James when he repudiates the theory of the association of ideas, and substitutes for it doctrines involving processes in the brain, saying that the ideas themselves can have no existence between appearances in the mind. Santayana perceives, in the mention of associations, combinations, and persistence of ideas, the erroneous assumption:

that ideas are beings; that they move in and out of the mind like so many personages in a comedy. But where have they been in the meantime? ... Ideas are not substances that exist by themselves and now and then allow us to look upon them. They are creatures of our thought, bubbles of our stream of life, mental figures in our mental kaleidoscope. When we lose sight of them, they no longer exist. (IW 103-104)

Now, do we not have in this passage the very objections which were later to be brought against Santayana's doctrine of essences? When someone speaks of ideas as though they are "beings," we are led to suspect a hidden psychologism, an assumption that these ideas drive events. More than one critic has voiced these suspicions, and construed this doctrine as a reversion to metaphysics and a retreat from naturalism. In light of the last citation, these critics, members of what Santayana calls the "empirical, nominalistic, positivistic camp,"⁴ are accusing him (as he accuses James) of abandoning a youthful naturalism in deference to idealist tendencies. There is nothing which Santayana denounces more frequently, however, than the idealism which grants existence and power to mere ideas. Moreover, he is always alert to the danger of backsliding when he deals with essences; his way of avoiding the danger is to assign being, but not existence, to essences. Only if they were assumed to exist, would there be any possibility of his neutral essences becoming powers.

The trouble is that, in the eyes of empiricist critics, any theory introducing two levels of existence has itself been discredited; they see in such a device a mere verbal attempt to avoid the trap. Consequently, they are not inclined to study the carefully crafted ontological context within which one may coherently make the separation of spatio-temporal existence from other forms of being.

For his part, Santayana tries to explain the empiricist hostility to any ontological development which goes beyond a simple presence or absence of existence. He traces this tendency back to the philosophy of experience of classical empiricism; the reluctance to assign a special category to material existence in space-time is a sign that this philosophy still functions on the level of literary psychology.

It seems clear that, if this issue is to be joined, there is required a readiness to acknowledge that distinct ontological presuppositions are at play, and that refutations of one within the framework of another is unproductive.

Those who seek further apparent traces of idealism in this review need go no further than the first paragraph:

⁴ See page 533 of *The Philosophy of George Santayana*, edited by Paul Arthur Schilpp, New York: Tudor Publishing Company, 1940.

Something of this ... seems to belong also to the spirit of an age. Whatever this spirit may be, it tends to pervade everything, and no department of life escapes the influence and contagion of the interest of the hour. (IW 97)

The spirit of the age – this has the ring of a Hegelian Idea propelling humanity towards its own fuller realization. Santayana conceded that *The Life of Reason* was written in a style which could suggest affinities with Hegelian absolutism. Was its sub-title not *The Stages of Human Progress*? He insisted, nonetheless, that he never wavered from naturalism. Attention to this earlier review bears this out. In the review he was, first of all, fully aware of the problem:

For our minds are parts and products of nature as much as our bodies, and the thoughts and feelings that arise in us are never separated from those physical phenomena which sometimes are called their causes, and sometimes their manifestations. (IW 98)

He moreover clearly opts for the side of physical *cause*, and rejects any construal of physical events as *manifestations* of mental events:

The repetition of a brain process will of course make the idea recur which was first connected with it; (IW 104)

Ideas appear and recur, because a brain process *makes* them do so. Finally, passages which might suggest the different reading of mental causation contain words like “influence,” “contagion,” and “interest.” Readers who are familiar with Santayana’s terminology will recognize here three of the many expressions he uses throughout his career, specifically to discuss intelligent, goal-oriented behaviour without reference to spirit.

The spirit of the age, or indeed spirit in any of its manifestations, is not denied or eliminated or reduced by Santayana. But intelligent naturalists will recognize that spirit arises as a manifestation of substance. Once this is accepted, philosophers are free to concentrate on spirit, if this is their chief interest.

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The Santayana Edition

This has been a quietly productive year for the edition. We are presently working on ten books: *The Last Puritan*, four books of *Letters*, and the five books of *The Life of Reason*. *The Last Puritan* is scheduled for publication in fall 1992. The editorial work is largely completed for the novel, and an inspector from the Committee on Scholarly Editions of the Modern Language Association inspected the work in August 1991. The results of this inspection will be reported to us this fall, and we do not anticipate any difficulties proceeding with the publication. John Friedman and I are still working on a possible film production. At present, we are focusing on the difficult task of locating production funding.

We now have over 2400 Santayana letters; only about 400 letters have been published previously. The *Letters* volume, edited by William G. Holzberger, should prove to be one of the more valuable editions for Santayana scholarship.

We have received funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities for 1991-93. Obviously, the edition would not be possible without this federal support. Once again we will have to raise matching funds amounting to ten thousand dollars.

Perhaps the most engaging news is the international Santayana conference scheduled for May 27-30, 1992 in Avila, Spain. By August 1991 over twenty American scholars indicated they would present papers at the conference, and there was a similar number from Europe and the United Kingdom. This should be the largest single gathering of international Santayana scholars ever assembled in one place. And the place is truly marvelous! Avila, even apart from Santayana's boyhood there, is a most intriguing and inviting medieval walled city. Please plan to come. Pedro García-Martín is co-chairing the conference with me.

HERMAN J. SAATKAMP, JR.
General Editor

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL CHECKLIST EIGHTH 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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