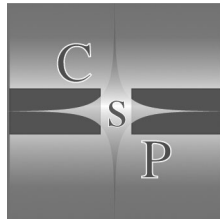


Under Any Sky

Under Any Sky
Contemporary Readings of George Santayana

Edited by

Matthew Caleb Flamm and Krzysztof Piotr
Skowroński



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In the past or in the future, my language and my borrowed knowledge would have been different, but under whatever sky I had been born, since it is the same sky, I should have had the same philosophy.

—George Santayana, *Scepticism and Animal Faith*, x

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface	x
Editor's Introduction	1
Part I: Ontology and Naturalism	
Are We All Materialists or Idealists After All? John Lachs	9
The Natural Claims of Spirit Angus Kerr-Lawson	14
Distance From The Truth Glenn Tiller	22
It Depends What the Meaning of 'Is' Is: Santayana, Identity Theory, and the Mind-Body Problem Jessica Wahman	34
Animal Faith or Natural Knowledge? Why Dewey and Santayana Can't Agree About Philosophy Paul Forster	45
Naturalism and Animal Faith: Santayana's Meta-Criticism of Scepticism Ángel M. Faerna	62
The Piety of Materialistic Conviction and the Abnormal Madness of Western Idealism Matthew Caleb Flamm	76
Part II: Culture, Society, America	
Santayana Today. Problems and Hopes Krzysztof Piotr Skowroński	94

How can Someone Committed to Social Progress Read Santayana Sympathetically? Richard Marc Rubin.....	102
George Santayana as a Cultural Critic James Seaton.....	111
Portrait of an Anxiety: Santayana on William James Ramón del Castillo.....	121
On the Structure of Santayana’s Dominations and Powers Daniel Moreno Moreno.....	130
Santayana’s Conscious Animality, Experience, and Inevitability: The Parameters Of His Thought Charles L. Padrón.....	137
Part III: Aesthetics, Poetry, and Spirit	
Agustin, Jorge, Susana Richard DeTar.....	152
Santayana, the Absurd and Ultimate Humor Daniel Pinkas.....	161
Santayana’s Mediterranean Aesthetics Giuseppe Patella.....	171
Beauty and the Labyrinth of Evil: Santayana and the Possibility of Naturalistic Mysticism Thomas Alexander.....	181
Reflections on George Santayana, Aesthetics, and the Ancient Quarrel between Philosophy and Poetry Till Kinzel.....	202
The Place of Aesthetic Experience in the Conception of Beauty in <i>The Sense of Beauty</i> Lenka Krejsova.....	213

Emerson and Santayana on Imagination	
H.G. Callaway.....	221
Notes Towards a Supreme Reading of George Santayana	
Antonio Lastra	231
“To an Old Philosopher in Rome”: Wallace Stevens’s Poetic Meditations on Santayana	
Jacek Gutorow	241
The Agony of the Spirit in Santayana’s Naturalism	
Manuel Garrido.....	251
Contributors	261
Index	266

PREFACE

JOHN LACHS, VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY

When celebrated philosophers die, their works go into decline. The excitement of observing a living mind struggle with momentous problems is replaced by waiting for the cold hand of history; the achievements of the thinkers come to be measured not against the dwarfs who surround them but such giants as Plato and Kant. Many philosophers who descend into the night of being unknown and unread never re-emerge. Tomes on the history of philosophy are replete with the names of people once famous, such as Norris, the British Cartesian, and Beck, the critic of Kant. But no one knows much about these figures and no one cares much. They had their day and are now forgotten.

At some point after his death, it seemed that the same fate would befall George Santayana. Critical realism had run its course, naturalism had turned scientific and even pragmatism had fallen on hard times. Santayana's literary style and his ontological turn made him appear a throwback to earlier ways of doing philosophy. Although many thinkers famous in those days, from Frankena and Feinberg to Danto, had read him as undergraduates, none of them considered him worthy of a philosophical response.

Things started changing in the 1970s. A few books were published, and graduate students began writing dissertations on Santayana's thought. An ambitious critical edition of his works started receiving support from the National Endowment for the Humanities. In 1991, a large international conference, held in Santayana's hometown of Avila, Spain, celebrated his contributions to philosophy. The revival continues today; this volume displays its multi-faceted vitality. A new generation of scholars is exploring the depths of Santayana's work and its rich relations to the thought of leading contemporary figures.

What accounts for this striking rebirth of interest? The renewed appreciation of American thinkers connected with the founding and subsequent success of the Society for the Advancement of American Philosophy was clearly one of the factors. The vigorous revival of pragmatism served as a contributing cause. The dominance of naturalism in the philosophical world and the search for subtler and richer versions of the view must have driven some philosophers

in Santayana's direction. But in the end, the central part of the explanation must consist of the permanent attractiveness of Santayana's philosophical ideas. The clarity and usefulness of his categories, his steadfast vision of human life and his striking reconciliation of the natural and the ideal are nearly without match in the history of thought.

This book is the result of the Second International Conference on Santayana's Thought, convened in 2006. The broad range of participants, the note of critical appreciation they strike and the substantial advances they make in understanding Santayana, and through him this baffling world, signify a great new flowering of attention to his ideas. Having emerged from the abyss of literary death, Santayana now stands ready to assume his rightful place among the truly important philosophers of the last several hundred years.

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

This book is a testament to the cross-cultural relevance of the work of one of the leading intellectuals of the twentieth century, George Santayana (1863-1952: birth name Jorge Agustín Nicolás Ruiz de Santayana). A fuller appreciation of Santayana than has been offered to date requires a broad interpretive framework, the relevance of which is hard to measure by the standards of academe which tends for the sake of universal understanding to bleach the hues of a thinker's larger vision. The partition of knowledge into a multitude of disciplines on the one hand and, on the other, the constant emergence of new inter-disciplinary studies requires a high level of specialization that makes it difficult to assume a holistic interpretive approach towards humans and their world. Santayana is one of those exceptional men of letters, humanists, philosophers, and authors whose work attracts interest from a variety of disciplines; thus, the expanse of his thinking, encompassing aesthetics, ethics, ontology, epistemology, history of philosophy, philosophy of politics, anthropology, value inquiry, literary criticism, poetics, cultural criticism, to say nothing of his best-selling novel and biography. Wisdom, to which Santayana can be said to have remained faithful throughout his life "lies not in pronouncing what sort of good is best but in understanding each good within the lives that enjoy it as it actually is in its physical complexion and in its moral essence."¹

Santayana's wide spectrum of philosophical engagement and more general disinterest in diminishing conflicting tendencies have caused problems for his interpreters, who have never satisfactorily situated him within a single tradition. He is regarded by many American scholars not only as an American thinker, but even as one of the Classical American philosophers along with Charles Sanders Peirce, Josiah Royce, William James, John Dewey, and George Herbert Mead. Meanwhile, in his native Spain, he is predominantly seen as a Spanish philosopher, and, in addition to that, there are some scholars who link him with *la Generación del '98*, the climactic intellectual, artistic, and philosophical movement of Nineteenth Century Spain, placing him amongst its greatest figures: Miguel de Unamuno and José Ortega y Gasset. The inability to

¹ George Santayana. *Dominations and Powers*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951: 466.

affix Santayana's thinking with a single cultural character forces one to search elsewhere—if indeed such a place exists—for a means of characterization.

Some scholars have identified alignments of his thinking with pragmatism especially in his early work (*The Life of Reason*), and still others have focused on his harsh criticisms of pragmatism and his Neo-Platonic metaphysics and accompanying doctrine of essence in his mature work (*Realms of Being*). This contrast is an outgrowth of the more general difficulties interpreters have had seeing the unity the author saw in his own work; for some, his work is impressionistic and eclectic, while for others, it constitutes a cohesive, although very vast, system of thought that presents itself in various literary and philosophic-artistic modes. For Santayana himself, philosophizing entails synoptic imagination and a self-conscious understanding of the indelibly relative character of philosophic vision: "As for me – Santayana declares – in stretching my canvas and taking up my palette and brush, I am not vexed that masters should have painted before me in styles which I have no power and no occasion to imitate; nor do I expect future generations to be satisfied with always repainting my picture."²

What then is Santayana's contribution to modern thought? Santayana was something of an ancient humanist in that he strove to understand the full moral complexity of life rather than be swayed by its sham brilliance. This was expressed by one of his most eminent contemporaries, Bertrand Russell, who writes that "Santayana, like Spinoza, is to be read, not so much on account of his theoretical doctrines, as on account of his view as to what constitutes the good life, and of his standard of values in art and morals."³ It would be unfortunate, nevertheless, to neglect Santayana's theoretical contributions. He was both an active participant in and penetrating critic of American philosophical life, which is what makes his criticism of America's illusory freedoms and, simultaneously, his appreciation of its vigor so unique. Moreover, his reflections can be seen to encapsulate many concerns over the status of science that took place some decades after the appearance of his major publications. Finally, his approach towards religion is exemplary in affirming that a robust naturalism need not preclude an appreciation of spirituality that infuses life with beauty and sense.

If the present volume does at least some justice to the breadth and profundity of Santayana's thought, the editor's work will have been justified. Certainly the major plots of Santayana's thinking are articulated here: Platonistic materialism in ontology, scepticism in epistemology, rationality in

² George Santayana. *The Realms of Being: One Volume Edition*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1942: xvi-xvii.

³ *Philosophy of George Santayana*. Edited by Paul Arthur Schilpp. New York: Tudor Publishing Company, 1951: 453-454.

social philosophy, naturalism in aesthetics, piety in materialism, and literary and poetic expression as a surer means to cosmic understanding – all of these themes are treated. On the other hand, the book displays a panorama of additional stimulations that Santayana’s thinking can provide; twenty-three scholars of various cultural backgrounds united to pay tribute to Santayana’s thought, comment on it and, at the same time, integrate its elements into their own inquiries.

Many of the contributions here originated as presentations for the Second Annual International Conference on George Santayana, convening at the University of Opole, Poland June 20th through the 24th, 2006. Besides being asked to elaborate and expand their papers for inclusion in this volume, contributors papers were selected on the basis of their thematic continuity with the book’s major themes. Following this (co)editorial introduction the book is divided into three respective thematic parts—I. Ontology and Naturalism; II. Culture, Society, America; and III. Aesthetics, Poetry, and Spirit. Introductory overviews of the contents of the three parts are provided by Matthew Caleb Flamm. A list of geographic origins of the scholars herein indicates the transatlantic cultural diversity of scholarly representation: scholars variously hailing from Canada, Germany, Italy, Poland, Slovakia, Spain, and Switzerland, and a number from the United States, representing three of its major regions.

The editors would like to acknowledge Andy Nercessian at Cambridge Scholars Press, whose favorable and encouraging reception initiated this book’s production. Matthew Flamm would like to thank Jennifer Anne Rea, who provided much assistance in preparing the book’s index and bibliographies and invaluable sundry feedback along the way towards producing the manuscript; additionally, his colleague Dr. Jeanie Murphy offered timely assistance with correspondence translations of book contributors.

As the book epigraph indicates, Santayana believed that philosophic vision transcends the webs of time and history. This view runs afoul of contemporary sensibilities, which are eager to expose any suspected essentialist prejudice against context. But somewhere in the center of this critical divide there is a lost opportunity, for Santayana also wrote: “...just because spirit, at each point, is a centre for all things, no one point, no one phase of spirit is materially a public centre for all the rest.”⁴ Supposing Santayana’s attitude about philosophy still offends, since he responded approvingly at being characterized as a “Castilian mystic” we can bring this into relief (taking our cue from Tom Alexander) by deferring with authority to William James’ remark about “Mystical classics,” that they “have ... neither birthday nor native land.”⁵

⁴ George Santayana. *Persons and Places*. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1963: 132.

⁵ William James. *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. Harvard, 1985: 332.

The editors hope that, from whatever irreducible spiritual center their readers view things, and that under any sky they happen to roam, such appreciations as came to Santayana can be found in some of these interpretive essays.

PART I: ONTOLOGY AND NATURALISM

The essays arranged in the first part of this book explore the background features of Santayana's philosophy—adhering, that is, to his own characterization from the famous debate over naturalism with his contemporary John Dewey. In the exchange Santayana characterizes experience as the “foreground” and the larger cosmos the “background” features of philosophic emphasis. In a span of twenty-five years following his departure from Harvard and the United States in 1912 Santayana's thinking pivoted between two major works, a novel and his mature system of philosophy. *The Last Puritan* was published in 1936, serving as a literary counterpoint to the four-volume *Realms of Being*, itself introduced in 1923 with *Scepticism and Animal Faith*, and published in the four-volume *Realms of Being* over the next thirteen years. The simultaneous genesis of these two major works is significant. It is as though the process of systematically framing his philosophical viewpoint (*Realms*, the “background”) needed genealogical depiction (*The Last Puritan*, the “foreground”). The novel contains a world of characters whose evolving viewpoints mirror philosophical tendencies and aversions in the author, sometimes seeming as testimonials to key moments of intellectual unfolding in his own life. If *The Last Puritan* can be said to indirectly chronicle the *settling* of Santayana's mature philosophic convictions, *Realms of Being* directly presents their more or less *settled* form.

When once Santayana had decided on his four ontological realms—essence, matter, truth, and spirit—he never abandoned them and in fact used the concepts with consistency throughout the rest of his life; not, it bears noting, in rigid modes of analysis, but rather as heuristics to articulate an already well-developed facility for freeform speculative expression. From the beginning of their inception, the realms of being were for Santayana tools—*toys* even, if one considers his language in one revealing letter—of interpretation. Santayana never had any use for the sort of systematicity sought after in either of the main traditions—German idealism, and British analysis—presaging Continental and analytic philosophy. Thus, his use of the phrase “system of philosophy” needs to be taken with qualification. As he says from the outset, his “system...differs

widely in spirit and pretensions from what usually goes by that name.”⁶ But if so then why call it a “system?”

Biography may only complicate this question. The years following his departure from academic life were spent liberating interpretive interests from academic pressures, especially those directly impacting professional advancement; and this was by no means due to Santayana’s inability to advance in academic life. In 1911, the year Santayana first announced his retirement from Harvard, he was encouraged to stay by recently appointed president Abbott Lawrence Lowell. Lowell went so far as to guarantee arrangements that would allow Santayana extended time to travel and write in Europe. Alas, taking advantage of an inheritance from the death of his mother Santayana left the United States permanently in 1912 in pursuit of an intellectual freedom he deemed impossible in academic life.

Soliloqueys in England, written during Santayana’s time in England during the First World War, was the first free-form product of his newfound intellectual freedom. At the same time however, Santayana demonstrated a desire to remain intellectually connected with the philosophic moods of his time by continually acquainting himself with his contemporaries, and by making semi-technical contributions to standard-bearing philosophic journals. In all of this there is a definite sense that, after his release from academic life, Santayana wished not simply to retain his status as increasing luminary in the American philosophic tradition, but to transcend that status by reaching a wider intellectual audience. Perhaps then the appellation “system” was a means of challenging the expectations of those conceiving Santayana as one of the main heralds of the American philosophic tradition. Santayana offers remarks in *Persons and Places* that illuminate this point: “I...have a system of philosophy which I hadn’t dreamt of [in my Harvard years] although the reasons for it lay all in me; but this system is not intended to found a sect and will never do so. It aspires to be only a contribution to the humanities, the expression of a reflective, selective, and free mind.”⁷ Santayana conceived his mature philosophy as a *system* in order to enter it for candidacy into the canon of humanist literature certainly not aspired to by his contemporaries—pragmatist and otherwise.

This suggests a second, non-biographical explanation for Santayana’s mature turn to a *system* of philosophy. Being, for better or worse, considered a preeminent *American* philosopher, Santayana was compelled to weigh in continually on the meaning and significance of the contributions made to that tradition by his Harvard teachers, Royce and James, and contemporary

⁶ George Santayana. *Scepticism and Animal Faith*. New York: Dover Publications, 1923: v.

⁷ George Santayana. *Persons and Places*. New York, Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1963: 156.

pragmatist counterpart, John Dewey. Between 1912 and 1923, Santayana wrote trenchant criticisms of these main figures in both the *Journal of Philosophy*, and in two key published books: *Winds of Doctrine* (1913) and *Character and Opinion in the United States* (1920). Though arguably sharing aspects of the orientation, Santayana was no pragmatist. And, albeit with notably nuanced presentation, he interpreted the philosophies of Royce, James, and Dewey as each tainted in some significant way by pragmatist elements traceable in spirit to the cultural shortcomings of their native America. His cutting indictments are legion: Royce's Hegelianism was in perpetual conflict with a holdover Puritanism, resulting in an agonized conscience whose only recourse was to affirm the right of conscience to be agonized. James's everyman sympathy and accompanying impressionistic philosophic technique was inadequately and unevenly predicated on a pragmatic view of truth that involves a confusion of its test and meaning. And Dewey, called by Santayana a "half-hearted naturalist" somehow contrives a naturalistic metaphysics (an oxymoron in Santayana's view), betrayed by an all-too-American spirit of enterprise and progress. Throughout these criticisms there is an undeniable sense that Santayana is echoing the authoritative assessments of Bertrand Russell, and indeed there is no doubt that he read both Russell and G.E. Moore favorably with a particular eye to incorporating elements of their fine-tuned theoretical contributions into his own philosophy. What better way then of distinguishing himself from his American contemporaries, and at the same time potentially garnering greater respect than framing his philosophic inclinations in a concise conceptual framework which luminaries on the other side of the Atlantic could respect? In short, Santayana might well have seen systematic ontology as a means of formalizing his philosophy in ways that insulated it against the formidable objections of, and better commended itself to, the sensibilities of European authorities.

Posterity has offered little to vindicate this potential motivation of Santayana's—his philosophy was never in its time, nor up to the present has it been deeply engaged by major or minor European schools. Nevertheless, as the essays that follow indicate, there are numerous ways in which his philosophy, especially in its stage of mature formalization, can be brought into dialogue with themes dear to the hearts of expounders of the European tradition—including major post-Deweyan American philosophers such as Richard Rorty. The task before Santayana scholars is to adduce features of his broad philosophy that deepen the contemporary conversation.

Our opening essay engages Santayana's thinking in a manner well suited to this task. John Lachs deftly cuts through ensconced confusions and rhetorical grandstanding involving what is probably *the* perennial philosophic divide: that between materialism and idealism. He asks the disarming question,

when it comes down to it, are we all materialists and idealists after all? Lachs pivots between Santayana and Hegel in order to highlight the importance of intellectual honesty in one's choice of emphasis in this entrenched divide. Angus Kerr-Lawson follows with a careful analysis of Santayana's attention to the "Natural Claims of Spirit." He focuses on the provocative fact that, despite the break in his early and late published works Santayana never relinquished loyalty to the notion of a life of reason, his abiding conviction being that spirit and nature are in harmony to the extent that there ensues a rational choice between pre-and-post-rational ethical impulses. Glenn Tiller considers the important role of truth in Santayana's fourfold ontology, the most problematic of the four realms both in terms of its inception and articulation. He brings Santayana into dialogue with Richard Rorty, applies the interpretations of Timothy Sprigge, and brings into relief a difficulty about the "being of truth" by appeal to the role of wonder and acceptance in reconciling the relation between inquiring, living humans and the vast reality of events framed by the realm of truth. Jessica Wahman insightfully engages analytic identity theories of mind by way of Santayana's most directly technical essay, "Some Meanings of the Word 'Is'." She mines this underappreciated essay of Santayana's in order to sort through ontological difficulties that still haunt debates undertaken by contemporary reductionist, and anti-reductionist philosophers of mind. Paul Forster provides a concise analysis of the famous published debate about naturalism between Santayana and Dewey. He analyzes the debate in order to show that their ultimate disagreement is deeper than it appears. The depth of their disagreement, Forster concludes, is seen in the fact that neither philosopher can agree about the starting point of philosophy. Ángel M. Faerna next takes up Santayana's "meta-criticism of scepticism." He argues, specifically, that Santayana's understanding of scepticism is akin to the metaphorical ladder of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, meant to be discarded once the way has been cleared for philosophic speculation. Finally, the present author examines the connections between Santayana's "pious" materialism and his larger critique of the madness of Western idealism. I argue that among other virtues Santayana's materialism achieves a moral depth that is lacking in other historical philosophies.

ARE WE ALL MATERIALISTS OR IDEALISTS AFTER ALL?

JOHN LACHS

In the heat of controversy, fighting words tend to lose their meaning. “Christian” and “Muslim,” for example, have come to signify a wide variety of beliefs and activities, as have such words as “communist” and “capitalist.” In philosophy, “idealist” and “materialist,” words with distinguished histories, have similarly lost their ability to designate precisely. Idealists may be of the stripe of Berkeley, maintaining that only perceptions and perceivers are real, or of the persuasion of Leibniz, arguing that the ultimate ingredients of all things are mind-substances or monads. Kantian “critical” idealists, however, assert that all but the sensuous manifold derives from human cognitive faculties, and Hegelian “absolute” idealists think they can show that the history of the world is simply the development of consciousness. There are even those, such as Fichte, who declare that idealism is the affirmation of human freedom and that those who reject it lack a self.

Similar, though perhaps less extensive, vagueness and ambiguity beset the word “materialism.” The vast distance between Lucretius’ conviction that atoms and the void exhaust the ingredients of reality and Marx’s notion that ideas are but human reactions to prevailing economic—that is, material—conditions is neither suggested nor adequately traversed by using a single word. “Austrian” materialism focusing on mind-brain identity and Santayana’s materialism that takes an epiphenomenalist view of consciousness are incompatible yet called by the same name. To say that Feuerbach, Haeckel and Hobbes are all materialists gives no precise information about their positions.

In the light of this terminological Tower of Babel, it is not surprising to find the claim that all materialists are really idealists and the counterclaim that idealists are latent materialists. One may be tempted to disregard such dialectical contortions, but to do so would be an error. A closer examination of the basis for asserting that everybody is a materialist or an idealist may actually help us get straight about what is at stake in making such wide generalizations.

In the last chapter of *Realm of Matter*, Santayana undertakes to show that although in official philosophy idealists differ sharply from materialists,

tacitly they nevertheless subscribe to the fundamental tenets of their opponents. What are these tenets? Santayana identifies two: belief in the existence of a world independent of us and acknowledgement of the contingency of all things. Concerning the first of these, he says that if idealists were to describe existence as it actually is, “this existence would still, for that very reason, remain outside of his mind and of his description.”⁸ Intelligent spirit, he asserts, “must assume the presence of an alien universe and must humbly explore its ways.”⁹ Concerning the second belief, he returns again and again to the “blind fertility”¹⁰ of the world and asks “Why, then, is any Idea manifested here and not there, perfectly or imperfectly, once, often, or not at all?”¹¹ The answer, he says must be sought in the “pregnant and unfathomable”¹² propensities of material substance. But, of course, there is no ultimate answer to be found: whatever exists does so without reference to reason or the good.

These considerations on behalf of obliterating the distinction between idealism and materialism bring into focus Santayana’s rather special conception of matter. His insistence on the centrality of materialism is Lucretian, though without the awkward atomism of that fine poet, in the sense that it is meant to purge the inventory of beings of all supernatural agents. The argument is simple: the material world, Santayana argues, is a spatio-temporal matrix continuous with our bodies. Every agent belongs in this world. If God and the Devil occupy positions of power in the field, they are material agencies who can affect us and who, in turn, are open to our influence. And indeed, God is presented as just such a being in the Old Testament; He tells the Israelites how to make the walls of Jericho come tumbling down and becomes angry and hurt when His orders are disobeyed.

Santayana can rightly say that his notion of matter is not any of the usual ones emphasizing atoms or other ultimate spatio-temporal realities. The reason is that matter, for him, is not a kind of being but a process permeating the farthest reaches of time and space that unites our animal bodies with the surrounding field of flux and power. Everyone is a materialist who acknowledges the everyday experience of the power of external events and the flowering of contingencies. The hungry idealist believes, with everyone else, that the food we eat does not cease to exist when it is no longer felt in the mouth, that the tragedies of life cannot be thought away and that there are no magical agencies to change the propensities of the workaday world.

⁸ George Santayana, *Realms of Being*, New York, Cooper Square Publishers, 1972, 392.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 398.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 390.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 387.

¹² *Ibid.*, 392.

Santayana's argument to show that even idealists are materialists is counterbalanced by Hegel's claim that materialists cannot avoid being idealists. He says, "Every philosophy is essentially an idealism or at least has idealism for its principle."¹³ Idealism, he declares, consists "in nothing else than in recognizing that the finite has no veritable being."¹⁴ Hegel also presents two considerations to support his view. The first is the well-known argument that if we think that atoms or some other ultimate particles constitute the material world, we still only *think* this: the thought of matter is not matter but a thought.¹⁵ This means that, try as we may, we can never escape the magic circle of consciousness.

Hegel's second argument is more complicated and more clearly Hegelian. The finite is the sensuous particular, he maintains, and materialists think they refer to these when they speak about atoms and matter. In reality, however, atoms, matter and the water of Thales are not particulars but universals, because as general concepts referring to a potentially infinite collection of items they are infinite themselves. The hallmark of idealism is exalting the universal over the particular and, unbeknownst to materialists, their theory, simply on account of being a theory stated in universal terms, is therefore a form of idealism. The only way to avoid this conclusion, Hegel avers, is to abjure the use of universals, and that renders philosophers unintelligible and their "philosophies" unworthy of the name.¹⁶

What can we make of this remarkable controversy? The most obvious point is that Santayana's first commitment, that to an independently existing world, is not enough to turn idealists into materialists. Just such steadfast realism characterized Peirce's system without his ever thinking that he had to give up his idealism. One can hold, quite consistently, that there is a world independent of all knowledge of it and that that world is nevertheless constituted by consciousness or sentience or monads. One can deny that to be is to be known and yet maintain, as Peirce did, that on the last analysis everything that exists is mind. Realism frequently accompanies materialism but does not imply it.

Hegel's first argument also fails to convince. There is no doubt that when we entertain the idea of matter we *think*, but that does not mean that we can never get near something non-mental in our reflections. The magic of this argument of idealists was broken by G.E. Moore in his famous "Refutation of Idealism," in which he showed that the object of consciousness does not have to be, and in fact is not, something mental. Santayana rightly adopts this view and

¹³ G.W.F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, Amherst, N.Y., Humanity Books, 1969, 154-5.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 154.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 155.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

makes it a centerpiece of his account of essences, arguing that though they serve as the objects of consciousness, nothing about them suggests that they are mental in origin or nature.

One may suppose that Santayana's insistence on the contingency of the world and Hegel's glorification of the universal address altogether different issues. But, surprisingly perhaps, the two views converge on roughly the same problem and make the choice between idealism and materialism clearer and easier. Hegel maintains that thought and language operate exclusively with universals. The sensuous particular is the first thing sublated in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* where, in the section on sense certainty, Hegel asserts that no matter how much we want to get to the particular, we can never go beyond the universal. If he is right, the particular in its particularity is of no significance, and it takes only a moment of self-recognition for philosophers to realize that they are, and must be, idealists.

To say that only universals are intelligible and real means that in eating I consume food, or more specifically, steak. In the grander scheme of things, I belong to a state that, through its laws, gives structure and meaning to my life. My private dreams are matters of irrelevant contingency; what counts is the development of the human spirit, in the course of which I am likely to perish. But the death of the individual is of little moment so long as the universal aims of reason prevail. The ordinary and the everyday are below the regard of philosophers who must keep their eyes on the grand patterns of history, from the perspective of which most everything seems necessary and the rest is dross.

What does such an idealism leave out? First, that the steak I eat was not long ago the living flesh of a particular animal; that the state gives no meaning to anyone's life; that my private dreams, though contingent, constitute my very being; that the death of the individual is no small matter to that individual who, in life or in death, has little use for the growth of spirit; that everything can seem necessary if we look at it from the standpoint of some chosen outcome; and that philosophers had better keep their eyes on the ground if they don't want to share the fate of Thales and fall into a pit.

One might object, however, that this does not address the fundamental claim that, in philosophy at least, the universal cannot be escaped. Perhaps so, but it points the way to a fuller answer. In fact, nothing is easier than to sidestep the universal; we have only to quit talking. In action, *this* body crashes into *that*; in love, *this* person cares for *that*; in suffering, *these* foreign forces threaten *me*. Even if we think in terms of universals, we live as particulars in a world of particulars, staggering from crisis to crisis. We need no language to communicate our distress: feeling it ourselves and showing our predicament to others is enough for understanding and sympathy. Hegel is so taken with grand schemes and totalities that he forgets who we are.

Of course, Hegel did not forget who he was. He, like the rest of us, dealt with the details of daily life and weathered personal crises. These do not show up in his philosophy, for he is simply not interested in what we call “the human condition.” Santayana’s call, by contrast, is to attend to precisely this welter of facts. Of course, whether we attend to it or not, we are embroiled in fending off the contingencies of fortune. Santayana’s philosophy of animal faith consists of identifying what we believe on the basis of what we do; that is the only way, he maintains, to stay close to the common sense or the “shrewd orthodoxy” of the human race. This is the foundation of Santayana’s claim of the latent materialism of idealists: since they act, as we do, taking into account the power of an external world in which everything is contingent, they must also believe that the world is just that way.

Does this make idealists materialists? Only in the limited sense of thinking of the world as a continuous field of action full of surprising, delightful and dismaying events. The baffling question is why this obvious fact is devalued or denied by so many philosophers. In his daily life, Hegel did not think that sensuous particulars are unreal—he spent his days seeking and dodging them. Why, then, does his official philosophy disdain the world he in fact inhabits?

In the end, the question boils down to where philosophers are to cast their glance. Should they attend to the world as it exists in their neighborhood displaying treacherous forces with which they must negotiate their survival, or should they look for the patterns of another world barely adumbrated in the gritty details of individual life? This is the question of honesty in philosophy, a question no one has raised more vividly, more urgently and more eloquently than George Santayana.

THE NATURAL CLAIMS OF SPIRIT

ANGUS KERR-LAWSON

Santayana's readers have raised questions about what he is setting forth as his ideal. In the early years, he wrote five volumes devoted to the life of reason, which seeks to optimize actions over the full range of human activity. The emphasis is on giving to each demand or aspiration its proper place, and only rejecting those which are incompatible with others of more consequence. This comprehensive viewpoint is absent from the ideal of a spiritual life advanced in later works such as *The Realm of Spirit*,¹⁷ which limits itself to what he calls the claims of spirit. From the point of view of the earlier volumes, he is presenting a form of post-rational morality, which is there contrasted with rational ethics. A number of admirers of his conception of the life of reason, as advanced early in the twentieth century, have been disappointed at the retrenchment they find in the late work, with its appeal to ontological realms and its advocacy of detachment.

Santayana admits a change in sentiment, but insists that his theories are unchanged, and that he continues to adhere to the life of reason. That his sentiments changed, as he says, is philosophically of no great moment. Of more consequence is the final status of his theory of rational ethics, and especially the place spirit has in his moral thought. I argue below that he does adhere to this ideal, but only through a certain change in his understanding of that ideal.

Under the name of the life of reason, Santayana espouses a prudential morality based on an enlightened self interest, in which a choice is made of the most valued among all possible goods. It is rational to maintain good relations with others, often based on natural ties to family and society. This is sometimes not possible and harsh methods may be called for to protect one's own interests. However, honesty requires us to acknowledge that others' ideals and interests are equally valid, a recognition that is traced directly to spirit in the later writings. It is of the nature of spirit to see things objectively, and to realize that

¹⁷ *The Realm of Spirit*, (London: Constable, 1940), the fourth and final book of *Realms of Being*. All four books appear a one-volume edition, *Realms of Being* (New York: Scribner's, 1942). Page references are to this edition, using the standard abbreviation RB.

one's own preoccupations have no objective priority over those of others. There is a spiritual bond with all sentient animal life. Spirit, then, introduces a welcome softening to a self-interested moral philosophy.

However, this objective comparison of one's interests to those of others, an offspring of spirit, may injure the dedication to one's rational preference, which is for him the germ of morality. The influence of spirit may go beyond a fruitful softening of ethics and lead to a confusion of purpose. Pure spirit can induce detachment from the concerns both of oneself and of others. The revised notion of the life of reason brings issues like this within its confines, where the various interests are open to comparison. I believe that Santayana adopts but does not fully acknowledge this changed view of reason.

The Texts

In the five books of *The Life of Reason*, published in 1905 and 1906, Santayana deals with a wide range of aspects of a rational ethics.¹⁸ It is curious that his much later *Realms of Being* contains little of moral philosophy, apart from a discussion of moral truth in the third book, and an extensive treatment of spirit in the fourth and final book. However, it is meant to be an account of his systematic philosophy: "Here," he announces, "is one more system of philosophy."¹⁹ But the several provisos he attaches to this announcement do not include any statement that he plans to cover only a special aspect of moral philosophy. Since he considered himself primarily a moral philosopher, such an omission is peculiar; his readers may be led to believe that he has thrown over the life of reason in favour of a post-rational ideal. However, this is not the case. In the preface to *The Realm of Spirit*, he makes it clear that his subject is *not* the whole of moral philosophy:

My subject is not experience surveyed impartially, as in a book of descriptive psychology, but experience viewed at a certain angle, in the measure in which it torments or educates the spirit. Nor is my subject the whole of moral philosophy or the life of reason; for there all forms of health and government would need to be appreciated, many of which might be and might be content to remain, purely spontaneous and worldly. (RB 550)

We can only conclude that moral philosophy, seen in its entirety, remains a study of the life of reason; despite certain reservations about the early major

¹⁸ George Santayana, *The Life of Reason, or the Phases of Human Progress*, (New York: Scribner's, 1905-06). His notion of a rational ethics is defined in the fifth book, *Reason in Science*.

¹⁹ See page v of *Scepticism and Animal Faith* (London: Constable 1923), a book that is Santayana's epistemological introduction to RB.

study of this theme, it continues to represent his contribution to moral philosophy, something he does not care to go over again at that time.

Santayana confirms his continued concern for reason and its application to moral philosophy in his last major work, where he offers “subsequent thoughts on the same subject.” In *Dominations and Powers*, he returns to political and moral issues going beyond those of a spiritual life.²⁰ With its third and final section concerning “the rational order of society,” he makes clear that he retains his interest in a life of reason. In these further comments, he retreats from some of the earlier positions. Experience has led him to question his competence as a judicial moralist who can legislate its nature, and to be less sanguine about its actually arising somewhere.

Santayana’s *The Realm of Spirit*, then, not meant to encompass the whole of ethics. He gives this account of his aims in this book:

A study of the realm of spirit is therefore an exercise in self-knowledge, an effort on the part of spirit to clarify and to discipline itself. ... This transformation or conversion would not be necessary if the psyche and the world moved in perfect harmony ... but revision grows possible and urgent for the spirit as it gets more and more entangled in all the contrarities of existence. Being always alive, and suffering more or less, spirit then becomes aware of its natural claims and interests, in contrast to the endless miscellany of events. The world turns into a school [and] life into a pilgrimage. (RB 551)

There would be no special need, no conversion would be necessary, if the psyche and world moved in perfect harmony. No doubt I am stretching his intention here, but I suggest that his early concept of an ideal life of reason was meant to do just this. In a society embracing the life of reason, citizens are required to contribute according to their talents and receive support according to their needs. Issues of religion, art, and science are there treated at the social level. Indeed, the failure of a life of reason signalled by post-rational morality is also considered as a social phenomenon, where citizens as a group feel compelled to retrench from the full exploitation of their potential. They turn to penitent forms of religion in a social movement toward the post-rational. It is only later that he deals with private efforts at some sort of salvation. This coincides with his later doubts about the likelihood of a life of reason arising. In *Realms of Being* he acknowledges the need for individuals to recognize the claims of spirit on them quite apart from their social setting.

Whereas *The Life of Reason* deals with all forms of health and government, *Realms of Being* deals only with the claims of spirit; whereas the former deals at a social and political level, the latter is a personal “exercise in self-knowledge, an effort on the part of spirit to clarify and to discipline itself.”

²⁰ George Santayana, *Dominations and Powers* (New York: Scribner's, 1951).

The Goal of Reasonableness

Santayana claimed that he always retained his allegiance to the life of reason. He resisted any characterisation of himself as an ascetic; indeed, he did not see himself as at all suited for the spiritual life. Early in *Realms of Being* he introduces a cautionary note, lest readers would make a faulty interpretation:

Much as I admire and in a measure emulate spiritual minds, ... I think their ambition, though in some sense the most sublime open to man, is a very special one, beyond the powers and contrary to the virtues possible to most men. I frankly cleave to the Greeks and not to the Indians, and I aspire to be a rational animal rather than a pure spirit. (RB 65)

Certainly, Santayana never deserted the main tenets of his moral philosophy: that the determinants of morality are the nature of the person and the opportunities open to that person; and that morality has a biological foundation, with its first principle one of relativity, meaning by this relativity to the above factual determinants. However, he does change his notion of a life of reason, and this change makes it possible for him to retain this allegiance.

Indeed, in responding to his critics in *The Philosophy of George Santayana*, he explicitly suggests a revision in the notion of the life of reason.²¹ His description of the nature of this change, I believe, is understated, and does not fully capture what is a significant amendment to his doctrine. In his early treatment of pre- and post-rational morality and rational ethics, Santayana says that in the main he had in mind the rational society approached in classical Greece and the post-rational thought that followed among the Hellenistic thinkers. He came to regret the temporal sequence that this brought into the theory, and argues in his response to his critics that the three kinds of morality need not follow any such sequence. However, the change in his thinking is more radical than is suggested by this explanation; for he goes so far as to ask of his critics that they admit into their notion of a good life post-rational as well as pre-rational elements.²² This is a sharp deviation from the doctrines found in *The Life of Reason*. There, post-rational morality represents a retrenchment and a departure from any forthright life of reason. It is seen as a loss of heart. With the later account, he admits that post-rational interests may be embraced without any departure from rationality. This seems to me a technical improvement, and

²¹ See pages 564-566 of his essay "Apologia Pro Mente Sua." in *The Philosophy of George Santayana*, ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp (Evanston: Northwestern University Press 1940). To be cited as PGS. The essay is his response to the papers in the book written by his critics, of which I am concerned mostly with those of Irwin Edman and Milton Munitz.

²² See PGS 565

yields a sounder notion of the life of reason. The original doctrine already admitted renunciation as an essential ingredient in reason: less important interests are always set aside in favour of the more important. The request he makes to his critics merely puts the claims of pure spirit on the same footing as other claims. With this revision, he can describe the issue raised by his critics as that of reconciling post-rational morality with rational ethics.

Detachment

Santayana's espousal of detachment in *The Realm of Spirit* has given his readers misgivings. He advocates in the penultimate chapter, for instance, that in expressing our union with the good we should identify ourselves with the totality of all ideals that have been upheld, however evil some might be in our eyes. More precisely, he expresses it somewhat differently: the *spirit in us* will identify with all ideals. For him, this is an important qualification and indeed it is the crux of the matter. Nonetheless, the critics find it outrageous to entertain any sympathy whatsoever for ideals so opposed to those we believe in.²³ Santayana is asking for something that can only dislocate our own ideals. It is surely pernicious to identify ourselves with the thoughts and deeds of wicked persons.

Santayana does not deny that his conception of union engenders a genuine conflict, and indeed he points to this frequently. Spiritual sympathy with the ideals of others, if taken too much to heart, can weaken one's allegiance to a chosen path; it can dissipate basic tenets of one's chosen life of reason. As his solution to this conflict, Santayana advises that one adhere tenaciously to one's enlightened self-interest, while at the same time maintain a sort of detached sympathy for the legitimacy of the ideals of others. One's domestic regimen is to be tough minded, but the foreign policy generous. Thus he calls on persons to maintain a difficult dual approach: one will admit the validity of the aspirations of others, but refuse to allow this to change one's chosen path. Here the two sides of this position conform to the two aspects of an admitted oscillation in his thought. The domestic regimen is part of the workaday world of action, while the sympathy is more contemplative and detached from that action.

We may feel sympathy for a criminal to be punished. Spirit might appreciate that his motives have their own validity or that his unfortunate past had been forced on him. Most would agree that we should not be ashamed of these humanist feelings; but that they should not deter us from endorsing the

²³ As well as the papers by Edman and Munitz in PGS, see James Gouinlock's "Ultimate Religion," *Overheard in Seville: Bulletin of the Santayana Society*, Fall 1998, pp. 1-12.