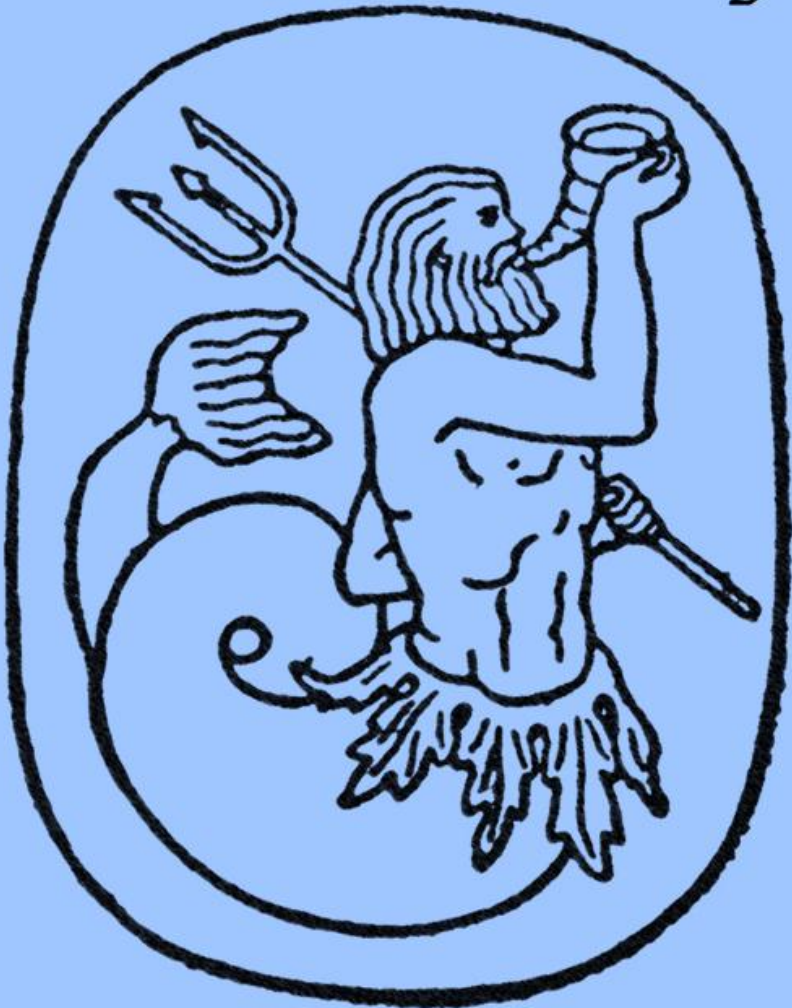


Overheard in Seville

*Bulletin of the  
Santayana  
Society*

No. 35  
Fall 2017



# Bulletin of the George Santayana Society

No. 35 FALL 2017

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*The George Santayana Society*

2018

ANNUAL MEETING

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

Speakers

***Richard K Atkins***

Boston College

“Santayana on Propositions

***Veronica Mueller***

Fordham University

Levels of Animal Life: George Santayana & a Purely  
Naturalistic

Model of Supervenience

Commentator

***Glenn Tiller***

Texas A&M University—Corpus Christie

Chair

***Richard M Rubin***

George Santayana Society

9:00 AM–11:00 AM, Friday, January 5<sup>th</sup>, 2018

*The George Santayana Society*

2018

OTHER MEETINGS AND DATES

**Internet Seminar:**

**The Nature of Spirituality Santayana and Beyond**

Moderator: Chris Skowroński

Participants include:

Michael Brodrick, John Lachs,

Charles Padrón, Glenn Tiller,

February 16, 2018

9:00 PM Berlin, 3:00 PM New York

**Submission deadline for 2018 *Overheard in Seville*:**

March 1, 2018

**Society for the Advancement of American Philosophy  
Indianapolis, Indiana**

Local Host: Martin Coleman, Director, Santayana Edition

Conference theme: Ethos and Creativity

March 8-10, 2018

Santayana Society session date, time agenda forthcoming

Speakers include: Herman J Saatkamp, Jr

**Angus Kerr-Lawson Prize submission deadline:**

May 21, 2018

**24<sup>th</sup> World Congress of Philosophy  
Beijing, China**

Conference theme: Learning to be human

August 13-20, 2018

George Santayana Society speakers in conjunction with the  
Society for the Advancement of American Philosophy:

Daniel Pinkas

Richard M Rubin

# Editor's Notes

This thirty-fifth annual issue of *Overheard in Seville* carries on the tradition established by previous editors Herman Saatkamp, Angus Kerr-Lawson, Glenn Tiller, and Matthew Flamm while introducing two new features: a biographical column describing Santayana's life seventy-five and one hundred years ago; and transcripts of recent conversations with Santayana scholars.

This second feature is inaugurated with a transcript of a conversation with John Lachs about *Scepticism and Animal Faith*, a video recording of which was shown at the annual meeting at the Eastern APA in Baltimore in 2017, and of a roundtable discussion with Jessica Wahman on her book *Narrative Naturalism*, which took place in Kansas City at the Central APA in 2017.

Herman Saatkamp's article "Is Animal Faith the End of Philosophy?" is a reply to Lachs's video presentation at the meeting in Baltimore. "Santayana and his Political Circumstances," an excerpt from Daniel Moreno's book *Santayana the Philosopher: Philosophy as a Form of Life*, gives context for this issue's new biographical column.

David Dilworth's article shows how Wallace Stevens retained Santayana's metaphysical beliefs even as the poet moved away from Santayana in sentiment, while Katarzyna Krempleska compares Santayana's interpretation of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* with that of Harold Bloom. A key difference she finds between Bloom and Santayana is whether, in the course of literary history, the character of Hamlet constitutes a breakthrough or a breakdown. Phillip L Beard takes up Santayana's criticism of idealism in "The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy" as a means to critically assess the thought of Jacques Derrida.

Diana Heney, the winner of the Angus Kerr-Lawson prize, focuses on Santayana as a meta-ethicist in an article originally presented at our annual meeting in Baltimore last January. She argues that Kerr-Lawson's approval of Santayana's skewering of Nietzsche misses some important similarities in the way Santayana and Nietzsche establish the grounds for ethical theory.

The issue also includes the regular Bibliographic Checklist update compiled by Daniel Moreno, and a brief note on the vital importance of critical editions from Martin Coleman, Director and Editor and of the Santayana Edition, which argues for the citing of critical editions as a basic research practice of responsible scholarship.

RICHARD M RUBIN

*Editor and President, George Santayana Society*

# Santayana 75 and 100 Years Ago

## Santayana in 1917

In May 1917, geographically pinned down in England because of World War I, but possessing a generous leeway of movement to travel freely within its borders, Santayana had already spent some thirty-four months immobile, unable to leave the island. Though he was, strictly speaking, not reduced to living a life of isolation in any way, he filled his days with his established personal régime: thinking, reading, writing. And though the European continent was engulfed in conflict, Santayana was quite engrossed in his *philosophical* engagements: collaborating with Logan Pearsall Smith on *Little Essays*, writing his own “Three Proofs of Realism” for an upcoming volume edited by Durant Drake in 1920 (*Critical Realism: A Co-operative Study of the Problem of Knowledge*), and always involved in (either writing or conceiving) his lyrical reflections that would eventually be collected in *Soliloquies in England and Other Soliloquies*. His letters attest to a healthy exchange of ideas with friends and other intellectuals. Oxford (22 Beaumont Street) was his refuge and home. He had retreated there in April after having spent January, February, and March in Cornwall, avoiding winter’s chill. Perhaps the war was taking a psychological toll, perhaps not. What we do know is that Santayana emerged from the war full of plans, full of energy, full of a *future*. And when peace broke out on 11 November 1918, a little less than a year later, he began making plans for getting to Paris, which he did in late June, 1919. But at the end of 1917, he wrote to the American poet Arthur Davison Ficke: “Oxford suits me well....What I want, and find, is a congenial setting for solitude. And I am working pretty hard” (LGS, 4 December 1917).

There was a certain self-reckoning for Santayana in the closing days of 1917, both in the sense of the thinker and scholar he had been up to that point (in his own mind), but especially with regards to what he had already written. And this inward reflection took place at a time when the war’s outcome and the prospective duration of the conflict were still up in the air. He writes on 4 December (the same day as the letter to Fiske) to Logan Pearsall Smith that “the ten volumes have arrived and I have set to work with such ardour that I have already finished the first volume of the L. of R. and half of the S. of B” (LGS, 4 December 1917). The ten volumes had to have been all of his previously published *prose* works: *The Sense of Beauty*, *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion*, the five volumes of *The Life of Reason*, *Three Philosophical Poets*, *Winds of Doctrine*, and *Egotism in German Philosophy*.

Casting today a glance back into the haze of historical time, we can descry a mental image of Santayana, living deliberately and uneventfully in England in 1917: settled in 22 Beaumont Street in Oxford, in “these rooms,” impotent to alter anything much about his own circumstances (dependent as they were on a conflict removed and complex), going carefully through—sifting through—his own recorded history, rereading and selecting passages for an upcoming edited volume

of his writings. Working diligently—yes, to be sure—but he was cautious, in conflict, and unsure about *his* (and the larger world's) eventual next phase and turn.

CHARLES PADRÓN

## Santayana in 1942—War Again

**O**f all Santayana's mature years, 1942 is perhaps the one year we know least about. It was his first full year living in the nursing home run by the Little Company of Mary (also known as the Blue Sisters or Blue Nuns). Having settled in Rome as his winter residence in the late nineteen twenties, Santayana had lived primarily in hotels. Following the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, it became increasingly difficult for his nephew George Sturgis in Boston to send sufficient money from Santayana's account to pay his living expenses. This problem became acute in 1941. Leaving for Spain or Switzerland, neutral countries where he thought he might go, turned out to be too difficult. It was becoming increasingly likely that the United States would join the Allied forces in opposition to Italy, making communication between enemy countries next to impossible. So, at his doctor's suggestion, Santayana moved into the Blue Nun's clinic in October 1941. The cost of his room and board could be covered by his nephew making donations to a branch of the nursing order in Chicago.

From the moment the United States entered the war in December 1941, there is no extant correspondence from Santayana to the United States until Rome was liberated from the Germans in June 1944. Nevertheless, we have a few letters to Santayana's relatives in Spain. At the start of 1941, he wrote to one of them that he still hoped to go to Switzerland and "as far as health is concerned I am well, better than last year, and I have no lack of things to do, or of books" (LGS, to Adelaida Hernández de Sastre, 9 January 1942). The report of his health refers to the first few months of 1941, when Santayana was suffering from heart problems, bronchitis, and digestive difficulties. He had mostly recovered and with the limitations of wartime rations had beneficially lost weight. He continued his customary routine of writing in the morning and walking the afternoon. Just before his correspondence to George Sturgis was cut off, he described his life in and around the nursing home. He wrote that the park where he took his walks was "filled with people and children sitting, knitting or reading the newspapers and playing in the sun" and "I am writing at this moment by a wide open french window into which the sunshine comes, with a wide horizon stretching in front of me, perfectly clear and rural" (LGS, 4 December 1941).

In spite of the communication difficulties, efforts to publish Santayana's books continued. In 1941, he had completed both a preface to the proposed one-volume edition of the *Realms of Being* and the first volume of his autobiography. His publisher, Scribner's, received the preface, but because of the success of the recently published last volume, *The Realm of Spirit*, decided to hold off

publishing the one-volume edition until 1942. So it came out without Santayana being able to know about it. Santayana had attempted to mail the manuscript of *Persons and Places* (the autobiography) in November 1941 but the post office refused it. He hoped that there might be some effort to transmit it through a diplomatic pouch. An attempt to do that was underway just before Pearl Harbor, but once the United States was involved in the war that opportunity through the US State Department was foreclosed. Unknown to Santayana, John Hall Wheelock, the director of Charles Scribner's Sons, was determined to get the manuscript and initiated a series of complex diplomatic negotiations. The result was that in July of 1942, Santayana was awakened from a nap by a messenger from the Papal Secretary of State with a letter asking him to turn over the manuscript for transmission. The typed copy on thin paper arrived at Scribner's in New York in October 1942.

Meanwhile, Santayana continued to write. He worked on the second volume of his autobiography. At the time he imagined it would be the final posthumous one, but *The Middle Span*, the second of three volumes, was published in 1945, before the end of the war. He also embarked on a project he had never planned. The books he said he had no lack of were those in the library of the nursing home. His own collection had been boxed up when the Bristol Hotel had been closed for repairs in the summer of 1939. Santayana described these books of the Sisters in a letter to Horace Kallen:

many novels, including much of Dickens again (as during the other war) and all Jane Austen, and a lot by Benson about the English Reformation: but besides I reread the whole Bible, most of the Summa of Thomas Aquinas, and most of Newman. This set me going . . . (LGS, 4 October 1944)

The endeavor these books set him going on was *The Idea of Christ in the Gospels*, which, along with volume two of his autobiography, was ready to be typed for submission by the time the Allies occupied Rome in June 1944.

By the end of the summer, George Sturgis's arrangement to pay a branch of the nursing home in Chicago fell through, the result of an IRS audit. The Chicago branch may have communicated to the Rome branch via the Vatican. Santayana must have learned about his inability to pay for his lodging by word of mouth, for he assured the nuns that he would cover his living expenses as soon as the war was over.<sup>1</sup>

The isolation and care provided by the nuns had given Santayana a productive and healthy year. At the beginning of the following year, he wrote in a letter to his nephew Pepe Sastre: "Jamás he estado mas tranquilo ni mas contento"<sup>2</sup> (LGS, 9 January 1943).

RICHARD M RUBIN

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<sup>1</sup> Verbal report of one of the nuns to Herman Saatkamp.

<sup>2</sup> I have never been more at peace or more happy.



# Interview with John Lachs

*John Lachs was scheduled to speak along with Herman Saatkamp at the annual meeting of the George Santayana Society in Baltimore in January of this year. Because of the recent death of his wife and long-time collaborator Shirley, Dr Lachs was unable to attend. One topic they had planned to address was animal faith. Fortunately, Martin Coleman had recorded an interview with Professor Lachs several years earlier in which Dr Lachs discussed several of the works of Santayana, including Scepticism and Animal Faith. The video of the interview was shown just prior to Dr Saatkamp's remarks.<sup>1</sup> What follows is a transcript.*

**Martin Coleman:** What is significant about *Scepticism and Animal Faith*?

**John Lachs:** Well, *Scepticism and Animal Faith* is the first Santayana book I ever read. It was as a senior in high school (in *high school!* [laughs])—a senior in *college*—and the person who assigned it in a senior seminar was T. G. Henderson who wrote on Santayana and Whitehead. He never published much on Santayana except a little squib at the end of his (Santayana's) life. He [Henderson] visited Santayana—he had visited him and wrote a note. Anyway, I was struck by the book for one reason, and dismayed by the book for another. I was struck by the book because I thought it was the finest account of skepticism and the most wholehearted skepticism that I've ever seen. And, I maintain that today. I don't think there's a better skeptic than Santayana—in the first half of the book. I was dismayed about the book, also, because when Santayana was coming back to restore all those beliefs that he had knocked down I thought he was cheating. Something was wrong and I couldn't figure out what it was, but I got so involved in trying to figure out what it was that I got stuck on Santayana and kept reading the book and eventually wrote a Master's thesis and a Dissertation on it.

Well, it's only in the last few years that I managed to figure out—to my satisfaction—what's problematic about the book and what this may mean. And it's this: the real innovation is a new philosophical method. It's the method of establishing philosophical theses on the basis of animal faith. And this is novel. This is new. This is revolutionary. Santayana doesn't make as much of it as he could. But he was a modest man, and so, he didn't want to be a Kant saying, "Hey, I've invented the great philosophical method and everybody step aside." But he did invent this, and it is a wonderful, wonderful method. It's the method of believing only things that you can enact and looking to your actions to see what kind of beliefs they involve. All of this is just right. What's not right about the book is that Santayana wants to build up from the bedrock of essences all the way to truth and steer it, and he wants to build that up little by little just as he tore it down. But building up that way is not the way that the method of animal faith works. The method of animal faith gives you the most generic beliefs that we

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<sup>1</sup> The video can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8a74uMhAKCw>.

have implicated in our actions, and therefore it's got to begin with something like the realist manifesto, the realist assumption that we all make, namely, that there are things outside of us. Not with discourse as Santayana begins and then slowly moves in the direction of a greater and greater complexity of beliefs. So, once I figured this out I'm not upset by the book anymore. I know what's happened. He wanted to make the book symmetrical. Tear down build up. But the symmetry doesn't quite work in the way in which he wants it to work. That's okay, because he comes away with a marvelous invention and that is the invention of animal faith in determining philosophical beliefs and philosophical theses and he does, in the process, show how powerful skepticism can be.

**Martin Coleman:** Are there books by Santayana that you think are weaker than others?

**John Lachs:** No, only different from others.

**Martin Coleman:** Okay.

**John Lachs:** I think he's a marvelous writer. I mean you read a book like *Platonism and the Spiritual Life* and it is a marvelous statement of the difference between spirituality and politics, so you got to distinguish the moral life from a life of spirituality (if it's possible to live a life of spirituality). Marvelous book, very short, but right to the point. Even a book such as *Dominations and Powers*, which is literally pieced together out of materials over many decades, even that is full of light, full of insights, and sufficiently annoying to people to be very pleasing to me.

**Martin Coleman:** One book that I anticipate people dismissing, because I have heard them do it several times, is *Egotism and German Philosophy*. What can be said about *Egotism*?

**John Lachs:** Well, it was one of those books written during the First World War. Dewey wrote one. Everybody wrote one. Only the dead like James didn't write one. They were really angry with the Germans, and of course you fasten upon German Philosophy, nineteenth century philosophy, and, dadgummit, for good reason! Nineteenth century German Philosophy is chock full of all kinds of very bad ideas: ideas of jingoism, of fake development, and of historical—of history—developments that put a stress on positing [unintelligible] out of nothing and creation on the basis of the will alone. It is a sort of fictive world, and Santayana goes for that, goes after that I should say, Santayana goes after that and I think he shows it to be spurious, not sufficiently naturalistic. I would never read the book as an account of German Philosophy of the nineteenth century, but I certainly like reading the book because it really ruffles the feathers of the Germans, and softens them up with a few pokes.

**Martin Coleman:** Do you have comments on *The Last Puritan*?

**John Lachs:** I have, maybe of all Santayana's books, the greatest difficulty with that [*The Last Puritan*] and I know that many of my colleagues and friends really

appreciate it. I guess I don't like nineteenth century novels. There is a lot of description in there. There is a lot of description of ideas in there. I am a simple minded guy, and I like to know where a guy stands and it's hard to figure out sometimes in *The Last Puritan* as to where Santayana stands and that's okay in a novel. It doesn't matter where Dickens stands. But I always view the novel as a statement of philosophy, and it's probably my mistake, because I have got to view it as work of literary art, and not as a work of philosophical reflection. So, that's my main problem with it, and it's my problem not Santayana's. It's a marvelous book otherwise.

**Martin Coleman:** I think I enjoyed reading *Persons and Places* more than *The Last Puritan* and people compare these books sometimes. What did you think of *Persons and Places*?

**John Lachs:** Well, now that's just exciting. It [*Persons and Places*] is really very, very interesting because it gives you his reflections on a variety of people of historical interest. People that you know we read quite independently of Santayana, and you learn a lot about them. Now, you learn a lot about them, of course, through Santayana's eyes and therefore you learn as much about Santayana as about them. But, I just found that [*Persons and Places*] full of insight and full of fun.

*Transcribed by JENNIFER A. REA*

*Rockford University*

# Is Animal Faith the End of Philosophy?<sup>1</sup>

## I. Tribute to John Lachs

I began my graduate studies with John Lachs at Vanderbilt University in 1967. It was John's first year at Vanderbilt. As I moved forward with my own scholarship and career, John made the remarkable transition from being my Ph.D. advisor and mentor to being a dear and long-standing friend. That first semester I wrote a paper on Santayana's concept of animal faith, and John commented that if I wanted, the paper could become a dissertation, and it did. We all owe a great deal to John and Shirley Lachs and we look forward to his continued contributions to our understanding of Santayana.<sup>2</sup> He and I had looked forward to presenting separate papers on Santayana's *Scepticism and Animal Faith* from our similar and also different perspectives. And we look forward to John's future introduction to the critical edition of *Scepticism and Animal Faith* and perhaps a future paper in response to mine. My paper is half of what we had hoped to present, and I fear not the better half.

## II. Structure of Scepticism and Animal Faith

John mentions in his video interview with Martin Coleman (see p.8) that he was never pleased with the second part of *Scepticism and Animal Faith* and that he now realizes why. As you will see in this article, I agree with John but I also suggest there are ways of reading the second half that make it even more engaging and that the implications of Santayana's concept of animal faith are far deeper and broader for philosophy than Santayana's reconstruction in the second part of the volume.

Although the second part of *Scepticism and Animal Faith* may not be what one might have expected or even hoped for, I suggest that there is a delightful way to view the two parts of *Scepticism* rather than only suggesting it moves in the wrong or an unexpected direction. This approach involves understanding Santayana's sense of humor and his delight in upending philosophical inquiry. In other words, one should read the entire book with the sense of Santayana smiling over one's shoulder and his delight if you catch on.

The conclusion of the first part of *Scepticism and Animal Faith* is a purposeful dead end: the solipsism of the present moment. With a smile, Santayana takes the approach of finding a rational basis for knowledge and belief. Taking the objects of reasoning and consciousness, he shows that a thorough analysis does not lead

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<sup>1</sup> This address was originally presented on January 6, 2017 following a showing of the video of Martin Coleman's interview with John Lachs (see p. 8) at the annual meeting of the George Santayana Society.

<sup>2</sup> Although John Lachs did not attend the Santayana Society APA Session because of Shirley Lachs's recent death, we all understood his absence and expressed our gratitude to him and to Shirley for their dedication and devotion to Santayana scholarship.

to any basis for knowledge or belief. Rather it ends in the contemplation of a momentary essence without belief or knowledge. This is an enchanting *reductio ad absurdum* argument that challenges the rational basis for all knowledge and belief. It upends the very basis of philosophy and even scientific investigation if one assumes that thought, reasoning, and rational argument are the foundations of knowledge, belief and action. So where does one go from such a conclusion? Sadly, one goes nowhere if consciousness and reason are our guides. Rather, we are left in an epistemological solipsism, the end result of a thorough-going skepticism. Santayana is using reason to undermine rationality itself. Skeptical doubts taken to the extreme remove the foundation for reason; and, in so doing, undermine the basis of skepticism itself. That quiet humor of Santayana and, as we shall see, of others is no longer hiding behind the curtain.

Instead of doubt and reason being our guide, perhaps we can find the pathway to knowledge and action by recognizing our commonality with all animals who must act and make decisions. Santayana takes that turn and rebuilds our abilities to decide and act on the basis of animal faith.

Animal faith provides the basis for action, belief, and knowledge. It does not have a rational base; rather, it springs naturally from our psyche (our physiological structure) and environment. Consciousness, reason, belief, and action are all aftereffects of the undercurrents in our physiological being and environment. With the concept of animal faith, Santayana brings human beings back into the animal kingdom by making reason and consciousness aftereffects of our physical development, aftereffects that have evolved through our ancestral history as with all other animals. We, like all animals, act and make decisions without reason playing a deciding role. However, when we reason about the acts we have taken and the decisions we have made, reason is a reflection of those activities and of our biological interests. Santayana is reviving Hume's complex notion of natural belief, but he does so in Santayana's early 20<sup>th</sup> century setting. Hume wrote in 1739 that "reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them." (*Hume* 462)

And Santayana's view also has common streams with Wittgenstein's account in *On Certainty* where Wittgenstein responds to G. E. Moore's account of the proof of the external world. Moore's claim that he has two hands is not something taught or that can be proved. Rather, such knowledge is like the bed of a river that gives meaning and context to such claims but cannot itself be proved or doubted. But the river bed is the foundation of all the currents of consciousness, belief, reason, and knowledge.

Following the explication of the solipsism of the present moment that leads nowhere, one may expect Santayana to expound on the complexity of the physiological base of knowledge and reason, and to discuss the bedrock foundation of animal life that leads to actions. But instead, with a more subtle smile, he begins his introduction to his realms of being: Essence, Truth, Spirit, and Matter, acknowledging that Truth is a subset of the realm of Essence. He gladly and joyfully takes ancient terminology, rejected by and abhorrent to his

contemporaries, and uses it to renew the insights of the Greeks, and others, regarding our ability to act. In so doing, he establishes matter as the basis for Spirit (consciousness), noting clearly, and in opposition to his contemporaries, that consciousness is an aftereffect of material forces. This is a remarkable turn for his time, and he had little scientific evidence available that our material world and physical self are the river bed in which the currents of all consciousness and reason are guided.

### III. Santayana's Notion of Reason

Before any discussion of Santayana's philosophy moves forward, or of anyone's philosophy for that matter, one must consider what the role of animal faith is in human life. If consciousness and reason are after effects of our physiology interacting with our environment, then consciousness and reason may be considered a non-causal aspect of human life. Hence, the study of philosophy, if based on the role of reason as a determining factor in individual lives and in human history becomes ineffectual. Indeed, some writers adopting modern approaches by scientists maintain that philosophy is dead because reason is seen as not determinant in human action, and, if they knew the history of philosophy, they might well indicate that Santayana wrote the obituary. How can that be?

One of the central tenets of Santayana's philosophy is the unity of mind and body. As mentioned earlier, thought is an aftereffect of our psyche (our material self, or perhaps more clearly our central nervous system). Conscious thought is not a causal agent in human activities but a result of physical activities in our bodies and sometimes the result of the physical interaction of our bodies with entities in our physical environment. Some scholars have classified Santayana as an epiphenomenalist because of this view. Classifying Santayana as an epiphenomenalist is wrong if one is trying to explicate Santayana's exact position, and Santayana says so. He clearly explains that he is not an epiphenomenalist. Traditionally, epiphenomenalism is defined as one entity generating another entity but that the second entity is epiphenomenal. It could be stated as one phenomenon generating an epiphenomenon. Clearly, Santayana does not think of thought as being a separate entity from the psyche, and in this case he notes that it is not emitted from a phenomenon but from a substance, the material world. Thought would have to be a separate entity generated by our psyche to be an epiphenomenon, but for Santayana, thought is not a separate entity existing independent from our physical being. He made this clear in a 1913 letter to his former graduate student, Horace Kallen.

And this leads me to make a slight complaint against you for having said that I am an "epiphenomenalist"—I don't complain of your calling me a "pragmatist" because I know that it is mere piety on your part. But the title of epiphenomenalist is better deserved, and I have only this objection to it: that it is based (like the new realism) on idealistic prejudices and presuppositions. An epiphenomenon must have some other phenomenon under it: but what underlies the mind, according to my view, is not a

phenomenon but a substance—the body, or nature at large. To call this is [sic] a phenomenon is to presuppose another thing in itself, which is chimerical. Therefore I am no epiphenomenalist, but a naturalist pure and simple, recognizing a material world, not a phenomenon but a substance, and a mental life struck off from it in its operation, like a spark from the flint and steel, having no other substance than that material world, but having a distinct existence of its own (as it is emitted continually out of bodily life as music is emitted from an instrument) and having a very different kind of being, since it is immaterial and moral and cognitive. This mental life may be called a phenomenon if you like, either in the platonic sense of being an instance of an essence (in which sense every fact, even substance, is a phenomenon) or in the modern sense of being an observable effect of latent forces; but it cannot be called an epiphenomenon, unless you use the word phenomenon in the one sense for substance and in the other sense for consciousness. (LGS2 127)

Hence, thought is a result of physical activity and is united with that activity, and since it is last in the string of causal events it has no causal impact on the world. Reason is organized thinking, providing meaning and structure to our experience and is usually thought of as a guide to living well. But if reason is dependent on thought, and thought is an aftereffect of other physical occurrences that has no further causal impact, then how can reason be a guide to life or the object of philosophical study? In this case, reason would provide an after-the-fact account giving meaning and support for decisions already made. And reason would not play any guiding role in human action.

In fact, some eminent scientists have declared that philosophy is dead because empirical evidence is now supporting reason being a secondary aspect of human activity. Stephen Hawking, for example, makes such a declaration, citing neurologist Ben Libet of the University of California, San Francisco, who found that the brain's processes occur nearly half a second before a person consciously decides to begin an action. In other words, there are action-specific electrical activities in the brain that precede any awareness of a decision being made to act (Burton 2016). Consciousness, thought, reason are aftereffects of physical activities that precede them.

Of course, this is Santayana's view! That he advanced it far before neuroscience was a discipline is remarkable. But there is an important element missing in contemporary neurophysiological explanations of human activities and it is a singularly important element that Santayana highlighted. He added the view that conscious life is not only an aftereffect of other physical interactions but that it is also celebrational. Perhaps in the same way when we encounter a smell that brings back memories of home, or a painting that is beautiful, or an encounter with another human being that elicits a wonderful sense of warmth, love, or natural sympathy. Humans, like other animals, are action oriented as Santayana carefully explicates and expands in his concept of animal faith. Instead of being rational agents, we, like all animals, are decision makers and our decisions are revealed in our actions. We are decision makers and not rational agents. Our

physicality precedes and determines any conscious moment or streams of consciousness.

What then is the role of reason? Importantly, how could Santayana develop a life of reason when he so clearly noted our commonality with the animal world is based on faith and not reason, on actions and decision-making that are fundamentally physical? It is our psyche (our physicality) that generates consciousness and thought as non-causal aftereffects, so what role can non-causal aftereffects play in human life? These are not simple or easy questions in light of research currently underway. And the questions become more complex when we realize we are not animals living isolated lives, but we are born into families, communities, states, and nations. What roles do our communal physicality and aftereffects play in social settings? Alas, there may be no simple or easy answers.

Social movements and organizations may also be considered the product of complex physiological interactions in our families, communities, states, and nations. In large part, Jonathan Haidt makes such a claim in *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion*. His thesis is that “intuitions come first, strategic reasoning second.” Our moral intuitions arise instantaneously and they determine and structure our later reasoning. Sound familiar? His principal metaphor is a rider on an elephant.

The central metaphor of these four chapters is that *the mind is divided, like a rider on an elephant, and the rider's job is to serve the elephant*. The rider is our conscious reasoning—the stream of words and images of which we are fully aware. The elephant is the other 99 percent of mental processes—the ones that occur outside of awareness but that actually govern most of our behavior. . . I'll also use this metaphor to show you how you can better persuade people who seem unresponsive to reason. (Haidt 35)

Brains evaluate everything in terms of potential threat or benefit to the self, and then adjust behavior to get more of the good stuff and less of the bad. Animal brains make such appraisals thousands of times a day with no need for conscious reasoning, all in order to optimize the brain's answer to the fundamental question of animal life: Approach or avoid? (Haidt. 289)

If our moral psychology is rooted in our physiology, then the extent to which we have a commonality with others may depend on a common physiology generating our intuitions from our embedded moral psychology. Moral reasoning follows our physiology as the rider follows the elephant. Consciousness and reasoning are the results of complex physiological interactions within ourselves and between all other human bodies and our environment. So consciousness and reasoning are aftereffects of our psyche and are not primarily causal in our lives or in the lives of others. Reason and argument serve our physiology like a good lawyer serves her client, or like a good press agent serves her client. In making social and political choices, if Haidt is correct, we are not aware of 99% of the basis for those choices. Our reasoning is to justify that which we are not conscious of, to plead our case for moving left or right, for changing directions or



staying a steady course. Our conscious lawyer seeks the best justification for actions already taken or ones that we may be physically leaning towards.

The social implications of animal faith and the complexity leading to the aftereffects of consciousness and reason are significant, perhaps of major significance in understanding social behavior. Following Haidt's analogy, we are the rider on an elephant, and the elephant explains 99% of our activities while the rider's role is to justify our actions. If the elephant, regardless of his previous paths, begins to lean to the right, the rider justifies that action regardless of previous leanings.

Our last presidential election is perhaps a good example. In a country established by immigrants, a Statue of Liberty welcoming all, and a growing acceptance of people of different faiths, races, creeds, and sexual preferences, the electorate shifted to the right, and justified that shift as a need for a change. And we elected a person as president who runs counter to previous qualifications thought necessary for the position and whose personal characteristics are not emblematic of the usual standards we hold. Yet many, perhaps most, evangelical Christians supported a person whose personal life contradicts the values of their religion. And many evangelical Christians are quick to justify their actions, to use their reasoning to present arguments in their favor. The white working class males appear to be following the same path.

Explaining such different leanings is difficult if one has a rigid sense of truth or of character. Perhaps the complexity of human actions is a place to begin to find some explanation for our newly elected President, recognizing that reasoning plays a secondary role in human decisions.

Then comes a very serious question. What then could possibly be the life of reason if it is not the principal guide to living life well and to shaping and governing our communities? The easiest route would be to end this essay now rather than trying to parse it out as if reason mattered. Tempting! But perhaps it is best to see what physiological activities generate my fingers to finish this paper and to enjoy being conscious of it occurring. So, here it comes.

## **IV. Santayana's Life of Reason**

Perhaps George Santayana, Stephen Hawking, and Jonathan Haidt are correct. Consciousness and reasoning are aftereffects of prior physiological interactions, heritable traits and physical culture. That might seem to be the death of philosophy, but it is not. The rider on the elephant is unaware of all that is going on beneath her, but that may simply mean that consciousness and reasoning are embedded in the elephant Santayana calls our psyche. When we trumpet our reasoning and delight in our consciousness, we are simply expressing an outgrowth of these physical processes. Even so, our consciousness may provide some indication, even if only a surface index, to what is occurring in our psyche. Hence the enlarged task of philosophy is to try to understand where the index is pointing with the hope that scientific investigations will clarify the process and better explain the way we act and make decisions with our reasoning and

consciousness reflecting those physical processes. And philosophy's larger role is to articulate reasoning's index and to explicate that relationship with scientific investigations. Hence, philosophy remains on top of the elephant, the highest of the disciplines, and discerning the role of the rider is the task of philosophy. The gigantic challenge is to coordinate what we see reflected in consciousness and reasoning with scientific studies in physics, biology, genetics, psychology and more. It is a much greater, more delightful and difficult task than simply analyzing the logic and rationality of our thought processes.

Of course, Santayana did describe mental life as "having a very different kind of being, since it is immaterial and moral and cognitive." (LGS2 127) This may be considered an odd characterization. The analogy of consciousness being "like a spark from the flint and steel" seems to mean that consciousness is material like the spark. It seems that although Santayana was going against many of the current and largely accepted views of the mind during his time, still he maintained that mental life was immaterial. That is a difficult issue to be resolved in another paper. Perhaps one avenue of explanation could be found in emergent properties like the temperature of the body that is not located in a place but is not thought of as independent of one's physical being. But the central point here is that Santayana portrayed our conscious life (the life of the spirit) as being produced by the material forces of our psyche and the world around us in such a way that consciousness is an aftereffect and not a material cause of action.

It would be hopeless to think that Santayana tried to coordinate his life of reason with the underlying physiological processes being discovered in the sciences of his day. He did not. But he did carefully note and describe the aspects of his life that produced activities that made his life delightful and worthwhile, and he decided to live accordingly. Hence, his consciousness was an index to his actions and what a good life was for him, the life of reason as he described it. He was aware of the preconditions for a good life.

To lead a rational life there are prerequisites: reason can be cultivated only if one's psyche (physical self), environment, social, cultural, and political circumstances are conducive to a life of reason. Such a life is possible only if one is able to take actions that are conducive to a good life in one's particular circumstances, and there is enough stability in one's social, political, cultural, and physical environment to support those actions. These actions are the effects of one's physical interaction with the world around us and are reflected in one's consciousness.

One may take Santayana's personal life as an example of actions leading to a life of reason. Prizing the development of his conscious (spiritual) life and realizing that that development was dependent on his natural, physical self and environment, Santayana cultivated his life of reason, both in terms of his personal life and in the five books of *The Life of Reason*. As with every human being, there was no choice in who his parents were, where he was born, the culture and attitudes he was raised in. But as he became of age, he began to structure his life to cultivate the qualities he was conscious of and cherished most. At Harvard, he was an outsider, and he cultivated that position by hosting discussions and

meetings with many others who were also outsiders. His former students included a great variety of individuals such as poets Conrad Aiken, Wallace Stevens, Robert Frost, T.S. Eliot, Witter Bynner, and John Hall Wheelock; the essayists, journalists, and editors W.E.B. DuBois, Walter Lippmann, Gilbert Seldes, Hutchins Hapgood, Scofield Thayer, Max Eastman, Herbert Seligman, and Van Wyck Brooks; and professors Austryn Wolfson, Horace Kallen, Baker Brownell, Samuel Eliot Morison; a Supreme Court Justice, Felix Frankfurter; many diplomats such as Bronson Cutting and the university president James B. Conant. He was popular, belonging to many Harvard organizations (perhaps 20 or so) and participating in the Boston community. Many scholars seem to overlook his many activities and even the fun he had at Harvard. He was part of the founding of the Harvard Lampoon, Hasty Pudding Club, the OK Club, the Harvard Monthly, and rarely is it noted that he was elected Pope! That is the position he was elected to when he helped form the Laodicean Club (a reference to the Laodicean Church in Revelation 3:14-22 that was lukewarm and complacent).

Yet, in 1893-4 he went through a metanoia, a changing of one's beliefs that led to a changing of activities and Santayana taking a different track. His father's death in 1893 and other personal experiences, no doubt, influenced this metanoia. He began planning for his retirement through savings and significant travel abroad. He found Harvard less and less to his liking, noting it was becoming too business-like and was not fostering the intellectual life. "There are three traps that strangle philosophy: the church, the marriage bed, and the professor's chair. I escaped from the first in my youth; the second I never entered, and as soon as possible I got out of the third." (AFSL 168)

During 1904-06 (the publication of *The Life of Reason* was 1905), he was abroad for 27 months traveling in Europe and the Middle East. He was promoted to full professor in 1907 and returned to Harvard to teach. Sometime after that, he announced his intention to retire from Harvard. The President, Santayana's colleagues, his many readers and his publishers were surprised. He was a young faculty member whose reputation and promise was significant. He was asked not to leave Harvard, and after much discussion and deliberation the President and Santayana arrived at an agreement: he could spend four months each year at Harvard and the remainder of the year abroad, mostly at the Sorbonne. His reputation as a writer and philosopher was growing and this brought invitations for lectures and professorships at other American and European universities.

His mother grew ill with dementia around 1909, and he spent considerable time assuring she had excellent care. Following a visit to the doctor with his mother and the doctor noting that his mother's health was good, he traveled by ship to England on January 24, 1912. Sadly, his mother unexpectedly died only two weeks later on February 5. Although several letters following his mother's death indicate he was unsure of returning to Harvard, he noted he wanted to think about this and to take care of family matters before he made a decision. It was important that he arrange for his half-sister, Josephine, who remained in Boston, to move to Spain where she would live with her sister, Susan. Eventually, on June 6, 1912 he wrote to the President Lowell of Harvard enclosing a formal letter of

resignation and requesting that the President not ask him to reconsider, as the President had done before. He thanks the President for his previous consideration and the agreement they had reached, but Santayana writes “I hardly think we could have been *faithful* to it for long.” And Santayana never returned to Harvard although he was offered a distinguished professorship along with invitations for special occasions. The rest of his life would be all on one side of the ocean.

When WWI came, he found himself in England, although he had previously decided to live in Paris after many trips between England and Europe. He made the best of the situation residing primarily at Oxford, and at the end of the war, although offered several positions in England, he returned to Europe living a vagabond life for some time (Paris, Riviera, Rome, Avila, Glion, Lake Geneva, Cortina d’Ampezzo). Finally in the late 20’s he settled in Rome for most of the year with a retreat to Cortina d’Ampezzo in the summer. There he remained for the rest of his life. He experienced war and fascism in Europe, particularly in Italy, and the Spanish Civil War. His relatives fought on both sides of the Spanish Civil War and one of his favorite nephews was killed. At first, he thought Mussolini would bring more order and calm to Italy, but that perspective changed. He attempted to leave Italy for Switzerland in 1939 but did not have the proper papers, so he returned to spend the remainder of his life in a hospital run by the Blue Nuns where his health would be cared for and he could return to his normal morning routine of responding to mail, writing and reading, then a restful walk in the afternoon, lunch, and writing in the evening. He chose his life in the midst of political turmoil and chaos. “All to the furrow, nothing to the grave” is a line from his “The Poet’s Testament” that was read by Daniel Cory at Santayana’s burial service.

For Santayana, consciousness and reason were aftereffects of one’s psyche and its interaction with the physical world and environment. Even so, one can live a good life if one attends to these aftereffects and discerns their indices to what enables one to prosper and flourish as a physical being living in a world of action.

## V. Conclusion: Complexity and the Role of Philosophy

Regardless of how we discern reason and its roles in human life, contemporary evidence indicates it may be far more complex and interactive than traditional philosophical approaches suggest. For Santayana, truth regarding the material world was based on a correspondence theory. True statements about the world corresponded to the actual facts in the world, that is, true statements accurately denote the essences embodied in matter. However, our ability to discover truth about the material world was based on a form of the pragmatic criterion of truth. We are never able to discern the correspondence of our statements to the facts of the material world because we can never escape our embodiment in a particular environment. An unbiased view is not humanly possible since we cannot be in a position to see both the embodied essences in the natural world and the essences we are conscious of to make a comparison. Hence, we are always in a biased

position, understanding the world from our particular physiological condition and environment and projecting the essences our psyche generates in consciousness on the physical world. That is an aspect of animal faith. But we can approach truth by trial and error, but projecting our statements on the world and testing them out. We will never have absolute certainty, only a collection of evidence that appears to support our views. Hence, Santayana began to recognize the complexity of reasoning, beliefs, knowledge and truth claims. Human nature is animal nature, and we act and make decisions just like all other animals, but Santayana's celebrational and spiritual aspect of consciousness is emphasized in human beings, although not absent in the rest of the animal world.

In short, the role of empirical sciences and their implications for human behavior are not clear or simple. Genetics is a relatively new field in which most human and animal activity is considered multifactorial. Many factors play a role in our actions, reasoning and moral outlooks. Consciousness and reason may well be aftereffects of our physiology and environment, but exactly how that plays out, the specifics of any causal patterns, and our ability to discern those patterns is not certain and may never be altogether clear. However, it is important to recognize that we are making progress in understanding the basis of human action and its aftereffects of consciousness, reason, belief and knowledge.

In actuality, this could be an enlivening and enriching arena for philosophy. Describing and explicating our conscious life may well provide indices for what is occurring in our psyches and the world around us. Detailed analysis of our reasoning, beliefs and knowledge claims, may provide insights into our behavior not easily discernible in our physiology and lead to new discoveries and quandaries about human reasoning. This would provide new lines of collaboration with the sciences, but also with art and poetry. The celebrational aspect of consciousness that Santayana highlighted is missing in today's accounts of human consciousness. That aspect may also provide significant insights into the meaning of human life as well as to its physiological and environmental foundations.

So, does animal faith write the obituary for philosophy? I hope not, but it may well lead us down different exploratory and philosophical paths of discovery.

HERMAN J. SAATKAMP, JR.

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# Santayana and his Political Circumstances

*The following essay is an excerpt from “The Social Warp”, the third chapter of Santayana the Philosopher: Philosophy as a Form of Life by Daniel Moreno Moreno, translated from the Spanish by Charles Padrón.<sup>1</sup> In his book, Moreno distinguishes three parts of Santayana’s philosophic system: philosophy as a form of life, epistemological and ontological considerations, and political philosophy. “The Social Warp” addresses Santayana’s political philosophy. The selection reprinted here explains the relationship between his life and his theory of politics. In Moreno’s analysis, Santayana’s political philosophy should be interpreted, along with the rest of his work, from a spiritual point of view. In that way, one can understand his theoretical reservations about democracy and liberalism and his political testament, Dominations and Powers (1951). Given the intense interaction of philosophy and life in Santayana, Moreno mines Santayana’s personal letters to get a feel for how he reacted to the historical events that he lived through; lived, in his customary fashion, as a marginal outsider observing the passing scene.*

**T**he connection between life and thought in Santayana is manifested in the parallelism between his political philosophy and the manner in which he situates himself in the light of the wars and social revolts that he witnessed. As a pure spirit, he would remain outside the world, but as an incarnate spirit that *is*, he could not help but hear howls and the rustle from the public square. At the end of his life he wrote: “I have my likes and my dislikes, of which I am not ashamed. I neither renounce nor impose them. I simply recognize them to be personal in me, traditional, or otherwise accidental...” (DP xxii). There is a need to take notice of many of his reactions in light of the political circumstances that punctuated his life.

It is significant that in the year of his *metanoia*, 1893, when only thirty years old and a professor at Harvard, he was also living through an historical time of panic, of general agricultural plight, and industrial and financial depression. This situation did not improve until William McKinley’s accession to the Presidency of the United States in 1897. A period of tranquility commenced in which the government became preoccupied with Big Business, especially following the industrial mergers that had led to constant rises in prices. The force of the Progressive movement increased, demanding reforms such as the direct election of Senators, the strict regulation of interstate railroads, the prohibition of children working, protection for working women, and the creation of insurance for accidents. The assassination of McKinley in 1901 ushered in Theodore Roosevelt as President, a young, outspoken political voice who revived the Sherman

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Antitrust Act of 1890, watched over economic practices, compelled the usage of arbitrage to settle the Coal Strike of 1902, put the interstate railways under national control, pushed through the Federal Meat Inspection Act of 1906, and furthered the exploitation of the American West. The political management wielded by his successor, William H Taft, on the other hand, was characterized by incompetence, indecisiveness, and major mistakes.

The years that Santayana spent in Cambridge (England) studying Plato, 1895-97, witnessed the intensification of conflict between the British and the Boers, which would eventually lead to outright hostilities. The Liberals were not in complete agreement over it, divided as they were between pro-imperialists and pro-Boers, like Lloyd George. The reign of Queen Victoria had left in its wake the prosperity that characterized it up till the 1870s, and it was going through a period of tensions, doubts, and pessimism. Farmers, stockbreeders, and industrialists all felt intensely the increasing competition of foreign products and merchandise, while steel production, textile production, and exports all fell. Socialist-inspired workers' revolts associations grew enormously between 1880 and 1900, leading to the founding of the Labour Party in 1893. This party would end up overtaking the Liberal Party in status as being the second most influential party. However, in 1906 the Liberal Party, overcoming their own internal differences, secured a great majority in the general elections, led by Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman. The direct result was a massive program of social legislation covering education, pensions, and the hours in the working day.

For the elections of 1912, the year in which Santayana departed permanently from the United States, the panorama enveloping his adopted country could not have been more confusing. The Republican Party was divided between those supporting the party apparatus and conservatives who supported the nomination of William H. Taft, in opposition to the rank and file and those Republicans, called "insurgents," who supported Roosevelt. Victorious in the primaries, Roosevelt ran for office as the head of a new party, the Progressive Party, defending a *new nationalism*, alluded to by Santayana in *Winds of Doctrine*, which included a radical program of firm controls over business and the reinforcement of federal power. The Democrats, for their part, nominated Woodrow Wilson, who offered a more conservative program, called *new freedom*—a program that intended to destroy the monopolies and increase the possibilities and opportunities of small merchants. In light of the divided Republicans, Wilson achieved an overwhelming victory, which would allow him to carry out his projected reforms and to prepare for reelection in 1916.

The England that Santayana encountered in 1912 was, once again, undergoing severe convulsions. In the aftermath of Edward VII's death in 1910, the conflict between Parliament (House of Commons), which supported Lloyd George and his goal of doing away with poverty through the taxation of large fortunes, and the House of Lords, which was intransigently hostile towards that piece of legislation, erupted. Throughout 1911 and 1912 a wave of strikes took place before his arrival in the United Kingdom, as well as the demands of the suffragette movement, and the inexorable gestation of the civil war in Ireland, had been ignited. In light of

the emerging conflict sparked by the assassination of the inheritor to the Austro-Hungarian throne, between Austria, supported by Germany, and Russia, supported by France, the British cabinet was divided, but the German invasion of Belgium in August 1914 compelled it to declare war against Germany. Santayana, at that same time, found himself *en passant* in Oxford, without his belongings and books that were in Paris. It was a visit that lasted for four long, trying years.

His state of mind during this time is captured well in his letters. In the same month the declarations of war were made, Santayana wrote to his sister Susana, voicing both excitement and calm, while confirming that it is humans who are the creatures without reason. His sympathies were with France, Belgium, and Great Britain, even though he did not feel angered by the German incursions, because he saw in them the incarnation of its heroic determination to convert itself into the master of Europe, a determination that was a common recognition of all nations who have been historically strong. It was, moreover, something between the fatalistic and the Nietzschean: "If they win, with all Europe against them, it will be because they deserved to win, being morally the stronger" (LGS2 189). His willingness to be impartial betrayed itself in the happiness he exhibited on receiving two issues of *ABC* (a Spanish newspaper) that Susana sent him from Spain, which allowed him to counterbalance the information from the English newspapers, which he considered excessively tendentious (LGS2 194). The Germans appeared competent, and he admired their conviction, planning, and effort, but was highly suspect of whether the world would be, in fact, better off should they win the war. Even though he found himself identifying with the sufferings of the British, this led him to wonder why he felt such anguish in the first place. During the same month, August 1914, in a letter sent to Mary Williams Winslow, Santayana spoke of the *shock* with which he had absorbed the war, and the indignity with which geography seemed to control the psyches and outlooks of individuals, up to and including the authentic moment of mortal confrontation. He acknowledged candidly the doubts that beleaguered him as a person, and claimed, on one hand, that France was rotten from the inside out, that England was a fraud, and that Austria and Germany, who embody clericalism and discipline, would do well to win because "perhaps it is better that men should recognize sour duties than no duties at all" (LGS2 192). Whereas, on the other hand, he also claimed that this was a farce and that he was not clear as to which side he thought should win.

In October, in another letter to Susana, Santayana showed himself as being convinced of the eventual German triumph by virtue of its moral fiber and being the strongest nation materially. With respect to the debate between Germanophiles and Anglophiles, which he witnessed in the Spanish press, he considered it understandable that the Catholic Party could support the German cause because he saw in it a strengthening of the social role of the Church, and for himself personally, a German world dominion seemed preferable to the possible "Americanization of the universe." Nevertheless, his preferences favored France, England, and Russia because they defended individual liberty and the enjoyment of life, whereas he despaired Germans, fundamentally, as superficial, barely



Christian at all due to a lack of humility, while lacking a comprehension of the significance of sin, or of the subtending vanity of the world, and of the *cross*. As a result, he thought that the Mediterranean countries, Spain included, should sympathize with the Allies (the Entente Powers), such as the secular and liberal parties did (LGS2 198). As it turned out, Santayana was both an Anglophile who admired Germans and an anti-German critic when it came to England. His identification with the sufferings of the British was accompanied by robust criticisms of liberalism as a political philosophy. At the same time as writing a philosophical diatribe against German egotism, he admired German militaristic feats. In fact, in 1915 Santayana published separate articles based on radically different premises; some prepared the way for his eventual book *Egotism in German Philosophy*, whereas others conveyed “the futility of liberalism and the shocking incompetence of politicians” (LGS2 224).

His state of mind, on the other hand, was one of dejection and resignation. He dedicated himself to reading Dickens and books on Germans, and, of course, writing prolifically. In November 1915, in another letter to Mary Williams Winslow, Santayana confessed his extensive mental involvement with the war, whose all-pervasiveness he saw as impossible to avoid, and which now provided the key that united his life and his philosophy: “However, disillusion rains upon us in these days from every side and you know that my philosophy has always been that disillusion is the only safe foundation for happiness” (LGS2 233). It was a disillusion that, on a philosophical level, came accompanied with tranquility and happiness, but which on a personal level, felt like an inevitable uneasiness. It was like an internal struggle between the way that one would like to feel, and the way that one in reality actually felt. It was like the difficulty in readjusting oneself to a new future while remaining attentive to news published in the media. It was a new and tough destiny that was none other than the disaffection with England and the life of reason, to which he had dedicated his most important *œuvre*. The stark reality of war ended up by filtering through him via various fronts: the world—with soldiers stationed in the trenches; the mind—for his difficult theoretical position; the heart—for the restlessness he felt; and, the family—for the Germanophilic position of Susana, which caused him to avoid traveling to Ávila in order to avert a confrontation (LGS2 233).

In April 1918, after the rigorous German advance on the front that seemed to tip the war in its favor, Santayana claimed that he felt less affected by the conflict than he had during its initial years, despite the complexion that the war evinced, because he had grown a shell that protected him from the suffering. The surprising thing, given the theoretical implications he entertained for what we will call the *spiritual life*, was that he described this condition as philosophy’s very own. This was the idea that all human intentions and all human ambitions, all the pleasures and all the sufferings, cancel each other out, inasmuch as they are successively generated by dark powers. Philosophy is conceived, therefore, as the refuge from which to contemplate, at a distance from, if not indifferent to, social, theoretical, and personal conflicts (LGS2 315). This is not less relevant than the impression he gathered from the Bolshevik revolution of the preceding year. The

specific conduct on the part of the Bolsheviks was scandalous, but he did think that the values they embodied were on-target, since they affected hostility “to every government founded on property and privilege” (LGS2 315), a claim in which it was not difficult to see an acerbic criticism directed at those very governments of which he had personal experience. In March 1919, he could now make a valuation as to what was presupposed by the war: “...the dissolution of the age of luxury and respectability in which you and I were born [to Logan Pearsall Smith]”<sup>2</sup> (LGS2 343), and proclaim the emergence of a new age in which Russia appeared to achieve the role of witness abandoned by Germany. As a result, Santayana developed the same ambivalent relation towards the new Bolshevik social system that he had held with Bismarckian Germany.

In January 1924, now settled in Rome, he considered it a likeable place not only due to character of the people and the Latin manner of viewing the world, and not only because it was a privileged city, most certainly unique, and one in which one could travel widely in time while moving slightly in space, but because the political atmosphere was good, in the sense that “the German and Anglo-Saxon shams have been discredited—representative government, for instance—” (LGS3 179).<sup>3</sup> In fact, even though he initiated his custom of passing winters in Rome in 1920, it was not until 1925 that he began staying there in a definitive fashion, reaching an agreement with the Hotel Bristol to take lodgings in the capacity of permanent resident (LGS3 236). It should be remembered that the March on Rome took place in October 1922, that in April 1923 the elections showered victory on the National Fascist Party and its allies, and that, after the governmental crisis brought on in June by the assassination of the socialist deputy Giacomo Matteotti, Mussolini emerged strengthened by concentrating all power, reducing freedoms of the press and suppressing the liberal parliamentary system. At the same time of these political changes, he relaunched, during the 1924-32 years, excavations that brought to light parts of Caesar, Trajan, Nerva, and Augustus’ forums, in an attempt to locate historical referents for the new Italy. Santayana, who lived *in situ* these discoveries, took them in happily as space in which he could “expound on the principles of politics” (Irazusta 1954, 69). It is quite possible that it was this chain of political and cultural occasions that produced euphoria in Santayana. It was this sense of euphoria that also reconciled him with the Church, and which led him to a position of preferring Europe over the United States. Along these lines, he wrote to Benjamin Fuller in 1926:

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<sup>2</sup> The two concepts expressed here—*luxury* and *respectability*—exude the aroma of an age that Santayana saw as ending; however, it was without regrets. In the “Preface” to the 1926 edition of *Winds of Doctrine*, he shared with us the following: “That comfortable liberal world was like a great tree with the trunk already sawed quite through, but still standing with all its leaves quietly rustling, and with us dozing under its shade. We were inexpressibly surprised when it fell and half crushed us...” (WD vi).

<sup>3</sup> In November 1935, despite the Italian-Abysinnian imbroglio officially just underway, Santayana would also assert: “The atmosphere here is tense but exhilarating, and I was never more pleased at living in Italy than at this moment” (LGS5 257). In May 1938 he still retained a similar outlook (LGS6 132).

Another true satisfaction for me is the new regime in Italy and in Spain, American in its futurism and confident hopes, but classical in its reliance on discipline and its love of a beautiful finitude and decision. That dreadful loose dream of liberalism seems to be fading away at last! Poor France and England are paying the penalty for having drugged themselves so thoroughly with that verbal poison. (LGS3 270)

With respect to Spain, he compared the dictatorship of Captain General Primo de Rivera, who had carried out a *coup d'état* in September 1923 by appealing to the utter exhaustion of democracy, and who had suspended the Constitution, with the nascent Mussolini regime. Later on, before the events that led to the proclamation of the Republic on 14 April 1931, he declared to his nephew, George Sturgis, that the Republican forces did not have his sympathies, but that the dictatorship had the misfortune of associating itself with all sorts of military, royalist, aristocratic, and clerical interests when, in his own judgment, it really need not have formed these ties (LGS4 253). Two months later, he slightly changed his tone when writing to a longtime friend, Mercedes de la Escalera: "This revolution is a sad thing for us who see the world we have known coming apart; but one must shed one's illusions. Everything human changes ceaselessly and no civilization can sustain itself in the form it had, or return to it" (LGS4 262).

One event that induced his praises was the intervention of the army in gaining control of the anarchist insurrection of December 1933, after the elections of November/December, in which the CNT (Confederación Nacional del Trabajo [Workers' National Confederation], founded in 1910) had promoted voter abstention. Once again, Santayana fell back on having to depend on the newspapers for finding out how the conflict ended, and eventually was relieved because "it seems that tranquility has been reestablished, and that, in general, the troops behaved well. That was the essential thing" (LGS5 68).<sup>4</sup>

The 1930s brought out simultaneously, on the other hand, clear gestures of sympathy with respect to the Bolsheviks, whose revolution had been viewed with approving eyes since its initial developments. As a result, in 1931, when he was evaluating the achievements of modernity in relation to the ancients, he claimed: "...haven't we Einstein and Freud, Proust and Paul Valéry, Lenin and Mussolini?" (GTB 163). Also in April 1930, in January 1932, and October 1935, he stressed the theoretical appeal of the Bolshevik revolution and caught a glimpse into the

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<sup>4</sup> The letter is addressed to Rafael Sastre González, the son from the first marriage of Susana's husband, an habitual companion during Santayana's country strolls in the environs of Ávila, and a participant in the uprising against the Spanish Republic in 1936. It is worth mentioning the rest of the paragraph, which includes: "...otherwise, the disaster that happened in Russia could have been repeated in Spain. And it would have been worse, because in Spain there are traditions and customs and monuments much superior to those that existed in the empire of the Czars, and with the destruction of it all the loss would have been much greater" (LGS5 68). One should keep in mind that Santayana communicated with his family in Ávila in Spanish.

worldwide expansion of State socialism.<sup>5</sup> Even though it was merely an interest in the “Russian experiment” on a theoretical level, because on a personal level, according to what he confessed to Sidney Hook, his political sympathies placed him in the opposing camp (LGS6 19).

In December 1935 Santayana expressed his happiness in living in Rome and Italy, at the same time as declaring that he was separated intellectually from England entirely. Only in the presence of Rafael, his Abulensean interlocutor, did he confess that “in these last years I have stopped completely being like an Anglophile,” (LGS5 266)<sup>6</sup> because, among other reasons, in Great Britain the aristocracy had abdicated from the admirable rôle that it had always carried out. In November 1936, he began displaying enthusiasm again for the news that was arriving from Spain. He even began to consider writing a book, which never did appear, with the title of *The Revolt of the Nations* (LGS5 401), in order to help him grasp the turn that history was taking. Personally, he was greatly affected by the death of his nephew Roberto in the war, who fought on the nationalist side, and whom he knew as a boy as a part of his extensive Abulensean family. He recalled many years later that he (Roberto), together with his brother, were “among the first to catch the new wave of hope and enthusiasm for the moral regeneration of Spain. They both joined the Falange...” (PP 335).

Such was his enthusiasm when, faced with the preoccupation that he ascertained in the United States with regard to the proximity of a new war, he thought there were no grounds for it. People had suffered too much from the previous one. In any case, civil conflicts would arise, as in Spain, since the time for fighting “for country” (LGS6 102) had since passed, and now, in 1938, the fashion was to fight “for party” (LGS6 176). Still, in May 1939, at a date so near the outbreak of total war, he tried to calm down his nephew George Sturgis by telling him that the owner of the Hotel Bristol, where he lodged, one Cesare Pinchetti, a member of the Fascist party and a deputy in parliament, was in agreement that there was to be no war (LGS6 241). Finally, when Germany invaded Poland on 1 September 1939, he even thought that the war was not going to be either long or frightening, but rather that there would be an overall recognition that the Treaty of Versailles had been a mistake, and there would be a signing of an across-the-board peace understanding in the general interest (LGS6 286). His state of mind, on the other hand, was one of “perfect peace” (LGS6 262) because, as seen from Italy and from the vantage point of his seventy-six years of age, he conceded “this war does not weigh on me like the other” (LGS6 380). When Mussolini declared war on Great Britain and France on 10 June 1940, Santayana, who happened to be lodging at the Hotel Danieli in Venice, heard

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<sup>5</sup> LGS4 171-72; LGS4 313; LGS5 249. William G. Holzberger addresses this question in an interesting note in his “Introduction” to vol. 1 of *The Letters of George Santayana* (LGS1 liii).

<sup>6</sup> The theoretical and emotional separation from the country that during WWI he had identified with so singularly, reached its breaking point when he let it be known that he had stopped reading English newspapers (LGS5 251, 253; LGS6 93). See also Martín 2002.

French bombs falling only a couple of miles away from where he was, which caused him to recall the first raid that he experienced in London more than twenty years earlier (LGS6 375).

In 1946 he was already disillusioned with how events were unfolding in Spain. Commenting on a book about the mystical soul of Spain, he wrote: "I am afraid the real soul of Spain at present is rather disintegrated (LGS7 295). Once WWII was over, the historical panorama that appeared opened him up personally to change, but not so much his political ideas. In March of 1948 he analyzed two elements of the new situation: the Marshall Plan of European aid, and the new perspectives that arose following the disasters of Germany and Italy. With respect to the first, he doubted the ulterior motives behind the American plan, not being sure of whether it was a concern to prevent the Russification of Europe, or simply a business enterprise. With respect to the future, he saw the real possibility of Europe remaining shattered, between two new camps, the Communist and the American (LGS8 7). In 1950, the question that preoccupied him foremost was what *form* of world dominance the United States would assume, once the possibility that had been hinted at in the 1930s, that it would be the Soviet Union that fulfilled this, was eliminated. As for the form of American government—democracy—he qualified it, reiterating once again the position that he had earlier maintained in his youth, which he did not see altered in any way by subsequent political experience, that it was a "dangerous and unjust method" (LGS8 293). Concurrently, any pretense that it was the only valid political system to be desired for all societies, seemed to him clearly both dogmatic and doctrinarian. In December of the same year he offered his assessment of fascism and Mussolini. In view of the discussion within the United States on whether Santayana was, or had been, a fascist, he wrote to Corliss Lamont. Lamont considered himself a disciple of Santayana's, and rejected thinking of him as a fascist. Santayana explained to him that it was a fallacy to equate criminal with fascism, and that he had never belonged to a party, so that, in this sense, one could never claim that he was a fascist. Notwithstanding this, he recognized that Mussolini's dictatorship, as a product of the generative order of society, had had more advantages than any other previous Italian political system, because it had made Italy a united country, strong and happy. The mistakes were his foreign policy and alliances, which were artificial and militant, apart from Mussolini himself, who was an thoroughgoing adventurer, instead of the agile surgeon he should have been in order to eradicate the disease (LGS8 310).

To crown this brief tour of Santayana's political circumstances, it might be helpful to rescue one passage from his autobiography—the one that captures the discussions that transpired at Harvard in 1898 with regard to the conflict between the United States and Spain. In it, Santayana recalls the reactions of William James and George Herbert Palmer during the negotiations that would eventually put an end to the war in Cuba, if, of course, Spain recognized the independence of the island, ceded Puerto Rico to the United States, and agreed to the "sale" of the Philippines for \$20 million. It seemed to James as if he had lost his own country, because, even though he defended the invasion of Cuba based on the perpetually

inept Spanish government in Cuba and the suffering of the native population, there was no excuse for annexing the Philippines; this annexation was a display of ambition, imperialism, and corruption. Palmer, for his part, tendered the argument that, ultimately, history's course depended on the Judgment of God, thus offering nothing of critical import, because if something was going to happen, then it was because it had to happen. Compared with James's anger, Santayana showed himself to be resigned and at peace, in a mood that, as best he could recall, would coincide with what he encountered when he passed through Irún and Ávila, just after the armistice in 1898 (PP 402-04).<sup>7</sup>

There was no somber nostalgia for Spain, nor apparently, was there somber nostalgia within Spain. This reaction would distance him clearly from what was shared by the members of the Generation of 1898, and which strongly *qualified* his ties to them, despite the insistence on the part of Concha Zardoya, Emilio Garrigues, and Ramón J. Sender.<sup>8</sup> In spite of this, one should mention also Bertrand Russell's testimony when he asserted in an *argumentum ad hominem*, that Santayana's proclaimed detachment seemed anything but genuinely comprehensive, especially during the Spanish-American war, a conflict about which he allegedly rooted passionately for the Spanish side.<sup>9</sup>

With regard to the ultimate meaning of the dispute in question, Santayana considered that it was more a case of how the world had functioned since the beginning of written history: the arrogance of the United States made it inevitable that, sooner or later, what occurred was what had to occur, because governments do not command circumstances, but rather obey material impulses, and are slaves to fabricated interests in such a way that when a political situation quickly changes, it is because its roots have lost their strength. This interpretation is the same as, to be sure, the one that allowed him to understand the rise to prominence of Germany, first of all, and then later the Soviet Union. What *was* tragic was not the power of the United States, but the weakness of Spain, a weakness that was attributable to its own inherent inability to administer its own resources. His differences with William James, however, ran much deeper than this one

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<sup>7</sup> Even though the anecdotal history goes back to 1898, it was written much later, most probably in the 1940s, which is definitely a sufficient amount of time for memory to begin doing its work, which is, in effect, an adjustment of memory to interpretation. García Martín points out, in his commentary on these pages, that Santayana "does not show even a trait of affective alteration in view of the facts" (Martín 2002, 177).

<sup>8</sup> This coupling of Santayana with the Generation of 1898 that one reads in Zardoya (1952, 1) and Garrigues (1952, 4) is highly suspicious. Ramón J. Sender also somehow arrives at the claim that Santayana represents the best "type" among the other members of his generation (1954, 4), and José María Alonso Gamio insists on something similar. See Alonso Gamio 1966, 56-60.

<sup>9</sup> "He professed a certain detachment which was not wholly sincere. Although both his parents were Spanish, he had been brought up in Boston and taught philosophy at Harvard. In the Spanish-American War he found himself passionately on the Spanish side, which is not surprising, as his father had been Governor of Manila. Whenever his Spanish patriotism was involved, his usual air of detachment disappeared." (Russell 86).

dissimilar political interpretation; those differences influenced the diversified ways of coming to grips with illusion and reality. James truly believed, innocently and romantically, in the ideals expressed in the Declaration of Independence, and this belief (once tainted) helped draw out his fit of bitter, profound tears over the first proofs of the imperialism in his own country. Santayana, nevertheless, presented himself as listening attentively to this inner voice that said *No; No*, to that which he makes reference to in *Dialogues in Limbo* (DL 57). His ironic nihilism carried him to the point of doubting the efficacy of any and all ideals, as convincing as they might seem in their expressions, capable of guiding the actions of nations. Ideals can, indeed, inspire the enactment of laws and reforms, but it is simple-minded ingenuity to trust that they are anything more than impotent illusions. The stubborn facts constantly prove that, although people do at times listen to the voice of reason, they can also remain deaf to it.

Santayana was a thinker who, ultimately, as a philosopher defended maintaining himself at the margins, but who as a breathing, living man found himself paradoxically immersed in the eye of the hurricane. He did not find, as so many others did, the path to tranquility in Switzerland or in the United States, but rather as one who was a witness to bombings, who saw individuals wounded and maimed, people dying, looting and invasions, and who lived his life in a wartime economy environment. And this transpired, furthermore, twice over: first in Oxford, and later in Rome. In his autobiography he claims that he lived through these circumstances in a state of overall serenity: "I on the contrary have been enjoying peace for thirty years, in the midst of prodigious wars" (PP 515), and this withdrawal enlivened him as a wellspring of tranquility, as a capacity for sympathizing with all points of view without identifying with any of them (PP 527). The practical requisite of this "amphibious" neutrality, such as he himself called it, was due to his Spanish citizenship, a circumstance that was assured to him by punctually renewing his passport, and which allowed him, during the two world wars, to live in Oxford and Rome, without having to participate in the conflicts. Throughout the civil war in Spain (1936-39), more than anything else, his age and geographical remoteness kept him personally at the margins.

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# Santayana's Anti-Romanticism versus Stevens's New Romanticism<sup>1</sup>

## Reality is an Activity of the Most August Imagination

Last Friday, in the big light of last Friday night,  
We drove home from Cornwall to Hartford, late.  
It was not a night blown at a glassworks in Vienna  
Or Venice, motionless, gathering dust and time.  
There was a crush of strength in a grinding going round,  
Under the front of a westward evening star,  
The vigor of glory, a glittering in the veins,  
As things emerged and moved and were dissolved,  
Either in distance, change or nothingness,  
The visible transformations of summer night,  
An argentine abstraction approaching form  
And suddenly denying itself away.  
There was as an insolid billowing of the solid.  
Night's moonlight lake was neither water nor air.  
Wallace Stevens

Appreciation of the “the most august imagination” in the title of Wallace Stevens’s poem requires the reader to savor an ambiguity in the word ‘august’ (signifying *majestic*, *dignified*, as well as the *eighth month* of the year). The first of these meanings describes this majestic scene of *poiesis* that expresses Stevens’s idea of transparent metaphysical imagination. But the *month* of August, symbolic of the *height* of *summer*, is also in play.

Among many other possible reverberations in Stevens’s poetry, “August” resonates with lines of “Esthétique du mal,” one of the longer poems appearing in his collection *Transport to Summer* (1947). There, again, it is “the argentine abstraction” of night’s moonlit lake that is neither water nor air:

The moon rose up as if it had escaped  
His meditation. It evaded his mind.  
It was part of a supremacy always  
Above him. The moon was always free from him,  
As night was free from him.(CP 314-315)

Typically for Stevens here, the “august” brilliancy of the night sky functions to symbolize his intuitive participation in “a supremacy always above him.”

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<sup>1</sup> The present paper augments and recomposes the first part of the author’s paper “Interpretaciones de poesías y religión: Santayana sobre Goethe y Emerson con la guía del romanticismo tardío postmoderno de Stevens,” pp. 245-260, in *Santayana: Un Pensador Universal*, ed. José Beltrán, Manuel Garrido, Sergio Sevilla (PUV, University of Valencia, 2011).

Stevens's later-phase poems essayed many such intimations of sublime imaginative transparency.

As to *Transport to Summer*, which included such long poems as "Credences of Summer" and "Things of August," Stevens averred that that late collection of his poetry (at age 68) in 1947 signaled a turning in his mind, one that sought to depict the supremacy of a reality beyond the mind as well as a sense of elusive poetic accord with it. "From the imaginative period of the "Notes toward the Supreme Fiction," he wrote, "I turned to the ideas of 'Credences of Summer,'" and noted that "at the time when that poem was written my feelings for the necessity of a final accord with reality was at its strongest." He explained that "reality was the summer of the title of the book in which the poem appeared", i.e., *Transport to Summer* (LWS 636,719).

His next long poem, "The Auroras of Autumn," magnified the symbolism by replacing the August night's moonlight lake with an exponentially sublimer scene of poetic transparency as he faced the brilliance and energy of the northern lights.

These and many other such symbolic avowals instantiate Stevens's final turn to the height of what several critics refer to as *aesthetic transcendentalism*.<sup>2</sup> This turn preoccupied him in his last decades of poetic expression. Stevens came to aver that the gods that had ruled in the *old romanticism* of traditional theological, metaphysical, and literary inheritances were now eclipsed, indeed had quite suddenly vanished from the scene. In their absence, he announced the possibility and desirability of forging the imaginative lineaments of a *new romanticism*. His later-phase career can be described as striving to inscribe such fresh intuitions of an "intensest rendezvous" in which "We say God and the imagination are one"—that is, to contribute to a *new romanticism* featuring an "essential imagination" of the "supremacy always above him."

In this paper, I lay the groundwork for employing Stevens's notion of "essential imagination" as a heuristic guide for reappraising Santayana's anti-romantic repression of two major literary authors, Goethe and Emerson—a topic I plan to address in a future article. In the current article, I explore Santayana's relation to the self-declared new romantic, Stevens himself. In contrast to Santayana, his erstwhile mentor at Harvard, I read Stevens's professed "new romanticism" as having upgraded Goethe and Emerson by virtue of absorbing their historical legacies in the development of his own *aesthetic transcendentalist* trajectory.

As an initial orientation to Stevens's new romanticism, Joseph Carroll (2007) cites Stevens's *Letters* in which Stevens speaks of a cycle in his poetry from romanticism, to realism, to indifferentism, "back to romanticism which is the

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<sup>2</sup>For full and penetrating, phenomenological and metaphysical, articulation of the concept of aesthetic transcendentalism, see Nicholas L. Guardiano, *Aesthetic Transcendentalism in Emerson, Peirce, and Nineteenth-Century American Landscape Painting*, Latham, Md., Lexington Books, 2017. Stevens came explicitly to locate his "poems of our climate" in the tradition of Emerson and Walt Whitman; his influence by Peirce is not as explicit, though mediated through his poetic transformation of William James's "will to believe."

highest form of imaginative fulfillment" (LWS 350), indicating how this sheds light on Stevens's mature view of the nature of poetry and his own mission as a poet. Citing Stevens's words, "The major poetic idea in the world is and always has been the idea of God" (LWS 378) in connection with his project of creating "a new romanticism, a new belief," i.e. "a poem equivalent to the idea of God" (LWS 369-70), Carroll argues that Stevens's essential genius was neither social nor ethical in character, but "lyric, mythic, and metaphysical." For Stevens, the new romantic "belief" itself is "fictive," that is, a matter of *poiesis*. The "older romantics," such as Emerson, Wordsworth, and Shelley, more unproblematically believed in a Supreme Mind or Spirit, whereas Stevens held that "the divine mind does not fully exist, or at least is not fully realized, until it is depicted in the images of poets" (LWS .90). Carroll goes on to point out that Stevens's poetry progresses through a dialectic of tonal opposites, between the "pure poetry" of the new romanticism and "common poetry"; in the latter mindset he sometimes disparages the ideal of "the [old] romantic"; in the former, "The whole effect of the imagination is," in Stevens's own words, "toward the production of the romantic" ("Two or Three Ideas", CP&P 849), and "the imagination is the romantic" (*Adagia*, CP&P 903),<sup>3</sup> Stevens oscillation between "pure poetry" and "common poetry" is also recognized by Helen Vendler (Vendler 2009).

Stevens achieved high honors in the American republic of letters for his collections of poetry published between 1923 until 1955. He achieved his prominent place in American literature after Santayana had emigrated from America back to Europe in 1912, never to return for his forty remaining years. As far as I know, Santayana pursued his long way round to nirvana in Europe without awareness of Stevens's eventual prominence. Back in England and then in Italy, Santayana continued to flourish as a trans-Atlantic luminary of philosophic and cultural criticism. He directed much of his *animus* against the "thought and character in the United States," though for the most part these necessarily were "reminiscences" of his impressions of America prior to (and, therefore, without awareness of) Stevens's poetic career

For his part, Stevens continued to follow Santayana's writings and remained apprised of his situation in Rome. Curiously, however, there exists no correspondence between them, though both were inveterate letter writers during their parallel later careers.<sup>4</sup> (Santayana died in 1952, Stevens in 1955.)

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<sup>3</sup> *Adagia* contains epigrams that Stevens collected.

<sup>4</sup> There are only twelve references to Santayana in the 790 pages of the Letters of Wallace Stevens. And this is over a 48 years stretch. The first is a brief remark in his Journal for 1906 in which he praises Santayana's sonnets for their intellectual content. The next two are passing references to Santayana in letters to Elsie Moll in 1907 and 1908. We must jump next to 1940 when Stevens, in a letter to Henry Church, who was contemplating founding a Chair in Poetry at Harvard, brings up Santayana's name as a person who illustrates the requisite scholarly and personal credentials, "although in him the religious and the philosophic are too dominant" (LWS, 378). The most substantial reference to Santayana occurs in a letter to José Rodríguez Feo dated January 4, 1945: "I doubt if Santayana was any more isolated at Cambridge than he wished to be. While I did not take any of his

While the trail of their direct interaction runs out after Santayana left America, the interface of their respective *career-texts* naturally prompts our interest. And it is not just a literary, but a *philosophic interest*, given the contrary directions of Santayana's professed anti-romanticism and Stevens's professed new romanticism.<sup>5</sup>

To paint with a broad brush, Santayana's professed anti-romanticism broadsided more than the literary and philosophic America of his times; its scope extended to the principal facets of European romantic modernity. The wide swath of his critical attack targeted the entire gamut of philosophers, literary figures, and "penitent artists" contemporary with his professional and retirement careers. Santayana often focused his critical *animus* on the iconic targets, Goethe and Emerson, as representative pioneers of romantic modernity. Emerson, he

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courses and never heard him lecture, he invited me to come to see him a number of times and, in that way, I came to know him a little. I read several poems to him and he expressed his own view of the subject of them in a sonnet which he sent me, and which is in one of his books. This was forty years ago, when I was boy and when he was not yet in mid-life. . . I always came away from my visits to him feeling that he made up in the most genuine way for many things that I needed. He was then still definitely a poet." (LWS 481-82). Four years later, in a 1949 letter to José Rodríguez Feo, he refers to Santayana as a "superb figure" and a "strong mind" (LWS 635). In the same year Stevens wrote to a graduate student, Bernard Herringman, referring to Santayana as a "decrepit old philosopher living in Rome" who was "not a philosopher in any austere sense" (LWS 637). This was followed two years later by a passing reference to the styles of Nietzsche and Santayana in a letter to Barbara Church in 1951. The following year, in a letter to Barbara Church dated September 29, 1952 Stevens grieved to hear of Santayana's death (this is the letter in which he says he died "in his sixties," possibly just a typo mistake in the Letters) (LWS, 761-72). In 1953 Stevens declined to write a review article on Santayana for the Hudson Review (LWS 771). In 1954 he replied to an inquiry on his friend Walter Arensberg, confirming that Santayana had been an influence on Arensberg in his Harvard years.

<sup>5</sup> Concentrating on the big picture of the contrasting and overlapping worldviews of Santayana, Stevens, Emerson, and Goethe, the present paper prescinds from the complex relationship that developed—and still needs to be philosophically parsed—among the broader swath of early 20th c. poets. To mention only a few contemporaries in a burgeoning scene, modernism in poetry had its roots in the romantic movement of the early nineteenth century. Yeats called himself one of the last romantics, but repudiated the second half of the nineteenth century. T. S. Eliot repudiated both halves. Stevens came to call himself a new romantic in direct opposition to Eliot and obliquely in separation from the naturalistic modernism of his close poetic colleague, William Carlos Williams. But Stevens united with Williams in denouncing Eliot's anti-modernist trajectory. Williams called *The Waste Land* "the greatest catastrophe" for the development of American modernism, while Stevens called it "negligible" as poetry and regarded Eliot "a bore." He increasingly developed his own poetic modernism in opposition to Eliot. Eliot had studied under Santayana at Harvard, and also under Santayana's disciple, Irving Babbitt, a neo-humanist whose hatred of romanticism also influenced Eliot. Eliot eventually disassociated himself from Santayana's skeptical Platonism as he developed his own neo-Catholic worldview. See *The Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry*, ed. by Richard Ellman and Robert O'Clair (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1988), 1, 280, 313, 480-482, and passim.

repeatedly mused, was “the Puritan Goethe.” As I shall show in a future article, both fell victim to Santayana’s carefully crafted pre-modern worldview, which reprised classical paradigms of the rational life.

Stevens, to the contrary, sought imaginatively to access an “American sublime” (CP 138) and other satisfactions of thought and feeling in a modernist “mythology” that “reflects its regions” (CP&P 476; in “The Owl in the Sarcophagus,” he also speaks of “the mythology of modern death” CP 461). As Harold Bloom has emphasized, Stevens’s “The Poems of Our Climate” (CP 205) had their provenance in the romanticism and transcendentalism that can be traced back to Emerson and Walt Whitman, while pushing forward his own “new romantic” intuitions concerning the relation of reality and the imagination (Bloom 1976). These intuitions were embedded in his lived American context in which “Oxidia is Olympia” (CP 193) and “The imperfect is our paradise” (CP 206). Along the way of seeking to express “exquisite fictions” of the “essential imagination,” Stevens also combated the “waste land” sensibility of T. S. Eliot (who had attended Santayana’s lectures at Harvard). He also tilted against certain “mickey mockers,” a circle of socialist literary critics who demanded a halt to his emphasis on the pure imagination and wanted him to tell “things as they are” (CP 165). Indirectly, he again collided with radiations of Santayana’s critical direction such as those of Santayana’s explicitly anti-romantic lines. Harvard students Irving Babbitt and Van Wyck Brooks. Brooks, for example, followed Santayana in denouncing the romanticism of Walt Whitman, who was a major influence on Stevens.

These issues are still on the table today. To be sure, in the nature of the case, my current construction of Stevens’s textual interface with Santayana is problematic. Stevens’s early personal acquaintance with Santayana and remembrance of him are well documented; on the other hand, Stevens’s writings suggest that he graduated *beyond* Santayana’s initial influence. This interpretation is fraught with minefields, especially in consideration of Stevens’s penchant to write with ironic nuances and ambiguous wordplay—making the comparison of Stevens to Santayana a daunting but nevertheless philosophically significant topic.

Though faced with such interpretive difficulty, I construct the case that Stevens in fact did graduate beyond Santayana’s influence, as shown in the form of his “poems of our climate” published in his mid- and late-career. This is a crucial point, providing much food for philosophic thought in itself.<sup>6</sup> I have a further and larger motivation here as well. Strategically, Stevens’s reversal of

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<sup>6</sup>Cf. Harold Bloom (Bloom 1967). Relevant to but outside the purview of the present paper, Stevens’s “poems of our climate” tilted against the poetic worldview of another of Santayana’s former students, T. S. Eliot, whose solution to the “waste land” of the modern world took the form of a neo-Catholic recovery of the other-worldly theological solutions of the pre-modern past. We can trace this antagonism all way through to the poems of Stevens’ late phase. One example is that his antagonism is still prominent in his long poem “An Ordinary Evening in New Haven,” which appears to have T. S. Eliot obliquely in mind.

Santayana's anti-romantic agenda should shed a light on the transmission of ideas in a major paradigm in the history of modern philosophy. The paradigm consists in the transmission of ideas from the *Jena-zeit* German Enlightenment stemming from Kant, Goethe, Schiller, Schelling, and others, to Emerson and other 19<sup>th</sup>-century American transcendentalists, and onto the classical pragmatists, Peirce, James, Royce (of which more below).

As he came into his own, Santayana had greatness thrust upon him. Time-wise, he found himself on the receiving end of this trans-Atlantic philosophic paradigm. However, his fame consisted rather in reacting *against* it. Retaining the deep-seated influence of his Spanish ancestry and its time-honored base in southern European cultural heritage, he found himself "in Boston but not of it." In due course, he came to set the fundamental terms of his worldview in a broad philosophic matrix *against* the achievements of northern European and American "modernity" *tout court*.

To the contrary, Stevens, in the course of his maturation as a poet over forty years, drew importantly upon the American heritage in a variety of positive expressions probing the imagination's relation to reality.<sup>7</sup> Realistically speaking, the "American climate" of his own day Stevens (not unlike Santayana) often found brutal to an extreme, and yet he remained true to his dictum that "the imperfect is our paradise," as seen in the theme of "Oxidia is Olympia" in *The Man with the Blue Guitar* (CP 182) and later expressions in "*Esthetique du Mal*," in his career's cascading flow of "high" and "low" poetry.

Stevens felt the influence of Santayana's personality and philosophy when he was a Harvard undergraduate around 1900. A fulltime attorney a decade later, he inaugurated his first poetry collection, *Harmonium* (1923), with the publication of two poems, "Peter Quince at the Clavier" and "Sunday Morning" in 1915—poems having something of a didactic nature as well as the tone of a Santayanan worldview, as typified by the phrase "death is the mother of beauty" (CP 68-69), which I take to mean that it is in the world where things change and die that beauty is to be found, not in some otherworldly sphere. Other such early poems of *Harmonium* as "A High-Toned Old Christian Woman," "The Comedian as the Letter C," "Le Monocle de Mon Oncle," "The Emperor of Ice Cream," "The Jack Rabbit," "Virgin Carrying a Lantern," "The Worms at Heaven's Gate," "Cortège for Rosenbloom," and "The Bird with the Coppery, Keen Claws" followed in the same vein. These early poems hewed closely to his Harvard mentor's naturalistic views articulated in *The Sense of Beauty* (1898) and *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion* (1900). Scholars of an earlier generation have suggested such correlations, but it remains a topic replete with possibilities of further appreciation.

Stevens was at Harvard when Santayana's Harvard-days' publications *The Sense of Beauty* and *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion* were received as substantial philosophic works. They laid the groundwork for the soon-to-follow

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<sup>7</sup> Stevens' vocation as an American poet is presaged in certain of the *Harmonium* poems, as for example, in "Earthy Anecdote," "In the Carolinas," "A Paltry Nude Starts on a Spring Voyage," and "Anecdote of the Jar."

expression of the wide range of his naturalistic worldview in his five-volume *Life of Reason* (1902-05), which included the individual volume of *Reason in Art*.<sup>8</sup> Thus, in "Understanding, Imagination, and Mysticism," the opening chapter of *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion*, Santayana asserted that "the single idea" of the essays was that "religion and poetry are identical in essence, and differ merely in the way in which they are attached to practical affairs. Poetry is called religion when it intervenes in life, and religion, when it merely supervenes upon life, is seen to be nothing but poetry" (IPR v).

In the conclusion of *Interpretations* Santayana professed what Joel Porte calls his "aesthetic faith" (IPR xxvi). This faith, Porte says, was redolent with the views of John Ruskin, Mathew Arnold, Walter Pater, Ernest Renan, and others. High poetry, Santayana averred, is simply "religion without practical efficacy and without metaphysical illusion" (IPR 171). High poetry should be appreciated without indulging metaphysical extravagances. Rather it should be cherished as an expression of harmonies of the human spirit. It is easy to surmise that the young Stevens absorbed these naturalistic indications of Santayana to a considerable degree, in due course reconfiguring them in the terms of his own notion of "high poetry" of the creative imagination.

Santayana consistently pronounced his personal version of this aesthetic faith in *The Sense of Beauty*, *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion*, and *Reason in Art*, and then again, in due course, all the way into his late theoretical writings, where he employed the terms of his ontology of matter, essence, spirit, and truth. Crucially, as well, this faith undergirded the criticism of culture that is closely aligned with his philosophy and comprises a significant part of his writings and reputation. His best-selling novel, *The Last Puritan: Memoirs in the Form of a Novel*, conspicuously intertwined central aspects of his ontological categories and his cultural criticism.

Back to Wallace Stevens. As indicated above, the influence of Santayana's ideas on the young Stevens can be traced to "Peter Quince," "Sunday Morning," "The Comedian as the Letter C," and other signature poems of his first collection, *Harmonium* (1923). Many of the one-hundred poems of this first collection ironically feature the life of the poetic imagination contesting the received tradition's "haunted heavens" (CP62), rather authorizing poets to "whip from themselves / A jovial hullabaloo among the spheres" (CP 62). *Harmonium* is replete with such deflationary themes of "earthy anecdotes" (CP 3), "invectives against swans" (CP 4)—that is, against biblical orthodoxies and their "canting curlicues of heaven and the heavenly script" (CP 12)—while promoting a this-worldly *jouiissance* of the imaginative spirit *per se* over the mentality of the masses of "boorish birth" (CP 50) who "lack the quirks of imagery" (CP 83).

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<sup>8</sup> For an insightful current discussions of Santayana's artistic ideas, see Richard M. Rubin, "Santayana and the Arts," and "Comment on Rubin's 'Santayana and the Arts' and Reply by Richard Rubin," in *Overheard in Seville: Bulletin of the Santayana Society*, Number 34, Fall 2016, 44-58 and 59-63.

Indeed, in Joel Porte's estimate, Stevens was "Santayana's truest disciple, his most constant epebe" (Joel Porte, IPR. xxix)<sup>9</sup>

It should be noted, however, that Porte's way of marrying the worldviews of Santayana and Stevens stops with his discussion of Stevens's early poetry. He does not account for Stevens's trajectory of high visionary poetry in his later career. Stevens, following a twelve year hiatus away from poetry after *Harmonium*, resumed his poetic career with the new poetry collections of *Ideas of Order* (1936), *The Man with the Blue Guitar* (1937), and *Parts of a World* (1942). Symbolically "Sailing After Lunch" (CP 128), he said "Farewell to Florida" (CP 125) that is, signaled that these new collections of poems should be read as expressing a conscious metamorphosis into a recognizably new post-*Harmonium* sensibility.<sup>10</sup>

Then, by the time of *Credences of Summer* (1946) and *The Auroras of Autumn* (1947)—as Stevens explicitly admitted—his "muse" (his "interior paramour") had gone further yet. The scene shifted to his envisioning an "enthroned imagination" (a superhuman cosmic imagination) which "in the midst of summer stops to imagine winter" (CP 417). In the contemporaneously written *Adagia*, he declared that "the exquisite pleasure" of the poetic imagination consisted "in

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<sup>9</sup> At the same time, while Porte discounts much of Santayana's early polemical writing against Emerson, he concludes his Introduction to the MIT Press critical edition of *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion* (IPR (pp. xxx-xxxi) by asserting that Emerson, Santayana, and Stevens shared the same project of naturalistic, skeptical idealism. All three, he says, promoted the "ideal harmonies" of imaginative interpretation of the world in which Santayana's sense of "relevant fiction" became in effect Stevens' "supreme fiction" that usurps the role of traditional religion and "makes widows wince." Daniel Fuchs, 'Wallace Stevens and Santayana,' (1967), is a good example of a convincing analysis of Stevens' *Sunday Morning* as resonating with the diction and tone of Santayana's early philosophic writings.

<sup>10</sup> Daniel Fuchs (1967) attempts to stretch Santayana's influence onto the later-phase Stevens; but, arriving at "Esthétique du Mal" (1944), he acknowledges that the linkage between Santayana and Stevens breaks down. Significantly, Fuchs makes no attempt to go into 'The Auroras of Autumn' (1947) or beyond that, which contain the poems constituting the vintage phase of Stevens's new romanticism. Joseph Carroll lists studies of other Santayana-inspired interpreters of Stevens, such as those of J. V. Cunningham, Yvor Winters, Louis L. Martz, Helen Vendler, Joseph Riddell, Alan Perlis, and Frank Doggett, who have attempted to see an unbroken poetics between Stevens's *Harmonium* (1923) and his later poetry (Carroll 1987, 30). Simon Crichtley's recent book on Stevens, *Things Merely Are: Philosophy in the Poetry of Wallace Stevens*, though not indebted to Santayana's influence, is an example of a like tendency to prioritize Stevens's early hedonistic "gaiety of language" (as in *Harmonium*) while egregiously misreading his later-phase poetry. Stevens himself, in a letter of 1935, indicated that he regarded *Harmonium* as something he had moved beyond: "when *Harmonium* was in the making there was a time I liked the idea of images and images alone, or images and the music of verse together. I then believed in pure poetry, as it was called" (LWS 288.). Later in his career, Stevens came to explore another idea of pure poetry as he moved beyond the style and intellectual fare of *Harmonium*.



believing in a fiction knowing that it is a fiction,” while associating the “supreme fiction” with “the idea of God.” These were the terms of his evolving new sensibility that can be construed as outgrowing his earlier adherence to Santayana’s aesthetic naturalism and culture criticism. Let us now spend some time tracing the outlines of Stevens’s professed move to his newer poetic scene.

## Stevens’s Metamorphosis in Poetic Sensibility

Stevens’s poetic and prose writings, including his *Letters* and *Adagia*, are notoriously ambiguous and elusive musings, often simultaneously playful and serious. Despite the daunting exegetical task they present, I propose in this section to present a further case for the metamorphosis in idealistic sensibility informing the post-*Harmonium* phases of his career, as well as to employ it as a guide for his new romanticism as a response to Santayana’s anti-romanticism.

“Reality,” Stevens mused in the title of the poem that serves as the epigraph for this article “is an activity of the most august Imagination.” In “Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour,” he spoke of “the intensest rendezvous,” one in which

... we collect ourselves  
Out of all the indifferences, into one thing,  
Within a single thing, a single shawl  
Wrapped tightly round us, since we are poor, a warmth,  
A light, a power, the miraculous influence. (CP 524)

In such a miraculous atmosphere of “august meditation,” he also imagined himself as a “new scholar replacing an older one”—*replacing, namely, Emerson of Concord!*<sup>11</sup>—the scholar-poet’s imagination being

Part of a discovery, a changing part of change,  
A sharing of color and being part of it.  
The afternoon is visibly a source,  
Too wide, too irised, to be more than calm,  
Too much like thinking to be less than thought,  
Obscurest parent, obscurest patriarch,  
A daily majesty of meditation.  
 (“Looking Across the Fields and Watching the Birds Fly”, CP 518)

These are only a few of the many textual sources I develop to pursue my case. Below, I explore the further relevant interpretive matter involved in his encomium to Santayana in “To an Old Philosopher in Rome,” a poem which appeared in the same collection of poems of his later years. Here it should be noted that Stevens published his explicitly Emersonian poem, “Looking Across the Fields and Watching the Birds Fly,” in the same year (1952) he published “To an Old Philosopher in Rome.” The latter poem is ostensibly about Santayana’s final days in the convent of the Blue Nuns. But just as plausibly, it must be read as imaging

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<sup>11</sup> See below at page 44 and Bates 2007, 59-60, 70.

Santayana as a surrogate for Stevens himself in his last years.<sup>12</sup> In the final analysis, "To an Old Philosopher in Rome" is only one of many scenes of metaphysically imaginative transparency in which Stevens sublated equally the worldviews of Emerson and Santayana. Both poems of 1952 have to be placed in the context of the trajectory of his later-phase aesthetic transcendentalism. Let me now pursue Stevens' quest for and progress in poetic realizations of such registers of metaphysical transparency.<sup>13</sup>

Now, in 1951, the year before publishing either poem, Stevens spoke of "the loss of the gods dispelled in mid-air" ("Two or Three Ideas," CP&P 844). His own project of writing a *high visionary poetry* was the other side of this coin. He wrote that such poetry was that in which "the idea of pure poetry, essential imagination, as the highest objective of the poet, appears to be, at least potentially, as great as the idea of God" (LWS 369). Terms such as "pure poetry" of "essential imagination" metamorphosed into various synonyms in Stevens's later poetry. These included: "essential unity" (LWS. 195), "the essential poem at the center of things" (LWS 377), "the pure idea" (LWS. 231), "pure principle" (LWS 361), "the first idea" (LWS 350), the "central heart and mind of mind" (LWS 229), "the whiteness that is the ultimate intellect" (LWS. 372), "the imagination that sits enthroned" (LWS, 360), and the "supreme fiction" (LWS 329), among other formulations.

Such cumulative expressions of his mature poetic trajectory certainly solidify Stevens's endeavor to construct a new romanticism of the imagination. In his essay "The Figure of the Youth as Virile Poet" (1942), Stevens had already written: "The idea of God is merely a poetic idea, even if the supreme poetic idea" (CP&P 674). Or again: "The mind that in heaven created the earth and the mind that on earth created heaven were, as it happened, one" (*Adagia* CP&P 913). As for this creative source, in the poem "A Primitive Like an Orb" (1948) he muses that "The essential poem at the center of things" produces all the phenomenal appearances—of sea, land, and sky. Thus while this "essential poem" is itself "something seen and known in lesser poems," the "central poem is the poem of the whole, / The poem of the composition of the whole" (CP 442). It is an "orb," an "encircling planet," a "huge, high harmony," a "miraculous multiplex of lesser poems," a "vis," a "principle," a "nature," a "patron of origins," and a "skeleton of the ether". (CP 442-443). (*Center*, *circle*, and *orb* are key metaphors in Emerson's poetic cosmology, as in his famous essay "Circles".)

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<sup>12</sup> See Harold Bloom: Wallace Stevens: The Poems of Our Climate, p. 361.

<sup>13</sup> In the immediately following I am especially indebted to Milton J. Bates (2007), "Stevens and the Supreme Fiction" in *The Cambridge Companion to Wallace Stevens* and to Joseph Carroll, "Stevens and Romanticism," in the same volume. I am generally indebted to Harold Bloom and Helen Cook, and to, among others, Helen Vendler, Frank Dogget, B. J. Leggett, John Serio, who still contribute to my reading of Stevens' poems. It would take another study to trace how frequently correlations with Santayana crop up in the exegetical commentaries of these authors.

Again, as early as 1940, in his poem "Of Modern Poetry" (CP 239) Stevens described the purpose and character of his *modern* poetry as "The poem of the mind in the act of finding / What will suffice". What *finally* will suffice constituted the project of his "poems of our climate," which culminated in perhaps his finest expression of imaginative transparency: "Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour" (1951):

Out of this same light, out of the central mind,  
We make a dwelling in the evening air,  
In which being there together is enough

These lines are preceded by the signature line, "We say God and the imagination are one" (CP 524).

I recommend juxtaposing the transcendently transparent imagination of "Final Soliloquy of the Paramour" with, "An Old Man Asleep," the poem which Stevens strategically placed as the leadoff to his last collection, *The Rock*, in 1954:

The two worlds are asleep, are sleeping now.  
A dumb sense possesses them in a kind of solemnity.  
The self and the earth—your thoughts, your feelings,  
Your beliefs and disbeliefs, your whole peculiar plot;  
The redness of your reddish chestnut trees,  
The river motion, the drowsy motion of the river R. (CP 501)

The river R" is another Emersonian symbol (see Emerson's poem "The Two Rivers") that Stevens's used in his incessant prospecting for the "supreme fiction" in which "God and the imagination are one." This symbol reappears in Stevens's "The River of Rivers in Connecticut" (CP 533). And all three poems shed light on Stevens's poetic intentionality in the two previously cited poems: "To an Old Philosopher in Rome" and "Looking across the Fields and Watching the Birds Fly" published in 1952.

"Final Soliloquy" and "An Old Man Asleep" are mutually interpreting. In his *Letters*, Stevens wrote: "It is not the individual alone that indulges in the pathetic fallacy. It is the race. God is the centre of the pathetic fallacy" (LWS 444). In other words, it is the whole human race that engages in the pathetic fallacy. For Stevens, in short, not the sensuous gaiety of language of his earlier poems of *Harmonium* (1923), but the new romantic poetry of transcendental transparency of his mid and late career became the highest form of his imaginative achievements, as well as the "noble" norm against which he came to measure all other forms of imaginative experience.<sup>14</sup> The net effect is that his new romanticism left behind the received historical experiences of realism, aestheticism, symbolism, and modernism, by way of incorporating his own

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<sup>14</sup> See "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words," the first essay of Stevens' *The Necessary Angel: Essays on Reality and the Imagination*.

“fictive belief” that all metaphysical ideas are “merely” constructs of the “central imagination.”<sup>15</sup>

In his early *Harmonium* collection, Stevens had written that “Poetry is the supreme fiction, madame” (“To A High-Toned Old Christian Woman,” CP 59). Now, in his mature phase, Stevens strove to fashion “fictions” of the clairvoyant imagination through which “the essential poem” becomes an ever elusive but living presence. This theme of elusive disclosures underwrote, for example, his “An Ordinary Evening in New Haven,” “Prologues to What is Possible,” “Not Ideas about the Thing, but the Thing itself,” and “Of Mere Being,” among many other poems that can be cited. In such intuitive flashes of clairvoyant imagination, he took the “final step” of embracing what he paradoxically called “the nicer knowledge of / Belief, that what it believes in is not true” (CP 332). It was this pervasive paradox that informed his signature notion of the “supreme fiction,” which could be called the overall central theme in the second half of his career.

In a retrospective note on his *Collected Poems* in 1954, Stevens wrote that his poetry explores “the possibility of a supreme fiction, recognized as a fiction, in which men could propose to themselves a fulfillment” (LWS 820). Such a “supreme fiction” involves not an *object* of belief but believing itself as an nonstop process of poetic revelation, human and more than human. One may perhaps think of the influence of William James’s “will to believe” here, too.

In his *Adagia* (1930-1955), there are similarly relevant musings concerning “essential imagination” that Stevens converted into his poetry. “After one has abandoned a belief in god, poetry is that essence which takes its place as life’s redemption” (CP&P 901); “It is the belief and not the god that counts” (CP&P. 902). “Perhaps there is a degree of perception at which what is real and what is imagined are one: a state of clairvoyant observation, accessible or possibly accessible to the poet or, say, the acutest poet” (CP&P. 906). “Realism is a corruption of reality” (CP&P. 906). “Poetry is a purging of the world’s poverty and change and evil and death. It is a present perfecting, a satisfaction in the irremediable poverty of life” (CP&P. 906). “God is a symbol for something that can as well take other forms, for example, the form of high poetry” (CP&P. 907). “The poet must not adapt his experience to that of the philosopher” (CP&P 909). “God is in me or not at all (does not exist)” (CP&P 911). “The imagination consumes & exhausts some element of reality” (CP&P 911). “The mind that in heaven created the earth and the mind that on earth created heaven were, as it happened, one” (CP&P 913).

Now, Milton J. Bates argues that after the war Stevens’s interest in a “supreme fiction” increased. He explored the notion of “central poem” (of “Primitive Like an Orb”) in a series of postwar lectures, namely, “Three Academic Pieces” (1947), “Effects of Analogy” (1948), “Imagination as Value” (1948), and “The Relation Between Poetry and Painting” (1951). In the late 1940s

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<sup>15</sup> Here of course I use “merely” (purely, simply?) in the highly charged sense of one of Stevens’ final legacy poems of the relation of reality and the imagination, “Of Mere Being” (1955).

and early 1950s, Stevens further speculated that “essential imagination,” the source of our lesser poems within “the poem of the whole,” may lie outside the consciousness of any individual. Thus, for example, in canto VII of “The Auroras of Autumn” (1948) he raises the questions:

Is there an imagination that sits enthroned  
 As grim as it is benevolent . . .  
 . . . which in the midst of summer stops  
 To imagine winter? When the leaves are dead,  
 Does it take its place in the north . . . ?  
 . . . And do these heavens adorn  
 And proclaim it . . . ?” (CP 417)

Then, again in interrogative form, “The Auroras of Autumn” advances a daring, anti-nominalistic, quasi-religious proposition, that a transcendent “crown and mystic cabala” is responsible for the order and seasonal change in the universe (CP 417).

We have seen that Stevens’s later-penned “Final Soliloquy of an Interior Paramour” (1951) contains what is perhaps Stevens’s most famous line, “We say God and the imagination are one” (CP 444). (“We” refers to Stevens and his muse or “interior paramour.”) Stevens lifted this line from his *Adagia* notebooks, the complete entry of which is:

“Proposita:

1. God and the imagination are one.
2. The thing imagined is the imaginer.

The second equals the thing imagined and the imaginer are one. Hence, I suppose, the imaginer is God.” (CP&P 914)

Set within “Final Soliloquy,” the line has Stevens and his muse as both active and passive. In its reference to “central mind,” this version of the “supreme fiction” most resembles the heavenly “imagination that sits enthroned” in canto VII of “The Auroras of Autumn.” However elusively, the “central mind” that has “arranged the rendezvous” supplies Stevens with an encompassing vision of reality.

Another key poem of Stevens’s sense of *metaphysical transparency* is the aforementioned “Looking across the Fields and Watching the Birds Fly” (1952). Bates’s interpretation of it is as follows. “Mr. Homburg” of Concord—stand-in for Emerson—at first seems to correspond to Santayana’s description of romantic dreamers who think that reality may be like themselves, their own transcendental self and their own romantic dreams indefinitely extended (cf. Santayana, WD 195). Stevens first maintains an ironic distance from what seems to be the world’s “pensive nature,” which is “a mechanical / And slightly detestable *operandum*, free / From man’s ghost, larger and yet a little like, / Without his literature and without his gods. . . .” Stevens finds this “irritating” rather than exhilarating

because Mr. Homburg expresses it incautiously (excluding human agency and nature's blunt laws).<sup>16</sup>

However—and this is key—"Mr. Homburg" gradually warms to this notion of a "daily majesty of meditation, / That comes and goes in silences of its own" and speaks of "an element," "A thing not planned for imagery or belief," which is "The transparency through which the swallow weaves" (the line which explains the title of the poem). This transparency is

Without any form or any sense of form,  
What we know in what we see, what we feel in what  
We hear, what we are, beyond mystic disputation,  
In the tumult of integration out of the sky,

and

Too much like thinking to be less than thought,  
Obscurest parent, obscurest patriarch.  
A daily majesty of meditation." (CP 517)

At the end of the poem, "A new scholar" (Stevens himself!) is finally prepared to accept Mr. Homburg's idealism, amended so as to accommodate human agency and recognition of nature's "blunt laws."<sup>17</sup>

Furthering the same angle of interpretation, Joseph Carroll, in *Wallace Stevens' Supreme Fiction: A New Romanticism*, Chapter Five, "A Landscape of the Mind," indicates that Stevens was developing various preliminary adumbrations, or "crystal hypotheses," to his idea of God as the "supreme fiction" in "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction" (Carroll 1987).<sup>18</sup> From *Harmonium* (1923) through "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction" (1942), his poetry tended to privilege the human imagination over external reality—as he said, for example, in "The Man with the Blue Guitar," the world as it is is not accessible to us as it is in itself, but as only as it is constructed by the imagination. "Credences of Summer," however, signals a change in his attempt to depict a reality beyond the mind. In Stevens's own words, cited at the beginning of this paper: "From the imaginative period of 'Notes' I turned to the ideas of 'Credences of Summer.'" Stevens added: "At the time when that poem was written my feelings for the necessity of a final accord with reality was at its strongest." Moreover, he explained that "reality was

<sup>16</sup> The words "mechanical . . . *operandum*" resonate with "The Auroras of Auroras," cited above, canto VII, "Is there an imagination that sits enthroned / As grim as it is benevolent . . . / . . . which in the midst of summer stops / To imagine winter?" As well, the world's "pensive nature" resonates with "the giant of the weather" (CP 417) and "the pensive giant prone in violet space" of "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction" (CP 387), and in similar allusions of other poems.

<sup>17</sup> Harold Bloom concurs in interpreting the poem's "Mr. Homburg" with Ralph Waldo Emerson (Bloom 358).

<sup>18</sup> B. J. Leggett observes the same trajectory. Leggett notes how Stevens himself acknowledged that "The Auroras of Autumn," which followed "Credences of Summer," was the marker for the shift in orientation seen in his later poems (Leggett 2007).

the summer of the title of the book [*Transport to Summer*, 1947] in which the poem appeared" (LWS 636, 719).

This coming to accord with reality would also appear to be the purport of his key transitional poem "Angel Surrounded by Paysans" (1949, CP 496) about which his *Letters* indicate that the appearing angel is the angel not of the imagination, but is "the angel of reality" (LWS 690, 652, 654, 655). It is the angel of reality which confronts "one of the countrymen" in an elusive apparition, saying:

... Am I not,  
 Myself, only half of a figure of a sort,  
 A figure half seen, or seen for a moment, a man  
 Of the mind, an apparition appareled in  
 Apparels of such lightest look that a turn  
 Of my shoulder and quickly, too quickly, I am gone? (CP 496)

Stevens repeated such a presence-in-absence of reality in another superb poem, "The World as Meditation", in which Penelope, longing for Ulysses's return, speaks the lines:

But was it Ulysses? Or was it only the warmth of the sun  
 On her pillow? The thought kept beating in her like her heart.  
 The two kept beating together. It was only day. (CP 521)

But again, even before "Angel Surrounded by Paysans" and "The Auroras of Autumn," "Credences of Summer" (1946) depicts a moment of accord with a reality independent of the mind: "Let's see the very thing and nothing else. . . / Without evasion by a single metaphor" (CP 373). This poem attempts to describe a world in which the sound of a bird "is not part of the listener's own sense" (CP 377), a world "complete in itself" that does not require the human imagination. It ends with "the summer night" as the fiction of an "inhuman author" (CP 377)—the meditation of a cosmic imagination meditating with the "gold bugs" (the stars?)—the theme he pursued further in "The Auroras of Autumn."

Now, while "Credences of Summer" (1946) is a poem of stasis, the realization of a perfect moment "Beyond which there is nothing left of time" (CP 372), "The Auroras of Autumn" (1947) breaks down such moments by depicting Stevens facing the awesome energy of the northern lights soaring millions of electrified miles in space. It first symbolizes the serpent shape of the *aurora borealis* as "the master of the maze / Of body and air and forms and images, / Relentlessly in possession of happiness" (CP 411). But the crucial next line says: "This is his poison: that we should disbelieve / Even that." Marianne Moore in 1954 delivered the acute commentary on the meaning of that line: "The poison in the meditations of the serpent in the ferns is 'that we should disbelieve' that there is a starry serpent in the heavens on which to fix the grateful mind."

All this is to say that "The Auroras of Autumn" is ultimately a poem of Stevens's monistic Emersonian "belief" taken to a new edge of "exquisite fiction." Cantos II, III, and IV all begin with "Farewell to an Idea," recalling Stevens's concept of the *human idea* of order in *Ideas of Order* and "Notes toward a

Supreme Fiction.” The humanizing functions of the mother and father in canto V finally break down, degenerating into a “loud, disordered mooch” (CP. 415), and by the end of canto VI *all* human ideas of order have been destroyed. The sources of these orders, human memory and imagination, which are depicted in the poem as “a single candle,” are helpless in face of the awesomely destructive “universe aflame,” as experienced with the *aurora borealis*. Stevens, “The scholar of one candle,” faces “An Arctic effulgence flaring on the frame / Of everything he is. And he feels afraid” (CP 416). But, reminiscent of the force of the Kantian sublime, at this point the cosmic imagination of “Credences of Summer” reappears: in canto VII, the *aurora* represents not only a universal destroying flux of nature, but also “an imagination that sits enthroned” in the northern skies “which in the midst of summer stops / To imagine winter” (CP 417). It “meditates” (CP 420) reality into and out of existence *innocently, not maliciously*, as Stevens takes great pains to emphasize in the poem’s finale. The cosmic imagination experiences “all pleasures and all pains”; the *aurora borealis* symbolizes tragedy and desolation but also change and death as a part of “an innocence of the earth” (CP 418).<sup>19</sup> Stevens ends having his interior rabbi read (“Read, Rabbi, the phases of this difference”) to his congregation, “for today and for tomorrow, this extremity”—namely,

In these unhappy, he meditates a whole,  
The full of fortune and the full of fate,  
As if he lives all lives, that he might know,  
In hall harridan, not hushful paradise,  
To a haggling of wind and weather, by these lights  
Like a blaze of summer straw, in winter’s nick” (CP 420-421).

## Conclusion

The upshot of this detailed exegesis of Stevens’s metamorphosis is that Stevens started with but went beyond Santayana’s vision of a world grounded in

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<sup>19</sup> We note that these last lines concerning “a haggling of wind and weather” provide Stevens’ own interpretation to his enigmatic earlier poem, “Chaos in Motion and Not in Motion.” Both “Chaos in Motion” and “The Auroras of Autumn” combat the poetic cosmology of T. S. Eliot’s “waste land.” According to B. L. Leggett, “Earlier Stevens’ poems depict unreal gods as projections of the human imagination; now the situation is reversed; we and our world, it seems, are part of a larger imagination” (Leggett 2007, 65). Joseph Carroll indicates that the culminating poems of Stevens’s high visionary poetry came after the death of his best friend, Henry Church, in April of 1947 (Carroll 1987, 213); nuances of the same are to be found in “The Auroras of Autumn,” “The Owl in the Sarcophagus, and “A Primitive Like an Orb” (1947 and early 1948). Leggett, in “Stevens’ Later Poetry”, also references, in addition to ‘The Auroras of Autumn’ (1947), 23 shorter poems in Stevens’s collection *The Auroras of Autumn* (1950) and 17 poems of *The Rock* (1954) and the *Opus Postumous* in which Stevens thematizes nuanced variations on a cosmic imagination (Leggett 2007, 65-75).



its material nature. Santayana used this material grounding as a chastening element—seeing the realm of matter as an unfeeling analogue of God. Stevens absorbed this viewpoint but reversed its direction. The imagination rather than the realm of matter becomes supreme. For Santayana spirituality takes account of all human passions, but remains detached. For Stevens, spirit is what arises from imaginative experience.

“Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction” and similar poems repossessed Santayana’s concepts of “pure poetry” and “aesthetic faith,” but at the same time they *reversed* them in a trajectory *away from* Santayana’s notion of “spirit” toward the idea of an “essential imagination”—imagination not restricted to a reductive materialistic grounding. A poem that encapsulates Stevens’s orientation toward spirit is “Less and Less Human, O Savage Spirit” (CP 327.)

Santayana’s humanism is grounded in his professed materialism. Consequently, his aesthetics was a hedonistic aesthetics of an Epicurean stamp. In contrast, Stevens’s poetic muse was metaphysical, his high visionary poetry aesthetically transcendentalist—very conspicuously Emersonian—as he mused in final lines of his “Esthétique du mal” published in *Transport to Summer*:

... The adventurer  
In humanity has not conceived of a race  
Completely physical in a physical world.  
The green corn gleams and the metaphysicals  
Lie sprawling in majors of the August heat,  
The rotund emotions, paradise unknown” (CP 325).

Here Stevens conspicuously rejects the other-worldly metaphysics of T. S. Eliot, but the poem can also be understood as encapsulating his departure from Santayana. Santayana’s anti-romanticism was a function of his disillusioned retirement from the world, which he theoretically expressed in the terms of his skeptical Platonism. In denying the literal truth of religions, he regarded works of high imagination as expressions of deeply felt human longings and experiences that show us how we might live better by seeing clearly what the world really offers and what it denies. It is anti-romantic in that it shuns the positive celebration of experience in favor of the purity of detached contemplation. For his part, Stevens adopts Santayana’s key insight that religion is a product of the imagination, but moves toward finding something to replace the false gods of religion with new disclosures of “essential imagination,” while knowing they are and must be imaginative. Because our perceptions of reality are fundamentally imaginative constructs, in his later poetry Stevens affirmatively celebrates reality itself as a product of high poetry. It is such a celebratory Emersonian attitude that is opposed to Santayana’s chosen role as disillusioned observer and makes Stevens into a romantic “adventurer in humanity” in pursuing “supreme fictions” in which “we say God and the imagination are one.”

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# Between Spiritual Dissolution and the Invention of the Human: George Santayana and Harold Bloom on Hamlet and the crisis of agency<sup>1</sup>

“Tragic hero is more ‘deinon’ than any man.” (Paul Ricoeur 1992, 246)

In this paper, I discuss briefly the relation of selfhood and the tragic from the perspective of Santayana’s cultural interpretation of *Hamlet*. More specifically, I present the philosopher from Avila in a dialogue with another thinker and literary critic, Harold Bloom. I hope this uncommon hermeneutic juxtaposition adds something new to our understanding of Santayana’s approach to Shakespeare. The exceptional elegance and power of language represented by both interlocutors has, in many cases, led me to quote rather than to paraphrase their thoughts.

While Nietzsche reached for early cult forms of tragedy as a Dionysian, collective, ritualistic expression of unconscious powers, Santayana viewed tragedy—in the vein of Aristotle and Bruno Snell—as a child of reflection, which, by giving rise to tragedy, sublimated the non-discursive tensions of old cults into something, in a broad sense, intelligible.<sup>2</sup> As Albin Lesky, in a Hegelian spirit, comments on the language of mature tragedy, it does not describe things but rather originates from them and spontaneously expresses the spirit’s synthetic inquiry into the world of human affairs (Lesky 2006, 176-177). Through tragedy, the Greek poets managed to overcome what was barbaric and undisciplined.

Likewise, for Santayana the spiritual in tragic art implied “passion . . . transmuted into discipline” (ARS 63). Mythology, tragedy, and the spirituality of mature religions belong to the same continuum of “disenchanted and re-enchanting” the world with an ultimate aim of “seeing this world in its simple truth” (PSL, 42). Both art (poetry in particular) and religion idealize experience imaginatively and, as such, are an expression of human spiritual freedom. Their subject matter is “all time and all experience” and their “ultimate theme” is “all the possibilities of being” (IPR 3-4). While myth and tragedy draw predominantly on the repetitiveness in nature, which legitimizes and sustains a certain *human condition*, mature religions offer a meaningful ethical language of negotiation between freedom and necessity (which in a religious orientation is replaced by providence). But already tragedy overcomes the mundane

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is based on a section of my dissertation devoted to Santayana’s conception of human self: Katarzyna Krempleska, *Mask and Thought: the Conception of the Aporetic Self in George Santayana’s Philosophy*, dissertation presented and defended in April 2015 at The Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of Polish Academy of Sciences, supervised by Agata Bielik-Robson.

<sup>2</sup> For an extensive discussion of this topic, see Snell 1982.

repetitiveness of myth, for it embodies the act of *understanding* proper to the spirit which transcends the locality in which it is grounded. It is an expression of growing self-awareness of humanity in respect to its own finitude experienced as confrontation with necessity. Necessity, which suggests the obscure “something” beyond, is idealized in tragedy and represented as fate. Moreover, it suggests a cosmic background, the grand structure of the universe, which endows the dramatic world with a “fine sense of the dignity and pathos of life” (ARS 71).

Santayana also tells us:

That life should be able to reach such expression in the realm of eternal form is a sublime and wonderful privilege but it is tragic . . . to the animal in man. . . . [Yet] this is the escutcheon of human nature, in which its experience is emblazoned. In so far as men are men at all . . . , they militate under this standard . . . . Whatever refuses to be idealized this way, they are obliged to disown and commit to instant oblivion. . . . What is not covered in this way by some abiding symbol can never be recovered . (SE 134-135)

*Animal symbolicum*—to use Ernst Cassirer’s term—by means of Greek tragedy managed to poeticize and dramatize necessity, inspiring it with the dignity of the divine. By the same token, tragedy revealed an early insight into the uncanniness and the singleness of human being in nature. *On one hand, man, as subdued to its laws, is part of nature, on another—inasmuch as he rebelliously strives to transcend it, he is “vengefully” transcended by it.* Thus, the transgression which accompanies *hubris* provokes *nemesis*. Tragedy, Santayana wrote, is

dominated by the idea of fate. . . . [There is] the deep conviction of the limits and conditions of human happiness . . . . The fates guide the willing and drag the unwilling. . . . Life is seen as whole, although in miniature. Its boundaries and its principles are studied more than its incidents. The human, therefore, everywhere merges with the divine. Our mortality, being sharply defined and much insisted upon, draws the attention all the more to [the] *eternity of Nature and of law.* (ARS 66-67, my emphasis)

Here Santayana draws attention to the spiritual achievement of elevating experience to a divine order. As an evidence of illumination and the immediate transmutation of life into what is “disciplined”:

The blackest tragedy is festive; the most pessimistic philosophy is an enthusiastic triumph of thought. . . . It is no interruption to experience to master experience as tragedy aspires to do . . . . Tragedy, the knowledge of death, raises us to that height. (SE 132)

The sublimating power of spirit lets Greek tragedy synthetically convey human condition as a *dramatic matrix of all action*. The Greek authors, as exemplified by Aeschylus, strive to reveal the essence, “the archetype” or “the hard core of human action” (Snell 1982, 106-107). According to the author of *Libation Bearers*, the principle that he who acts suffers and suffering leads to understanding, belongs to the essence of action (Lesky 2006, 183-184). The possibility of this synthetic approach was, Santayana claimed, due to the

wholeness of Greek outlook, the condition of any wholeness always being “not this or that system but some system. Its value is not the value of truth, but that of victorious imagination.” (ARS 71) <sup>3</sup> The “imaginative power” gives “sublimity” to the works of several poets, “as it gives sublimity to many passages in the Bible.” (ARS 71)

Santayana enjoyed declaring sympathy to antiquity, the genius of which he saw resting in the sublimated unity of experience and art. He juxtaposed this ancient unity with the tendency towards an unfortunate separation of art from experience, exhibited, in his view, by Western culture ever since. Similar voices appear in contemporary interpretations of tragedy. Alenka Zupančič, combining elements of psychoanalytical and philosophical approach, writes of tragedy as “essentially the work of sublimation, in the precise sense of elevating a singular subjective destiny to that place of the symbolic structure that constitutes its blind spot, its inherent impasse” (Zupančič 2008, 176). Modernity is marked by a mimetic crisis of tragedy manifesting itself in the experience “worse than tragedy”—the experience of *bare life*, beyond any sense of wholeness, which might “inscribe death in the dimension of, for example, honor and dignity” (Zupančič 2008, 175).

Going beyond the limits of Greek tragedy towards modern - religious and secular - representations of the tragic aspect of human condition, one may say (at the price of gross generalization) that tragedy essentially shows man as—to use Santayana’s way of phrasing it - *a creature of circumstance*. In other words, a human being *essentially* is in situation which, always and inevitably, exceeds the limits of both his awareness and his actions. Yet this suggests that *the creature of circumstance* is assumed at once to be *a spiritual creature* because only on that condition something like a tragic conflict might be experienced, imagined, and woven into a plot; “for what is tragedy but the conflict between inspiration and truth?” (TP 219). <sup>4</sup> On one hand, the fact that tragedy often ends in death establishes the paradigmatic triumph of truth over “inspiration”. On the other hand, it definitely is a spiritual perspective to equate the death of the hero with the annihilation of the values he represents. Whatever might happen in future “makes no difference to the drama in this soul” (TP 219), because *the hero represents a principle contrary to that of the truth of tragedy*. The hero, then, is a rebel against the realm of facts. Interestingly, Walter Benjamin shared some of Santayana’s reflections on tragedy. Tragedy is the work of genius, says Benjamin, since for the first time something superior to “demonic fate” is given artistic expression, namely - a “pagan man becomes aware that he is better than his god, but this realization robs him of speech, remains unspoken” (Benjamin 1996, 201-206). There is no peaceful consent on the hero’s part for the logic of guilt and

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<sup>3</sup> This sketchy overview of Santayana’s argument in the support of philosophical and religious synthesis is part of his critique of modernity as expressive of the loss of unity and discipline, symptomatic of spiritual disintegration, which is likely to lead to the instrumentalization of reason and a new form of “wholeness” represented by positivism.

<sup>4</sup> We may read “inspiration” here as “axiological motivation”.

atonement. Benjamin's (agonistic) *genius* of the tragic hero may perhaps be translated into Santayana's language as the manifestation of the hero's spirituality, which enables him to pursue ideals and value them above facts. This elevation of the hero renders him/her sublime—an aesthetic effect in tragedy, of which we have spoken.

The tragic, when approached as an aspect of human condition and experience idealized in art, may well be regarded as non-religious and non-philosophical (neither the way of faith, nor that of reason leads to the revelation of the nature of the tragic), and yields itself to interpretations in a "disillusioned" mode. According to Paul Ricoeur, tragedy is "*the voice of nonphilosophy*, ... [an] untimely irruption" from which "we await the shock capable of awakening our mistrust with respect not only to the illusions of the heart but also to the illusions born of the *hubris* of practical reason itself" (Ricoeur 1992, 241). The disillusioned mode was the choice of Seneca, Santayana notes, and later that of Shakespeare, the difference being that for the first it was a meaningful disillusion, while for the latter: "sound and fury, signifying nothing" (ARS 65). I will discuss briefly Santayana's interpretation of *Hamlet* with reference to the most "old-fashioned humanist"<sup>5</sup> contemporary literary critic, Harold Bloom. The choice of Bloom as an imaginary interlocutor for Santayana is justified precisely by an "ancient" sort of universalistic humanism inherent in their thinking, an outlook which—no matter how untimely or anachronistic it may have seemed in the light of changing paradigmatic worldviews at Academia - is never dead and once in a while makes a brilliant come back as epitomized by Bloom's *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*. Bloom and Santayana, anti-dogmatic as they are, are of an opinion that literature reveals certain historical and universal aspects of human being in the world. They view the author as a particular individual, as an (unconscious) voice of his times, and his work as a representative of humanity at large. In the case of *Hamlet*, some of their conclusions converge, revealing, however, two divergent *sympathies*, which, in addition to making the discussion more vivid, enhance our understanding of Santayana's cultural critique and its relation to the issue of the human *self*.

Santayana reads Shakespeare's tragedies in the light of the secularization of Western culture. Within the worldview symptomatic of the progressing dissolution of faith in the playwright's era, when religiosity began to seem "Puritanical," he re-introduced the non-discursive and the inhuman in the form of a mere fact, an accident, an absurdity. The undeniable genius of the poet's use of language, Santayana notes, may well rest in that he literally "embodied" the truth, "rendered human experience no longer through symbols, but by direct imaginative representation." (ARS 69) His detailed and rich depiction of human life "leaves that life without a meaning." (ARS 65) *Wholeness is replaced by fullness*, which used to be contrasted with "the unity of faith" at that time.

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<sup>5</sup> This comes from a review by Michiko Kutakani in *The New York Times*, quoted in Bloom 1998, iii.

Kierkegaard discussed in detail the shift of tragedy from the ancient objectivity to the psychology of a moral subject. He articulated the need for a religion of salvation as a response to the inhumanity of guilt interiorized (guilt instead of fate) (Kierkegaard [1843] 2013). Santayana—as I read his interpretations of art and religion—emphasized their “neutralizing” spiritual function of providing language on the ground of which human *self* may enter into *a creative relation with the finite* instead of subduing to the force of mere factuality—the fatal mask assumed by finitude in a culture dominated by a flat, positivistic language. Repetition in nature may provoke a new expression in the free play of the mind as long as it is free to imagine, to idealize, and to find meaning, and yet remains disciplined enough to keep an eye on the plane of action.

The character of Hamlet seems to epitomize, for Santayana, a triple loss accompanying the change in the representation of the tragic: the world losing unity, man interiorizing and then “losing” the world, and finally man losing integrity, a loss that manifests itself in a deep crisis in which he finds himself unable to act. It is important insofar as it exposes Santayana’s dialectical understanding of the relation between the tragic, the *self* and culture (the world), an aspect of his views fully revealed, for example, in *Egotism in German Philosophy*. That is why he reads *Hamlet* as “most psychological of tragedies” (HA 128) and a full-blown anticipation of a new tragic hero. I would suggest that “most psychological” here stands for something like: presenting a turning point in the movement of the human psyche towards its modern guise. Likewise, Harold Bloom says,

The internalization of the self is one of Shakespeare’s greatest inventions, particularly because it came before anyone else was ready for it. There is a growing inner self in Protestantism, but nothing in Luther prepares us for Hamlet’s mystery. (Bloom 1998, 409)

The interiorization of the tragic conflict results in Hamlet’s balancing between the tragic and the comic. The prince exemplifies those aspects of Santayana’s cultural critique that he sometimes refers to as *spiritual discord* or *dislocation of reason*. Hamlet’s romantic solipsism, his continuous introspection hide “a mind inwardly rent asunder, a delicate genius disordered, ... a mind that with infinite sensibility possessed no mastery over itself nor over things.” (HA 130) At the same time, in a manner proper for a tragic hero, Hamlet is noble, capable of mental elevation, philosophically oriented, yet doomed to “moral dissolution,” which starts with seeing the ghost (HA 132).

The ghost scenes in Hamlet ... are excellent examples of profound, ill-digested emotions breaking out fiercely against circumstances which are not well in hand. . . This ghost is not like the deities that often appear in Greek tragedies, a *deus ex machina* ... this ghost is a party to the conflict, an instigator of sinister thoughts, a thing hatched in a nest of sorrow. Its scope is exclusively personal... at once a spectre and a suspicion, a physical marvel and an inward authoritative voice .... We feel that not Hamlet the

Dane but the human soul in its inmost depths is moonstruck and haunted.  
(HA 143)

There is some similarity between these remarks and Bloom's noting:

Hesitation and consciousness are synonyms in this vast play.... Hamlet inaugurates the drama of heightened identity. ... His world is the growing inner self.... he celebrates almost continuously." (Bloom 1998, 405)

But the other side of the "drama of heightened identity" is the crisis of agency. The logic of *Hamlet*, Santayana says, is that "he acts without reflection, as he reflects without acting." (HA 135) In a similar vein, Zupančič called *Hamlet* a tragedy "entirely constructed around the hero's not being equal to his act." (Zupančič 2008, 160-161) Hamlet's "morbid indirection" and the "brilliant futility" of his mind, notes Santayana, render the tragic guilt resting not in an action but in refraining from action! Correspondingly, Bloom claims that "for Hamlet revising the self replaces the project of revenge," (Bloom 1998, 400) he is never "wholly committed to any stance or attitude, any mission or indeed to anything at all" (!) (Bloom 1998, 406).

Shakespeare, as a playwright of his era, faced the alternative between Christianity and nothing, and "he chose the nothing" (ARS 63). The secular world of Hamlet resists any metaphysical conception whatsoever; it is even hard to speak of fatality on this ground of broken bonds between man and the world. His heroes are left "in the presence of life and death with no other philosophy than that which the profane world can suggest and understand" (ARS 63). They are either immersed in their own interiority in a way that verges on madness, or act motivated by drives, superstition, and the need to adapt. Their thoughts are sometimes inhabited by the remnants of virtue and saintliness, but these no longer operate in the world. Santayana sees both in *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* a critical moment for the shape of humanity in Western culture. The quality of *uncanniness*, attributed to humans since antiquity, in the time of the devaluation of the very idea of humanity becomes a metaphor for the amazing independence, if not hostility, in the relation between the subject and the world, each standing in its own right. "Spirituality", historically related to the so-called *inner man* in a relation *of* and *to* transcendence ("transcendence" towards God, the other, and the world), in *Hamlet* stands dangerously close to its own caricature - an immature and mad mind hovering around in a world full of phantoms and the ghosts of concepts inherited from Christianity. One of Shakespeare's themes is "a historical junk-shop [which] has become the temple of a *new spirit*" (HA 131, my emphasis), where reason is an "accomplishment rather than a vital function" (HA 139 and 136).

In a striking correspondence to what Santayana says, Bloom notes that the secular nature of the world in the play makes Hamlet bear the possible blessing of his brilliant mind "as though it were a curse" (Bloom 1998, 406). His spirituality, and Bloom seems to share this view of spirituality as a form of life, in the world which is no longer *his* world turns into a form of *death* (Bloom 1998, 406). Santayana comments on it: "here is immense endowment and strange



incompetence, constant perspicacity and general confusion, entire virtue in the intention, and complete disaster in the result.” (HA 142) Shakespeare achieves an effect of suspension between horror and grotesque, leaving his spectators waiting “to see the spectacle of things dissolved and exorcised ... and the rest, as says Hamlet, is silence” (HA 143).

Bloom considers the ending phrase “the rest is silence” a “secular triumph” sealing the tragicness of Hamlet’s spirituality (Bloom 1998, 431). The immaturity of Hamlet evoked by Santayana is phrased by Bloom as Hamlet’s being simultaneously “the youngest and the oldest,” which is due to “the catastrophic consciousness of the spiritual disease of his world, which he has internalized” (Bloom 1998, 430). This is, then, as Bloom suggests, a self-conscious immaturity.

Both interpreters, then, are sensitive to the articulation of the spiritual crisis in the dramatic world. The author of *The Western Canon* was as acutely aware of the spiritual disease as Santayana - an outcast, a cosmopolitan philosopher, doomed to a cultural in-betweenness, which was both a blessing and a curse. But in an apparently never-ending debate between the moderns and the classics, they finally turn out to stand on the opposite sides. Bloom sees in *Hamlet* a new beginning, a critical point triggering *the invention of the human* capable of withstanding the pressure of fatality and preserving spirituality in a secular world, and in Shakespeare himself he sees - as Agata Bielik-Robson notes—“a genius of instruction” (Bielik-Robson 2000, 105). Without getting into the details of Bloom’s complex interpretive strategy, what he admires in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* is the subjective, agonistic and revisionist potential of the hero in relation to the overwhelming power of time as embodied by tradition (Bielik-Robson 2000, 87-122).<sup>6</sup> Santayana is rather skeptical about this possibility for he views it through the lens of his theory of the logic of German egotism culminating in instrumental reason. Bloom seems to believe in the power of self-revision and the idea of self-cure. So does Santayana in his emphasis on spiritual life, but the path of self-revision for him can be defended as long as there is a world, a “beyond” of some objectivity. The phase of solipsism, if a phase it be, Santayana might have responded to Bloom, is not conducive to a cure other than a *cure of oneself of oneself*, meaning it is a self-annihilating strategy. Santayana, like Bloom, was fascinated by the idea of secular transcendence, but he distrusted the spirit of romantic thought.

Much as both thinkers link spirituality to a specific temporal modality, they might rather disagree on Hamlet’s relation to time. “Hamlet will not do anything prematurely; something in him is determined not to be overdetermined. His freedom partly consists in not being too soon, not being early,” notes Bloom (Bloom 1998, 407). The key to Bloom’s reading seems to be the quest for freedom from a fatal temporality, the temporality of “it was” of Nietzsche, or “already there” of Heidegger, or “events in one way fading in the other uncertain” of Santayana. While Bloom suggests Hamlet’s deliberation is an expression of his

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<sup>6</sup>The author analyzes the connection between Bloom’s conception of strong subject/selfhood and his interpretation of Shakespeare.

endeavor to be in control of time - by purposefully being *ahead of time* - for Santayana Hamlet has neither himself nor the world ever "well in hand." He cannot have it otherwise because his is the time of disowning first of *that* and then, logically, of *this* world. The inner man, if this "inner" is to have any meaning at all, must function in relation to something out there, something objective an valid, and, as Bloom admits, "Hamlet has usurped the Western literary consciousness, at its most self-aware thresholds, gateways no longer crossable by us into transcendental beyonds" (Bloom 1998, 412). Bloom seems to be uncertain as to his own optimism, and by asking rhetorical questions such as "How much freedom can be afforded Hamlet by a tragic play?" as if foresees the answer to be "none," as it is in the case of another of his questions—"What project can be large enough for him?" (Bloom 1998, 418) Bloom suggests imagining Hamlet in a context different than tragic, but that would require another world, not this one. If Bloom hopes that Hamlet by self-revision and a change by "self-overhearing" can change the world, Santayana would object because the world is lost for Hamlet, as he is for the world. By way of digression, Bloom mentions Nietzsche as amongst those saying "it is we who are Hamlet" (Bloom 1998, 412). In his cultural diagnosis presented in *Egotism in German Philosophy* Santayana seems to share this general intuition about the continuity of the process of the subjectivization of human experience.

Santayana's interpretation, however, may be said to suffer from generalizations, which come from a certain cultural bias. In his brief and panoramic essays, Santayana often chooses to *use Hamlet* to support his larger project rather than offering an in-depth analysis.<sup>7</sup> Thus, no matter how insightful his conclusions may be, he loses something of its merit and undeniable intrinsic power. Bloom seems to be right to note that

Hamlet's freedom can be defined as *the freedom to infer*, and we learn this intellectual liberty by attending to Hamlet. Inference in Hamlet's praxis is a sublime mode of surmise, metaphoric because it leaps ahead with every change in circumstance, and inference becomes the audience's way to Hamlet's consciousness (Bloom 1998, 419, my emphasis).

The famous "to be" question for Santayana is rather futile because it simply has been already resolved; for Bloom it is absolutely vital, "a fullness and an emptiness playing off against each other" (Bloom 1998, 409). The question might actually be paraphrased into the question Santayana let Oliver, the hero of his novel *The Last Puritan*, ask himself: once one believes in nothing, is life worth living? Likewise, it could be asked whether to live actively in and for this world or to turn into madness, i.e. to become dead for this world. But then again, another question arises: How should one live with "a growing inner self" when one has "a total lack of faith in language" and in oneself? (Bloom 1998, 409- 410). W.H. Auden has an insightful remark concerning the crisis of agency that

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<sup>7</sup> Still, Santayana's approach may be justified by his self-conscious "moralist" position and his engagement in cultural critique.

preoccupies us here. Hamlet, he says, having lost faith in everything, cannot *act* “for he can only ‘*act*’!” (Bloom 1998, 410). Hence Hamlet’s perverse theatricality, his hopeless desire of becoming “what Greek tragic hero is, a creature of situation” (Bloom 1998, 410), and his abdication expressed by “readiness is all.” Worldly context, Santayana would say, is inadequate for the prince, the world can only kill him. Hamlet’s consciousness had outgrown itself and debilitated even his ability to defend virtue until he understood, in the final act, that when virtue cannot be defended and ideals cannot be pursued everything vanishes.

There is no definite reconciliation and probably no last word in this imaginary dispute between both thinkers. Much as they agree upon some points, they differ in sympathy. While Santayana sees not much hope for self-creation without limits and definition, Bloom sees a sort of unfathomable hope in the protagonist of “character unlimited,” even though he may not know what “to do with a new kind of human being, one as authentically unsponsored as Hamlet is” (Bloom 1998, 418). The ground for their possible discussion is that both were convinced of an immense importance of Shakespeare’s dramas as pre-defining the guidelines as to what will be the key questions Western man would have to ask himself in the coming centuries.

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# Santayana's "The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy," Derrida, and the Ghosts of Idealism

In his 1911 talk given at The University of California at Berkeley, George Santayana sketched a genealogy of American morals. He says academic philosophy in America has "caught the stale odor" of its "hereditary philosophy" (WD 187). The "hereditary philosophy" or the "genteel tradition" of the essay's title is a variant of Calvinism. ('Genteel' in Santayana's usage is not a term of praise, but the word indicates a starchy religiosity that, in his view, simultaneously cloaked the ruling class and much of American academia.) This "hereditary philosophy" exerts a dominant influence not only on American philosophy, but on its religion and morality. Santayana notes that this "Calvinism," which he defines more as a type of spiritual psychology than as a religious denomination, is not confined to Protestantism or even to religious thinking. He says, "I do not mean the Calvinism of Calvin, or even of Jonathan Edwards, but rather a faith in externals and history of revelation" (WD 189). This essay is an acerbic and accurate criticism of American idealism's tendency to revert to, or depend on, a pious authoritarianism, but the flexibility of Santayana's insights allow their application, with some modification, to poststructuralism, specifically to the legacy of Derrida. Further, Santayana's own philosophy suggests the possibility of a more truly pluralistic philosophy than poststructuralism's legacy often affords.

The dominant trend in academic philosophy in America from 1880 until 1920, despite nascent pragmatism and positivism, was idealism, and Santayana enthusiastically criticized idealism's tendency to transform morality into cosmology, to move from statements of ethical desire to terms of cosmic imperatives, to the idea that a human desire for a good must be subservient to circumstances, as if anything that happens occurs only by divine decree; any event, anywhere, viewed with this logic, becomes holy, regardless of its human impact. The fatalistic religious overtone of such thinking is obvious, and Santayana saw the tendency of idealism to *alienate* ethics from human experience (to make the ground of ethics cosmic, not human) as germane to American religiosity. "Calvinism" becomes in Santayana's definition merely a typological label, not a strict history, because "the philosophical principal of Calvinism appears also in the Koran, in Spinoza [seventeenth century Dutch pantheist], and in Cardinal Newman [mid-nineteenth century Roman Catholic essayist]; and persons with no very distinctive Christian belief, like Carlyle [early nineteenth century Scottish essayist] or like Professor Royce [late nineteenth century American idealist]."

Santayana's essay often politely avoids naming names when he describes "the genteel tradition," but it seems fairly obvious that Santayana bases many of his judgments on, and sees the tradition typified by, Josiah Royce (1855-1916), who

was a member of the Harvard philosophy department from 1882 until 1916.<sup>1</sup> At the outset of "The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy," Santayana mentions Royce as a prime example of Calvinist idealism, a view he sharply criticizes in that essay. Santayana makes similar judgments about Royce in two other places: Santayana's marginal comments on Royce's *The World as Will and Idea* and in an essay published in *Character and Opinion in the United States* in 1920. There is some irony in Santayana, half-Spanish and still somewhat sympathetic to an ancestral Roman Catholicism, delivering this paper in California as an Emersonian-sounding rebuke to the native Californian Royce. Prototypical of these turns of thought in Royce that Santayana targets is the work of Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814). Both Fichte and Royce use the "Absolute" to ground the individual, with costs that Santayana rates not only exceeding the benefits, but which repeat the psychology of Calvinism:

To discredit the intellect, to throw off the incubus of an external reality or truth, was one of the boons which transcendentalism in its beginnings brought to the romantic soul. But although at first the sense of relief (to Fichte, for instance) was most exhilarating, the freedom achieved soon proved illusory: the terrible Absolute had been simply transplanted into the self. You were your own master, and omnipotent; but you were no less dark, hostile, and inexorable to yourself than the gods of Calvin or of Spinoza had been before . . . (COUS 114)

Idealism, which may posit an identity of individual and absolute thought, may appear to be the categorical opposite of poststructural theory, which typically denies any knowledge of coherent wholes and speaks of sliding chains of signifiers or indeterminate figures of desire. However, they are more mirror images of each other than dialectical opposites, as both are critical methods that sought initially to condition how thinkers express themselves and how we phrase and frame what we know, but as practiced, they often (not always) become systems of value. The idealist (positing absolute truth) and the poststructuralist (denying absolute truth) alike often have the scholastic effect, that knowledge is its own object, not knowledge of the world. In practice, poststructural criticism operates much more like idealism than like an absolute skepticism; it tends to take skeptical mandates seriously only to a point, and often promotes a reversion to categorical claims of value without reference to natural experience.

And because both systems operate in suspicion of the world, nature, and toward a truly pluralistic attitude toward knowledge, they alike over-commit themselves to moralizing judgments and thus they mirror each other. While a few features are inverted, the outcomes are similar. They also reveal an indebtedness

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<sup>1</sup> It may be objected that Royce is not referred to as frequently as other writers in the "Genteel Tradition" essay. In 1911, Royce, a friend, colleague, and former teacher was alive, well, and working at Harvard, which can easily explain Santayana's reluctance to give Royce more explicit prominence. Nevertheless, Santayana's language in "The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy" is structurally and stylistically extremely similar to his criticism of Royce in the two other places noted.

to Calvinistic models of thinking that may trap them in obversive judgment, or negative description, as their principle mode of definition.

In "The Genteel Tradition and American Philosophy," Santayana gives us a critical illumination of the tendency of idealist reason to become authoritarian and anti-human and he gives us a flexible model (not an anodyne vision) of reason that is a work in progress and that reflects contingent realities and which also must answer to and for cultural differences. By reviewing Santayana's criticism of idealism, we may see that idealism's tendency to essentialize and alienate ethics and to attach it to cultural identity persists in the postmodern period. That is, a prototypical series of arguments in the postmodern era is to claim that there is no stable ground for values, but to proceed (often without full candor about how the conclusions were reached or what emotional imperatives compelled them) to claim that the liberation of one's cultural identity (ethnic, national, or self-defined) from oppressive hegemonic determinants is the only utterable ideal good. This kind of argument often confines what may be good to terms of liberation of single identities without clarity about how people may cooperate epistemologically (as we may exist together in nature) or politically (as we cooperate democratically for a greater good). I am certainly not arguing against liberation, but I am urging that liberatory arguments be coherent, and that a categorical aversion to terms like 'reason,' 'nature', or 'humanity' (even understood as partial, evolving, and contingent categories) is often unnecessary and self-defeating. I am thus using Santayana's criticism of the genteel tradition to perform a suspicious reading of poststructuralism, to reveal and criticize some of its repressed contradictions.

The fundamental characteristics of the "genteel tradition" are a curious blend of skepticism of any natural or empirical source of knowledge and a reversion to an ideal, imperative authority. Rather, knowledge is a product of intuition, self-abnegation, and cosmic authoritarianism: the negation of one's own authority and the simultaneous elevation of an impersonal standard, with which is seen as holy. However, the elevation of the impersonal standard usually comes with some evasion of precision, as the philosopher bases the knowledge of these ethical imperatives on personal sentiment. Thus the key feature of the Calvinist is "an agonized conscience" or a "fierce pleasure in the existence of misery," as "misery" manifests that the "Absolute is irresponsible or infinite or holy" (WD 189). Individual self-abasement helps illuminate the majesty and inscrutability of the authority of God.

Santayana admits in his 1910 address that this system may seem to be "fantastic and even unintelligible" to one lacking an "agonized conscience," but he concedes that this mode of philosophy is yet logical and "intently thought out from its emotional premises." Santayana identifies this "Calvinism" as the basis on which "the current academic philosophy has been grafted" (WD 188).

By "the current academic philosophy," Santayana is here referring to philosophical idealism, or a particular variant of it.<sup>2</sup> This essay will show that the

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<sup>2</sup> Santayana himself was sympathetic to epistemological transcendentalism of a sort that overlapped with both Emerson and Kant: he did not respect traditional definitions of truth for their own sake, and he regarded reason as a supreme arbiter. Further, if

biggest similarity between Santayana's criticism of idealism and my criticism of poststructuralism is that Santayana identifies a transformation as transcendentalism began as a *critical method*, but it becomes, instead a "sham system of nature." We see this when Derrida's issues an injunction upon the question "what is?" as a pointless portion of philosophy in "Of Grammatology" (Derrida [1967] 1998, 19). Before proceeding with this comparative analysis, I will review two likely models for the kind of idealism Santayana had in mind.

I will use as examples of idealism Fichte, Kant's immediate successor in German idealism, and Josiah Royce, who was the major American idealist of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the chair of the philosophy department at Harvard, and almost certainly the primary target of Santayana's criticism of idealism in "The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy." Fichte collapsed the distinction between fact and value in a move that potentially simply recognized the contingency of value on someone to register it, but which encouraged a romantic turn toward a constructive idealism in which the evaluative subject makes all that is important, or in effect, makes the world in his own image (Mander 2016 32-34). I do not mean to dismiss or reductively denigrate Fichte (even Santayana was in accord with Fichte on a number of points—see MARG, Book 1), but I will try to quickly define the claims of Fichte that stand as models for Santayana's criticism of transcendentalism.

The dependence of value on a sensible subject and the interdependence of values and facts lead Fichte to the more dubious conclusion that the Ego (or the agency of thinking) makes the world inasmuch as the world depends on the meaning we give it—a conclusion that may sound like Heidegger's philosophy phrased in 1798 terminology. However, Fichte turned what could have remained an illuminating insight about knowledge into a metaphysical necessity. In a phrase that has become famously definitive of this position, Fichte said *the world* is "the material of our duty made sensible" (Fichte [1798] 1994, 152). This is not merely a claim about the form of knowledge, but about the substance of the world: the only substance given the world is the one I give it, in terms of the duty I conceive in my own freedom. What remains is a moral imperative: "The compulsion with which belief in the reality of the world forces itself upon us is a moral compulsion" (Fichte 152).

Fichte has a fairly concise statement of transcendentalism: "no world subsists on its own. Wherever we look, we see nothing but the reflection of our own inner activity" (Fichte 145). In a more romantic formulation, he says, "I myself, along with my necessary goal [formed by his moral sense] constitute what is supersensible" (Fichte 147). A principal feature shared in common by idealists (in this case Fichte) and poststructuralists is a rhetoric of abruptly deployed

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"transcendentalism" means to understand that knowledge inevitably passes through a particular point of view and through categories that shape experience, Santayana thought this method was correct, "unforgettable" and "the chief contribution made in modern times to speculation" (WD 194). But note transcendentalism in this sense is merely a critical method of processing experience; to say that human categories shape experience is a methodological fact, not a truth essential to non-human nature.



imperatives, often without a gradual series of logical steps leading to a claim with metaphysical implications such as Fichte's saying, "with this one can observe, first of all, the absolute necessity of the conclusion" (Fichte 148). The bulk of the reasoning in Fichte's *Introduction to the Wissenschaftslehre* called "On the Basis of Our Belief in a Divine Governance of the World" consists of similar claims of self-evident necessity or statements of transcendental compulsion: "the world is *nothing more* than our own inner acting." His first principle is *thinking*—and not mere reflection, but evaluative thinking: and from this first principle, meaning makes the world. The world not only has no substance independent of meaning, its substance *is* meaning. As its meaning is our only concern, its only real substance is the meaning we give it.

This line of reasoning risks confusing the "substance" of the world, in the sense of the natural conditions that we are born to and inhabit, with a sense of *import*, as in "the substance of his plan was altruistic." But this is not a harmless or irrelevant gesture. If we neglect the natural conditions of thought, we risk misunderstanding the nature of circumstances (nutrition, disease, or climate change, e.g.) in favor of moral ideals, which may be influenced by economic imperatives, historical superstitions, or by any number of contingent biases that may distort or hide what may be empirically available evidence.

The psychological justice of Fichte's scheme is that it stresses the primacy of the moral sense as that which leads to a faith in absolute divinity rather than toward a measurable sense of a being among other beings that could be called God. Fichte's argument is psychologically compelling, even a kind of elegant poetry, but dangerous as science. This turn of Fichte's puts poetic and pathetic emphasis on the central role of the meaning-making imagination, but it risks drastically overstating the ability of imagination to render reality to egotistical ends—it lacks mortal candor and natural humility. But whether read skeptically or sympathetically, Fichte's emphasis on the "I" implies an overlooking of the sublime otherness of the universe. There are many things that have no particular meaning even after we have discovered them, like a moon of Jupiter that we cannot, in the foreseeable future, inhabit. Rather than entertaining a space for investigating new realities, all facts derive from values (and from egotistical projections, at that) within the Fichtean system.

This turn in Fichte's thought is similar to what happens in poststructuralism, as the assumption guiding both Fichte and Derrida is that their variants of skeptical criticism are alike liberatory—in Fichte's case from the potential oppressiveness of a given, material circumstance, and in Derrida's case from virtually any definition, whether political, scientific or aesthetic, that one might encounter. Yet both may result in a retreat to a promontory of value-claims with natural truth remaining an inhospitable, unexplored ocean crashing about its edges. In many of Derrida's formulations, meaning is confining and an instrument of ideology, control, and compromise. To reveal the mechanism of these power structures is allegedly to be aware of how to remake them. But the value terms used are often limited, selective, and abstract, and echo enlightenment goals of freeing thought from traditional or institutional compromises, in phrasing like this, as Derrida here tries to envision a post-rational academic community: "Such a community

would interrogate the essence of reason . . . [this] thinking must also unmask—an infinite task—all the ruses of end-orienting reason" (Derrida 1983, 2).

Fichte and Derrida alike are less than candid about their dependence on inherited moral judgments, and how their criticism implies a fidelity to certain progressive values that both imply that small communities (even "congregations") will be needed to maintain a hermeneutical sense of meaning, because meaning will not come from nature, since that is potentially a ruse of "end-orienting reason." Rhetorically, the turn from nature gives idealism and poststructuralism alike an air of inevitability and a thinness of value argument, since value will be a matter of will and desire, and (potentially) not based in an investigation of nature.

While Fichte's account of the centrality of the "I" in meaning making is a significant prototype of transcendental authority, most of Santayana's criticism of "idealism" within "The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy" is likely directed at Josiah Royce, whose thought he describes in *Character and Opinion in the United States* in terms resembling Fichte's:

The outlook [that good and evil, in Spinoza's view, must be qualities relative to a living being that experiences them], however, was complicated and half reversed for [Royce] by the transcendental theory of knowledge which he had adopted. This theory regards all objects, including the universe, as merely terms posited by the will of the thinker, according to a definite grammar of thought native to his mind. COUS 112)

Royce thus has an emphasis on value judgment in common with Fichte.

Santayana's language in "The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy" is structurally and stylistically similar to his criticism of Royce in two other places. In "The Genteel Tradition," Santayana refers to Calvinist idealism's tendency to construe "the Absolute [as] irresponsible or infinite or holy." By this oppressive standard, "Human nature, it feels, is totally depraved." In his essay on Royce, Santayana identifies a similarly alienating argument: "piety, to [Royce's] mind, consisted in trusting divine providence and justice, while emphasizing the most terrifying truths about one's own depravity and the sinister holiness of God." In his marginalia on Royce's *The World and the Individual* (1900), Santayana also finds a particularly Calvinist sophistry in the argument that human error is evidence for an absolute good, as errors would thus exist to validate the glory of God. Santayana annotated significant portions of Royce's monumental work but stopped abruptly with a comment on Royce's sentence: "my will is here . . . one with the divine Will, God who here, in me, aims at what I now temporally miss, not only possesses, in the eternal world, the goal after which I strive, but comes to possess it even through and because of my sorrow. Through this my tribulation the Absolute triumph, then, is won. Moreover, this triumph is also eternally mine. In the Absolute, I am fulfilled." Santayana wrote, with vivid sarcasm, "The glory of God consists in the torments of the damned," presumably because Royce's morality is grounded not in animal experience but in an absolute other whose truth absorbs the individual (Fuss 1970, 334). Through the marginalia in Royce's *The World and the Individual*, Santayana makes it plain that in "The Genteel

Tradition in American Philosophy" when he says "idealism in American philosophy," his chief example might be Royce.

The structure of critical authority in the post-structural period (roughly 1980-the present) in the humanities (especially in literary studies) has a number of definitive similarities with Santayana's "genteel tradition." The significantly similar pattern is the move from radical skepticism to moral imperatives. We can see the similarity as critics in this period deny the agency of authors (Barthes, e.g.) the value of aesthetics (Derrida, e.g.), the existence of nature (Foucault, e.g.), yet these same critics, and those who serve as their disciples, often affirm a morality that is revolutionary, absolute and whose sources are unexplained. How else is it that poststructuralism may be viewed as categorically "liberatory" unless it has a moral agency?<sup>3</sup> And what is this agency based in if not an unnamable positively valued absolute, often in opposition to a negative absolute?<sup>4</sup> Such morality must be, given the radical skepticism and of the deconstructive methods, free floating and miraculous, like Grace in the Calvinist's system. That identity often is only coherent in small groups is another similarity of postmodern identity to an identity that secures meaning from a church congregation or that requires the hermeneutical circle of a group to exist and something like faith to energize its values.

There are several structural and thematic similarities between the idealists of the late nineteenth century and the poststructuralists of the late twentieth century. Both tend to regard all truth as mental, and independent of any natural or other kind of truth. For the idealist and the poststructuralist alike, truth is merely a coherence of ideas, not a reality or set of conditions independent of a thinker. Thus both idealists and poststructuralists tend to refute, deny, or repress objective or natural standards. They are also alike in replacing epistemology with ethics, rather than having an ethics that grows rationally from a scientific epistemology.

The other similarity between idealism and poststructuralism is that as they become morally essentialist, they thus contradict the questing uncertainty implied in their foundational statements. A perfect idealism rejects "independent events" or "material documents" but insists on a knowledge of an "absolute" to ground its ethics, merely because without this term, the desire for meaning is frustrated—the ground of imperative is sentimental (see Santayana on the English idealist F.H. Bradley, TTMP 69). Meanwhile, most criticism that is allegedly based on poststructural theorists like Derrida is not really poststructural at all. It takes only a few of the fundamental principles of poststructuralism seriously, and these are typically used as solvents or crowbars to disassemble an aesthetic object or a

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<sup>3</sup> Simon Critchley, summarizing an apparent climate of critical opinion, frequently refers to the deconstructive tradition as inherently "emancipatory" in his 2001 *Continental Philosophy: a Very Short Introduction*. Derrida himself had labeled an "emancipatory impulse" as an "irreducible" motive within deconstructive practice. [S. Kofman, *Lectures de Derrida* (1984) qtd. in Peter Zima's *Deconstruction and Critical Theory* (2002).]

<sup>4</sup> Richard Rorty makes a similar claim in noting that the "ubiquity of [Michel Foucault's idea of] power is reminiscent of the ubiquity of Satan, and thus of the ubiquity of original sin—that diabolical stain on every human soul" (Rorty 2003, 95).

structure of value. But within such criticism, ideas of agency, morality and argument—in short, how writerly argument is conveyed—are likely to be extremely conventional and to be conserved throughout the “deconstructive” process. Essays even in journals that have promoted “poststructural” thinking in the last generation like *PMLA* rarely entertain unconventional rhetorical strategies like extended irony, or satire, or novel renovations of, or alternatives to, standard, linear argument with court-room style illuminations of evidence. “Poststructural” implies a realm of wild irony and play, strategies like using a series of epigrams or mixing registers, styles, or even masking authorial identity, techniques that are unusual in most American journals of literary and cultural analysis but which were common in the works of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. While postmodern fiction writers like Barthelme and Pynchon in the 1960s used such techniques, and while the poet John Ashbery is an excellent example of literal post-structural writing, “poststructural” critics not only tend to avoid new forms but hew carefully to Apollonian styles of argument.

Often the agency in poststructural criticism is either spoken of as abstract (“the enactment of a thought decides” what is “beyond reason” [Derrida 1983, 19] ), or a property of texts themselves, as an inherent process, like the acidification of paper; a commonplace of deconstructive criticism is that literature is “a self-deconstructive text” (Jones-Katz 2017, 63) or, “there is no metalanguage: the text reads theory at the same time as it is read by it” (Attridge 1988, 65). A typical value formulation in Derrida consists of abstractions strung together on a chain of prepositions, such as, “[the] double gesture bridges the ungrounded space of the conditions of possibility over which positions on ethics and responsibility, reason and rationality, are thought out and taken.” (Derrida 1983, 13). This style has had the idealist consequence of implying that abstractions somehow have a ghostly agency apart from thinking subjects who work in the world.

Another idealist quality of deconstructive criticism, particularly of the sort taken up in American departments of literature, is that it often unnecessarily forces analysis into absolute judgments. John Searle cogently analyzed this quality in the early 1980s, but the criticism was never thoroughly refuted, digested, nor often repeated. The problem with much poststructural discourse is that it insists that terms must either be mechanically precise or they are without foundations: “First there is the assumption that unless a distinction can be made rigorous and precise it isn’t really a distinction at all” (Searle 1983). Searle mentions the distinction between fiction and nonfiction as a primary example—in the poststructural era, a common judgment is if the boundary between fiction and fact is ever blurry, then, categorically, there is no coherence in any definition of either. The structural dynamics of this judgment play out also in definitions of authors (either authors are absolutely coherent and autonomous entities capable of utterly unambiguous truth claims, or they are categorically “dead”), aesthetics (either aesthetics are based in timeless verities about pleasure, or only understandable as seductive instruments of social control). Either authorial intent is a mechanical force that can be measured, or it is a phantom of critical propaganda. If intention is contingent or ambiguous, how do we know anything?

Searle drained the problem of exaggeration by appealing to the ways people understand each other in ordinary speech:

Our use of these concepts and our distinctions between the intentional and the unintentional, the literal and the metaphorical, and between fictional and nonfictional discourse is *grounded in a complex network of linguistic and social practices*. In general, these practices *neither require nor admit of rigorous internal boundary lines and simple mechanical methods of ascertaining the presence or absence of a phenomenon*.

Graduate training in the American humanities frequently treats young scholars *as if* they have assumed that the truth of literature or history is unambiguous and timeless, and then sells them a remedy for this hubris. But most readers do not have this problem.

A typical pattern is seen in the works of Derrida. 1) A plausible, likely partial description of how language functions is made into a term of metaphysical certainty or structural necessity: “the literal meaning of language is metaphoricity itself” (Derrida [1967] 1998, 15). This is somewhat true, but it is not the grounds for a philosophical revolution. We often make peace with verbal approximations. Few people ever feel the words they choose embody meaning with exact precision—and yet Derrida’s maxim, itself made of imprecise and ambiguous words, would correct a metaphysical error (the idea that language translucently represents material facts) that few people actually believe, even casually. 2) A statement of absolute necessity is made to amplify the first claim, often in a judgment against modes of philosophy which, again, rarely have been practiced: “metaphoricity can not have an ultimate referent.” That’s fine, but only as a piously intoned straw man argument that has been repeated in English graduate programs for a generation. It needs to be qualified, but teachers and students rarely note that many writers have been quite content for human language not to have access to ultimate reality, but to partially known and approximately rendered reality. This is true even of Coleridge and Kant, even though as they may be branded in critical shorthand as thinkers who were uncritical, ontological idealists. Rather, language understood as referentless metaphoricity is promoted as a kind of scientific advance<sup>5</sup> on the mystified modes of reading that people in the past were confined by and determined to make. 3) Derrida will next introduce a signature move, which he shares with several classic poststructural theorists. This is the rhetorical figure of the poststructural writer as a geographical pioneer, making what I call the “audacious spaceman” turn, by which Derrida implies that if we but understand his terms, even in their negative import, we will be propelled into realms of new, wild freedom. For example, if one rejects “the encyclopedic protection of theology and logocentrism,” one may be propelled into the bracingly thin, chill air of “difference in general” (Derrida [1967] 1998, 18). This movement is cloaked in a rhetoric of progress, even of the sort of a Calvinist

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<sup>5</sup> “Some prefer to think of [deconstruction] as a more ‘scientific’ approach to literature.” *The 1980 Yale Course Catalog* (qtd. in Jones-Katz, 56).

chastening in which one becomes aware of knowledge and language's limits, and thus, potentially, a sadder, better person.

However, because "difference in general" cannot be clearly defined, or have much positive content, either in terms of value or style, Derrida's argument begins to rely on, or exploit, the bad conscience of the reader more than he may articulate the positive content of his thinking. This is a classic move of rhetorical bullying that he shares with theologians like Calvin and Jonathan Edwards. 4) After such chastening the reader may be compelled to embrace new jargon or abstractions and the vatic authority of Derrida himself. Phrases like 'can only be' and 'nothing but' and the frequent use of other reductive terms throughout "Of Grammatology" imply a dire paucity of flexible alternatives which compel readers to emotional, rather than rational, consent. One must challenge the "very form" of questioning "what is," he says (Derrida [1967] 1998, 19). Then, if we make the audacious spaceman turn, we could escape the gravity of questions like "what is this?" entirely and move into a new kind of certainty, or maybe make peace with a capacious uncertainty.

Derrida's style may provoke his acolytes into arguments and terms that are obscure and paradoxical. A book called *Derrida's Post-Deconstructive Realism* by Michael Marder argues that Derrida is not an idealist because he defines a "new realism." This argument would be more compelling if it acknowledged, as Derrida himself did at times, that his practice was in the line of Kant's transcendental idealism, that he was writing about the conditions of knowledge, not about the condition of truth or the realm of matter. Marder argues that Derrida defines a "thing" as an "event." Marder describes strange oscillations of motive within a thing itself that disclose no clear agency; the "thing continuously turns itself inside out and outside in." It "exteriorizes" a perpetual internal unrest, so that the "realism" consists in acknowledging the "phantomatic effects" of the "thing" which is neither material nor temporal, but "forever suspended quasi transcendental causality" that "operates perhaps before and after the event" (Marder 2011, 12).

This could be a poetic evocation of how observers are continually oscillating between a sense of a thing as given and a thing whose meaning is being made by a particular observer moment to moment, but the oscillation is described not as a matter of psychology but as a matter of ontology, of the essential character of "a thing" (12). This thicket of jargon redefines realism as either a mystical uncertainty or something like an ambiguous electrical phenomenon: as matter is neither particle nor wave, a thing is neither in matter or time, but in and out of each, etc. (as Derrida sees matter is imbued with strange energies of self contradiction). This kind of writing may earnestly evoke the difficulty of actually knowing a thing-in-itself, but this adds little more than some abstruse and awkward poetry to the Kantian commonplace that we know the thing through categories of knowledge and thus through probabilities learned in experience. To claim that this language defines a "realism" begs the question as to what 'real' means.

But I am less interested in the scientific accuracy of such writing than its social effect. The assumption in broad reviews of Derrida's import, including

those by Marder and Chritchley, is that such writing can help one diagnose the conditions of oppressive authority (see Chritchley 2001). But this kind of writing, by frequently occluding contact with actual people who have points of view on nature, science, the realm of matter, or the notion that there is a truth in the universe that does not care if we know it, believe it, or see it, but we inhabit its conditions—by occluding this sort of “realism,” such writing makes it likely that any terms of “liberation” will sail in a platonic ether of abstractions. Thus the effect of deconstructive liberatory criticism, which is still a common idiom of humanities writing, is to promote exclusive judgment as the job of analysis.

Derrida's movement, from a radical skepticism to a zone of thinking which is pure metaphor which nonetheless affords newly coherent value judgments, recapitulates the dynamics of ontological idealists like Fichte or Royce. First, everything is defined as pure consciousness—there is no known material reality or conditions of truth independent of consciousness. Second, the reality of duty, value-making, and/or self-recognized “identity” become the only realities. For Fichte, the universe was coextensive with duty: all that we meaningfully knew was duty. For Royce, the individual is a function of an absolute moral entity, the absoluteness of God.

Derridean deconstruction, in its agnosticism, may seem wholly opposed to this kind of idealism, but again, as understood by many, it is practiced as an idealism. The poststructural doctrine of total alienation from truth (a commonplace in Derrida's analyses is “there can be no assurance of any principle of truth or legitimacy” [Derrida 1984, 283]) is parallel to the Calvinist doctrine of total depravity. The only ethical recourse is the academic surrogate of a church, the atomized discipline resisting the devil of hegemony.

But the problem is not merely an abuse of rhetoric and an arbitrarily reconstituted ethics. The other problem is an abandonment of any realm of truth. In a classic, prophetic bluff that led to decades of bad writing in universities, Derrida calls science into question at the end of “Of Grammatology:” “Writing,” he says, has placed “ballistics . . . agriculture, and penal law” (amid a seemingly arbitrary list of enterprises) under the same “yoke,” or rhetoric of power. “Indeed one must understand,” he urges, “the *incompetence* of science which is also the incompetence of philosophy” [*italics in the original*]. This is tied to the blunt claim that the “origin” of writing has been “communicated in a manner” with the distribution of political power. Like a medieval fortress commander under siege, Derrida blows bricks into the corridor behind him, prior to his own escape, lest empiricism track him: as he impugns *science itself*, we “must understand” the incompetence of science (Derrida [1967] 1998, 93).

While science is obviously conditioned and occasionally mystified by politics or other social conventions, the evident competence of science to criticize itself suggests the writerly power of Derrida is largely rhetorical, and negative, in such moments. More than promoting a reasoned criticism of science, he indulges a categorical rejection. The consequences of this resumption of idealist methods is to base criticism on sentiment. Science is “incompetent” (thoroughly) because it not only may be manipulated or influenced by politics, but because it is, like all “writing,” *originally* political and in the service of nefarious, controlling interests.

This prototypical Derridean prophecy is consistent with long traditions of criticism (typically religious) that suggest a new source of ethical power could, or does, lie on the other side of a bold rejection of worldly questions like "what is?"

Much poststructuralist thinking confines attention to what Santayana calls the realm of essence. Note this is not Platonic essence, but essence defined by Santayana, which is stripped of numinous presupposition: in the context of perception, the realm of essence is effectively the realm of signs, or an inclusive vision of all possible meanings, not just in linguistic practice, but in experience. The thing itself or any object of attention or linguistic designation is inevitably transposed or translated in sense and language and is thus perceived through "an essence," i.e., a sign. Occasionally Derrida's assertions bear some resemblance to Santayana's in this respect: "From the moment that there is meaning there are nothing but signs. We think only in signs" (Derrida [1967] 1998, 50), but paraphrasing Peirce, Derrida veers away from Santayana's animal faith in an independently existing world, when he says, "What broaches the movement of signification is what makes its interruption impossible. The thing itself is a sign" (49). Derrida insists on mystifying rather than clarifying perception and expression by erasing nature and the subject and by investing more meaning in freshly coined abstractions like "spacing" and "différance" which imply that language is about nothing but language, not about experience, and certainly not about an experience of nature: "Spacing as writing is the becoming-absent and the becoming-unconscious of the subject" (69). It is one thing to call attention to the variety of essence available to a subject (as both Derrida and Santayana do); it is another to occlude, as Derrida does, the existence of subjects and any kind of natural (and shared) ground of experience between subjects.

Santayana's definition of 'essence' coincides with meditative practice in a way that can illuminate how the power of ideas is conceived. In Santayana's use of the word 'essence,' ideas, like all essences, are units of meaning that have no "metaphysical status" (SAF 79) or inherent power. They are utterly neutral.

So often in criticism, especially in cultural studies, *ideas* are credited with being autonomous agents of ideological power. They are like a virus that may inject their DNA through cell walls of readers or viewers. *Behold the idea, and become infected by its power.* Treating ideas in this way makes for dramatic criticism, but the implied attitude bears some resemblance to Calvinist restrictions, implying the only way to have a healthy culture is to avoid bad ideas (or any writer or historical figure who ever thought them), or that the minds of the young should not be exposed to or sullied by these nefarious presences. The banality of this line of reasoning and its mistrust of the power of critical analysis is evident in the contrary implication that *good ideas* are similarly potent and grant the cultural critic who promotes them an easy claim to virtue. But Santayana's notion of essence reminds us that ideas themselves are neutral until we energize them, or in Santayana's terms, until the psyche generates enthusiasm for or aversion to an idea. But optional responses to ideas are not simply to be victims of pernicious control or benefactors of saintly virtue. Our responses to ideas are complex and involve bodily reactions, for we literally grasp ideas when we visualize responses to them. And we can either do this, or decline to respond. The notion that ideas



are essences, as Santayana defines them acknowledges that because ideas have no force of their own, human actors must activate ideas for them to play a role in any social context.

By isolating nature and the arbitrary subject and its animal perspective on experience, Derrida (or his followers) may confine criticism of life, culture, and literature to an analysis of how works may fail to bring about, predict, or prescribe a kind of liberation; typically, the liberation is from any agency that would compromise the political validity of self-identity. The emphasis is not on collaboration, communication, or dialogue, terms which may evoke the demon of "hegemony," but on solipsistic determinations of identity. Further, any fidelity to matter, nature or a realm of truth is obviated. So while there is an exciting emphasis on critical skepticism in Derrida, and there seems to be a revolutionary promise here, by isolating nature from this kind of discourse, he makes it less likely that such criticism may improve anything, because there can be no ground of rational consensus, only perpetual difference. If there is concord, further, it can only be the forced assent of an idealist "this must be" statement to make metaphysical sense of human action. This idealist implication is handled often disingenuously by poststructuralists because, unlike Fichte, they do not acknowledge their motives and their sense of duty to affirm values which they serve. They act as if consensus is possible only when based on an ideal suggested by a negative judgment. That there could be consensus comes only via idealism's persistent ghost of religious judgment in the system.

Despite this criticism of deconstructive analysis, I am not making a traditionalist dismissal myself—I am sympathetic to poststructuralism used as a method, and I especially agree that literature often contains exciting hints of counter-intuitive analysis: but I would insist that these readings are not something the text is "always already" doing, but a kinetic activity it may inspire readers to perform. Deconstructive principles are not a value system or even a metaphysics that compels value. The dynamics in the poststructural era which simultaneously compel ideal judgment and repress agency have contributed to the rudderless, servile quality of the humanities in American universities. Because Derrida's central terms remain quasi-mystical—"difference" itself is the "un-namable"<sup>6</sup>—he seemed to predict a kind of Nietzschean free-for-all or new theater of inventions. But while he avoided (contra Jung or Heidegger or other late romantics) evoking a pre-scientific, primitive realm as an alternative to or anodyne for the sins of reason, what this post-scientific candor consists of was not clear, even in the negative. A freedom at once vague and absolute is evoked, as we might "escape" the past as if it were the rule or even a literal, geographical territory belonging to a corrupt aristocracy. "Of Grammatology" ends with a Heideggerian filigree: "thinking is what we already know we have not yet begun" (Derrida [1967] 1998, 93), an epigram suggesting a field of wild possibility in philosophy and in the humanities at large. Ironically, the implied standards of critical reference that Derrida uses are the enlightenment virtues of liberty and self-determination, but in significant ways, Derridean analysis has contributed

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<sup>6</sup> See Spivak's Preface to *Of Grammatology*, lxx.

more to servility than to liberation, largely because communication is coded as a univocal articulation of identity or offense, and not as dialogue. This limitation tends to emphasize political activism having to do with ethnic and sexual identity, but much less so economics.

The updated "genteel tradition" now visible in American society is a plutocracy of commercial interests. Their work to deregulate high finance and privatize education proceeds apace while significant numbers of students and faculty at universities confine their critical energies to opprobrium in matters of identity politics. Students are often taught to "interrogate" the past, though often this does not mean (though sometimes it does) to read current and past history with a critical intelligence capable of nuanced insight, praise, and blame, but in a categorically-minded, dismissive criticism, often more concerned with shaming alleged opponents, voicing outrage, and summarily branding historical figures like Kant or Jefferson as "wrong" based on part-for-whole judgments of their philosophical character (Quizon 2017). Such judgments may extend to the category of "reason" itself, as it may be judged, essentially, as the engine of oppression, which we must dismiss, denounce, and get beyond. But one can measure and criticize the grotesque irony of Kant's and Jefferson's eighteenth century racial attitudes and still integrate what we deem good about them into an evolving history of reason. Even if we banish them to the outer darkness of intellectual history, we will likely not "get beyond" enlightenment reason, as any ideal or political criticism will still use mental tools, categories, and values related to, and occasionally derived from, their work. The feminist Kelly Oliver recently commented on the tendency of denunciation to displace nuanced argument in the *New York Times*, lamenting "an educational environment in which outrage, censoring and public shaming has begun to replace critique, disagreement and debate" (Oliver 2017).

Thus the final irony that Santayana's 1911 address helps us see is that while the genteel idealist tradition circa 1900 fairly explicitly served the ruling class, the poststructural idealist tradition (while often still referred to as vaguely counter-cultural, and despite hollow accusations since the 1980s of being essentially radical) implicitly supports our own moneyed ranks or gentility. A misunderstanding of critical thinking techniques has left too many academics baffled, splintered, and ready to be colonized by people who still have commitment and force in the university: the managerial class which serves corporate interests. Humanities departments often can affirm a value only if it is assigned to a micro-identity, as many scholars would mutter shyly or self-effacedly if asked to affirm the collective value of the humanities, implicitly regarding—according to poststructural principles—such a goal as a benighted, hegemonic project full of oppressive self-contradictions.

Meanwhile, commercial interests aren't shy in their affirmations, that consumerism, even fueled by student debt (at nominally public universities filled with privately administered entertainment opportunities) and the indefinite growth of various large industries, are the chief prizes of life and work. Some of the real social consequences of poststructural idealism include an atomization of groups, and a shattering of liberal arts communities into competing congregations within

universities. These dynamics limit rather than encourage a sympathetic coherence (with rational continuity and real political power) among liberal arts departments. As groups become involved in micro-identity debates, they often become more dependent on *judgments* rather than *reasoning*, and academics may lose awareness of the ways universities are being colonized by the corporate class.

A strong value of Santayana in works like "The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy" and in *The Life of Reason* is his insight into something like post-structural contingencies but in showing these insights do not mean that there are *no* values. Santayana's anti-foundationalism is fairly comic and easy-going, and tilted toward pragmatism, with the reserve that there is something called truth. In *Scepticism and Animal Faith*, Santayana moves dialectically between a realm of pure essence, which is like the poststructural realm of signs (without inherent metaphysical status) and animal faith. Knowledge is never absolute, but contingent and based in a narrow and provisional faith, and this is adequate:

If now I turn my face in the other direction [that is, opposite the realm of essence] and consider the prospect open to animal faith, I see that all this insecurity and inadequacy of alleged knowledge are almost irrelevant to the natural effort of the mind to describe natural things. The discouragement we may feel in science does not come from failure; it comes from a false conception of what would be success. Our worst difficulties arise from the assumption that knowledge of existences ought to be literal, whereas knowledge of existences has no need, no propensity, and no fitness to be literal. (SAF 101)

This limited definition of success in science is analogous to the limited transparency of language, and both are more likely to result in coherent communication than the allegedly emancipatory skepticism of Derridean deconstruction which results in *Of Grammatology's* categorical dismissals of science, democracy, and nature as failed attempts to define authenticity—dismissals that depend on what Santayana would call "a false conception of what would be success" (SAF 101).

Santayana's idiosyncratic usage of 'essence' and 'spirit' are be good examples of how he maintains a kind of linguistic or symbolic continuity with past culture without indulging anything authoritarian, categorically dismissive, or, on the other hand, nostalgic for allegedly static cultural truths. Yet today there are kinds of pluralism that are not really pluralistic; arguments for noncanonical literature may facilitate the avoidance of difficult and thoughtful writing from the past (Shakespeare, e.g.)<sup>7</sup> in favor of works that are easier to read and teach as tracts about morality or politics. Pluralist cultural ideals could mean we acknowledge idiosyncratic goals or excellences within older works *and* more recent, non-canonical work instead of categorizing works according to a univocal absolute.

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<sup>7</sup>"The [Yale] English major's curriculum has come under fire in the last year: A student petition in May 2016 calling for the abolishment of the "Major English Poets" sequence [including Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton and Wordsworth] garnered 160 signatures" (Treisman 2017).

For Santayana, the idea of essence expands rather than reduces possibility; essence "is something passive, anything that might be found, every quality of being; it therefore has not the function of reducing plurality to unity for the convenience of our poor wits or economy of language" (SAF 78). In their comparative analysis of Santayana and Wittgenstein, Hodges and Lachs note that for Santayana, the "pluralism" of possible essences in any description indicates the "open-ended diversity of communicative structures" available to a language user (95). This play of language games "breaks the hold" of the idea of single descriptions. This idea of essences could inform a robust sense of the pluralism of plausible descriptions of the world and is less likely to resort in the "nothing but" restrictions of Derridean rhetoric, which implicitly rely on idealist imperatives which freeze the progress of skepticism, even in solipsistic subjectivity.<sup>8</sup>

Santayana operates with the sense that we make use of the cultural past, with an evolving reason that judges things according to occasionally quite unusual types of excellence: "Excellence is relative to the accidental life of nature which selects now one essence and now another to be the goal of some thought or endeavour." (SAF 79) This idiosyncratic idea of excellence is also specified in Santayana's frequent repositioning of Aristotle's word 'entelechy': "Animal life sometimes reaches its entelechy in a stream of intuitions, expressive of its modifications by the presence of other bodies, or by the ferments of its own blood. These modes of spirit are in themselves intangible, unobservable, volatile, and fugitive" (SAF 221).

A creative consequence of Santayana's idea of essence plays out in the way he reads other writers. Perhaps most significant is Santayana's attitude toward the past: he isn't victimized by it, so his choices are not reduced to submission to past authority or avoidance of influence. In his contact with older thinkers, there is a reflective and dialectical conversation. Sometimes detected excellences are unique to each reader. Santayana is both more adventurous in considering what pluralism could mean for the future and in the way he regards the past than many postmodern critics are. Pluralism in some pious formulations means that all groups are worthy of democratic equality. This position is already incoherent; unless these groups have in common an overarching value system, they cannot be part of a unified system.

This doesn't exclude the excellences of groups, or the moral or aesthetic essence one might detect in an older work of literature, but *all* of these are contingent and subject to revision. The value of the past is viewed by Santayana less like a moral guidebook, and more like language itself. It is incumbent on the individual user of the images of the past or references to past works of literature to be facile, graceful, and intelligent in reference to these works. Reading literature for Santayana—given the way he reads philosophy as a model—is an

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<sup>8</sup> "The Derridean self relates not to other people but only to her own desires. While ostensibly deconstructing the concepts of subjectivity, nature, and origin, Derrida in fact treats the autonomous subject, isolated in an experiential world of her own creation, as natural and original." Guyora Binder and Robert Weisberg, *Literary Criticisms of Law* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).

exercise in sharp, but limited skepticism. He does not read to make himself a follower of those past writers he especially respects (like Plato, Lucretius, and Spinoza), but to expand his own vocabulary so as to express insight and desire within the limits of natural life.

Santayana balances a sense of evolving excellences (as in Aristotle's *entelechies* [see SAF, 130] ), a moral issue, with respect for mechanics, or how things are, which is a matter of physical science, with an added transcendental criticism of science. He thus provides a vision of how science may fit within, and not determine, the life of reason. A mutual respect for a realm of truth and realm of matter need not be reduced to a claim that, as Derrida said, "One can no longer distinguish between technology on the one hand and theory, science and rationality on the other" (1983, 12). A shared commitment to understanding natural truth may be a ground of connection between people across cultures, and not be an apology for ideology, social control, or class structure, as variants of Darwinism or evolution have been. In human terms, Santayana argues not that people conform to an evolving nature (although he acknowledges evolution as a correct theory), but that they develop an evolving rationality. He argues less about people having to fit themselves to environment than he does about people making artful changes to their own interpretations of experience. Science itself will change as understandings enlarge; if modern literature from Dostoyevsky to Pynchon contains salient sermons in addition to irony, the defect of science is a lack of transcendental criticism, a portion of what Santayana calls the realm of spirit. In Santayana's terms, this is nothing supernatural or mystical, but a set of guiding ideas, fit to the universe, which is not a set of static truths, but a work in progress.

Santayana manages to balance a sense of our alienation from ultimate knowledge of matter or existence, being committed to a representational or even transcendentalist theory of knowledge, with a stoic's understanding that we exist in a realm of matter and develop as animal intelligences. Prior to any affirmation of value, we inhabit a realm of matter that shocks, conditions, and supports us, by turns. By acknowledging nature while denying that we have ultimate, but only a developing, knowledge of it, Santayana avoids many of the contradictions and sleights of hand that characterize Derridean postmodernism, while engaging the more vital portion of its skepticism.

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# Metaethics for Mavericks: Santayana and Nietzsche on False Idols and True Poetry<sup>1</sup>

George Santayana's style is highly recognizable—encountered once, his nuanced philosophical prose and pithy character sketches are easily identified a second time. Consider Santayana's reminiscences of his colleagues in the Harvard University Department of Philosophy:

A young Californian, Josiah Royce, had come back from Germany with a reputation for wisdom; and even without knowing that he had already produced a new proof of the existence of God, merely to look at him you would have felt that he was a philosopher; his great head seemed too heavy for his small body, and his portentous brow, crowned with thick red hair, seemed to crush the lower part of his face. (COUS 64)

Royce was not Santayana's only nearby target:

There is a sense in which James was not a philosopher at all ... Philosophy to him was rather like a maze in which he happened to find himself wandering, and what he was looking for was the way out. In the presence of theories of any sort he was attentive, puzzled, suspicious, with a certain inner prompting to disregard them. He lived all his life among them, as a child lives among grown-up people; what a relief to turn from those stolid giants, with their prohibitions and exactions and tiresome talk, to another real child or a nice animal! (COUS 62)

Equipped with these examples, one would have no trouble in guessing that Santayana is also the author of the following remarks:

What Nietzsche disparaged...under the name of morality was not all morality, for he has an enthusiastic master-morality of his own to impose. He was thinking only of the Christian virtues and especially of a certain Protestant and Kantian moralism with which perhaps he had been surfeited. This moralism conceived that duty was something absolute and not a method of securing whatever goods of all sorts are attainable by action. The latter is the common and the sound opinion, maintained, for instance, by Aristotle; but Nietzsche, who was not humble enough to learn very much by study, thought he was propounding a revolutionary doctrine when he puts goods and evils beyond and above right and wrong ... Whatever seemed to him admirable, beautiful, eligible, whatever was good in the sense opposed

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<sup>1</sup> This essay was presented in honour of Angus Kerr-Lawson to the George Santayana Society at the Eastern American Philosophical Association meeting in Baltimore in January, 2017. My thanks to the audience there, as well as to Richard Rubin and two anonymous referees from the *Bulletin* for their very helpful comments on earlier versions of the paper.

not to *böse* but to *schlecht*, Nietzsche loved with jealous affection. Hence his hatred of moralism, which in raising duty to the irresponsible throne of the absolute has superstitiously sacrificed half the goods of life. Nietzsche, then, far from transcending ethics, re-established it on its true foundations, which is not to say that the sketchy edifice which he planned to raise on these foundations was in a beautiful style of architecture or could stand at all. (EGP<sup>2</sup> 124-5)

It is hard to know if we should be more deceived in taking these sallies seriously or in not taking them so. On the one hand it all seems the swagger of an immature, half-playful mind, like a child who tells you that he will cut your head off...On the other hand these explosions are symptomatic; there stirs behind them unmistakably an elemental force. (EGP 135)

Whereas affection ekes through in Santayana's assessment of his colleagues, it is markedly absent from his remarks regarding Nietzsche. Still, the relation of their views is much more complex than lampooner and lampooned—though it is that, too—and it is hard to puzzle out how seriously we should take Santayana's remarks about how seriously we should take Nietzsche.

In his 2008 "Santayana on Nietzsche", Angus Kerr-Lawson takes up the challenge. There, Kerr-Lawson explores Santayana's most extended engagement with Nietzsche, which is found in *Egotism in German Philosophy* (1916). Kerr-Lawson is unapologetically pro-Santayana in navigating this terrain, and endorses Santayana's way of labeling Nietzsche: romantic, heathen, egotist. He gives a capsule view of Santayana's criticism of Nietzsche:

Although he had the courage to maintain his preferences, which is essential to morality, he was lacking in moral strength; although the essence of morality was conspicuous in him, he had no idea of something that must also be critical to morality. (Kerr-Lawson 2008, 27)

Kerr-Lawson acknowledges that what Santayana intended in asserting that Nietzsche lacked moral strength is "not entirely clear" (Kerr-Lawson 2008, 32). Santayana evokes the idea in *Egotism in German Philosophy*, where he evidently takes it as a constitutive component of being fit to be a moral philosopher, but rarely anywhere else. Kerr-Lawson takes Santayana to have meant by "moral strength" something akin to "spiritual discipline", a more familiar slant for the reader versed in Santayana. In Kerr-Lawson's opinion, Santayana is right in saying that of spiritual discipline, Nietzsche had no idea. "From his unruly thoughts," Kerr-Lawson concludes, "[Nietzsche] failed to work out any viable alternative ideal that might enhance people's lives" (Kerr-Lawson 2008, 35).

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<sup>2</sup> I am aware that *Egotism and German Philosophy* has not always been taken particularly seriously by Santayana scholars, but am not myself inclined to dismiss it out of hand as simply a war-time reaction—especially given a number of intriguing references to Nietzsche in Santayana's letters. For another perspective on whether any of Santayana's works should be taken more or less seriously than they have been, see the transcription of the interview between John Lachs and Martin Coleman (this issue, p. 8).



I will return to Kerr-Lawson's way of negotiating and assessing the conversation between Santayana and Nietzsche. But my main task in this paper is to investigate the matter from a different angle. I set aside entirely Santayana's (very) occasional laudatory remarks about Nietzsche's philosophy, as well as his frequently scornful engagements with Nietzsche as a character. I go back to the rough ground: the critique of morality offered by Nietzsche, and the existentialist-tinged expressivism of Santayana.<sup>3</sup> If we set aside the critique of Nietzsche as a person and realign ourselves to his writings, I suggest that we see more similarity with Santayana's work than Kerr-Lawson found, or than Santayana himself was willing to see. Santayana's own interpretation notwithstanding, the congruence between his work and Nietzsche's is notable. I argue for this congruence along three argumentative axes: in section 1, I focus on methodological similarities; in section 2, I present overlapping features of their metaethical arguments; in section 3, I consider modes of affirmation. In section 4, I return to Santayana's remarks, and Kerr-Lawson's reading of them.

## 1. Methodologies

Despite his frequently polemical style, Nietzsche also has a subtle side. Though Santayana is often supremely subtle, he is—as his critique in *Egotism in German Philosophy* demonstrates—ferocious on those occasions when he is on the attack. Each has a literary style resoundingly unlike anyone else's, such that both seem destined to stick out at just about any point in the history of philosophy. But behind Nietzsche's aphoristic expression and Santayana's smooth prose stand similar methodological commitments with respect to the idea of moral philosophy—and ultimately, similar metaethical views. In this section, I start with method. I consider two shared features of Santayana and Nietzsche's ways of being philosophical about morality: the emphasis on beginning midstream, and the call to philosophy as corrective.

Let us begin with beginning midstream. Santayana's "Preface" to *Scepticism and Animal Faith* is an encapsulation of the spirit of pragmatism. He says that there are no first principles in philosophy, or if there were, we could only ever find them by working back from where we find ourselves—such that what we do, really, is "lay siege to the truth...first from one quarter and then another" (SAF v). We have no choice but to plunge in *medias res*. This is to say that philosophy, like other human activities, is an embedded enterprise.

Nor are we embedded merely as knowers. We are also materially embedded—as Quine put it, each of us is "a physical object sitting in a physical world" but nonetheless capable of striking back at matter through "a torrent of discourse" including "joy and sorrow, good and evil" (Quine 1957, 1). Four decades earlier, Santayana declared himself a materialist, maintaining that everything that is

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<sup>3</sup> In both cases, there is a massive amount of text to consider. Since relevant work runs to several volumes on each side, I will say a little in section 2 about the basis for my particular selections. But one obvious takeaway from this paper is that there is much more to say.

experienced arises from a matrix of matter. In *that* sense of being a materialist, Santayana thought himself “apparently the only one living” (SAF vii). Since the experience of anything as good or evil arises in some way or other from the material substratum, inquiry into the moral sphere is an inquiry in the same sense as any other: an investigation of the natural world. Its deliverances are as scientific as any animal knowledge can be, empiricist because it could not be otherwise, and the subject-matter exhausted by “self-knowledge and knowledge about the world” (Tiller 167).

Insofar as one thinks—as Aristotle and John Stuart Mill clearly did—that morality and human happiness are intertwined, one is obligated to wrangle with the question of what makes people happy, including oneself. This self-knowledge, too, is an empirical matter. “The nature of happiness”, Santayana declares, “dawns upon philosophers when their wisdom beings to report the lessons of experience: an *a priori* philosophy can have no inkling of it” (EGP 153).

Another methodological commitment exhibited across Santayana’s work is to think of philosophy as a corrective to lazy or received ways of thinking about morality, and as a corrective to philosophy itself—in particular, to the universalizing tendencies of traditional philosophical approaches to moral life. One of the passages quoted at length in Kerr-Lawson’s paper presents perhaps the strongest injunction that one can find in Santayana:

Happiness is not for wild animals, who can only oscillate between apathy and passion. To be happy, even to conceive happiness, you must be reasonable or (if Nietzsche prefers the word) you must be tamed. You must have taken the measure of your powers and learned your place in the world and what things in it can really serve you. To be happy you must be wise. (EGP 152-3)

Although his presence in this passage is by way of a snide aside, Nietzsche shares both of the methodological commitments just discussed.

Like Santayana, Nietzsche calls for treating morality as a subject investigated in context. Consider the remarks made in *Beyond Good and Evil*, in the chapter titled “Natural History of Morals”: “The moral sentiment in Europe today is as refined, old, diverse, irritable, and subtle, as the ‘science of morals’ that accompanies it is still young, raw, clumsy, and butterfingere”. He is swift to clarify what he finds scary within the scare quotes: “Even the term ‘science of morals’ is much too arrogant considering what it designated, and offends *good* taste—which always prefers more modest terms” (BGE 287). But despite his derision of what we might now term scientistic treatments of the phenomena of moral life, Nietzsche does think that there are such phenomena, and that it is through experience that we come to appreciate their subtlety, their variety, and which among them are capable of moving us with urgency. In the sense in which Tiller describes Santayana’s approach to ethics as “scientific”, Nietzsche’s is equally so: Nietzsche, too, is concerned with self-knowledge and knowledge about the world.

Nietzsche is also an empiricist, but not—as Santayana suggests in painting him as an anti-rationalist—uninterested in reason. In a section titled “Feelings and their origination in judgments”, Nietzsche questions the legitimacy of the expression “Trust your feelings!” He notes that

feelings are nothing final or original ; behind feelings there stand judgments and evaluations which we inherit in the form of feelings (inclinations, aversions). To trust one’s feelings—means to give more obedience to one’s grandfather and grandmother and their grandparents than to the gods which are in *us*: our reason and our experience. (DB 25).

Also like Santayana, Nietzsche regards philosophy as a corrective. His explicitly methodological remarks are voluminous; two will serve our purposes here. First, a well-known image from *Twilight of the Idols*:

There are more idols than realities in the world: that is my “evil eye” for this world; that is also my “evil ear.” For once to pose questions here with a *hammer*, and, perhaps, to hear as a reply that famous hollow sound ... This little essay is a great declaration of war; and regarding the sounding out of idols, this time they are not just idols of the age, but eternal idols, which are here touched with a hammer as with a tuning fork: there are altogether no older, no more convinced, no more puffed-up idols—and none more hollow. (*Twilight of the Idols*, PN 466)

The idea of Nietzsche philosophizing “with a hammer” has seemed to some readers to represent a kind of gleeful destruction of convention for destruction’s sake. The “explosions” that Santayana describes as “symptomatic” and moved by “elemental force” seem to be cast in this mold: he sees Nietzsche as blowing things up without erecting anything better or more beautiful in their place (EGP 135). But as this passage explicitly states, Nietzsche takes himself to be in a much more subtle business. The hammer he takes to idols—such as the cherished conventions of traditional practices and the core ideals of longstanding normative theories—is a tuning fork. He is interested not in explosions, but in reverberations: in whether the sound reveals solidity or hollowness. Where an idol (or an ideal) rings hollow, it is the job of philosophers to say so—and perhaps then the hammer *qua* hammer is the appropriate tool.

It may seem that while Santayana is primarily turned inward in the corrective enterprise, Nietzsche is turned outward. Santayana reflects. Nietzsche tells people what to do. But this easy distinction misrepresents both of their views. For Santayana does expect things of his reader, not least that she will agree that her happiness is contingent upon developing wisdom and accepting her genuine preferences—upon discovering and being honest about what in the world suits her. And Nietzsche faces inward as well as outward in the practice of philosophy as corrective, as a second quotation about method demonstrates:

For the new year—I still live, I still think: I still have to live, for I still have to think. Sum, ergo cogito: cogito, ergo sum. Today everybody permits himself the expression of his wish and his dearest thought; hence I, too shall

say what it is that I wish from myself today, and what was the first thought to run across my heart this year—what thought shall be for me the reason, warranty, and sweetness of my life henceforth. I want to learn more and more to see as beautiful what is necessary in things; then I shall be one of those who make things beautiful. Amor fati: let that be my love henceforth! I do not want to wage war against what is ugly. I do not want to accuse; I do not even want to accuse those who accuse. Looking away shall be my only negation! And all in all and on the whole: some day I wish to be only a Yes-sayer. (*The Gay Science*, section 276)<sup>4</sup>

Here, Nietzsche is bending his own back to the yoke of acceptance, exhorting himself to what sounds remarkably like Stoicism<sup>5</sup>: seeing as beautiful what is necessary, being happy with the world as it has been determined—finding in philosophy the antidote to what is ugly.

One might, at this point, protest: surely, if the similarities in question boil down to a focus on the embedded nature of moral inquiry and the trope of philosophy as antidote (or inoculation), there are scores of philosophers “just like” Santayana and Nietzsche. Perhaps that is true, though I would be interested in seeing the list. But the similarity between these two thinkers extends beyond what we might think of as first steps and frameworks. Where those steps lead and how those frameworks are articulated shows a deeper congruence still. So let us turn to what we might consider substantive philosophical agreement.<sup>6</sup>

## 2. Metaethical Heterodoxy: Metaethics for Mavericks

Santayana and Nietzsche both offer unorthodox (or perhaps untimely) philosophies. This is true specifically in the arena of metaethics—understood roughly as the study of the preconditions of moral thought and discourse, including the ‘stuff’ that might make sense of such thought and discourse—where

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<sup>4</sup> *The Gay Science* comes up in Santayana’s letters on more than one occasion, and seems to have been a work of Nietzsche’s for which he had some genuine admiration. In 1939, Santayana wrote to Nancy Saunders Toy from Venice, a city which he complained had too few books. He noted that he did secure a translation of *The Gay Science*, which he calls “admirable”—and further comments, “I may be wrong, but I find great comfort in Nietzsche” (LGS5 276-9). Of course, this correspondence postdates EGP by more than two decades. It would be unwise to hang too much on the references to the Nietzsche that occur throughout the *Letters*, but it is perhaps not too rash to conclude that there is more to Santayana’s understanding of Nietzsche than what EGP offers.

<sup>5</sup> It is remarkable in this context because one point of Santayana’s sustained critique of Nietzsche as anti-rational turns on what he takes to be Nietzsche’s failure to understand wisdom in Ancient Greek thought. For tensions in the project of reading Santayana as himself a stoic, see Lachs 2014.

<sup>6</sup> This is, of course, arbitrary. Agreement about method is already highly significant agreement. What I mean here is something like “propositions mutually affirmed”.

both thinkers diverge from the general trends of ethics in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The extent to which Santayana *has* a metaethics is somewhat disputed. Here, I follow Tiller (as most recently in his 2014, but also his 1998 and 2000) in treating Santayana's explicit treatments and more scattered remarks as jointly expressing of a theory of ethics. What I will offer here can be no more than a sample, since a complete assembly of Santayana's considered views on this subject would include close readings of at least the following texts: *The Sense of Beauty*, *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion*, *Egotism in German Philosophy*, *The Life of Reason*, *Scepticism and Animal Faith*, *Dialogues in Limbo*, *Realms of Being*, and "The Projection of Values".

The same is true of a complete assembly of Nietzsche's views, though he is more explicit about the place of metaethics in his work as a whole: "The question concerning the origin of moral values is for me," he writes in *Ecce Homo*, "a question of the very first rank because it is crucial for the future of humanity" (EH 747). To offer a complete catalogue of the many ways in which Nietzsche engages the question and undertakes the "reevaluation of values" would require close readings of at least the following: *Daybreak*, *Beyond Good and Evil*, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, *The Gay Science*, *Twilight of the Idols*, and *Ecce Homo*.

From this mass of material, we can extract the following two points of deep agreement: Santayana and Nietzsche both affirm that there are no moral facts and that preference is the true "stuff" of moral life.<sup>7</sup> While in exploring methodological commitments, I considered Santayana and then Nietzsche, I work in this section on the premise that the overlap of substantive commitments is best established by seeing each shared proposition in two voices.

First, we have the claim that there are no moral facts.<sup>8</sup> We are spoiled for choice in finding this position articulated in Santayana's works. Here are but a few of the ways he makes the claim:

In...*moral* judgment...it is hard to see how there could be any truth. The only truth concerned would be that such a judgment was passed, that it was more or less general and lasting, and more or less passionate. But there would seem to be no conceivable object or reality in reference to which any type of morality could be called *true*. (RB 474)

Moral terms are caresses or insults and describe nothing. (DL 38-39)

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<sup>7</sup> A possible third point of significant agreement is that authenticity is the true litmus test of one's morality. But as we shall see in sections 3-4, Santayana's way of being authentic seems to be basically incompatible with Nietzsche's, because each takes the step of affirmation in the face of realizing one's morality comes down to preferences in a different direction.

<sup>8</sup> By this, I mean no mind-independent arrangements in the world that fix moral properties, but also no mind-dependent shared facts of the kind posited by constructivist views in metaethics. Santayana explicitly avows relativism in "Apologia Pro Mente Sua", where he states: "The first principle of my ethics is relativity".

In primitive or poetic thought it is natural that moral essences should be treated as if they had a personal unity and material subsistence (things incompatible at bottom, but loosely projected together into the same object, as into a man). ("The Projection of Values", AFSL 350)

What we experience directly in moral life then, is in no way reducible to some external fact which is capable of being accessed by all alike. Instead, we are dealing with essences: non-material, non-existent being. An essence is "perfectly individual", "perfectly self-contained and real only by virtue of its intrinsic character" (RB 18).

Nietzsche also denies the existence of moral facts that could impose upon us from outside. Here is a sample of his way of articulating this shared commitment:

[O]ur moral judgments and evaluations too are only images and fantasies based on a physiological process unknown to us. (DB 120)

Whatever has *value* in our world now does not have value in itself, according to its nature—nature is always value-less, but has been *given* value at some time. (GS 242)

Like Santayana, Nietzsche is what we would in contemporary metaethical terms call an anti-realist about value. This is to say that value-terms have no vindication in valuer-independent facts. Our moral judgments, then, are simply not truth-apt: not the kind of propositions that can stand as candidates for truth and falsity.

This leads to a second point of deep agreement between the two philosophers, which concerns what we *should* say about moral judgments, if they do not express matters of facts. Here, we find that both affirm that although moral judgments are not the kind of thing to be true or false, they are nonetheless interesting, meaningful, and potentially self-revelatory. While moral judgments are not truth-functional, they may still express sincerely. This is because the ground of moral life, and the experience that we carve out as moral, is preference.

Santayana in uncharacteristically blunt in making this point:

[T]he nerve of moral judgment is preference. (RB 473)

This idea is present in his works from a very early stage, appearing also in *The Sense of Beauty*, where he argues that all preference is arational, and that moral judgments have their basis in sensibility (SB 13-14). This means that what evaluative statements track, at least when they are authentic expressions, is our felt responses. It also suggests that "Verbal judgments are often useful instruments of thought" (SB 14), though what they are useful *for* is self-knowledge: we can learn something about ourselves, and put ourselves on the path to wisdom. For moral essences do truly impact us—it is just that in doing so, they reveal our constitution rather than some hidden truths of an independent moral realm.

Nietzsche is as adamant, and—less surprisingly, perhaps—as blunt as Santayana in affirming that morality is at bottom about preferences. As he puts the thesis in *Beyond Good and Evil*, "moralities are...merely a *sign language* of

*the affects*” (BGE 290). Further, “What is essential and inestimable in every morality is that it constitutes a long compulsion” (BGE 290); that is, what theories of morality have been set up to do is respect some compulsion so deeply felt that it has seemed to the one who has it like a conduit to some self-evident truth.

Just as Santayana thinks that we must avoid reifying essences, Nietzsche insists that we avoid endorsing some mistakenly enshrined ideals—false idols—which have often been given persuasive expression by someone who has mistaken her window on reality for the whole view. What a moral philosophy offers, generally unwittingly, is

the personal confession of its author and a kind of involuntary and unconscious memoir ... above all, his morality bears decided and decisive witness to *who he is*—that is, in what order of rank the innermost drives of his nature stand in relation to each other. (BGE 203-4)

The story of a theory of morality, or a collection of moral judgments, is just that: a story, and at its best when frankly understood as autobiographical.

It is clear that there is at least some genuine congruence between Santayana and Nietzsche’s metaethical views, which flow from shared convictions about the starting points of philosophy. It should be unsurprising, then, to find that both philosophers also end up in a similar place. While in contemporary metaethics, expressivism is sometimes represented as recommending no particular course of action and leading to the abandonment of reason<sup>9</sup>, both Nietzsche and Santayana think that there are still things to be done.

### 3. Affirmation

From shared methodological commitments and through unconventional metaethical positions, both Santayana and Nietzsche end in the same place: in affirmation. Once you recognize that your deeply felt moral convictions are just that, *your deeply felt* moral convictions, there is nonetheless a meaningful next step. What you ought to do, whether you are reading *Daybreak* or the *Realms of Being*, is find a way to say ‘yes’. As we have already seen Santayana say, self-knowledge is necessary for wisdom and for happiness. It is *knowledge* of self rather than transformation of self in light of some external ideal that he is describing in saying that “You must have taken the measure of your powers and learned your place in the world and what things in it can really serve you” (EGP 152-3). Affirmation, then, is the acknowledgement and acceptance of one’s own powers and place.

Santayana’s way of saying ‘yes’ to the essentially preference-driven nature of morality is rooted in his epiphenomenalism. One can take ownership of one’s preferences, or one can seek to submerge or repudiate them, but one can do little

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<sup>9</sup> For instance, Crispin Wright has characterized expressivism as a “grotesque lapse of rationality”. (Wright 1996, 4).

to change them—so the course of wisdom is affirmation, rather than self-deception. One's preferences are contingent and one's ability to alter the world limited to adjusting one's attitude towards it. The moral essences that move one are a gift (or burden) of the natural lottery, but one can still say 'yes'—through poetry. We must resist reifying essences to create moral 'facts', to which we could then appeal in correcting one another's opinions. But we can, nonetheless, express through the poetic use of language what we must deny ourselves ontologically. What poetic engagement with the moral essences that move us offers is "a momentary harmony of the soul" (IPR 289). This internal harmony is achieved through positioning ourselves at some remove from our experiences of good and evil, at a distance that allows acceptance of our preferences *as preferences*—incapable of anchoring universal legislation or launching moral imperialism, but nonetheless ours to be acknowledged. As Vincent Colapietro has framed the poetic project,

When experience is concretely imagined through a work of art to be a *destiny*...as poetic experience must be when envisioned by rational imagination, it becomes nothing less than a task of reconciling ourselves with the conditions of our existence. (Colapietro 2009, 563)

Santayana's mode of affirmation is thus aesthetic: to compose poetry is to express as beautifully as one may what is admittedly contingent in one's nature. It is a way to say 'yes' to moral essences, without moral facts.<sup>10</sup>

Nietzsche is equally eloquent in describing his own way of saying 'yes':

I do not want to remain silent about my morality which says to me: Live in seclusion so you can live for yourself. Live in ignorance about what seems most important to your age. Between yourself and today lay the skin of at least three centuries. And the clamor of today, the noise of wars and revolutions should be a mere murmur for you. You will also wish to help—but only those whose distress you understand entirely because they share with you one suffering and one hope—your friends—and only in the manner in which you help yourself. I want to make them bolder, more persevering, simpler, gayer. I want to teach them what is understood by so few today, least of all by these preachers of pity: to share not suffering but joy. (GS 270-271)

Nor can it be doubted that what Nietzsche intends is not just to teach others, but to orient himself authentically toward happiness, as we have seen in his expressed desire to be love as beautiful what is necessary.

Indeed, Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo*, shows that he endorses something very like what Colapietro picks out as important in poetry, seeing "experience is concretely imagined through a work of art to be a *destiny*" (Colapietro 2009, 563). In that work, Nietzsche has a chapter brashly titled "Why I Am A Destiny" (EH 782-792)—but if the sentiment seems hubristic, consider the artistic enterprise of

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<sup>10</sup> For the claim that poetry satisfies a "moral function", see the "Preface" to IPR.



writing poetry purely to serve one's own harmonizing impulse. Seeing oneself—and one's perceptions of moral value—as inevitable is one way for a person to reconcile herself with the fact that she lacks the power to actually alter anything. What one does have, always, is the power of creative redescription.

## 4. Back to the Beginning

I began with a series of remarks made by Santayana about fellow philosophers, including some of his most provocative comments on Nietzsche from *Egotism and German Philosophy*. I explored a strategy different from that of Kerr-Lawson, by focusing primarily on navigating these remarks in their context. It is to Kerr-Lawson's work that I now return.

He claims that "Not many both appreciate Nietzsche's virtues and at the same time are uncompromising about his excesses. One such is George Santayana" (Kerr-Lawson 2008, 27). Based on a survey of a considerable range of text on both sides in sections 1–3, I am not so sure that Santayana appreciated Nietzsche's virtues. Santayana's opinions were negatively, but probably unavoidably, influenced by the generally lousy state of Nietzsche scholarship in 1916. But the intervening hundred years have both improved access to Nietzsche's work, and offered the possibilities of more balanced readings of it. We know now that *The Will to Power* was assembled by Nietzsche's virulently anti-Semitic sister from his notebooks and published posthumously in a form that he never authorized. We know that, as Walter Kaufmann has argued, "Nietzsche was not a one-book man" (*BW* xxii). And perhaps the time is right for untimely philosophers—for a renewal of interest in figures like Nietzsche and Santayana, who do not so much stand outside the main currents of their philosophical times as defy them.

In this new context, although Kerr-Lawson follows Santayana in treating the notion of the "superman" as being of central importance for Nietzsche's critique of conventional morality, there are good reasons to resist that reading. Santayana himself saw this, noting that "We may perhaps see the principle of [Nietzsche's] ethics better if we forget for a moment the will to be powerful" (EGP 127-8).<sup>11</sup> In the context of that remark, Santayana tries to shift his critique from the issue of power to what he takes to be Nietzsche's narrow sense of the aesthetic. But

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<sup>11</sup> Again, Santayana's letters suggest that his views may have softened over time, or become moderated by a wider reading of Nietzsche's works. In a letter to Hugo Munsterberg that predates EGP (1907 or 1908), Santayana thanks Munsterberg for sending him a copy of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Although Santayana claims that he read it with pleasure, he also remarked, "I don't see that there is anything very new at bottom, or very philosophical, in the new ethics" (LGS1 359). Quite different is a note from Santayana's exchange with Nancy Saunders Toy while reading *The Gay Science*. Evidently Santayana was reading a book by Montaigne that he had also obtained while visiting Venice, and the comparison he drew is perhaps surprising: "Montaigne is of course a capital rogue: prose still decorative and eloquent; but Nietzsche on the whole inspires more respect: more incisive, braver, more unhappy" (LGS6 350).

throughout the three chapters of *Egotism and German Philosophy* explicitly devoted to Nietzsche, Santayana seems to have been unable to refrain from gravitating back to the issue of power as evidence of some kind of basic petulance on Nietzsche's part.

Despite our differences, I think that Kerr-Lawson is right to locate the heart of Santayana's dislike in Nietzsche's total lack of interest in a "spiritual life" in the sense of that notion that Santayana himself prizes. The difference in what I have explained as their modes of affirmation seemed to Santayana insurmountable. And perhaps it is. On the one hand, we have the poet who retreats, even far enough from his own preferences, to see them as the substance of a story with no special claim save that it is authentically lived. On the other, we have the "yes-sayer" of *The Gay Science*, who is also the fisherman of *Daybreak*, who is also the acoustic investigator of *Twilight of the Idols*, who also does seem at times like a little boy threatening to cut your head off. But perhaps this, too, reveals a commonality. For the issue is one of style, and even here, we have convergence: given Santayana's emphasis on the aesthetic and Nietzsche's insistence of turning away from the ugly, both see style *as* substance.

In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche began the section "On Reading and Writing" as follows: "Of all that is written I love only what a man has written with his blood. Write with blood, and you will experience that blood is spirit" (PN: 152). This is precisely the sort of manifesto that Santayana found repulsive in Nietzsche's thought. But whereas Santayana's life of spirit is ironic, poetic, and detached, Nietzsche's life of spirit is pouring itself out, bleeding itself dry. The way Nietzsche's scholarly career and life ended may make that way of reading him especially tempting, but there is every sign that he wished to be read urgently at every stage, and especially in his critique of morality. It may seem, then, that core points of Santayana's critique of Nietzsche, as further advanced by Kerr-Lawson, come too close to reading Nietzsche and finding fault with him against Santayana's own preferences.

John Lachs's way of bringing together some of the core insights that comprise Santayana's moral philosophy is helpful here in making sense of this charge. In particular, he articulates the sense in which value is relative on Santayana's view (a sense which would be equally sensible as a reading of Nietzsche):

Value in all cases presupposes an act of valuing: an evaluator subject as well as a treasured object. This point seems to be valid, and it is a little surprising that it has not gained universal acceptance among moral philosophers. (Lachs AFSL 330).

Lachs goes on to articulate a key consequence in striking terms: "Different natures make for different ideals; it would be just as ridiculous to expect an oyster to obey the fifth commandment as it would be impertinent for me to demand of shoemakers that they become heroes, saints, or composers of inspirational music" (AFSL 331). Or as Nietzsche claims, "'Pure Spirit' [is] a prejudice":

Wherever the teaching of *pure spirituality* has ruled, it has destroyed nervous energy with its excesses: it has taught deprecation, neglect or

tormenting of the body and men to torment and deprecate themselves on account of the drives which fills them; it has produced gloomy, tense, and oppressed souls ... their system attained its summit when it came to take ecstasy for the higher goal of life and the standard by which all earthly things stood *condemned*. (DB 27)

Certainly, Santayana can sound critical of “earthly things” when their consumption leads to worldliness. His insistence on the cultivation of wisdom as the path to happiness, in the mood of an injunction, could also be read as a condemnation of those who fail to be harmonious in light of some higher goal of life. Notice that he says not, “to be happy, *I* must be wise”, but rather “you”. This makes it seem that anyone who seeks some path to happiness other than the cultivation of wisdom is making a critical misstep. But could such a condemnation make sense?

If we connect the dots, perhaps it would be as ridiculous for Santayana to hold Nietzsche to fault for endorsing a different mode of affirmation, given his own commitment to the relativity of values, as it would be to chastise the commandment-flouting oyster. Santayana calls us to recognize that the whole “basis of morality” is that “certain things are preferable relative to the nature of the individual psyche” (AFSL 332). Nietzsche agrees, which is why though all moralities are “sign language of the affects” (BGE 290), their expression is still important as an expression of *something* real—of one’s experience, of what one values. And the answer to the question “What ought I to do?” is “know thyself and act accordingly” (AFSL 347). At least on these criteria for understanding what “spiritual discipline” could mean, Santayana is not being entirely charitable in his reading of Nietzsche.

In overcoming contingent preference to regard all essences on par, the spiritual life forces one to release her grip on the arbitrarily felt specialness of her own instinctual likes and dislikes. That instinct alone may be the stuff of morality, but it is itself pre-rational. In order to be rational with respect to morality, we must refuse to “accept human nature, as it sprouts, altogether without harmony” (LR5 254). But reason itself is a preference, and not a universal mandate (AFSL 347)—the harmonizing impulse is an impulse, not a necessity.

This brings us back to modes of affirmation. Why think ironic resignation superior to blood? In the face of the discovery that morality comes down to nothing other than preference, writing poetry and righting idols are both things one could do. Perhaps we might go so far, as Lachs implicitly suggests, to say that one should do both at different life stages. As he observes, to live spiritually in Santayana’s sense is “to have no painful and no binding attachments, to be always ready to die”—which may be “the perfection of old age...the consummation of a full life”, but “never the whole of it” (AFSL 349). Even on a view of morality that locates the whole business in preference, we might think that moral life is enriched by caring urgently—having the sense of urgency about one’s only life necessary to resist oppression, defy convention, and erect ideals felt fitting for the times. Santayana argued against urgency (and for the playfulness of poetry)

because he found moral fanaticism to be an evil. And so it is. But so, too, is moral indifference.

I have effectively echoed Kerr-Lawson in his diagnosis of the real crux of Santayana's dislike of Nietzsche as both character and philosopher: it comes down to Santayana's respect for reason in the service of wisdom, and his prizing of the spiritual life. But unlike Kerr-Lawson, I think there is something to be said for Nietzsche's critique of morality beyond what Santayana's analysis in *Egotism and German Philosophy* suggests.

Kerr-Lawson saw the value of putting Santayana in conversation: with Aristotle (2003), with James (1991), with Spinoza (2001), and with Nietzsche, too. I do not expect that I will have the last word here, nor is such my intention. Rather, let texts be opened and voices be lifted in the conversation that Kerr-Lawson has bequeathed us.

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# Roundtable on Narrative Naturalism

*What follows is an edited transcript of a panel discussion conducted on March 2, 2017 at the American Philosophical Association meeting in Kansas City.<sup>1</sup>*

**Richard Rubin:** Welcome to the George Santayana Society session at the Central Division of the APA in Kansas City. Jessica Tabor Wahman has published a book based on Santayana's writings, *Narrative Naturalism*, and we're going to talk about the book. We have on our panel Jennifer Hansen of St Lawrence University and Martin Coleman, who is at Indiana University Purdue University in Indianapolis and is the Director of the Santayana Edition. We're going to start with my interviewing Jessica about the book so that those who are unfamiliar with *Narrative Naturalism* and even with the works of Santayana might get some idea of what they are about. Then Jennifer will give her comments and then Martin. So I'll just ask at the beginning: What prompted you to write the book?

**Jessica Wahman:** Of course, there's a lot of motivations to write a book. One has a whole lot of related ideas and they could go on forever, so you've got to put them all down in one place. The more particular motivation has to do with trying to articulate the relevance of Santayana's philosophy to contemporary disputes in philosophy of mind and naturalism—naturalism, as I understand it, being taken, usually, to mean a kind of reductive physicalist approach to nature. This book is an attempt to bring a different view of nature back into the conversation and to also draw on other contemporary thinkers like Jennifer Hornsby and Stephen Horst (to a certain extent—he disavows some of the more naturalist language). To bring back into the conversation the non-reductive approach: that was the general idea.

## Narrative (3:35)

**Richard Rubin:** I'd like to just walk through the parts of the book. Your first chapter is called "Narrative." So why don't you tell us why you think narrative is important and what is central to that idea?

**Jessica Wahman:** I don't have a theory of narrative in the book. It's not so much about showing exactly how narrative functions so much as trying to say that the ways in which we explain what we take to be true about the world takes the general form of stories. I have six quotations that I wouldn't mind just bringing up right now at the very beginning that I use as examples. It starts with single-celled organisms—actually with atoms, then single celled organisms—and works its

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<sup>1</sup> Although the transcript has been edited for clarity, no major part of the conversation has been deleted. So it should be possible to read the text along with the unedited recording. Each section heading indicates the time in the recording where the section starts. The recording is available at

[http://georgesantayanasyociety.org/VN520248\\_Roundtable%20on%20Narrative%20Naturalism%202017-03-02.mp3](http://georgesantayanasyociety.org/VN520248_Roundtable%20on%20Narrative%20Naturalism%202017-03-02.mp3)

way up to political systems, showing how these things are not just grammatically but effectively put in a situation of agency and that when we engage in explanations we are usually drawing on something that tells a kind of story that relates in some familiar way to our own experience. I'm trying to stress that that is how things make sense to us, fundamentally. Even though we may employ highly technical concepts and mathematically measurable entities, ultimately when we take that data and put it into the form of a cohesive story or cohesive tale, that's when we have something along the lines of an explanation. In terms of Santayana then, I use his epistemology of what's called animal faith: the idea that knowledge—even though it involves certain kinds of confirmations of our experience—fundamentally does not involve certainty, but a kind of basic trust or belief: in our memories, in our existence, in the existence of that which we perceive, and ultimately a belief that these sorts of experiences actually cohere in something like a world. These are the beliefs that he builds one after another in his famous book *Scepticism and Animal Faith*.

**Richard Rubin:** So the idea is that there are different stories that we can tell about the same set of facts or the same set of events and they are all at least plausible or useful ways of interpreting the world or expressing our experience of the world?

**Jessica Wahman:** That's true to some extent. I would want to say that some are going to be more plausible than others. I think one of the dangers of using the language of stories is that you wind up making it sound like we just say whatever we want to about the world and, if it seems true to us, then it's true. I don't want to stress that at all. I want to focus more on that we actually have *systems* of stories.

We should clarify the meaning of *fact* in your statement. There's a set of material events that occur and they can be interpreted—perhaps economically, in terms of physics, in terms of chemistry, in terms of biology. If you have an economic transaction there are biological beings engaged in it, social beings, psychological beings, economic beings, physical beings. But what is the best and most effective level of explanation to solve a particular problem? Some will be implausible. To give an example in the book: it snowed in the Finger Lakes in August of 2013. That's not an equally plausible statement as any other. There will be more and less plausible accounts of some economic situation. I'm not going to give too many examples as I'm not economist, but economics might be a situation in which you may have some competing plausible accounts depending on what sorts of facts have been focused on for the story.

## The six opening sentences (7:43)

**Richard Rubin:** I would like to move on through the book; but, before we do, maybe we can use some of the examples that you give in your opening quotes of the different kinds of narrative. You give several sentences and each one is an example of a kind of narrative. So why don't you at least present some of them.

**Jessica Wahman:** The first one—this is not great fiction. This is your one-sentence narrative. I'm not trying to compete with Faulkner or even Santayana. The reason I like the first one is because it's about atoms:

Atoms bond to form molecules, often by sharing electrons in their outer shells.

Now, the meaning of a *bond* and *sharing* have a lot of affective connotations. It's not that a physicist thinks that two oxygen atoms come up to a hydrogen atom and go: "Hey you want to share?" But that's what's invoked in what's going on here. In fact, whatever's actually going on, at a level that's beyond any kind of direct perception, is not directly available to us. So we make sense out of the data by calling this a kind of sharing and a kind of bond. When we talk about sharing, we talk about the forming of a bond. This is the way in which a basic metaphor—sharing in the form of bonds—helps explain something that isn't otherwise available.

**Richard Rubin:** So it's a story in part because the language that we use is metaphorical in order to convey even complex physical notions. Might it also be a story because it's part of a system of physics, a wider narrative which this sentence might be part of?

**Jessica Wahman:** Exactly. The statement about atoms sharing electrons isn't just about an isolated instance. In fact, this is a very general statement about what it is atoms do. I should also add that it also gives a sort of sense of agency—that this is something atoms are *doing*: Atoms bond to form molecules. Now, I don't think a physicist or anybody reading this would interpret it literally to mean that we think atoms have some kind of intentionality at the level of complex organisms like ourselves. But as we go down my list of sentences—we have the paramecium at the next level:

A paramecium uses its cilia to sweep food into its own mouth.

This is already starting to imply some kind of intentionality, though probably not something done with conscious purposiveness. One element of narrative I want to focus on is the use of metaphor. The other is the way in which we have agents that are seen as in certain kinds of relations. This is part of what forms it into a story. And certainly, these statements are part of a bigger systematic story in each case.

**Richard Rubin:** Why don't you give one or two other examples?

**Jessica Wahman:** Well, I did one at the individual human level because it's the most obvious idea of a basic narrative:

Larry felt bad about failing to return Martin's call and so he sent an apologetic email.

Again, this is not a great novel, but I focus on this one because it has the personal basis from which the other ones derive. It's how our everyday knowledge is extended either to the very small or the very abstract. The basis of a personal



explanatory story is: Well, why did you send that email? I felt bad because I hadn't returned his call for a while.

And then we have this quote:

John F. Kennedy's inaugural address is argued to have inspired the social consciousness of a generation.

Yes, we can say John F. Kennedy intended to give an address, but then we talk about how the address is inspiring. It isn't just that John F. Kennedy is inspiring people. People hear this *story* and it's influential for generations to come.

The final sentence—just to exhaust these opening quotations—is where I'm talking about something so abstract that we have a hard time pinning down exactly where its boundaries lie. So I'm going to read:

When a given society is repressive toward one of its subgroups, this can effectively radicalize the beliefs of the group.

So, when we talk about a society being repressive, it's not that there is some sort of straightforward entity called a society that then goes, "I'm going to repress this subgroup." But yet this is an explanatory tale. We understand a sense in which there is an entity called a society that has this causal relationship with a particular subgroup. Relating these abstract concepts or entities back to a more personal sense of everyday communication and cause-and-effect interaction helps that sentence make sense to us.

**Richard Rubin:** OK. One more observation about these before we move on. There's just one that you skipped over.

**Jessica Wahman:** That's true, I did!

**Richard Rubin:** I'll read it:

Interneurons communicate by releasing chemicals called neurotransmitters which either to excite or inhibit the activities of other neurons.

So what you've done is set out a number of levels at which our discourse takes place, all of which are plausible ways of describing the world. You start at the atomic level. You move through the one-celled organisms. Then you move to the brain. Then you move to interpersonal relationships and a person's feelings about them. Then you talk about a political event and a generalization about it and then you move to a rather abstract sociological observation about effects of something on society.

**Jessica Wahman:** Indeed. And since you've pointed that out, I just also wanted to stress that one of my favorite things about that last sentence is the idea that interneurons communicate—that is not to say that they don't—but interneurons are basically neurons in our brain. You have the stimulation of the neuron, enough so that the axon fires and it releases neurotransmitters which cause—we know the story. But the point is: this is not one neuron going, "I need to communicate to these others in order to not let her say the stupid things she is

about to say.” Of course, that’s not what’s literally going on and yet that’s how we understand these interactions among neurons.

## The Physicalist Trap (14:53)

**Richard Rubin:** Your next chapter is called “The Physicalist Trap.” So what is the trap?

**Jessica Wahman:** I have to thank John Lysaker for this phrase, because it was such a good one. When I was talking to him about this topic, he said, “Oh, it’s the physicalist trap!” I asked, “Can I quote you?” So I did. The physicalist trap is basically what I think philosophers of mind fall into when they take the veracity of physical science to be foundational. In other words, the physicalist trap is physicalism when applied to the philosophy of mind. At least that’s how I’m using it here. What happens is: we start thinking about the organism as primarily a physical one, and then maybe at least get to the level of interneurons where we are talking about the neurological level; and it seems compelling, because of a very complex philosophical and scientific history, to think that this must be what’s really going on right at the bottom of things, underneath it all. And then the mystery is: how could consciousness possibly fit into this machine? How could this machine give rise to consciousness? And I’m trying to say that we fall into a trap because we’re set up to think of the organism according to one kind of story and then we’re asked to think about something that seems not to fit in the story. So, to me, the answer is, this is not an effective story for talking about the organism as a conscious being. It’s not that physics or biology doesn’t say important true things about something that goes on in the organism, but when we think of it as what essentially or at bottom or ultimately is all that’s going on in the organism, we fall into this trap.

## Naturalism (16:54)

**Richard Rubin:** Your next chapter is called “Naturalism,” and so, following on what you just said, even though there are these multiple levels or multiple ways of describing the world—I think that’s what you’re saying, isn’t it?—we don’t want to just think that the physiological or physical description is the only accurate description of the world. So even though you want to talk about our conscious lives—Santayana would call it our spiritual aspects—you still want to be a naturalist. So, what does that mean?

**Jessica Wahman:** What it means for me—the agenda in this chapter is most strongly an attempt to say: here’s a kind of pragmatism that could actually be appealing to more traditionally naturalist philosophers of mind, analytical philosophers of mind with a naturalist inclination. A lot of pragmatism likes to avoid materialism or avoid any sense of a world, any sort of non-empirical aspect of the world. A lot of pragmatism says, “This is a question that’s beyond the bounds of experience, it doesn’t interest us, we can just be agnostic on the question of nature,” and I think that’s part of what sometimes bothers

naturalistically inclined philosophers of mind. And so they think, “I want to throw out pragmatism.” But I think pragmatism, as an epistemology, is extremely important and informative and helpful and actually truer to the natural sciences than I think a lot of philosophers are willing to acknowledge. And I think there are a lot of scientists who are happy to acknowledge these sorts of storytelling and pragmatic aspects of what they actually do when they do science. So, the point of this particular chapter, “Naturalism,” is to say, here is a way that we can have a pragmatism and a belief that the truths that we’re stating are actually about a world that is whatever it is no matter what we happen to think about it. (And it’s that “is whatever it is no matter what we happen to think about it” that makes some of the pragmatists want to say “I don’t want to go there.”) So that’s a big motivation for that particular chapter—that Santayana believes that we have this belief in nature, in a world that all these stories are directed to. So, no one story is the ultimately right or the ultimately foundational story, but they do all—they aren’t just a collection of stories, they’re a collection of stories that aim at a given world. We think there’s a problem when certain stories fundamentally jar with other stories, and we are relieved when we have a sense that the chemical story and the physical story and the biological story actually make sense along with one another—they don’t conflict. So there’s an implicit notion of a substance, or a world. This substance is what Santayana calls “matter,” and you can call it something else if you want, but that’s Santayana’s word for it, and I find it helpful because I think it’s useful in talking with reductive materialists about brain states and so on. I can say, “Okay, I’m with you on matter, I just don’t think that there’s only one right story to tell about it.”

## Monism (20:34)

**Richard Rubin:** Now that you’ve brought up Santayana and how you use his ontology and epistemology as the basis for your account, I want to ask you about something that Santayana scholars might find unusual. I say this with a warning and some skepticism that I’ve always had about applying a label to a philosopher, because that really doesn’t explain what the philosopher is about. But you deliberately choose to call Santayana’s philosophy a monism. Santayana himself, even when the issue came up as to whether he was a monist or a dualist, said okay, I can be a dualist as long as you understand that consciousness is not some ethereal independent form of existence. So why do you want to choose the term ‘monism’ for Santayana?

**Jessica Wahman:** The reason I want to choose the term—and I think I try to explicitly say it’s a certain *kind* of monism, I refer to it as a *substance* monism—is because Santayana doesn’t believe there’s more than one kind of substance. Spirit is not a separate substance; it’s not like Descartes’s mental substance or anything like that. So, I call it a substance monism, again, because I’m often trying to keep philosophers of mind in mind as I write this, and the second you see anything like divisions of four *anything* it’s going to be: “Oh you’ve violated science, you’ve violated the laws of conservation of matter and energy.” And so I call it a monism

to bring home the idea that there's just one substance; it's just that it can't be reduced to any one of these four characteristics that Santayana finds so worth distinguishing. That's really what it comes down to.

## Structure of the book (22:37)

**Richard Rubin:** Maybe we should now briefly go into the four realms of being because you've opened that up, and your next chapter is about essence—you've mentioned matter—so what are the other three realms of being in Santayana's ontology?

**Jessica Wahman:** Maybe a helpful way of addressing this without just enumerating the four realms of being is to talk about the structure of the book, which is actually set up to do exactly that, and I think you're nicely leading me into it. To review, the first chapter is "Narrative," the second one is "The Physicalist Trap," which is trying to talk about the limitations of physicalism as a narrative. The third one is talking about the general idea of nature, and then the next four chapters are ways of taking up each of what Santayana calls his "realms of being": essence, matter, truth, and spirit. The fourth chapter is the "Essence(s) of the Matter," the next one focuses on a particular aspect of the realm of matter called "psyche." The one after that focuses on his realm of truth, which is one of the weirder realms according to many people, and then finally spirit. So those are the four realms, but I don't want to just go through and enumerate all of them. It might be more interesting to address particular questions about them.

## Santayana's realms of being (24:02)

**Richard Rubin:** Well, maybe we ought to explain . . .

**Jessica Wahman:** . . . just the general ontology?

**Richard Rubin:** Yes, briefly, what the relationships among those four are.

**Jessica Wahman:** Okay. I like using some aspects of Spinoza, even though the epistemology is very different. If you drop the epistemology and the geometric deductive stuff, what you've got is *one* nature, it's a kind of holism, and there're two aspects, at *least*. (I'm starting with Spinoza and then I'm going to refract his ontology into Santayana's four realms.) For Spinoza, first, there's extension; for Santayana it's matter because we can't know the *essence* of matter (for Spinoza, extension *is* the essence pertaining to matter, one of the infinite essences by which we perceive God's existence). For Santayana, matter is the stuff of existence. Then there is Santayana's concept of spirit, which is nothing other than the awareness certain material beings have of their own condition and environment. So here you could think of Spinoza's concept of mind as the idea of the body. I don't think it's a bad way to think of spirit.

**Richard Rubin:** So matter and spirit are the two realms that exist. We have physical things and we have thoughts, feelings, experiences, which are the realm of spirit.

**Jessica Wahman:** Exactly. Since you bring that up, that's very important, because that can be misleading if you say these two things exist. Because then it sounds like there's a thing that's a spirit and a thing that's a body and they somehow get stuck together. But Santayana doesn't mean it that way. He just means that conscious events exist. If I say that I felt really depressed last Tuesday, that *happened*, that was an existing event. In fact, I only felt depressed until my husband came home and then I was happy again, and that happened at an exact time. So that was an event that actually occurred in the sense that the conscious moment existed, but it didn't exist as a separate substance from material substance.

**Richard Rubin:** So now, essence is what?

**Jessica Wahman:** The essences are the tricky ones. Essences are the universals. The realm of essence—I'd like to start there, because it's the easiest way to get at something weird—is the realm of potentiality. It is a realm of any potential characteristic, description, perception, concept that consciousness could ever possibly entertain or experience. It includes things that never have been experienced, that never took place—even the notion of the inconceivable is an essence, or the ineffable. The American Philosophies Forum, which Jenny Hansen and I both attended, had entire conference a few years ago on the ineffable. The fact that we can talk about the ineffable *qua* ineffable shows there is a kind of essence to ineffability. We know something about what we mean when we say it, even though of course we can't pin down exactly how to "eff" that ineffable.

**Richard Rubin:** Santayana says that an essence is exhausted by its definition. Arnett and several other writers have said that the realm of essence is really the realm of meaning. It's any possible idea, thought . . .

**Jessica Wahman:** Not just meaning, because it would include anything in Peirce's *firstness*. Let's not worry about meaning. That seems too *thirdness*.

**Richard Rubin:** Well OK, yes, it's any sensation, any feeling, any idea: anything that either can come to mind or be represented in the world.

## Property, quality, predication (27:37)

**Jessica Wahman:** Yes.

**Richard Rubin:** And you introduce—I'll just mention this briefly—but you introduce a vocabulary distinction that Santayana himself doesn't use. You distinguish property from quality. Tell us about that distinction.

**Jessica Wahman:** There're three things: property, quality, and predication. This is my distinction, not something I'm citing from Santayana. It's something that I

find useful, because I find the terms being used interchangeably in ways that confuse me and frustrate me. So, a quality would be something like one of Santayana's essences. There some quality I may perceive: let's say the blueness of the Dasani water bottle label. There's a blue quality to it. But when I refer to it as a property of that label, I'm saying that there is something about it, whatever it is, that gives—you know, we can say, in the terms of physics, that it refracts certain light waves and so on. So there is something about the bottle label that produces this quality of which I am aware. But I don't want to equate those two things and those are what I think sometimes do get equated. And then, when I *predicate* blueness of that label, that is a *statement* I'm making about that particular quality I perceive and attribute to some property in the bottle. But the property in the bottle is not and cannot be known to be identical to the quality I perceive, and that's epistemological point I want to stress.

**Richard Rubin:** The key thing in Santayana's ontology is that essences are both the content of experience—that is, what we experience from moment to moment is complex essence. And then as our experience changes, we go from one essence to another. But essences are also what are exemplified in the world. So the essence of bottle is in the bottle. The Dasani bottle instantiates that as a physical thing, but also we perceive that essence when we think of the bottle and when we think of the particular parts of it. So you are distinguishing between the essence as it's perceived, which you would call a quality, and the essence as it's exemplified, which would be a property?

## A property is not an essence (30:10)

**Jessica Wahman:** Oh no, actually I don't think I am here. So that's interesting, because that's why I actually spent some time in the chapter trying to make—again this is what I thought you're going to say when you suggested some Santayana scholars might disagree with me—when I was making a more technological argument about Santayana distinguishing form from essence. There are different scholars who think differently about whether or not essences are instantiated in matter, and I want to side with Angus Kerr-Lawson against that idea. So I noticed some interesting quotes in Santayana where he stresses that form could be a problematic way to think of essence. He says he's a Platonist where essence is concerned. When he says matter is only known *mediately* via essences what he means is all we ever directly experience are these various kinds of essences. Whether they are pictorial, conceptual, or in some kind of other dynamic relation, those are essences. John Lachs is famous for using the example of—you could have an essence of an entire basketball game. There is an essence of the Cubs at the World Series in the final game. *That game* had a certain essence. But so did every moment of that game. So what I want to actually stress is A) that there are properties of matter, but anything we experience about those properties is only going to be via essences; and B) the other thing I stress in the chapter—these objects of experience are always in our case going to be relational, because the only way in which we interact with anything in the world is through

some kind of relation and that means that we really only perceive objects as our bodies—as our psyches—perceive them. So we never get at what anything is in itself so much as it is by way of our sense perception and our rational capabilities and so on. I want to stress that, yes, Santayana does think matter has form. He has that quote where he says, Look, if matter didn't have form there would be no difference between it being a flux and not a flux. It has form, but I want to say that the essences that we attribute to those forms—those distinctions are not themselves the forms.

**Richard Rubin:** We're going to have to have a discussion, later, because I actually agree with you and with Kerr-Lawson on that interpretation. We may have some minor vocabulary issues, but we want to we don't want to spend time on that technical issue here.

## Psyche (32:54)

I want to press on and maybe end this preliminary interview with a discussion of psyche. We want to get into that because that's what I expect Jennifer may want to talk about—because that's where you get into talking about the different psychoanalytic theories. First of all, I'm going to ask you two questions at once. I'll tell you what questions I'm going to ask are beforehand: What does Santayana mean by 'psyche' and how do you use that both to criticize some psychoanalytic theorists and also to use Santayana's ideas to amplify an approach to psychotherapy? So that's a big question . . .

**Jessica Wahman:** I think the first part of your question was just clarifying what Santayana meant by 'psyche'. OK, so he refers to it as a system of habits. That's not too unfamiliar. Think of Dewey's notion of habits in *Human Nature in Conduct*. We have these habits, we're habitual creatures. But I think he really means that an organism is a system of habits all the way down. The activity of cells involves habits. Our neurological processes are habits—habits of these connections of firings, these networks of firings habitually repeating themselves. So the psyche, as an organism, in its ability to maintain itself against entropy and so on, is the self-maintaining and self-perpetuating system of habits. Furthermore, for Santayana, it's what gives rise to consciousness—what makes (at least in human beings—who knows for sure exactly where else) some kind of awareness and self-awareness possible.

In terms of psychotherapy, I start talking about why psyche is an important ontological principle. One thing that's important about Santayana's notion is that he says it is material. So, what he wants to stress is that the psyche, the organism, this system of habits is not the stuff itself, it's the system of organization of the stuff, and so it's still material. Ironically, I haven't seen this referenced enough—I wonder, Richard, if you know more sources—but I've never seen a comparison done with John Locke's notion of identity, because to some extent the distinction between identity of substance and the identity of the same man is very much like what Santayana's talking about with matter and psyche. Matter is the substance

and psyche is the organism. To be the same organism is to be the same way in which substance is transferred in and out and the habits by which it maintains itself despite the change of substance. I think there's a there's a real similarity there. We get to person, and things get more complicated, but....

**Richard Rubin:** Santayana does say that the self is the psyche.

**Jessica Wahman:** Yes indeed.

**Richard Rubin:** The psyche is not consciousness. It's what produces consciousness and so consciousness is just the moments of awareness and feeling and whatever else we experience, but it has no causal efficacy.

**Jessica Wahman:** That's right.

**Richard Rubin:** So how do you relate that to Freud's notion of the subconscious?

**Jessica Wahman:** Subconscious or the unconscious?

**Richard Rubin:** The unconscious.

**Jessica Wahman:** I think I actually compare it more to something like the id, as opposed to the unconscious as a particular construct built up by repressed memories and repressed desires and so on. It's more Freud's notion of the id and the ego that I think is a helpful difference here because really the id is just the "it"—as Vincent Colapietro helpfully reminded me just last week. It's not Latin in Freud; it's just *it*—it's the instincts. It's the organism just instinctively doing what it's doing. And the ego is the awareness that arises and then wants to be—in Freud's language—wants to be aware of some of it and doesn't want to be aware of some other parts of it. He has this nice metaphor—this is the part that's relevant to psychotherapy—that the way in which the ego guides the id is like a man on horseback. As a horseback rider, I rather like this metaphor. Quite often, you're obliged to direct the horse in the direction that it wants to go. Now if you completely did that, you'd wind up back at the barn, but what I think Freud means—at least as a horseback rider—is the more you get into direct conflict with a horse the less you're going to get anywhere you want to go. The more you're just trying to fight it and dominate it, you're going to get at a stalemate. So I think what he means by the instincts is: the more we think of ourselves as somehow at war with our id or dominating our id, we're a self at war with itself. And then we have to realize that what we're being aware of when we have certain desires or certain plans is that this is an awareness of our own psyche. So it's a psyche trying to engage or trying to acquire some kind of self-control. It's not a consciousness trying to control the psyche. So the job in psychotherapy is often just helping the psyche develop the kinds of self-control that will ultimately be most helpful to it in certain social contexts.



## How do we learn to live? (39:07)

**Richard Rubin:** How would Santayana—and Jessica Wahman—how would you interpret what happens in psychotherapy? How do we get better? How do we learn to live better—learn to overcome our neurotic impulses?

**Jessica Wahman:** I heard a really good talk at a conference on philosophy and psychotherapy and psychiatry last spring, where someone<sup>2</sup> was pointing out that the various theories of psychotherapy, whether it's Freudian or Jungian or cognitive-behavioral or psychodynamic in some other vein or Rogerian—all these different ways—the theories, apparently, statistically don't seem to matter in terms of helping people get better, but in his language—this speaker's language—it's really the acquiring of different skills. In each case there's an acquiring of skills of coping with certain kinds of stuck habits—a developing of more flexible skills, as Dewey would say, in response to problematic situations—rather than being rigidly stuck in these repetitive ones. For the Freudians, it's repetition formation. The cognitive-behavioral therapists say, "Look, I'm going to point out this glitch in your thinking and we're going to show you where you have missed a step and now you're going to think about it in this new way." One cognitive-behavioral therapist I knew liked to tell her clients "I want you to start thinking this way: 'Hey, didn't I do a good job on this!' instead of 'Aren't I stupid.'" When the clients would say, "But that doesn't feel true," she'd say, "I don't care. Just keep saying it until you believe it." So I think that's an example in which the awareness of our own stuck habits—or of the psyche's stuck habits—can somehow be helpful in disrupting stuck habits and trying new things. But it's a kind of indirectness. We're paradoxically passive and active. Consciousness is passive in the sense that you pointed out: it has no direct causal power. We can't just say, "Get over it," and have the psyche magically heal itself. But there's many times we realize that it's actually in the psyche having to alter its own habits (or sometimes just taking time to grieve or heal) that this kind of conscious attention to and practicing changing of certain kinds of habits can be healing.

## Raising the heart rate (42:10)

**Richard Rubin:** Let me offer an analogy and see if you agree this is the type of explanation you're going after. If you want to increase your heartbeat—if you want to make your heart beat faster—you can't just sit and think. You can't consciously make that happen. What you have to do is to go out and run or jump or do some exercise or drink a lot of coffee or something that will physically cause that change.

**Jessica Wahman:** I would just add one thing to that. I can't speed up my heart rate by saying, "Heart rate, speed up!" But I could speed it up by thinking about something that terrifies me or excites me. That's similarly indirect. I can't just will

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<sup>2</sup> Perhaps Nicolaus Slouthouber.

my heart rate directly and say “Heart rate, speed up,” but I’m just trying to suggest that thinking about frightening things is a way of engaging the physiology.

**Richard Rubin:** You could say the same thing about sexual arousal. You can’t just will it, but if you start thinking about things that might arouse you then it might happen or you put yourself in a situation.

**Jessica Wahman:** Might or might not. That’s another one where I swear the psyche doesn’t know what’s going on.

**Richard Rubin:** But the point is you’re putting yourself in a situation. In psychotherapy, what you’re doing is you’re putting yourself in a situation where the psyche might undergo a change so that your habits of thought will change.

**Jessica Wahman:** That’s right. It’s like in the twelve step program. If you want to quit drinking, don’t go into a bar and order coffee. You’ve got to put yourself in a different situation. Dewey says, if you’re going to change a habit, don’t think, “I will not slouch anymore.” That’ll last about two seconds and you go back to doing it. So if you’re going to quit drinking, you’re not going to say, “I’m not going to drink today.” You’re going to say, “I’m going to take up knitting,” or something like that. So Dewey focuses starting a new positive habit. That’s what you’re saying: put yourself in a different situation.

## Jennifer Hansen (44:22)

**Richard Rubin:** I think we can stop the initial interview here. There are three other important chapters in the book. I do have a question about your analysis of spirit and freedom but let’s leave that for now and let the other people on the panel participate. Jennifer the floor is yours.

**Jennifer Hansen:** Thank you. It was not an easy task to figure out how to respond to this book; for one, because I’m not anywhere near a Santayana scholar—maybe I could be after reading this book. . .

**Richard Rubin:** Did our opening discussion help or confuse you?

**Jennifer Hansen:** I will say is that there’s a lot to absorb. The distinctions that Santayana makes are sometimes familiar to me from the kinds of theorists that I like to work with, one of those being Dewey, but mostly I work out of phenomenology—some phenomenology is not totally empirical in the way you describe it—I work in the philosophy of psychiatry. So on the one hand it was hard work, but not bad work—hard work for me to get through what I call the metaphysics of the book; and I appreciated it, because I’m always willing to just skip it over and get straight to the practical consequences. The way that I want to start off my remarks is to highlight the things in reading this book that I thought were extremely valuable to me. That doesn’t mean that I’ve mastered or absorbed Santayana; but, whatever Jessica has taken from Santayana’s philosophy or this framework that she’s using, there were moments in the book when I thought, oh my God, that’s brilliant, and I’m going to use it from now on. So I want to talk

about a few of those. Then, I really just have one question and it's oddly not on what, if you know my work or if you know me, one would expect, because I work in the philosophy of psychiatry, so one might expect I'd immediately go straight to talking about the medical model and psychiatry, but it's not.

First, I want to go through the things that I thought were really, really helpful. One of them, that I just was reminded of when Jessica was speaking, was this metaphor or what she calls a theoretical construct: the concept of levels. It's really helpful to remember that when we say that there are all these different levels—ways of talking about phenomena or talking about matter—that gets stuck in our mind because of the physicalist trap, which is to assume that what we should be doing is trying to reduce. So that eventually we should be able to reduce the repressive society down to the bonding of electrons in the outer shells of atoms. I think I was reminded, when you started talking about the different levels of description, that it's really helpful to remember that that's just a metaphor. The levels are not hierarchical nor is there any sense of more exact and less exact.

**Jessica Wahman:** Or that they're levels. You have an image of a building: there's the bottom level—

**Jennifer Hansen:** Exactly. OK, so the other thing that I really enjoyed was in your in your discussion of spirit in the chapter “Why Psyche Matters.” As I've already admitted, I come out of phenomenology, so I tend to think about the self as largely unconscious to itself, largely engaged or absorbed in the world, doing things until things break or don't work. What I liked was when you were describing the relationship of spirit to psyche (it's on page 108), you called spirit psyche's eyes, for otherwise the organism is just blind impulse. I thought, yes, that's brilliant, because what consciousness is, is attention. So that if your account is right, which I think it is, that consciousness is the kind of thing that emerges in highly complex biological organisms. And, because those organisms are hell bent on survival and thriving, and because they're so sophisticated that they can't just eat their food in their environment, but they have to go and search for it, then what the psyche/ consciousness is, is another way of attending to the environment. But then you talk in terms of illuminating or organizing, and I just find I'm going to be using that language a lot, because when you think about why consciousness comes to the fore in our daily experience—again, if you approach this as a phenomenologist, it's usually in experiences of failure or frustration, which you bring up with Becker. So when something that you were just trying to do can't get done, all of a sudden you have to switch to a different mode of attending. You have to start representing the environment to yourself in order to figure out why it's not working.

**Jessica Wahman:** Like Heidegger and the hammer.

**Jennifer Hansen:** Heidegger talks about disclosing or the *Lichtung*, the lighting.

**Jessica Wahman:** I'm just using my hammer and then the head falls off. Now I've got to figure out what a hammer is.

**Jennifer Hansen:** Exactly. I really found that valuable. The other thing I wanted to mention was on page 103. I'm always trying to get away from talking about the human organism as a machine, even though biologists do, even though many theorists who are starting to talk about autopoiesis instead of reductionism use that language. I think one of the distinctions you make on page 103—I'm going to characterize it because yours is way more poetic than I would be—is that the difference between the kind of machine that a human organism is versus an artifact—the kind of machine that we make—is that when the machines we make break, we can fix them; but there's a certain point where the human organism when it breaks that's it. It's gone. It's dispersed or—what do you say?—it dissolves just as incoherently and more inevitably back into the material flux. That distinction is so important—it's why we shouldn't be thinking about fixing mental illness as a fixing of a broken brain, because we aren't just broken machines. We can't just fix ourselves.

Then the last thing that I'm going to say that I really liked was in your chapter on truth—this is Chapter 6, “Expressive Truth.” It's familiar to me. It's the way that I think from the texts I come out of: that there is so much about the matter, the material is so transcendent—I guess in the way you put it—to our capacities for engaging with it, representing it, thinking about it, that that there's no one way of describing it that would be *the* one way or *the* most adequate way.

**Jessica Wahman:** At least not for human beings.

**Jennifer Hansen:** Right, that's really important. . .

## The Realm of Truth (53.42)

**Richard Rubin:** Jennifer, if can I just interrupt for one moment, because the realm of truth is the only one of the four realms that we didn't talk about yet. So, Jessica, if you could just give a very brief explanation of what the realm of truth is and then we'll let Jennifer continue.

**Jessica Wahman:** There are arguments among Santayana scholars about whether the realm of truth deserves to be its own realm or whether it should be a subset of the realm of essence, but we won't go there.

**Richard Rubin:** You have the floor.

**Jessica Wahman:** It's a kind of a subset, but I see why it deserves its own realm because it has this unique relationship to existence that the realm of essence does not. So if essences are any kind of quality, description, concept that may or may not be related to actual existence or to the history of any past existence, then the realm of truth is that subset of essences that actually do truly describe some material fact or set of material facts. Santayana distinguishes himself from the pragmatists here, too. He says, No, I think that the truth is a separate concept from the correctness of a judgment and is certainly separate from the notion of the agreement of two ideas with one another. If you take Hume's notion of relations

of ideas, you can say in one sense that it's true that a bachelor is an unmarried male, but that is not what he means by truth. The absolute truth would be that complete description of all existence perceivable by any possible entity in all of its possible manifestations. So, obviously the absolute truth is completely beyond our capacity to grasp it. But even any given material event he thinks is beyond our capacity to completely grasp—for that exact reason. The description of the existence of some sound as perceived by a dog is going to elude me to some certain extent, even if I can say, I noticed that that dog was able to hear something that was beyond my capacity, for example. So the truth is not matter itself, but a description of material events and a description of the other realm that exists—the realm of spirit. So it is just as true that my serotonin levels were depleted when I felt depressed as it is true that I felt depressed. These are both true and can both be expressed in true statements, one that describes some material event in one way, and one that describes the same material event in another way, that is, as actualized as a moment of consciousness.

**Richard Rubin:** It might be characterized as what some philosophers call a correspondence theory of truth, with the caveat that the idea does not have to resemble the thing it represents, but it merely accurately reports or reflects the ideas that correspond to what actually occurred.

**Jessica Wahman:** Exactly, I think it makes sense, but I can see why others might think it doesn't. He's got a coherence theory of knowledge, but a correspondence theory of truth. We say we come to know some fact by virtue of its agreement with other experiences we've had or its ability to align with and agree with the experiences of other people. So we say we have knowledge when our experiences cohere in various ways, but to say that that knowledge is true of the world, for Santayana, is a kind of correspondence. These descriptions faithfully report some fact that is always more and other than our experience of it.

## Jennifer Hansen again (57:55)

**Richard Rubin:** We interrupted Jennifer.

**Jennifer Hansen:** Yes, in fact you did say that you had the correspondence theory of truth, but it is not based on resemblance, which I thought was fascinating. In the chapter I was looking at, you use the word 'plausible'. I'm not going to read that part, but I'm going to set up what I'm going to get to. You do talk about how some accounts are more plausible than others. The thing I like, though, is on page 133 at the very bottom. You try to make this point that there can be many ways to make a true statement—many ways in which you can say something about matter or about the material in a way that corresponds, so that it's accurate. You give the example of a portrait and I thought this was extremely helpful. You said that if we say a painter's portrait has truly captured its subject, we do not imply that there is no other way to represent the matter. We do not expect all true paintings of a given subject to be identical. There's something else going on here that you do throughout your book. Maybe, it's why you like

Santayana or the way Santayana has influenced you. This came out when you were going through those sentences at the beginning. When you attempt to explain something very difficult, like Santayana is for me, you regularly refer to metaphors that try to bring me back to something that is familiar—that I can relate to. So that was extremely helpful, but it brought me to two questions. Maybe, I'll ask my newest one first. You say something about Santayana a couple times in the book that I was surprised about. It's something that I always thought that was true of Russell and not Santayana, which is that Santayana has a critique of the coherence theory of truth because he argues that it confuses the test with the meaning of truth. But now you've just pointed out, and that makes sense, that he has a coherence theory of knowledge. So my first question is: What is the test? Is it that the statement coheres with—? I don't understand what the test is, based on that distinction that you just made between a coherence theory of knowledge and a correspondence theory truth. My other question is inspired more by earlier things you wrote about in the beginning of the book and that are even more dark now. You talk about Karl Rove and what he has called "the reality-based community", and now we have Kellyanne Conway and her alternative facts. You talk about gaslighting, which is a really wonderful example. You use that as an example of mental abuse. I think it fits in well with your point about truth, because what's happening there is somebody willfully trying to make you distrust your familiarity with something—distrust your reporting or your accounting of events.

**Richard Rubin:** Your memory?

**Jennifer Hansen:** Yes, your memory—by isolating you from others who can corroborate it, etc. But it brought to mind a film that I show in Intro a lot—and it's part of a textbook I teach—called *Hillary and Jackie*. The film—I'll try to explain it to illustrate my question, which is a question about interpersonal truths—not about events that happened outside of the relationship, but truths about the relationship. That film was based on the memoir of Jacqueline du Pres, who was a famous cellist. The film demonstrates three pivotal events from the standpoint of each sister, Hilary and Jackie. Their perceptions of the events are wildly different, but each is utterly convincing. So it's very hard to tell if one of them is delusional or the other. It's hard to tell if there was some other fact that could be pointed to to clarify what really happened. It's a great example for talking about truth. I thought about this in thinking about the sort of political climate we're in, because it's one thing when people in relationships have profound disagreements about things that were said or facial expressions that were made, but it's another when someone of great power is utterly convinced about certain interactions with people that seem to be at odds with those people. My only question then, having admitted that there's much that I agree with in your account of truth, following Santayana, is what do we have to find correspondence with the truth of what happened between two people, outside of witnesses or outside of a video. Even a video recording might not even do it because it's sometimes so much about what that facial expression meant or how the intonation of those words sounded. There's other frames that are being brought to bear on that. So, it's not just an important

question in terms of interpersonal dynamics, but it's an important question terms of the repressive dynamics of the society. So I guess that's where I'll stop.

**Jessica Wahman:** That is a fantastic question. Something I've been thinking about a lot lately. In fact, I was just thinking about it today watching CNN. I will get to that at the end of my answer. So, what is the test of knowledge? What is *the* test. I'm not going to say, Oh, it's exactly this. But in the context of when Santayana says the pragmatists confuse the test of truth with the meaning of truth, I do think, speaking very generally, anything from our more casual confirmations of our beliefs to more systematic scientific ones, they have to do with corroborations among experiences. In the most casual sense, if I'm not quite sure that what I see is what I think it is, I may reach out and touch it. I may just look again. And what scientists do is, they engage this way but with more precision, they find something that must be measured. And the precision of measurement of course varies greatly, and what is meant by measurement has to vary greatly depending on whether you're measuring survey responses in a psychological study or whether you're measuring how far something rolls down an inclined plane. But there are two elements, there's corroboration of our experiences with our other experiences, and then there's also the corroboration of our experiences with the experiences of others. That gets back to the gaslighting. What the scientific community does is a heightening of what we do casually all the time. "Did you see what happened?" "No, I didn't see that at all." So I go: "Maybe it didn't happen." Or, "yeah, I saw that happen." Now you both agree and you're very happy. That's, of course, at least part of why we like to talk to people who we know are more inclined to agree with us: because it feels a whole lot better to have your beliefs confirmed than to have them challenged. Our first instinct is to say, "Yes, that's exactly what happened!" The person who doesn't think that happened: "She's crazy!"

I just want to clarify the point about gaslighting—just a technical point, but it may be helpful. Again, the gaslighting wasn't so much an example of truth, but an example of how much knowledge is fundamentally based on faith. The reason that I think gaslighting is illuminating is because what happens to the gaslighted individual is that they begin to lose faith in their everyday sense of the world. It's that faith that is undermined. I'm trying to strike home that the idea that we have any kind of certainty (and any logical certainty or that our knowledge is based on that) is, I think, flawed and is one of Descartes's problematic contributions to epistemology. Rather, our knowledge is fundamentally based on trust in the reliability of our experiences, trust in the reliability of the experiences of our friends. These sorts of feelings of being OK in the world get challenged when our own experiences don't align with themselves or they're challenged by the experiences or the claims of others.

So then we get to interpersonal truths. One thing I want to stress and remind us as we talk about the realm of truth is that truths are not just statements about material events as non-human events, but can be statements about human experience of events. I talk about a continuum of the sort of events are being

aimed at. So when we talk about the truth of a human life, we might be better off looking to a novel than to a physicist's tale about what happened in atoms. If I want to know the truth of what Henry the Fifth was really like, I might look to historians and to Shakespeare rather than to a physicist. I'm going to actually get a more useful description of what it is I'm trying to find out. That said, I think interpersonal truths about relationships themselves can be some of the most knotty ones to settle because they depend so much on two organisms' interpretations of a highly complex event, and those organisms have their own habits and their own agendas. So part of what you're trying to know about the truth of what happened in a relationship isn't just going to be "Did that glass fall to the floor and break?" but: Did you do it? Did you push it? Did you push it on purpose? or Did you push it on purpose just to piss me off? I'd have to know your whole organism to get even close to certain truth about it. Even today, I'm watching CNN—I told you I'd get there. So now, Sessions<sup>3</sup> has recused himself. But what he's saying is that he misunderstood Al Franken's<sup>4</sup> question, that he thought Al Franken was asking him: Did you talk to the Russians about their interference? Did you talk to the Russians about the Trump campaign? So, when he was answering Al Franken, Sessions claims he thought that's was what was being asked, so he said: "No, of course I didn't." Then it turns out that he had talked to the Russians, but he's now claiming he only talked to the Russians—even though it was at same time—in his capacity as a senator. So he didn't lie, he claims; he just misunderstood. Elijah Cummings and Feinstein are up in arms, saying he obviously lied. How do you not know whether you talked about X? To be fair, Cummings said, "I'm a good lawyer I'm not going to judge whether he lied until all the facts have come out." What I actually thought was: What facts would those be? How would you know? What kind of evidence—unless you're going to have in Sessions's journal: "Today I lied to Congress." It's going to be hard to prove that he didn't misunderstand. In this situation, it is not so much that these aren't issues about truth, it's just that when you're talking about the truth of a situation which involves the intent of individuals—something not immediately and directly available—we're relying on layers of interpretation that can easily be argued. Then with something like a relationship, all these things ultimately are going to come down to people with different perceptions of events. You say it's very hard to tell who was deluded, if anybody, and what really happened. That's the one of the biggest challenges about discussing who is mentally ill. You've got the Icarus Project where you have bipolar people saying, "I'm not ill. I'm fine. It's you guys who are just way too boring. I want to be like I am because I have these great experiences." Or you have Huxley<sup>5</sup> saying, "I took Mescaline and I've seen reality as it really is. I got good and stoned, and the doors of perception were opened, and *this* is reality." We don't have some nice God's-eye vantage point to say: No, ordinary waking consciousness: that's the true representation of existence

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<sup>3</sup> Attorney General and former Senator Jeff Sessions

<sup>4</sup> Senator from Minnesota

<sup>5</sup> The writer Aldous Huxley



and everybody else is simply having a false one. Rather we're going to be thinking about which kinds of habits wind up being more or less functional in different social environments. We could go off on a tangent—you know, we were both reading those articles about how schizophrenia is worse in westernized cultures than it is in some non-Western culture, India especially, where there is a functional place for the schizophrenic and his or her experience. So they actually have less of the more problematic symptoms of schizophrenia. I don't know if that answers your question.

**Jennifer Hansen:** I guess the one thing I would say is related to what you were saying earlier when you're kind of going over the point that Freud makes about the ego and the id. There's something deeply true about not just working with yourself, but interacting with others. Maybe truth isn't the point. If there are impulses there or if there are forces that are coming against you and saying, "That's not what I meant" or "This is what you meant," maybe the point is not to dominate them and say "Yes, that's exactly what happened," but to make peace with them—to understand the place they're coming from and accommodate them, or whatever, and then find another way.

**Jessica Wahman:** Maybe there will be times when you can't or shouldn't, but it comes back to the whole notion of corroboration. I remember a friend of mine once said, "Look I'm going to think that whatever my habit is is fine if one person challenges me, but if everybody I know starts telling me I have a problem [and that's just corroboration] then I might take a look at it." So, if just one person says you have a drinking problem, you may believe: Well, you're just a teetotaler. But if everybody starts telling you, you have a drinking problem, that's what an intervention is all about. Which is not to say that those other people have the God's-eye absolute truth, and you're just wrong. It's really more: OK, my experience is clearly at odds with a lot of other people's experience, and if I believe that knowledge has to do with something more than just my own individual comfort—if I believe it involves some kind of corroboration with others—I at least have to address this as a problem, and, as you said, open my mind to thinking about this from somebody else's perspective. Now, it's not required that we all do this. Not everybody cares about knowledge as a goal. Some people like self-certainty. Charles Peirce's method of belief takes tenacity as really useful for some people. Some are running the country. But, as Peirce would say, if you care about knowledge, then these corroborations are involved.

## Martin Coleman (1:15:15)

**Richard Rubin:** Martin, do you have any questions or comments?

**Martin Coleman:** I think this is a really nice book. The first chapter—I think the beginnings of it were in Atlanta. You presented the paper about five years ago with John and Vincent<sup>6</sup>.

**Jessica Wahman:** Yes, exactly.

**Martin Coleman:** I think it was very influential on me, because I read this chapter and I thought: Yes, I wish I had written this. There are a lot of ideas you've been thinking about that came out in that chapter and I saw a lot of things that I've been thinking about for a long time. So I really appreciated that. I've always thought you are a good, clear writer, and what I liked about this book is that it was clear and it was really disciplined. The style—I want to say it's easy to read, but I'm afraid that sounds like it's not serious enough and that is not what I mean. I think it's very disciplined in the clarity of its ideas, and this helps the reader immensely.

One of the ways that this clarity comes out is in the explication of Santayana's philosophy. I think it's a very useful book in that way and it was helpful for me in thinking about Santayana. I have two questions that are pretty general. One is an interpretive question. You talk about the certainty of the immediate—the immediately given—the indubitability of the given. You also say certainty and knowledge are incompatible in Santayana. All of this makes sense, but this infallibility of the presently given or the immediately given—what does it mean to say that it's indubitable or it's infallible when it's not even knowledge?

**Jessica Wahman:** That's great. My instinctive response in interpreting Santayana here is to say he has such a literary style that he's not going for 'indubitable' or 'infallible' in the sense of "now we have certain knowledge," because, as you point out and as I like to stress, certainty and knowledge are incompatible. I think he means that, because we're not even at the stage of knowledge, it can't be doubted. It's not fallible because it's not even trying to do anything yet. It's just staring at the datum. That's what I take him to mean. I don't think he means: Yes! Now I've grasped this. There's not even a *this* to be grasping. There's not an *I* to be grasping. As soon as I say I grasped that moment, it's gone, and I'm into areas of belief and memory. I think that's my sense. It's indubitable in the sense in which I simply I'm not even in a position to be doubting, because to be doubting I'd already be this organism thinking about that experience in relation to past experiences and so on. This is Santayana's whole skeptical exercise, where he's doing his own version of Descartes: looking for the one thing that's certain. So he gets to: No, I don't even have "I think, therefore I am." I just have "uuuuuuuh." That's his solipsism of the present moment. One way of thinking about it—of

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<sup>6</sup> John Stuhr and Vincent Colapietro. See *Overheard in Seville*, 31 (Fall 2013).

course, Hegel builds very differently—but if you start with sense certainty, it's just now. But then you have the problem that there are lots of nows. So how do we build on that? Hegel has one explanation. He has a dialectic, but in Santayana you have to use belief to get anywhere beyond now.

**Richard Rubin:** To use Santayana's vocabulary: this essence is before me. That's what's not doubtable. Whether the essence represents something veridical or not, that is another question. That's a matter of belief.

**Jessica Wahman:** I know what you mean by "this essence is before me," but just to take that out of its context, if you mean by 'me' a self or a spirit or a consciousness, he doesn't even want to go there.

**Richard Rubin:** Because he doubts his own existence in *Scepticism and Animal Faith*. He says, I'm just left with this essence.

**Jessica Wahman:** That's right.

## Santayana as a Kantian (1:20:30)

**Audience member:** He sounds sort of like a Kantian to me. In your example earlier, you have the blue label on the bottle. You see it as blue, but you don't really know what the object itself is. You know your perception, and I can understand that. But what troubled me in your exposition is there also seems to be a confidence that materiality is the first level of being. If you say you can never know the thing in itself, but you only know your perceptions and the way things appear, which is, as I said, pretty much Kantian, I don't know what right he has to posit materiality as the source of it.

**Jessica Wahman:** Excellent. I think you're absolutely right. There is a sort of Kantian element. In fact, toward the end of *Scepticism and Animal Faith* Santayana speaks rather positively about Kant, but a big distinction he wants to make, just for one piece of clarification, is with Kant's transcendental categories. Kant thought that he could deduce the necessary conditions of experience through transcendental analysis. Santayana found this problematic. He thinks that that which shapes our experience and makes it into a certain kind of perception are more like psychic habits rather than logical or of some sort of categorical condition. In terms of the noumenal-phenomenal distinction, there is one that's very similar, I think. In terms of your question—what right does he have?—this goes back to his epistemology of animal faith. This is what I see as his distinctive move, one that can be very unsatisfying to many philosophers because they want to give knowledge some kind of ground. Santayana says there is no logical, rational ground of knowledge. Knowledge is fundamentally an animal incapability of doubting certain things, like our memories. Before we get to belief in nature as a coherent world—or at least a potentially coherent, comprehensible world—he has a belief in substance. He claims—and of course some pragmatists will disagree—but he claims that whenever we posit a belief or a make a claim about anything that is not the immediately given—anything that is in some way

absent—either, it's that thing itself, not just my perception of it, or it's that thing that happened a minute ago, or it's that thing that will happen—it's something not given, in his language. He says whenever we do that, we are making a substance out of that. That's what he thinks, and so he just says, I'm going to call it matter. He said this is my psychological inclination—to use James's language, this is my temperament—because I'm a materialist. Somebody else might be a panpsychist or an idealist. They might want to say it's all ideas, but he says, I am being honest: I call it matter. So he doesn't feel he has rationally justified his belief in matter. He says it's enough that it's inevitable. Belief in substance, he thinks, is inevitable, and he wants to call that substance matter.

**Jennifer Hansen:** It matters to the organism.

**Jessica Wahman:** Yes, exactly. That's why he doesn't think he's provided some sort of logical ground, like Kant, but there is that similarity.

**Richard Rubin:** That there is a realm of matter—that there are things—that is totally a matter of belief.

**Jessica Wahman:** That's right.

**Richard Rubin:** The one thing I might suggest, though, is that the distinction between phenomena and noumena is not as sharp—that Santayana did not posit another sphere of reality in the sense of noumena and phenomena. In fact, there's the passage in *Scepticism* where he talks about signs. Signs will point me to an object—signs meaning our sensory impressions and our ideas about them. They point me to an object, but to get to the heart of the matter, he says, requires sympathetic imagination. So Santayana does say we can really get a sense of hard core belief and understanding of the way things are, but it's always still belief.

**Jessica Wahman:** Yes, OK I'll grant you that. I don't want to go the heart of the matter. I'm going to I'm going to duck away from that one. We could wind up in an argument about what Kant meant by noumena and the *ding an sich*. You know, it's a transcendent reality for Kant, and the realm of matter is transcendent to consciousness for Santayana and, so far as that is similar, I think it works. Martin?

## Martin Coleman: Is Santayana an epistemologist? (1:26:58)

**Martin Coleman:** I have one more. The question is this: why do you use the word 'epistemology'? Why talk about Santayana's epistemology? I think there might be reasons to just discard epistemology altogether. The response you just gave to the question about how does he justify his belief in matter makes me think he doesn't care about epistemology. What made me think you might be sympathetic to this view is the line that I like on page 49: "the epistemological emperor has no clothes." The best sort of argument I can give for this would be

what I think I learned from Levinson's book: that *Scepticism and Animal Faith* is a comedy. It's a joke. And that the punch line is the realms. That might be stretching it. But I think it means that he does not care about knowledge nearly so much as he cares about spirit. He cares about spirit and celebrating spirit. And so I like to read that whole thing as: Here I am, doing what I love to do, which is spiritual.

There was something else that you said when you talked about monism. So I was wondering: do you want to use epistemology for the same reasons you want to use monism? Or do you really think: Yes, it's a good idea to talk about Santayana's epistemology?

**Jessica Wahman:** Yes, I think it's a good idea to talk about Santayana's epistemology! I like the comedy thing. I wrote an essay on Santayana and comedy, so I'm very sympathetic to that. I'm not sure that all comedy is a joke, though. So I think he is humane, humorous, and he's very funny, but I don't think he's just joking. If the realms of being are a joke, that is a *long* joke. That's a big book. I mean, any comedian that had to tell a joke that long—his audience would have left him. I think he's deflationary about his realms when he says: Look, these aren't things. These aren't the fundamental ways to carve up the universe. These are the four things I find worthy of distinguishing. But he distinguishes them in an enormous book and they are all pretty equal—not all equal in length—you would know better than anybody, compiling all these things. But he's got a whole book on reason—five volumes on reason. He's got an enormous ontology. I think of *Scepticism and Animal Faith* as a propaedeutic to *Realms of Being*. I want to use 'epistemology.' I don't want to cede to certain narrow segments of the field the label 'epistemology'. Because I think a pragmatic epistemology, and Santayana's is one, even though he is not a pragmatist, is a much better epistemology than almost any other epistemology out there. And so I'm not giving it up. It just means to give an account of knowledge. The way I read it, he writes *Scepticism and Animal Faith* because he can't do ontology until he clears away all these kinds of pretensions to certainty and rational deduction that he thinks have created these narrow specializations in philosophy and an inability to talk about a cosmos in the Greek sense. So he says, in order to get back to the Greeks, I've got to deal with the moderns, and the moderns have done this to epistemology. So I'm going to recover it. He thinks that the Greeks, in their own way, had a far more faithful sense of knowledge. Certainly Aristotle—when you read *De Anima*—there's so much he's taking for granted, thinking that he's grasped it. I'm not saying that he explicitly has a sense that a lot of this is based on faith, but he engages in a rather faithful belief that his perceptions are basically reliable transmissions from objects.

The phrase "the epistemological emperor has no clothes"—I think the stress in that phrase is on 'emperor'. It's the *emperor* who has no clothes. There can be lots of rulers—oh, I'm going back to politics, again. We've got lots of rulers, but they don't all want to be emperors, or dictators, or be all powerful. So, we could have a humble epistemology. In fact, the Stephen Horst book that I use at length

in the naturalism chapter talks about epistemological humility. And I just started reading this book by Deirdre McCloskey on economics, and the very last lines are about the importance of epistemological humility in economics. So this is a thing.

## Personal Identity and immortality (1:31:27)

**Audience member:** I want to ask a question about naturalism and narrative in terms of personal identity. One of the ways you can establish personal identity traditionally is bodily integrity. Then there's this idea—I'm not sure it's true—idea that our cells regenerate every seven years, so that can't be a foundation for personal identity. Maybe Santayana would want to talk about a Platonic soul that is incorruptible, though that can be problematic, too. One of the best ways I've heard of talking about personal identity is the story that you tell about yourself and the story that's told about you. What's important about that is that it can even extend beyond death, so it's a story that gets told on and on. So it doesn't have to do with body, and doesn't have to do with matter, but it's certainly not a rock solid notion of personal identity. It's open to interpretation. You certainly can't control the way you're talked about. You can talk about yourself, but you can't control your own story. So how does that factor in?

**Jessica Wahman:** That's great, because it ties back to where I started to talk about personal identity and Locke's notion of it. What you were talking about—the self as a narrative story—there's Dennett's notion of the self as—I always get the order wrong—narrative concept, narrative center—is it narrative center of gravity, or the center of narrative gravity?—I do take up Dennett in the book briefly, because I think he has is an important way of thinking about it.

First thing, Santayana would not have a notion of a Platonic incorruptible soul. His notion of the psyche is wholly natural. He thinks it's just a mystery why a bunch of matter decides—to use the metaphor—a lot of things that you<sup>7</sup> think were picturesque in my speech, I'm afraid they were paraphrases of Santayana, so he gets most of the credit—but he talks about a soul as a vortex. Souls, in the Aristotelian sense, include plants, animals—it's just any time that matter forms life, then you have this vortex of habits that resist entropy; and for Santayana, at least at some point, it doesn't keep doing that anymore. And then we have death. So he's wholly a naturalist in the sense he doesn't believe in a soul or essence that transcends the body or is immortal.

Personal identity—I want to go back to Locke for a second because I like how he disambiguates certain things. We have identity of substance. That can't be it, because—I don't know if our cells regenerate exactly that way either—but I'm quite sure that I've moved a lot of substance around: I moved a turkey sandwich, I moved some cereal, I had some dim sum, I am not the same substance I was this morning, because there's been a lot of moving of substance. So that isn't it. So then the identity of the same man is something closer to the identity of the self,

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<sup>7</sup> Jennifer Hansen

because the self is the psyche and the self is the system of habits. Now we have the identity of a person. Locke says a person is that self-consciousness that knows itself, and I think that might be something more like a self-concept—my understanding of myself, my awareness of myself. I don't want to identify anything Santayana says with Locke's notion of personhood, because I think Locke's concept of the person is bound up with certain modernist notions and certain Christian notions. When I talk about Dennett's concept of the center of narrative gravity, I want to distinguish the self-concept and self-knowledge from the self, because for Santayana, the self is the psyche. Then any narrative we tell about the self—its history, its beginning, its ending—is going to be a self-concept, or a story about that self. I wouldn't want to equate the self with the story, but I think that a lot of what we do when we engage in self-knowledge is tell ourselves stories about ourselves, often with the corroboration of others. If the story I'm telling far too often is: I'm a terrible philosopher and I don't know what I'm doing, I have lovely friends who come and say, No, no, you're a good philosopher, or you wrote a good book, and then I try to alter my narrative a little bit. Of course, this goes back to issues with therapy. Often the altering of one's own narrative into a more healthy one that fits with a variety of experiences is helpful. So my thought about identity here is that self-identity is going to be like the identity of the same man, which means it's not any kind of strict identity. It's an organism that's always changing and fungible, more or less, in its habits. If we ever try to pin it down to: this is exactly who I am, I am in essence *this*—I think we're not going to find that. When we talked about the realm of essence, that's one thing that we skipped. One of the things I love about Santayana's realm of essence is that he doesn't think of essence in either an Aristotelian or a Platonic sense, as this is *the* essence of the thing. This is the really essential essence of that thing. He doesn't mean that the bottle has just *an* essence and that anything else you predicate about it is somehow accidental or incidental to it, but that anything is an essence. So there's no hierarchy of essences and so there is no one essence that is truly the essence about me or my psyche either. But there's lots of them.

**Jennifer Hansen:** If you don't mind, I'd like to jump in on this, because the narrative theory of the personal identity is interesting. If we go back to mental illness—you were invoking bipolar—one of the things that has been shown to be problematic about that—it seems like it solves a lot of problems, the narrative theory, like the problems of psychological continuity theory in the body—is that there are people like bipolar individuals who don't have coherent narratives. The theory seems to depend a lot on agency as a result of being able to tell that coherent narrative; but, if you can't cohere the narrative, does that mean the self does not have agency? What I like about what Jessica is doing with Santayana—I guess because it's so much like what I'm trying to do—is that the narrative can still work as long as it's got recourse to the psyche. The way I would put it is: even in the case of the bipolar individual, there may still be habits of the organism that maybe the individual—him or herself—can't look to, but others could to say: No, there's some coherence to you that you could narrate that you may not have access to otherwise. Sometimes I think the narrative theory becomes kind of

another psychological theory that would be better if it has recourse to embodiment, if that makes sense: that embodiment needs to be an essential ingredient of narrative theory for it to really work.

## Spirituality (1:39:46)

**Jessica Wahman:** That reminds me: one of the things I'm afraid I dropped in my defense of epistemology was Martin's point: Isn't Santayana all about the spiritual life? That obviously is not very much in my book—the spiritual life. There's this whole aspect of Santayana where he focuses on the spiritual life. I think, yes, for him writing was the spiritual life. I do write about that elsewhere, but not in this book, because I didn't think it was as relevant to what I was doing in philosophy of mind. But I don't want to reduce everything he's doing to just an interest in the spiritual life. I think a big part of his spiritual life was his act of both self-knowledge and, as self-knowledge, his understanding of the world around him. It was something he was taking seriously. He wasn't just saying: So, now I'm just going to reflect on essences and write a really long book. He was writing what he really saw to be true. He saw his greatest spiritual friendship was with the Greeks, and he wanted to articulate that. That itself was meaningful to him. But you're right that philosophy, for him, is a spiritual endeavor. It's an endeavor to look at what he took to be the eternal things—the things that consciousness finds ultimately meaningful about life. I talk about it a little bit at the end of the narrative chapter when I talk about philosophy and narrative, but it does get short shrift.

**Richard Rubin:** I want to thank our panel—Jennifer and Martin and Jessica, especially—and also the people in the audience.

**Jessica Wahman:** May I just add to that? I just want to thank Richard for making this happen and both of you, Jenny and Martin, for your really thoughtful and helpful comments and for your interviewing of me, because it was just such a wonderful experience to be able to articulate all this and reflect on it. It's been a very special experience for me, and I'm grateful to you for making it possible, and I think we should do more of these sorts of things at the Santayana Society. So you just have to have somebody else write their next book and we'll talk about it.



# BIBLIOGRAPHICAL CHECKLIST

## THIRTY-THIRD UPDATE

The items below 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 and dissertations, the following articles and books are classified according to their years of publication. Readers with additions or corrections are invited to send these by email to [bulletin@georgesantayanasociety.org](mailto:bulletin@georgesantayanasociety.org).

The editors send a special thank you to Daniel Moreno for his time and effort in researching and compiling entries for this year's update.

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# The Critical Importance of the Santayana Edition

The projected twenty volumes of the critical edition of *The Works of George Santayana*, published by The MIT Press, present Santayana's writings in a form as close to the author's intention as can be determined by examination of manuscripts, correspondence, different editions of published works, and the author's marked-up reading copies. These twenty volumes will consist of thirty-three books, of which the Santayana Edition has now published nineteen. As part of this work the Edition has restored chapters held out of the first edition of Santayana's three-book autobiography and published it as he wished it to appear, as the single book *Persons and Places*; published the most complete collection of Santayana's Letters in eight books; produced two books of selected marginalia from his personal library; and, most recently, completed the critical edition of the five books of Santayana's masterpiece of philosophic naturalism, *The Life of Reason*. The autobiography, letters, and marginalia are especially helpful for understanding Santayana's intentions and judgments regarding his works, and the Edition draws on them extensively in editing *The Works of George Santayana*.

The efforts of the Santayana Edition have also led to new discoveries of letters and manuscripts. The Edition has produced electronic versions, available on our website, of previously unpublished class notes and Santayana's translation of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. Recently the Edition learned of over 300 pages of newly available Santayana documents from Columbia University Libraries Archival Collection, which include letters from Santayana to his friend Baron Albert von Westenholz, whom Santayana described as one of the "best-educated persons I have known" (*PP*, 442). The letters to Westenholz, written between 1903 and 1937, will be transcribed and made available electronically on the Santayana Edition website along with transcriptions and translations of letters to Santayana from his father, Agustín. Santayana's letters to his life-long friend Herbert Lyman recently went up for sale at an auction in Maine, and the Edition is interested in arranging eventually to transcribe them for electronic publication.

In addition to these discoveries and restorations, there is a further value of a critical edition. Perhaps the chief value lies in the stability and integrity of the text established through historical research and critical editing procedures. Knowing the history of the printed text allows editors to identify different versions of the text and to determine variants among the different versions. Critical editing methodology includes recording and justifying with evidence and argument any emendation or preference for one variant over another. A published critical edition always includes a list of all the variants of the critically edited text and the editors' rationale for choosing one variant as definitive, making the origins of the critical text transparent. The result is a reliable text that scholars can use with confidence.

Consider *The Life of Reason*, the most recent published volume of the critical edition. Without a critical edition, *The Life of Reason* exists in several forms among which the differences are not immediately apparent. One readily available reprinting of the work presents itself as the first edition, but it does not acknowledge that its text comes from a printing later than the first edition and contains several changes from the actual first printing. A version presented as the second edition is not actually a new edition, but it is the third version with variants. And the true second edition makes changes that Santayana himself was not in favor of. The critical edition sorts this out and creates a text as close to the author's intention based on the text closest to the author's hand and any notes or corrections made in the author's hand.

This text is important as a common reference for scholarly discussion and interpretation. While this may not seem as dramatic as restoring lost or expurgated chapters, it is hugely important to scholarly activity. For example, in cases where various versions exist with some being misidentified (such as the so-called first edition *Life of Reason* that already had variants introduced), misquotations in scholarly works (which are not as uncommon as might be hoped—they sit marked up on my shelf) cannot be definitively corrected. Without a common text, obstacles remain to resolving disputes about quotations, and complications to interpretation compound needlessly.

The basic principles of critical editing also make plain why the one-volume abridgment of *The Life of Reason* should be considered a new work entirely. Besides being an abridgment, Daniel Cory completed it after Santayana's death, so the final form was out of Santayana's hands. This work was not considered when determining the critical text. But its variants were noted and included in an appendix to the critical edition of *The Life of Reason*. It is offered for comparison but not for justification of any part of the critical text.

The critical edition provides a stable and reliable text supported by sustained historical inquiry; justified by arguments based on rigorous editorial principles; and augmented by carefully researched annotations of allusions, quotations, and figures. The integrity and stability of the text is the most consistent benefit of a critical edition to scholarship. In providing a common reference for discussion and interpretation, a critical edition contributes to the conscious harmony of intentions that is the *Life of Reason*. This is why any sincere and serious scholar should cite a critical edition. Consulting a critical edition is basic research, whether one purchases the text or obtains it through a library—it is a standard scholarly practice that should be encouraged by colleagues and journal editors. It is my hope that you may be convinced of the importance not only of Santayana's philosophy but also of critical editing more generally and of the institutions that support it such as, in the case of the Santayana Edition, the National Endowment for the Humanities.

MARTIN COLEMAN

*Director, Santayana Edition, Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis*

## Some Abbreviations for Santayana's Works

Page numbers in articles refer to the critical edition of Santayana's work, if it has been published, unless otherwise specified in the references for a particular article. For a list of the volumes of the critical edition that have been published, go to <https://www.iupui.edu/~santedit/sant/about-the-edition/publications/>. These abbreviations should be used for citations only. To refer a work in the text, authors should spell out its name.

AFSL	<i>Animal Faith and Spiritual Life</i> , ed. John Lachs	PGS	<i>The Philosophy of George Santayana</i> , ed PA Schilpp
BR	<i>Birth of Reason and Other Essays</i>	POML	<i>Physical Order and Moral Liberty</i> , ed. J and S Lachs
COUS	<i>Character and Opinion in the United States</i>	PP	<i>Persons and Places</i>
POEMS	<i>Complete Poems</i>	PP1	<i>The Background of My Life</i>
DL	<i>Dialogues in Limbo</i>	PP2	<i>The Middle Span</i>
DP	<i>Dominations and Powers</i>	PP3	<i>My Host the World</i>
EGP	<i>Egotism in German Philosophy</i>	PSL	<i>Platonism and the Spiritual Life</i>
GTB	<i>The Genteel Tradition at Bay</i>	RB	<i>Realms of Being</i> (one-volume edition)
ICG	<i>The Idea of Christ in the Gospels</i>	RE	<i>The Realm of Essence</i> (RB Bk. 1)
IPR	<i>Interpretations of Poetry and Religion</i>	RM	<i>The Realm of Matter</i> (RB Bk. 2)
LGS	<i>The Letters of George Santayana</i>	RT	<i>The Realm of Truth</i> (RB Bk. 3)
LP	<i>The Last Puritan</i>	RS	<i>The Realm of Spirit</i> (RB Bk. 4)
LR	<i>The Life of Reason</i>	SAF	<i>Scepticism and Animal Faith</i>
LR1	Bk. 1, <i>Reason in Common Sense</i>	SB	<i>The Sense of Beauty</i>
LR2	Bk. 2, <i>Reason in Society</i>	SE	<i>Soliloquies in England and Later Soliloquies</i>
LR3	Bk. 3, <i>Reason in Religion</i>	TTMP	<i>Some Turns of Thought in Modern Philosophy</i>
LR4	Bk. 4, <i>Reason in Art</i>	TPP	<i>Three Philosophical Poets</i>
LR5	Bk. 5, <i>Reason in Science</i>	WD	<i>Winds of Doctrine</i>
MARG	<i>Marginalia</i>		
OS	<i>Obiter Scripta</i>		

# Submission Guidelines

The editors of *Overheard in Seville: Bulletin of the Santayana Society* invite submission of articles and essays about George Santayana from any discipline. Letters to the editors (not exceeding 300 words) are also welcome.

The editors may request revisions before a piece is accepted for publication. Upon acceptance, authors will be expected to approve editorial corrections.

Previously unpublished manuscripts are preferred and simultaneous submission is discouraged. Authors typically may expect notice of the status of their submission within three months of submission. Submissions are accepted all year with a March 1 deadline for inclusion in a particular year's issue.

## Manuscript Style

- Manuscripts should be submitted electronically as e-mail attachments to [submissions@georgesantayanasociety.org](mailto:submissions@georgesantayanasociety.org).
- Manuscripts should be double-spaced and in an editable file format such as Microsoft Word (.doc or .docx), Rich Text Format (.rtf), or OpenDocument Text (.odt).
- Manuscripts should be prepared for blind review. Identifying information should not appear in running heads, footnotes, references, or anywhere in the manuscript. Identifying information in footnotes or reference may be replaced with blanks or dashes.
- Manuscripts should be prepared according to [\*The Chicago Manual of Style\*, 16th edition](#) guidelines. See also: [Manuscript Preparation Guidelines](#) and [Preparing Tables, Artwork, and Math](#).
- Footnotes should be reserved for substantive comments, clarifications, and ancillary information that would interrupt the flow of the main text. These should be kept to a minimum.
- Textual citations should conform to author-date system described in the *Chicago Manual of Style*. The author followed by the date (if the author has more than one work cited) and the page number should appear in parenthesis within the text wherever such a reference is needed. In block quotations, the parenthesis appears at the end just after the last punctuation mark in the block. For citations within the text, the parenthetical citation should be after any closing quotation mark but immediately before the final punctuation mark, unless the final punctuation mark is a question mark or exclamation point that belongs inside the quotation.
- If you use an edition or version other than the original, the date of the date of original publication should be in brackets before the date of the edition you are using. If a passage is different in a later edition or found only there, the date in brackets should be the date that the passage first appeared. If it is the edition you are citing, then the date in brackets should be left out.

- A reference list should be provided at the end of the manuscript, specifying which edition is used. Note that in author-date style, the date immediately follows the author's name and is followed by a period.
- References to classical writers, such as Plato and Aristotle, should use standard page numbers.
- References to Santayana's works should use the standard abbreviations found in recent issues of *Overheard in Seville* (e.g., SAF for *Scepticism and Animal Faith*) followed by the page.
- If a quotation from a Santayana work is taken from a critical edition and only critical editions are cited, the work need not be included in the reference list, as long as you use standard abbreviations. If you cite non-critical editions or non-Santayana material, then you should include the abbreviation of the work in your reference list and simply indicate that the critical edition is the one referred to:

LR1 Critical edition

- An author may use an abbreviation to refer to another author's work by preceding the bibliographical listing of the work with the abbreviation. For example,  
     AE Dewey, John. 1934. *Art as Experience*. New York: Minton, Balch and Company.
- If there is only one reference with an abbreviation for an author, list that reference alphabetically by the abbreviation. In the case of multiple references with abbreviations for the same author, list the references indented under the author's name and alphabetically by the abbreviation.
- If an abbreviation or the author's name alone is used in a citation, do not put comma before the page number. If the date is included, place a comma after the date.
- In citing a reference to a work identified by an abbreviation that contains essays by more than one author, if the context does make clear who the author is, include the author's name before the abbreviation. For example: (Hartshorne PGS 153). It is an option to specify the title of the article.
- The preferred way to cite one of Santayana's letters is to use the abbreviation LGS followed by the date and "to [recipient]." If either the recipient or date is given in the text, it may be left out of the citation.
- Wherever possible, references should be to authoritative scholarly editions, such as *The Works of George Santayana* (MIT), *The Collected Works of John Dewey* (SIU), *The Works of William James* (Harvard), *The Jane Addams Papers* (UMI), etc. Authors should notify the editor if they do not have access to a particular authoritative edition.
- Research articles and essays should be no more than 8,000 words.
- Authors should divide their manuscripts with appropriate section headings. Section headings may use paragraph styles Heading2, Heading3, etc. We do



not recommend subsections, unless some obvious contextual reason calls for them.

- Except for block quotes, use no paragraph style other than Normal set to double space and to indent 1 inch before the first line,
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- Submissions should include a brief description of the author's background and work for use in a contributor's note.
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Submitted manuscripts and communication regarding submissions should be addressed to [submissions@georgesantayanasociety.org](mailto:submissions@georgesantayanasociety.org). Correspondence about matters other than submissions may be addressed to [bulletin@georgesantayanasociety.org](mailto:bulletin@georgesantayanasociety.org)

## Angus Kerr-Lawson Prize

The George Santayana Society offers the Angus Kerr-Lawson Prize in tribute to the late Professor Kerr-Lawson's outstanding contributions to Santayana scholarship both as longtime editor of *Overheard in Seville: the Bulletin of the George Santayana Society* and as the author of many articles that appeared in the *Bulletin* and in other publications. Kerr-Lawson was an early participant in the George Santayana Society.

The prize is available to a scholar not more than five years out of graduate school for an essay engaging or rooted in the thought of George Santayana. We encourage applications from graduate students and junior faculty members. Authors may address any aspect of Santayana's life and thought. We welcome essays that relate his thinking to other figures in the American tradition and beyond and to contemporary social, cultural, and philosophic concerns. Relevant themes include materialism and naturalism, realism and Platonism, metaphysics and morals, and issues connected to American culture and intellectual history.

The winner will receive \$300 and be invited to present the winning paper at the Society's annual Eastern APA meeting in early January. The winning essay will be published in the edition of *Overheard in Seville* that follows that meeting. This year the winner will be notified in September, 2018. Authors should prepare submissions for blind review (no exposing references to the author within the composition) and send electronically in Word, ODT, or PDF format to: [submissions@georgesantayanasociety.org](mailto:submissions@georgesantayanasociety.org). The subject line of the email should read: "Kerr-Lawson Prize Submission, [author's name]." The deadline for submissions is May 21, 2018.

# *Overheard in Seville*

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