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# **Winds of Doctrine**

## **Studies in Contemporary Opinion**

**By: George Santayana**

**Edited by: David E Spiech, Martin A. Coleman,  
Faedra Lazar Weiss**

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# GEORGE SANTAYANA: *WINDS OF DOCTRINE*

AN INTRODUCTION  
BY PAUL FORSTER

*Winds of Doctrine*, Santayana's fifth book in philosophy, was published in 1913 at a pivotal time in his life. His reputation as a philosopher had long since been established: he was well known internationally, sought after as a lecturer, someone Harvard was keen to retain and other universities eager to recruit. Nevertheless, having for many years felt out of step with the institutional vision of Harvard's administration, the ethos of professionalized philosophy and even the tenor of American culture, Santayana resigned his teaching position in January of 1912 at the age of 48.<sup>1</sup> The move (made possible by savings accumulated over many years and an inheritance) marked the end both of his career as an academic and his residency in the United States. Though written for the most part while still a professor, *Winds of Doctrine* is the first book he published as an unaffiliated, itinerant, and, he would say, liberated, intellectual.<sup>2</sup>

Reviews of the book were largely positive, indeed effusive. In the *American Library Association Booklist* the book was judged to comprise "brilliant, original essays written by a philosopher who has the poet's vision and power of expression and uses both in revealing and sharply

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1 Of his reluctance to become an academic, Santayana writes: "The life of a wandering student, like those of the Middle Ages, had an immense natural attraction for me—so great, that I have never willingly led any other. When I had to choose a profession, the prospect of a quiet academic existence seemed the least of evils." *The Philosophy of George Santayana* [hereafter *PGS*], ed. Paul Schilpp (New York: Tudor Publishing Company, 1951), 12.

2 Santayana says that "in *Winds of Doctrine* and my subsequent books, a reader of my earlier writings may notice a certain change of climate.... It was not my technical philosophy that was principally affected, but rather the meaning and status of philosophy for my inner man" (*PGS*, 23).

criticizing tendencies in modern thought.”<sup>3</sup> In the literary journal *The Athenaeum*, the book was deemed “fresh and lively,” one that “should be taken seriously, for its high spirits are the natural result of that feeling of enhanced power which accompanies the exercise of keen critical faculties.”<sup>4</sup> The reviewer for *Catholic World* wrote that “in literary quality and mental distinction, there are few to equal [Santayana]” and went on to commend the “manner especially detached and impartial” by which he “reviews the various phases of religious and philosophical opinion just now popular in the English-speaking world.”<sup>5</sup> In the British journal *The Spectator*, Santayana was said to possess an “independence of standpoint and a literary style of an excellence rare among philosophers.”<sup>6</sup> A reviewer for *The Nation* found the book to contain “wit and subtlety” and singled out Santayana’s essay on Bergson as particularly “important” and “brilliant.”<sup>7</sup>

Reviews in periodicals were no less enthusiastic. The critic for *Harper’s* wrote that “a new book by George Santayana is always an event of importance to a few, because...it means that on some subjects of permanent value they have been helped along to a more finished understanding,” and added that “this country now has no essayist who is his equal.”<sup>8</sup> *Winds of Doctrine* was characterized as a “brilliant book about present-day conditions” and the reviewer surmised that “it will be a long time before a book is published with more general intelligence than this one contains.”<sup>9</sup> Meanwhile, in *The New York Times* the work was judged “extraordinarily interesting” and Santayana was commended for his “acute and searching observation” and for stating his case “with such vigor in a style so cogent and even compelling that he holds the attention of even the least sympathetic.”<sup>10</sup> *The Times* later included *Winds of Doctrine* in its list of the 100 best books of 1913, alongside Winston Churchill’s *The Inside of the Cup*, Jack London’s *John Barleycorn*, Thomas Hardy’s *A Changed Man and Other Tales*, Edith

3 *A. L. A. Booklist* 10 (1913): 63.

4 *The Athenaeum*, no. 4457 (March 29, 1913): 353.

5 *Catholic World* 97 (July 1913): 534.

6 *The Spectator*, March 1, 1913, 365.

7 To be fair, the *Nation’s* reviewer also said the essay on Russell, though “clear and analytical,” is “somewhat scattering” and that in his essay on Bergson Santayana “allows his cleverness to run away with his pen” (*The Nation* 96, no. 2501 [June 5, 1913]: 574).

8 *Harper’s Weekly*, August 16, 1913, 27.

9 *Ibid.*

10 *New York Times*, June 1, 1913, 53.

Wharton's *The Custom of the Country*, Sir James Fraser's *The Golden Bough*—Part 6, G. K. Chesterton's *The Victorian Age in Literature*, and Josiah Royce's *The Problem of Christianity*.<sup>11</sup>

At first glance, the scope of *Winds of Doctrine* seems impossibly broad. In a few hundred pages Santayana endeavors to sum up the dominant intellectual currents of early twentieth-century thought and trace their implications for American culture, for ethics and religion, for arts and letters, and for philosophy. In the process he assesses the intellectual significance of modernism in Catholic thought, the philosophical work of Henri Bergson and Bertrand Russell, and the poetry of Percy Bysshe Shelley (taking significant sidelong glances at the work of others along the way—Aristotle, Immanuel Kant, G. W. F. Hegel, Ralph Waldo Emerson, William James, and Walt Whitman among them). However, underlying this eclectic mix of themes and topics is a unifying philosophical orientation.

Santayana thinks it evident that human beings are a species of animal living in a material world. He thinks it equally obvious that the human animal is a spiritual creature—one “that, when he lives at all, lives for ideals.”<sup>12</sup> He sees no insuperable difficulty in reconciling a materialist conception of human beings with a genuine appreciation of their spiritual nature. Materialism, for him, is a view about the causes and origins of things—that “matter is the only *substance, power, or agency* in the universe” and that it exists independently of human beings and for no particular purpose (*PGS*, 509). Conceptions of spiritual life, by contrast, “draw from reality materials for an image of that ideal to which reality ought to conform, and to make us citizens, by anticipation, in the world we crave.”<sup>13</sup> They deal, not with what is the case, but rather with “the meanings and values of life, in its anticipation of perfection” (*IPR*, 3). For him, then, reconciling materialism and spirituality requires only the “expedient of recognizing facts as facts and accepting ideals as ideals” (*IPR*, 4).

On Santayana's view, factual questions are to be settled through empirical inquiry rather than *a priori* reflection. For him, it is clear when we reflect on how human beings are situated in the natural world that there is no evidence for knowledge other than sensory

11 *Ibid.*, November 30, 1913, BR664.

12 *Winds of Doctrine* [hereafter *WD*]: 4.

13 *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion* [hereafter *IPR*], *The Works of George Santayana*, vol. 3, ed. Herman J. Saatkamp Jr. and William G. Holzberger (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), 3.

experience and no kinds of knowledge deeper or more secure than natural science and common sense. This is not to say that he thinks science and common sense yield beliefs that are literally true. To the contrary, he thinks such a claim presumptuous in light of the fact that the sources of information about the material world are, in the case of human beings, extremely limited and highly selective—confined to inputs falling within certain ranges of light, sound, odors, textures, and tastes. Moreover, the cognitive significance of sensory inputs depends on certain presuppositions—background assumptions, principles of reasoning, and interests—that cannot be verified in experience since they are assumed in any understanding of experience. The truth of these assumptions can be granted only as an instinctive act of “animal faith.”<sup>14</sup>

Yet while maintaining that claims to know literal truth are unsustainable, Santayana does not think it either possible or reasonable to suspend belief altogether. The demands of life compel us to have views about the world and we are so constructed that “whatever picture of things we may carry about in our heads we are bound to regard as a map of reality” (*IPR*, 8). When it comes to evaluating beliefs in the absence of standards of literal truth “all we can do is, without abandoning the aspiration to knowledge...to control as best we may the formation of our conceptions; to arrange them according to their derivation and measure them by their applicability in life, so prudently watching over their growth that we may be spared the deepest of sorrows—to survive the offspring of our own thought” (*IPR*, 8).

In the case of common sense and science, Santayana thinks our views respond to, and are controlled by, experience. While seeing no way to show that the principles necessary for belief are literally true of reality, he thinks it reasonable to claim that, whatever the inherent nature of the material world may be, it is such that events occur in regular patterns. To the extent that common sense and scientific beliefs are shaped in response to causal input from the environment and issue in

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14 “Five senses... to gather a small part of the infinite influences that vibrate in Nature, a moderate power of understanding to interpret those senses, and an irregular, passionate fancy to overlay that interpretation—such is the endowment of the human mind. And what is its ambition? Nothing less than to construct a picture of all reality, to comprehend its own origin and that of the universe, to discover the laws of both and prophesy their destiny. Is not the disproportion enormous? Are not confusions and profound contradictions to be looked for in any attempt to build so much out of so little?” (*IPR*, 8).

reliable predictions they tell us something of the world—namely, what it is like when judged from the perspective of human knowledge. Thus science and common sense “live in a world of expurgated mythology” and are rightly deemed factual, rather than fictional (*IPR*, 9).

When it comes to spiritual ideals, however, Santayana insists our beliefs are only tenuously connected to the causal input of the environment we inhabit. Our conceptions of what the world ought to be transcend the limits of empirical verification and thus are no more than “fictions inspired by the moral imagination” (*PGS*, 497). However, the fact that spiritual ideals fall outside the scope of scientific knowledge does not imply that they are extraneous and to be purged from our system of belief. To the contrary, Santayana thinks spiritual ideals are “indispensable” (*IPR*, 11) and express our profoundest needs and hopes (*PGS*, 497). As he puts it, “to stimulate the imagination [to contemplate spiritual ideals] is to produce the deepest, the most pertinacious emotions” while “to repress it is to chill the soul, so that even the clearest perception of the truth remains without the joy and impetuosity of conviction” (*IPR*, 11). Thus it is, he thinks, that spiritual ideals, though of no use in science, “remain the inspiration of poetry and religion” (*IPR*, 4).<sup>15</sup>

For Santayana, failure to appreciate the difference between scientific discourse and religious–poetic discourse proves disastrous to both sorts of endeavor. Finding no spiritual consolation in materialism—since

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15 As he explains: “A metaphysician who transcends the intellect by his reason can be conceived only as using his imagination to such good purpose as to divine by it the ideal laws of reality or the ultimate goals of moral effort. His reason is an imagination that succeeds, an intuition that guesses the principle of experience. But if this intuition were of such a nature that experience could verify it, then that higher reason or imagination would be brought down to the level of the understanding.... When the prophecies of faith are verified, the function of faith is gone. Faith and the higher reason of the metaphysicians are therefore forms of imagination believed to be avenues to truth ... not because their necessary correspondence to truth can be demonstrated, for then they would be portions of science, but because a man dwelling on those intuitions is conscious of a certain moral transformation, of a certain warmth and energy of life. This emotion, heightening his ideas and giving them power over his will, he calls faith or high philosophy, and under its dominion he is able to face his destiny with enthusiasm, or at least with composure.

“The imagination, even when its premonitions are not wholly justified by subsequent experience, has thus a noble role to play in the life of man. Without it his thoughts would be not only far too narrow to represent, although it were symbolically, the greatness of the universe, but far too narrow even to render the scope of his own life and the conditions of his practical welfare. Without poetry and religion the history of mankind would have been darker than it is” (*IPR*, 10–11).

it “carries with it no commandments and no advice”<sup>16</sup>—some philosophers seek to reconceive nature in spiritual or ethical terms (e.g., by construing evolution as the progressive realization of certain ends, as in Santayana’s day, or, as in our own time, by positing spiritual forces operating at the level of quantum physics). On such an approach “the habits of imagination cloud science with passion, with fiction, with sentimental prejudice” (*IPR*, 12), while fostering the illusion of an objective ground for morality. On the other hand, to belittle or dismiss spiritual ideals on the grounds that science has shown matter to be indifferent to our higher purposes is to ignore the importance in a rational life of a conception of what it means to be human. To avoid both errors, Santayana insists that science ought to confine itself to discerning what the world is like (to whatever extent possible for human beings), while religion and poetry ought to surrender any claim to provide knowledge of what is the case and aim instead at uncovering those things that are most valuable to creatures with the sort of hopes, needs, fears, and capacities that human beings have.

This conception of science and spirituality informs Santayana’s philosophical method and style. As he sees it, philosophy is lay religion and thus literary, rather than scientific, in nature. Philosophical argumentation serves to direct us to “a steady contemplation of all things in their order and worth” (*TPP*, 7). Philosophers *per se* do not seek to uncover facts about the world, such being the task of natural science. Rather they seek to supply a compelling and critically defensible interpretation of one’s place in it. Philosophy so understood is both intellectual and edifying—committed to a true understanding of human beings and their world and dedicated to fostering appreciation of what is intrinsically worthwhile.<sup>17</sup>

Santayana thinks a philosophical theory is rational to the extent that it unites the diverse aspects of human nature and provides a vision of life befitting creatures such as we are, given the world we live in. At

16 *Three Philosophical Poets: Lucretius, Dante, and Goethe* [hereafter *TPP*] (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2019), 20.

17 “In philosophy itself investigation and reasoning are only preparatory and servile parts, means to an end. They terminate in insight, or what in the noblest sense of the word may be called *theory*, θεωρία—a steady contemplation of all things in their order and worth. Such contemplation is imaginative. No one can reach it who has not enlarged his mind and tamed his heart. A philosopher who attains it is, for the moment, a poet; and a poet who turns his practised and passionate imagination on the order of all things, or on anything in the light of the whole, is for that moment a philosopher” (*TPP*, 7).

the same time, however, he does not expect that philosophers' ideals of human fulfillment will necessarily match up. In philosophy, he thinks "a view becomes untenable only when seen to contradict some conviction ineradicable from one's own mind; and not the same convictions are ineradicable from all minds, at least not in mature years" (*PGS*, 605). In philosophy rigorous proof is out of the question. Faced with a disagreement over fundamentals, "you cannot refute a principle or rebut a preference, you can only indicate its consequences or present alluringly the charms of a rival doctrine" (*PGS*, 604). Such is the aim and purpose of *Winds of Doctrine*.

In each of the book's six essays Santayana evaluates a prominent intellectual current or school of thought in light of what he takes to be fundamental needs and values that human beings share. Though he denies an objective ground for philosophy, he does not deem all philosophical views equally reasonable "since they are not equally conducive to human purposes or satisfactory to human demands" (*IPR*, 13). His critical discussions draw on science (where debates turn on questions of fact), logic (where questions of the coherence of ideas arise), moral considerations (where assessments of what is valuable are at issue), and aesthetic considerations (where the beauty of the ideals being proffered is in question).<sup>18</sup> In keeping with his view of philosophy, his style is rich in metaphor and free of technical debate. However, this does not mean his criticisms lack rigor or philosophical sophistication. Santayana writes as he does because his aim is to draw attention to what he thinks are the deeper motives and interests—the properly philosophical presuppositions about human beings and their place in the world—that give rise to technical debates in philosophy and give them their broader point and significance. He argues that the various philosophical perspectives he considers have profound limitations when construed as portraits of human life. What he ultimately hopes to put in their place is a comprehensive, true, and satisfying conception of the world and how to flourish in it.

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18 As he puts it: "There will always be beauty, or a transport akin to the sense of beauty, in any high contemplative moment. And it is only in contemplative moments that life is truly vital, when routine gives place to intuition, and experience is synthesized and brought before the spirit in its sweep and truth. The intention of my philosophy has certainly been to attain, if possible, such wide intuitions, and to celebrate the emotions with which they fill the mind. If this object be æsthetic and merely poetical, well and good: but it is a poetry or æstheticism which shines by disillusion and is simply intent on the unvarnished truth" (*PGS*, 21).



## I ~ The Intellectual Temper of the Age

In his opening essay, Santayana claims that the current age is confused morally and intellectually and argues that pragmatism is more a symptom of what ails contemporary culture than a remedy for it. He attributes the confusion to a clash of civilizations. On one hand, there is the fading culture of Christendom—based on devotion to established religious doctrine, academic art, duty toward local institutions, class hierarchy, and privilege based on lineage. On the other hand, there is an emerging commercial, industrial culture ushering in a “slow upward filtration of... an emancipated, atheistic, international democracy” (*WD*, 1). These worldviews have equal claim to authority inasmuch as each answers to something deep in our animal nature. The conflict between them is not a clash of disjoint factions but rather of incongruent value systems that lie within “the mind and heart of the average individual” (*WD*, 2).

What Santayana thinks is required to settle the contemporary mind is an intelligent, inclusive, and systematic vision around which diverse tendencies can be organized—a vision of the sort that accompanied the advent of ancient Greek culture and the birth of Christianity. No such organizing vision having emerged from the ashes of the French Revolution, contemporary culture remains adrift, without the sort of “integrating reform” (*WD*, 6) that “clarifies and brings to expression something which was potential in the rest of us, but which with our burden of flesh and circumstance we were too torpid to utter” (*WD*, 13).

Santayana sees signs of constructive reform in contemporary culture but thinks fine arts, religion, and philosophy “are still in full career towards disintegration” (*WD*, 7). While acknowledging that pragmatism is “a very interesting fresh movement” (*WD*, 8) in philosophy, he does not think it signals “a reawakening of any organising instinct” (*WD*, 8). To the contrary, he views it as “an extreme expression of romantic anarchy” (*WD*, 8). Rather than providing a rational conception of the world and our place in it, Santayana thinks pragmatism undermines reason as a source of insight into the way things are and ought to be.

On Santayana’s reading, pragmatists (and here he has James and Bergson especially in mind) merely follow out the consequences of Berkeley’s critique of the concept of substance and Kant’s claim that

talk of “things-in-themselves” lacks sense. They view experience not merely as the means by which we know the world, but as the very stuff of reality.

Santayana rejects this view because he thinks it leads to solipsism—the view that only the mind and its experiences exist. On his reading, pragmatists view experience as it is given—so-called pure experience—as a continuous stream of uncognized feelings. These feelings take on cognitive significance only insofar as they are interpreted by means of concepts. However, unlike feelings, concepts are discrete, unchanging, and abstract, bearing atemporal logical relations to one other. Thus, far from representing the character of pure experience, conceptual understanding inevitably distorts it (and by extension, distorts our conception of the nature of reality). Moreover, pragmatists deny any necessity to the conceptual interpretations of experience we give, urging that their authority “lies in the fact that they may be more or less congenial or convenient, by enriching the flying moment aesthetically, or helping it slip prosperously into the next moment” (*WD*, 8). On such a view, Santayana urges, claims that purport to represent things not found in pure experience or that imply a reality beyond pure experience—claims about events in the past and future, other minds, or things distant in space—must be either rejected as cognitively meaningless or viewed as mere tools for negotiating the flux of experience. Rather than accounting for knowledge of a material world—a world that includes much besides the experience of knowers—Santayana thinks pragmatists end up denying its possibility. As he puts it, “If all knowledge is of experience and experience cannot be knowledge of anything else, knowledge proper is evidently impossible. There can be only feeling; and the least self-transcendence, even in memory, must be an illusion” (*WD*, 9).

To reply that pragmatists are not committed to solipsism because they deny that experience consists of sensory contents lodged within an individual mind is to miss Santayana’s point. It is true that James, for example, takes experience to be neutral between mind and matter—one and the same stuff being mental when viewed in the context of a subject’s life and material when viewed in the context of public events. But if, as James says, interpretations are true or false in virtue of how experiences are connected to one another and there is no truth that isn’t in a sense “malleable” to human need, then it would seem to follow that the reality we know, and not just our understanding of it,

is mind-dependent—that, in James’s words, “the trail of the human serpent is thus over everything.”<sup>19</sup> It is the failure to acknowledge the possibility of knowing something of a world that is altogether apart from our experience that Santayana finds indefensible. Instead of confuting the dichotomy between an idealism that locates the world in the mind and a realism that renders the world inaccessible because beyond the limits of experience, as pragmatists hope to do, Santayana thinks they end up with a view that implies that reality, insofar as it is an object of knowledge, is constituted by the subject’s interpretations of it.<sup>20</sup>

Santayana further claims that the solipsism implied by pragmatism gives way to an unsatisfying “moral materialism” (*WD*, 10). The line of thought here is not made explicit but the suggestion seems to be that having taken intuitions of pure experience to be foundational in philosophy, pragmatists find—rightly, Santayana avers—that there is nothing more evident in experience than feelings of expectancy and anticipation. Accordingly, they take reality to be inherently dynamic and to manifest change, growth, action, and novelty. In light of this, pragmatists venerate innovation and technological control over traditional contemplative virtues and, thereby, lend aid and comfort to proponents of the emerging industrial culture.

Finding nothing in pure experience corresponding to the subject or ego, Santayana continues, pragmatists deny the existence of consciousness and view the mind as material in nature. They identify passions with certain bodily sensations, ignoring their traditional role in moral psychology as exemplifications of the virtues and vices that steer us to the good. On such a view, the moral subject—the nobler, cherished aspects of human nature—becomes identified with parts of the physical world and the esteem accorded human nature is transferred to mere matter in motion. In the process, appreciation for the value of the passions as expressions of the human spirit (expressions

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19 William James, *Pragmatism*, Vol. 1, The Works of William James, ed. F. Burkhardt *et al.* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), 37.

20 Bergson, for example, writes: “The method we speak of alone permits us to go beyond idealism, as well as realism, to affirm the existence of objects inferior and superior (though in a certain sense interior) to us, to make them co-exist together without difficulty, and to dissipate gradually the obscurities that analysis accumulates round these great problems” (*An Introduction to Metaphysics* [hereafter *IM*], trans. T. E. Hulme [New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1912], 112). For Santayana, Bergson’s claim to at once go beyond idealism and realism while holding that objects are in a sense interior to us is equivocal, if not incoherent.

that, Santayana acknowledges, have material causes) is lost. Having “materialized” ethics and rejected the notion that the universe progresses towards fixed ends as an unempirical dogma, pragmatists have nothing in the way of moral inspiration to offer beyond faith in the idea of change itself. With no room for a conception of ultimate ends, and having limited knowledge to the discovery of practical means, pragmatists leave us without any reasonable account of what we ought to strive to become or achieve.

As Santayana sees it, the pragmatists’ turn toward pre-cognitive experience as fundamental in philosophy reflects the widespread notion that reason is something of a death force. Intelligence, on their view, is preoccupied with abstractions that are distant from vital matters and lack the intensity of lived experience. In light of this, pragmatism finds favor among those who seek to rein in the intellect in an effort to liberate an imagination no longer inspired by traditional religion and deadened by the daily grind of a culture governed by business interests, stale social conventions, and the pursuit of unrefined pleasures. But rather than liberate intelligence from its shackles, Santayana thinks pragmatists urge us to renounce detached contemplation of life and the world and immerse ourselves in immediate experience.

Santayana thinks the attempt to circumvent or restrain intelligence is as hopeless as it is dehumanizing. As he sees it, greatness requires an ideal vision of some possible order or organization. Yet in “an age when nobody trusts himself, or feels any confidence in reason” such greatness is impossible and so “there is none of it to-day” (*WD*, 14). Still, all is not gloom and doom for him. He thinks the current age remains intellectually active and open to new possibilities. On the one hand, modernism in religion and pragmatism in philosophy are attempts to rationalize the veneration of instinct, evolution, practical action, and novelty. On the other hand, romanticism (in Shelley’s poetry) and Platonism (in Russell’s philosophy) are attempts to find solace and guidance in the contemplation of a reality that is higher and more sublime than the mundane, material world. Both of these tendencies are “but gusts of doctrine; yet they prove that the spirit is not dead” (*WD*, 16). As to which, if any, will “carry the mind of the coming age,” he thinks only time will tell.

## II ~ Modernism and Christianity

Having argued that contemporary culture is torn between the worldview pragmatism promotes—a view that advances the values of the emerging industrial culture at the expense of compelling spiritual values integral to traditional religion—and Christianity—which advances religious values at odds with the scientific and democratic tendencies of the times—Santayana considers, in the second essay of *Winds of Doctrine*, the solution to this dilemma offered by Catholic modernism.<sup>21</sup>

Modernism emerged as a movement within the Catholic Church in the late nineteenth century. Its goal was to reform church doctrine and practices in light of contemporary knowledge and values.<sup>22</sup> Inspired by Kant and later by Bergson, modernists saw knowledge as confined within the limits of human experience and incapable of extending to the supernatural. Rather than take sacred texts literally—as the revealed word of God—modernists viewed them as human articulations of personal religious experience, experience rooted in pre-cognitive feeling or intuition. Modernism posed a challenge to the church because it legitimated the criticism of established dogma in light of new knowledge and changing values, made the institutional interpretation of religious dogma secondary to religious experience unmediated by ecclesiastical authority, and put all religions more or less on a par as legitimate, albeit diverse, expressions of personal religious sentiments. Santayana thinks the debate over modernism worthy of special attention because it carries the clash of civilizations described in his first essay to the very heart of what is “constitutionally the most stable of institutions” and “least inclined to revise its collective memory or established usages” (*WD*, 17), namely, the Catholic church.

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21 Though apt to describe himself as a Catholic, Santayana says he always used the term as “a matter of sympathy and traditional allegiance, not of philosophy” (*PGS*, 7). He was never a practicing Catholic and maintained that his philosophy is religious in the Protestant sense of the term, meaning that it decries belief in the literal truth of traditional religious dogmas (*PGS*, 588). Still, he calls religion the “head and front of everything” (*PGS*, 7) in his philosophy and claims to have retained “an unspoken and sacrificial trust in an unfathomable power...” adding that “*faith* and *trust* in that universal dispensation are signs of healthy life in ourselves, of intelligence and mastery; they bring, if we are reasonably plastic, a justified assurance of fellowship with reality, partly by participation and partly by understanding” (*PGS*, 588).

22 The leading modernists were Alfred Loisy (1857–1940), George Tyrrell (1861–1909), and Ernesto Buonaiuti (1881–1946). Edouard Le Roy (1870–1954), who served as an assistant to Bergson from 1914–1920, was also prominent in the movement.

Though Santayana says his essay on modernism is “patch-work... and I am afraid it shows it,” its central argument is clear.<sup>23</sup> He thinks modernism offers an untenable mix of secular and religious doctrine. Modernists hope to revitalize Catholicism by purging it of doctrines and practices that do not square with findings in history, science, and philosophy. While allowing that Catholicism has always adapted itself to changing circumstances and that it is fair for modernists to question practices that have either lost their point or are inconsistent, Santayana argues that modernism is unstable inasmuch as it is at odds with basic tenets of Christianity.

On Santayana’s view, Christianity, both in essence and origin, is a summons to renounce worldly goods and pursue a spiritual life in light of the prophecy that the world, being wicked, is destined to end. True Christians relinquish interest in such things as wealth, power, the gratification of desires, and concern for the opinions of others in order to evade the fate that awaits a corrupt world. They put their faith in a heavenly afterlife and devote their efforts in this life to ministering to the poor, the sick, and the downtrodden, and to preaching the word of God. Whether the destruction of the world is taken to involve its annihilation or merely the end of one’s earthly life, the basic teachings are the same: the call to repent is urgent, the consequences for one’s soul momentous, and the path to salvation otherworldly. The true Christian accords little ultimate significance to the mundane matters that fill the time leading up to the final judgment.

Santayana claims that Christianity (like Judaism and paganism before it) rests on a “supernatural physics” (*WD*, 23).<sup>24</sup> It requires belief in the existence of a higher power outside the forces of nature and allows that the “destiny which nature seems to prepare for us may be reversed... by an actual historical, physical transformation in the things themselves” (*WD*, 23). “While the church lives at all,” he says, “it must live on the strength” of its “supernaturalism, [its] literal realism, [its] other-worldliness” (*WD*, 26).

<sup>23</sup> *The Letters of George Santayana* [hereafter *LGS*] 2:111.

<sup>24</sup> Though nothing in his critique of modernism turns on it, it cannot be overlooked that in this essay Santayana betrays a view of Judaism that, as his biographer puts it, reflects a “prejudice unworthy of a man of his fineness in other matters, and scarcely comprehensible in the man who wrote *The Life of Reason and Realms of Being*” (John McCormick, *George Santayana: A Biography* [New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987], 359).

According to Santayana, this commitment to supernaturalism poses an inescapable dilemma for the church and its practitioners. To the extent that Christianity renounces the world and remains focused on purely spiritual pursuits, it lacks the means to effect change in the material world. On the other hand, to the extent it develops the capacity to bring about material change, it must, as an earthly institution, pursue the very sort of mundane interests it is pledged to renounce. In every age the church risks being corrupted by the tools it devises to promote itself and it is in its attempt to reconcile concern for supernatural salvation with concern for its survival as a worldly institution that the modernist debate is engaged.

As Santayana sees it, modernism does not represent a new way of thinking. It is driven by the same critical spirit that inspired the Renaissance and the emergence of Protestantism. Like thinkers of the Renaissance, modernists appeal to secular, rational standards of knowledge to scrutinize church dogma. For example, they view scriptures as historical documents the content of which is conditioned by the age in which they were produced and Biblical stories—such as the accounts of the incarnation and resurrection of Christ—as allegories, rather than literal records of events. Santayana has no quarrel with this approach to the critique of church dogma. Nor does he take issue with the conclusions to which it leads. For him, Christianity is important not because it is a true history or metaphysics. Its importance lies in its “*moral idealism*,” “the expression it gives, under cover of legends, prophecies, or mysteries, of the effort, the tragedy, and the consolations of human life” (*WD*, 33).

What Santayana thinks modernists fail to see is that their attempt to divorce the Christian account of the past from Christianity’s call for salvation and their rejection of God as an active force in the universe is “a *fundamental apostasy*” (*WD*, 23). In denying literal truth to Biblical lore, modernists end up replacing the traditional notion of sin with that of mere misfortune, rejecting revelation as a source of connection to a supernatural being, and undermining the urgency of the call to salvation by denying the reality of the final judgment. On the modernist view, the moral summons and prophecy of destruction that form “the soul of the gospel have lost all force... and become fables” (*WD*, 33). Christianity is reduced to a mere practice or convention. However much modernists claim to stay true to Catholicism, Santayana thinks

they end up unable to believe any part of it “as it demands to be believed” (*WD*, 32).

In light of this, Santayana finds it unsurprising that modernism was condemned as heresy (in an encyclical by Pius X in 1907) and its leaders excommunicated. What is mystifying, he thinks, is that such learned scholars as the modernists were could have been so ignorant as to think their views consonant with Catholic doctrine. Santayana allows that modernists have an uncompromising respect for historical facts and a sincere need to revitalize their faith but he observes that, as Catholics, they are also bound to uphold a fixed creed that overlaps and even contradicts secular history, science, and philosophy. Modernism is a precarious position, Santayana insists, because these two tendencies pull in opposite directions.

Santayana argues that how one assigns relative probabilities to Biblical and secular accounts of history depends in part on one’s own spiritual experience. To the true Christian, miracles seem anything but far-fetched and indeed are confirmed by the testimony of those that have borne witness to them, if not by one’s own experience. Rather than follow modernists in debunking Biblical accounts of history and explaining miracles away, the true Christian is apt to challenge and explain away the modernist’s disregard of the wealth of evidence for miracles provided through direct testimony. To reject miracles, as modernists do, on the grounds that they violate laws of nature, belief in which rests on our ability to predict and control events, is to appeal to non-Christian standards of evidence, standards that are rooted in practical and scientific knowledge rather than Biblical testimony or revelation. The true Christian sets aside this sort of profane knowledge precisely because it contradicts the revealed word of God and the supernatural physics that are the cornerstone of the faith. Christianity, Santayana insists, was never a religion for rationalists, having at its core a certain alienation from the world—the world disclosed by historians and scientists included. It thus remains stalwart in the face of any challenges based on secular learning in history and natural science that modernists offer.

Santayana attributes the modernists’ blindness to their own heresy to their seminary training. Lacking knowledge of other religions with which to compare Catholicism, modernists failed to see what is essential to their faith. Moreover, having been taught in seminary that



anything good or true is founded in the Catholic faith, the modernists naively assumed that all sincere religious inspiration points in the same direction. Faced with diverse interpretations of religious dogma, modernists opted to stretch traditional church teachings to accommodate differences rather than interpreting them strictly and rejecting alternative renderings as erroneous or heretical. This approach led the modernists to stray, not only from the teachings of the Catholic Church, but also from the doctrines that are essential to Christianity. At the end of the day, Santayana thinks, the modernists, however unwittingly, ended up as no more than “freethinker[s], with a sympathetic interest in religious illusions” (*WD*, 31) who purge religion of “its first principles, of its whole history, and of its sublime if chimerical ideal” (*WD*, 33).

Does the fact that church doctrine flies in the face of history, philosophy, and science doom it to irrelevance and extinction as the modernist fears? Santayana thinks not. He reckons that people alienated from life in this world will continue to be drawn to the Christian promise of salvation in the next. He also thinks that in the current age people are open to any sort of superstition and faith and are aided and abetted in this by philosophers who question the objectivity of science and history.

In the end, then, Santayana rejects the modernist view that the Catholic Church is necessarily weakened by its resistance to the intellectual currents of the age. Intellectual fashions come and go and while Santayana agrees it would be dishonest to insist on the literal truth of the Bible, he thinks it foolish to suppose that what is incredible to the contemporary mind could not some day prove edifying. “The imagination is suggestible and there is nothing men will not believe in matters of religion” (*WD*, 36). Science and history tell us something about the way the world is apart from us; however, Santayana believes, people’s experience of the vanity of the world, of sin and salvation, even of so-called miracles, is far more powerful and influential on their beliefs. Catholicism may be only one faith among many and beset with difficulties but it still offers advantages to its followers in the way of “charm,” “comprehensiveness,” “maturity,” “internal rationality,” and “external adaptability” (*WD*, 37). Thus there is no reason to doubt that people will be attracted to it in the future. The sole hope of the church, he advises, lies in retaining its “frank supernaturalism” and “tight clericalism” (*WD*, 37). To embrace modernism would be suicide

for the church since modernism “concedes that everything in Christianity, as Christians hold it, is an illusion” (*WD*, 37).

### III ~ The Philosophy of M. Henri Bergson

While Santayana rejects the modernist’s response to the conflict between the industrial and Christian worldviews that he thinks besets contemporary culture, he does not reject the modernist critique of Christianity. He agrees with modernists that Christianity is false when taken as an account of historical events or the workings of nature and thinks any significance Christian teachings have is moral in nature, deriving from the meaningfulness of the conception of human life it promotes. Having intimated in his first essay that there is much to be said for the spiritual outlook of Christianity when compared to that of industrial civilization, he sets out in the third essay of *Winds of Doctrine* to examine in greater depth the philosophical views associated with industrial culture, views of which he thinks Henri Bergson’s writings are “the most representative” (*WD*, 39).

When Santayana first read Bergson’s work he was very much impressed. However, after meeting him, sometime in 1906–7, Santayana dramatically reversed his opinion. As he explains:

I thought him a great man, one of those whom we admire without feeling called upon to agree or disagree, since they seem to be above controversy, like the poets. But when I saw Bergson, and felt what his inspiration was, that he was a little cowed advocate of irrational prejudices and stubborn misunderstandings, feigning and acting the part of an impartial, subtle, liberal thinker – then all the charm vanished even from his written words, and I hear the cracked voice of the sectary and the whine of the reactionary in every syllable. (*LGS*, 1:378)

Despite his low opinion of Bergson’s work, Santayana seems to have devoted considerable attention to it, the essay in *Winds of Doctrine* having been culled from “reams” he had written on the subject (*LGS*, 2:111). While he appears to have second-guessed the essay’s strident tone, he seems not to have doubted its cogency. He writes:

Benda’s capital book on Bergson...relieved me of all my qualms about my essay, which I feared might seem too severe.<sup>25</sup> When I read now some newspaper accounts of [Bergson’s] visit to America...

25 Julien Benda, *Le Bergsonisme ou une philosophie de la mobilité* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1912).

I begin to fear on the contrary that I have taken him too seriously. But the best way of discrediting a charlatan is perhaps not to call him one. (*LGS*, 2:128)

Bergson's thought defies simple summary. However, to appreciate Santayana's discussion two elements of it must be understood. The first is his view of the nature and limits of conceptual knowledge. The second is his reliance on immediate experience as a model for understanding reality.

Bergson distinguishes between discursive or symbolic knowledge—such as that provided by positive science—and intuition—for him, the stock and trade of metaphysics. Symbolic knowledge is relative—it provides an understanding of objects that is conventional, partial, and fashioned to serve some practical interest. Mechanics, for example, is conventional because it represents bodies using an agreed-upon frame of reference and a coordinate system for identifying the various positions in space. It is partial because it considers only those aspects of things relevant to calculating their motions and ignores everything else. It is practical since the aspects of reality it considers are singled out in light of an interest in predicting and controlling objects to satisfy needs and desires. In the final analysis, Bergson insists, every application of a concept characterizes what we are to do with some object or what that object may do for us.

Intuition, on the other hand, provides knowledge of things as they are in themselves, rather than as interpreted selectively through conventional forms of representation designed with practical interests in mind. Intuitive knowledge is absolute, rather than relative, since it discloses the intrinsic nature of things—what they are like apart from any connection to other things. It is gained, not by subsuming objects under concepts, as symbolic knowledge is, but rather by identifying with objects. As Bergson explains:

By intuition is meant the kind of *intellectual sympathy* by which one places oneself within an object in order to coincide with what is unique in it and consequently inexpressible. Analysis, on the contrary, is the operation which reduces the object to elements already known, that is, to elements common both to it and other objects. To analyze, therefore, is to express a thing as a function of something other than itself. All analysis is thus a translation, a development into symbols. (*IM*, 7)

To illustrate the distinction between symbolic knowledge—what he calls “analysis” in the passage just quoted—and intuition, Bergson contrasts knowledge of a character in a novel gained by reading the author’s portrayal and the intuitive understanding of this same character gained through “intellectual sympathy.” As he sees it, the former is deficient in at least three respects. First, since there is no limit to the conceivable traits of a human being, any description of the character is bound to be incomplete. Second, no description can convey the character’s innermost essence. Being couched in general concepts, a description can only reveal traits the character possesses as a result of her connections to other things. To describe her as tall is to say how she stands compared to other people with respect to height, to say she is ebullient is to liken her to people with a certain energy and enthusiasm and to contrast her with people lacking such qualities, and likewise for any such characterization. In describing what the character is like in relation to other things, the author’s portrayal fails to convey what she is inherently. Finally, Bergson thinks the author’s description represents the life of the character as a series of discrete states—certain things are said to be true of her at some times and other things true of her at other times—and no collection of such states can capture the “duration” of her life (*IM*, 3–6).

“Duration,” among the most difficult and fundamental of Bergson’s technical concepts, connotes a continuous, evolving consciousness. Such consciousness involves the unfolding of an inner impulse, but in ways that are neither governed by fixed laws, as in mechanics, nor directed to fixed ends as final causes. The duration of the life of a character in a novel eludes description because it is concrete and particular, rather than abstract or general; dynamic, rather than static; continuous, rather than a series of discrete states; and independent of relations to things external to her. Being ineffable, duration is only grasped intuitively—by imaginatively projecting oneself into the character’s stream of consciousness.

For Bergson, intuition is not only a method for understanding lived experience but also the proper route to knowledge in metaphysics. As it is intuited, duration is “the foundation of our being... the very substance of the world in which we live.”<sup>26</sup> In the universe, duration

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<sup>26</sup> Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution* [hereafter *CE*], trans. Arthur Mitchell (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press Publishers, 1975), 45.

involves the playing out of a cosmic impetus, or *élan vital*. This impetus is unfathomable in scientific terms, not least because its inner nature defies conceptual understanding. Still, Bergson claims, it is immanent in evolution—the progression from what is vague, homogeneous and simple to what is definite, diverse, and complex—and in the emergence of forms of being that are novel in the sense that they are not merely the result of the reconfiguration of antecedent elements, as mechanics would compel us to view them.

In his essay, Santayana portrays Bergson as an anti-intellectual whose views are rooted in prejudice and confusion, rather than honest reflection about knowledge or reality. He takes issue with Bergson's reliance on intuitive knowledge as a basis from which to challenge the claims of science and common sense to know a world that is independent of experience. What is more, he scorns Bergson's use of intuitive knowledge as a foundation for metaphysics, accusing him of trading in pseudo-explanations and falsely projecting a conception of the meaning of life into the structure of the universe.

Santayana begins by suggesting that Bergson's notoriety is due more to the style of his writing than its substance. While Bergson talks at great length about the latest developments in science, Santayana claims he does so as an outsider—as someone suspicious of science and concerned to limit its reach, rather than as someone committed to its advance. Santayana attributes at least part of Bergson's failure to consider science in its own terms to his belief that evolution is progressive. He thinks Bergson (among others) slides from the undeniable claim that later things grow out of earlier ones to the patently false claim that later things are an improvement on what they emerge from. This error leads Bergson to view past ideas as significant only insofar as they anticipate contemporary views and to deny to thinkers of earlier times the same capacity for knowledge that he claims for himself. Bergson's view of progress imposes a deceptive narrative on the history of ideas and reduces questions about the worth of ideas to questions of their chronological order. Against this view, Santayana insists that it is the approach to truth—timeless and eternal—that determines the value of developments in the evolution of thought, not the place of ideas in the evolution of thought that determines the degree to which they approach the truth.

Santayana next claims that Bergson's views about science are tainted by his resistance to the notion that human beings are a small

and insignificant part of a vast, impersonal, mechanical universe. The suggestion is that the sense of alienation Bergson derives from the mechanical view of nature drives his efforts to reconceive the universe in terms he finds more congenial—terms drawn from experience as it is immediately felt or lived. Santayana insists, however, that to impute any conception of the meaning of life to contemporary mathematical physics is to attribute to it “pretensions and extensions which it does not have” (*WD*, 43). In affirming that the laws of matter apply to everything in the universe, physicists do not claim that the ontology of physics exhausts reality. Nor in uncovering the material conditions of events and formulating precise laws to predict their occurrence do they imply that only those features of the world that figure in their calculations are real. Physics does not show that it is pointless or empty to reflect on and pursue ideals that lack grounding in our knowledge of the physical world. Nor is it an indictment of physical theory to maintain that there are such things as truth, beauty and goodness, love, art, music, and poetry about which physics has little, if anything, to say. Santayana thinks physicists can even grant Bergson’s point that the freedom one experiences as an agent cannot be captured in scientific terms—precisely because it is an immediate feeling, rather than a relation among events of the sort that physics studies. As Santayana sees it, then, nothing in physics legitimates (or, for that matter, repudiates) the sort of ennui Bergson is concerned to avoid.

Bergson’s view of mathematics is, according to Santayana, no less misguided than his view of physics. He is wary of mathematics in part because he takes its application in natural science to imply that the course of events is precisely determined by fixed laws, rather than evolving in ways that allow for creative redirection. However, Bergson fails to appreciate that if mathematics has proven useful in predicting the order of events, it is because events in the world really do unfold in calculable ways. Moreover, in claiming that mathematics subserves our interest in predicting and controlling events, Santayana thinks Bergson misses its true importance. Mathematicians, he insists, study ideal possibilities without regard for their application in science and life. In discovering new possibilities, mathematics expands the horizons of thought, rather than boxing it in, as Bergson suggests.

When discussing natural history and biology, Santayana thinks Bergson is right to observe that phenomena such as growth,

reproduction, and nutrition are not easily explained by mechanical principles—not least because they are irreversible, unlike mechanical processes. But rather than drawing attention to these phenomena with a view to improving our scientific understanding of them, Bergson cites them in an effort to show that scientific understanding of them is impossible. Such a view, Santayana maintains, blocks intellectual progress. Instead of explaining these phenomena by appeal to processes that are well understood, Bergson mystifies them by attributing them to the “magic power of the *élan vital*” – an inscrutable agency that is not only inherently unpredictable but also far more obscure than the phenomena it is invoked to explain (*WD*, 45).

It is important to note that while he rejects Bergson’s views about science, Santayana does not simply dismiss his contrast between conceptual understanding and intuition. To the contrary, he grants that it is an important distinction to note. Were Bergson only to be making the point that in the absence of conceptual interpretation immediate experience lacks cognitive significance and that, as a result, our conceptions of the natural world are nothing more than conjectures, Santayana would have no complaint. What he finds wrong-headed is Bergson’s suggestion that inasmuch as science goes beyond immediate experience and claims to reveal something of what nature is like apart from appearances it is false and needs to be supplemented, perhaps supplanted, by a metaphysics grounded in intuition.

It is also important to recognize that Santayana does not reject Bergson’s views simply because they cannot be squared with the mechanical explanations offered in physics. He grants that it is legitimate to question whether the laws governing biological phenomena can be subsumed under the laws of physics or whether, instead, they are autonomous. However, he thinks this question is very different from the question of whether *élan vital* is a legitimate explanatory notion. On Bergson’s view, *élan vital* is a non-mechanical life force, one that cannot be subsumed under physical laws. In invoking it to account for biological phenomena, Santayana thinks Bergson denies the continuity between the physical and the biological and treats life as “an alien and ghostly madness descending into [material being],” rather than as an effect of material conditions (*WD*, 48). Bergson does not merely counsel caution in the face of overconfidence about the explanatory power of mechanics, as defenders of vitalism in biology do. He sets out to preempt the scientific understanding of life altogether. Unable to

accept that he and his fellow creatures are material systems in a material world, Bergson jumps to the view that everything is a center of passion and sensation with which he can sympathetically identify. The result, according to Santayana, is an anthropomorphic view of nature better suited to Aesop's fables than a serious treatise.

Santayana does not deny that the method of imaginative sympathy that Bergson defends as a means to intuitive knowledge can yield important insights. He thinks it reasonable, for example, to discern other people's feelings or experiences by reflecting on one's own reactions in similar circumstances. However, he thinks this method is productive only where the knower and the known are significantly similar. Where there are vast differences of culture, for example, conclusions arrived at by intuition are apt to reveal more about the person straining to understand than the subjects he or she is seeking to comprehend. When it comes to applying the method to other species or to inorganic objects, Santayana thinks it stretches credulity past the breaking point to suppose that the conclusions Bergson comes to tell us much of anything about the world. If people find Bergson's account of the universe compelling, Santayana suggests, it is only because it is couched in terms that, having been drawn from immediate experience, have a familiar feel, not because they are rooted in the inner workings of things.

Taken as a contribution to subjective psychology, on the other hand, Santayana thinks Bergson's account of immediate experience is insightful. He grants, for example, that sensuous daydreams manifest the fluidity, continuity, and indeterminacy characteristic of duration and freedom, as Bergson understands these terms. He likewise thinks the experience of shooting pains and intestinal movements exemplifies the sort of continuity that Bergson insists cannot be represented spatially (since it does not involve a change of place within a homogeneous field comprising discrete points). And he agrees with Bergson that consciousness comes in "stretches," or "aesthetic wholes"—like "snatches of melody"—that "we should never be aware of anything were we not aware of something all at once" (*WD*, 53). But, unlike Bergson, Santayana sees nothing in such experiences to give science pause. He thinks it is one thing to reflect on unconceptualized experience and note how undetermined and fluid it is, quite another to deny that such experience has material conditions amenable to scientific explanation. In noting that immediate experience is unpredictable,



that its flow is prior to what moves in it, that it lacks any separation between perceptions and the objects of perception, Santayana thinks Bergson makes a legitimate contribution to our understanding of animal sensibility. Bergson's mistakes arise from his taking ruminations on subjective experience to reveal the structure of the universe and dismissing any conception of the world that goes beyond immediate appearance as fictional.

To highlight the confusion underlying Bergson's way of proceeding, Santayana considers his discussion of creative writing. He applauds Bergson's characterization of the experience of a writer who projects herself into the lives of her characters and finds herself carried along by the internal momentum of the story she is crafting—"heighten the tone a little, and you might have a poem on those joyful pangs of gestation and parturition" (*WD*, 56). Yet, he insists, this characterization is a "literary confession," not serious science, relying as it does on data of introspection that are "casual and superficial" (*WD*, 56). Writers do not always strain to identify with their subject matter. The way they weave together the strands of their narratives, far from being inexplicable, is *post hoc* traceable to the "sensuous endowment of the literary man, his moral complexion, and his general circumstances" (*WD*, 56). Nor is there any reason to suppose the momentum writers sometimes experience to be anything other than the "discharge of many automatisms long imprinted on the system" (*WD*, 56). While Santayana thinks it hard to deny that Shakespeare, for example, planted himself in the lives of characters like Antony and Cleopatra—in the sense that he drew on historical information, imagined himself in their situation, and tried to make out their feelings—he thinks the suggestion that Shakespeare literally entered into their psyches to be nothing short of fantastic. "Here again, ... we have ... a piece of really wonderful introspection, spoiled by being projected into a theory of nature, which it spoils in its turn" (*WD*, 57).

Santayana recognizes that his criticisms draw on common sense and science, appeals that are apt to be unpersuasive given Bergson's insistence that in philosophy ineffable experience trumps discursive knowledge. He is well aware that Bergson views talk of a world outside the totality of possible experience as unintelligible and takes it to imply empty and pernicious dualisms between appearance and reality, between the heart (i.e., lived experience) and the head (i.e., the world of facts as it is rendered intellectually). However, Santayana

makes clear that he speaks only as a proponent of the life of reason, his point being that from this point of view Bergson's deference to immediate experience over the intellect countenances immersion in dreams and delusions (i.e., appearances) at the expense of understanding. Unable to defend reason in other than intellectual terms, Santayana says, "All a critic can aim at is to understand these sentiments [behind Bergson's views] as existing facts, and to give them the place that belongs to them in the moral world" (*WD*, 59).

Having clarified his own critical standpoint, Santayana turns his attention to the model of evolution that Bergson advances. As he sees it, Bergson's view of evolution as the progressive development of complexity and heterogeneity out of simplicity and homogeneity is a metaphysical dogma. While granting that any account of the origins of things is speculative, Santayana considers it rash to conjecture on the basis of intuition that nature is ever simple—given that it is wider and richer than both our experience of it and our capacity to divine its structure. Bergson, he charges, moves from the fact that immediate experience lacks any inherent complexity (i.e., discriminated parts) and contains no clues as to the causal mechanisms that give rise to it to the view that complexity in the universe has evolved from a primal state in which it is utterly absent. Santayana's objection to this is not easy to make out but what he seems to suggest is that it is hard to fathom what there is in a purely homogeneous state that could give rise to complexity—how, that is, the primal state Bergson posits has the power to produce what, being homogenous, it does not contain, imply, or foreshadow. "Doubtless new things are always arising... but that the real cause of them should be simpler than they, that their Creator, if I may use this language, should be ignorant and give more than he has, who can stomach that?" (*WD*, 59–60).

On Bergson's view, complex forms of being emerge creatively (i.e., non-deterministically) through the interaction of *élan vital* and inert matter that resists and opposes it. But Santayana wonders why complexity should be expected to emerge from interactions of this sort. To say that it is simply a law that things progress from the simple to the complex is to restate what needs explaining, not to explain it. On the other hand, to account for the evolution of complexity by invoking a set of conditions from which it might plausibly be thought to emerge would be to show it to be a natural process, not the result of forces outside or beyond nature. Santayana acknowledges that it is

presumptuous to suppose scientific knowledge is ultimate, if by this it is meant that science represents reality as it is inherently and apart from us. He thinks this because he sees no good reason to think the nature of reality is limited by, or mirrored in, forms of human understanding. However, he sees no reason to follow Bergson in claiming that scientific explanations are nothing more than useful tools and that they are in need of supplementation by metaphysics. For him, a scientific explanation is ultimate to the extent that it accounts for phenomena in ways that cannot be improved upon. All explanations come to an end and Santayana thinks any stopping point involves a connection between the phenomena being explained and their antecedent conditions. “If atoms and their collisions, by any chance, were the ultimate and inmost facts discoverable, they would supply the explanation of everything, in the only sense in which anything existent can be explained at all” (*WD*, 60). Just as it would not deepen our understanding of atoms to attribute their behavior to an underlying Will to collide in certain ways (or to the Will of God, for that matter), so too it does not deepen our understanding to follow Bergson in attributing evolution to an underlying cosmic life force.

To drive home his point, Santayana considers Bergson’s discussion of the evolution of the eye. On Bergson’s reading, Darwinian evolution occurs by accidental variations, some of which become pervasive and others of which disappear through the mechanism of natural selection. He thinks the odds of two independent series of accidental changes producing one and the same complex structure are astronomically long. Yet both vertebrates and mollusks have eyes, even though they have no common ancestors with vision. After rejecting as implausible the hypothesis that the eye emerged by a sudden leap, rather than by a gradual accumulation of small modifications, and also the hypothesis that the eye is created by the impingement of light on various organisms, Bergson concludes that the evolution of eyes cannot be explained as a confluence of material causes and must instead be attributed to an organizing principle—*élan vital*—working on and through matter.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Bergson writes: “The more we reflect upon it, the more we shall see that this production of the same effect by two different accumulations of an enormous number of small causes is contrary to the principles of mechanistic philosophy... Every moment, right before our eyes, nature arrives at identical results, in sometimes neighboring species, by entirely different embryogenic

In countering this argument, Santayana urges that even if Bergson has the facts right, all that can reasonably be concluded is that eyes can be formed in different ways, just as puddles of water are formed both by rain and underground springs. Explaining the emergence of eyes in mollusks and vertebrates by appeal to a tendency to evolve vision is, for him, akin to invoking a tendency to evolve puddles to explain the various ways water pools. Even if no satisfactory scientific account of the emergence of eyes in mollusks and vertebrates were forthcoming, Santayana insists, Bergson's appeal to *élan vital* would no more be vindicated than the failure to uncover precise laws of weather vindicates the appeal to Neptune and Aeolus as the causes of storms. To attribute phenomena to *élan vital* is not to explain them but rather to accept them as the brute and arbitrary effects of a brute and arbitrary force.

Not only does Bergson fail to shed light on the question of how eyes came to be, Santayana adds, he raises a host of speculative questions: how does *élan vital* determine its end, how does it conceive of it in advance of attaining it, how does it select the means by which its end is achieved, and how does it act on and through matter without itself being material? In the absence of answers to such questions, Santayana thinks appeal to *élan vital* "illustrates the worst and most familiar vices of metaphysics. It marvels at some appearance, not to investigate it, but to give it an unctuous name. Then it turns this name into a power, that by its operation creates the appearance. This is simply verbal mythology or the hypostasis of words, and there would be some excuse for a rude person who should call it rubbish" (*WD*, 61–62).

Santayana considers Bergson's penchant for invoking traits of immediate experience to explain phenomena, instead of viewing them as in need of explanation, an abuse of psychology in metaphysics. He sees this sort of error as endemic to the Kantian tendency to discount the distinction between things as they are experienced or judged to be and things as they are in themselves apart from experience or judgment. Santayana recognizes the difficulty of persuading post-Kantian idealists that there is a world entirely independent of mind. Any examples of mind-independent objects that might be offered—hands, molecules, Ancient Greece, natural numbers no one has counted—are

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processes" (*CE*, 83–84). Thus, he adds: "Whether we will or no, we must appeal to some inner directing principle in order to account for this convergence of effects" (*CE*, 85).

all too easily construed by idealists as things falling within the realm of possible experience and, as such, not truly independent of the mind. However, Santayana thinks such construals involve an illicit slide from the legitimate claim that knowledge of objects is rooted in experience to the dubious ontological claim that objects known through experience are parts of experience. Such a view is a counterintuitive combination of skepticism—the denial that things as they are apart from us can be known—and the claim that talk of things as they are is nothing more than talk of things as they are experienced or judged to be.

It might seem that Bergson sidesteps Santayana's critique of Kantian philosophy, since he views idealism and realism as rooted in a single error. According to him, idealists and realists agree that realism implies a world that is the way it is whether or not we can discover or describe it correctly. The difference is that idealists deny this concept of reality legitimately applies to the objects that we know and hold instead that all we take to be real is comprised of this or that bit of experience. Bergson thinks he can avoid both idealism and realism by holding that one and the same metaphysical tendency manifests itself as a world of subjective experience, on the one hand, and as a world of material objects set over against subjective experience, on the other. Rather than viewing mind and world as separate and independent domains of being, as realists and idealists traditionally have done, Bergson views them as different configurations of one and the same primal stuff—pure experience. On this view, idealists are right (and realists wrong) that there is no world beyond pure experience. However, realists are right (and idealists wrong) that objects exist outside, and independently of, the experience of individual knowers.

For Santayana, Bergson's resolution of the question of realism and idealism is a cheat. As he sees it, Bergson's account of the emergence of mind and matter out of pure experience is nothing more than a psychological explanation of how, given immediate experience, a mind might come to know the difference between mind and matter. Even if Bergson's account is true as a matter of psychology, Santayana thinks it cannot be taken to shed light on the nature of mind and matter without regarding the processes of knowing as somehow constitutive of the objects known. For Bergson, the contrast of mind and world remains a distinction between kinds of experiences, rather than between experience and what it is experience of. Moreover, Santayana

insists that the pure experience with which Bergson identifies the world presupposes a mind in which such experience occurs. Bergson thus remains committed to idealism despite his protestations to the contrary.

Santayana acknowledges that Bergson's idealism differs from earlier versions inasmuch as he views the world of pure experience as a world in process—as something coming into being, rather than wrought once and for all according to timeless principles. However, he sees tensions in this view that Bergson does not consider. If (following William James) one stresses the temporal dimensions of Bergson's view of reality—the fact that reality unfolds—then one will build a metaphysics by tracing the consequences of the view that the universe is flux. If, on the other hand, one focuses on the immediacy of the experience out of which everything is constituted (as Bergson himself seems to), then one is forced to reduce the flux (i.e., the flow from past to future) to what is present (i.e., to the present image of what is past and the present anticipation of what is future). This latter view, far from being novel, harkens back to Plotinus's conception of the One and to Spinoza's notion of substance.

“Nor,” according to Santayana, “is this the only point at which [Bergson's] philosophy ... drops its mask of novelty and shows us a familiar face” (*WD*, 64). For all its alleged openness and indeterminacy, evolution, on Bergson's view, remains subject to certain constraints: it must create things in sequence, not all at once; unfold in only one sequence, not in all possible sequences at the same time; and proceed in a definite direction, rather than jumping incoherently from moment to moment or reversing itself. In traditional religion, these features of evolution would be traced to a supernatural deity and Santayana wonders if there are not religious motives behind Bergson's work—the implication being that it is Bergson's spiritual values that drive his conception of the facts, not the other way around.

Santayana rounds out his discussion of Bergson's philosophy by examining its implications for ethics. Although Bergson had not yet written on the subject when *Winds of Doctrine* appeared, Santayana thinks a system of ethics is implicit in the model of evolution he defends. As Santayana sees it, the view that *élan vital* unfolds freely and progressively implies that living things have a duty to persevere, labor, experiment, and propagate. They are also obliged to exercise their

absolute freedom—their independence from antecedent causes—to act in ways that are continuous with, and hence loyal to, the past. Santayana considers this view to be ill-founded—since it is a normative view that is purported to be grounded in physical facts—and, even confused, inasmuch as it defines the ultimate good in terms of what unfolds in the future, rather than what is timeless and eternal. Still, philosophical foundations aside, he thinks it a view of ethics worthy of careful examination.

In evaluating Bergson's ethics, Santayana focuses on what it has to say about death. If, as Bergson claims, *élan vital* is the origin of all being, then matter is merely a manifestation of living experience—one of the ways the primordial life force expresses itself—and not a condition of the existence of life. On such a view, Santayana argues, there is nothing outside of or opposed to the life force that could bring life to an end. Santayana finds this view implausible, taking it to be obvious that there are genuine material threats to life. He observes, moreover, that on Bergson's account of evolution it is only in the face of inert obstacles that impede the life force that new and increasingly complex entities come into being. Given Bergson's claim that the material world is nothing more than a useful tool, it would seem to follow from this that any individual center of consciousness can be extinguished only through the creative efforts of other centers of consciousness who are pursuing their own interests in an effort to further *élan vital*. On this view, "Each mind sucks the world, so far as it can, into its own vortex... The one that succeeds in ruling that movement will live on; the other[s], I suppose, will die" (*WD*, 67). *Élan vital* carries on in whichever form of life wins out in the struggle among centers of consciousness and each death is to be viewed as worthwhile inasmuch as it prepares the way for the more advanced forms of life that emerge from it. Just as the death of grass makes possible the life of the sheep that eats it, the death of the sheep makes possible the life of the humans who eat it. But on this line of thinking, Santayana argues, it follows that if there should emerge a form of life more complex than human beings whose continuation requires the extinction of the human race, Bergson would have to view the destruction of humanity as right and good.

In addition to finding his ethical vision unpalatable, Santayana argues that Bergson has contradictory views concerning the prospects for human immortality. On one hand, Bergson's model of biological

evolution precludes the immortality of individuals. On that view, *élan vital* persists throughout evolution—and is thus immortal—but only as something wholly general and undifferentiated. The centers of consciousness through which *élan vital* is carried forward are individual only as a result of being tied to a material body—something with a specific location in space and time, a definite set of sensory modalities, particular practical needs, all of which constitute its particular perspective on the world. Since individuality resides only in material conditions that *élan vital* continually leaves behind, it is impossible for an individual center of consciousness to be immortal.

On the other hand, Santayana thinks Bergson's discussion of *élan vital* in metaphysics allows for the possibility of individual immortality. On this view, *élan vital* is not a principle that operates in opposition to matter. It is rather the source of all being—organic and inorganic. If *élan vital* gives rise to centers of consciousness attached to material bodies, it must be because it is destined to do so from the start, there being nothing outside the life force to account for it. But there is nothing in the bare idea of *élan vital* working its way through individual centers of consciousness to preclude the immortality of individuals, so long as the bodily form necessary for a center of conscious to be individual also persists.

Santayana thinks Bergson fails to adhere consistently to either of these two views of immortality. He does not (and Santayana thinks cannot plausibly) preach the immortality of the body, as he must on the metaphysical view of *élan vital*—the view that allows immortality is possible. But neither does he abandon the idea of personal immortality, as he must if he adheres to the biological conception of *élan vital*. To the contrary, Bergson says “the whole of humanity, in space and in time, is one immense army galloping beside and before and behind each of us in an overwhelming charge able to beat down every resistance and clear the most formidable obstacles, perhaps even death” (*CE*, 295). Thus Bergson has no consistent position on immortality.

In closing his essay, Santayana condemns Bergson's work as nothing more than an assault on understanding rooted in a misguided love of primitive illusions (i.e., uninterpreted appearances). He attributes the favorable reception of Bergson's work to a widespread suspicion of science and the intellect more generally, and a propensity—especially prominent among those engaged in commerce—to subordinate



intellectual interests to practical concerns. However well suited to the times Bergson's ideas may be, Santayana insists they lack an adequate foundation.

#### IV ~ The Philosophy of Mr. Bertrand Russell

Having dispatched the philosophy he associates with the emerging industrial culture, Santayana turns his attention in his next essay to what he considers to be a more constructive line of thought—the philosophy of Bertrand Russell. In “The Intellectual Temper of the Age,” Santayana portrayed Russell as a defender of reason, swimming against the rising tide of pragmatism. In “The Philosophy of Mr. Bertrand Russell” he uses Russell's work as a jumping-off point to develop his own ideas. His discussion is of interest, not only for the light it sheds on the development of his thought, but also for its impact on Russell, who says “It was Santayana's criticism (in *Winds of Doctrine*) that caused me to abandon the belief in the objectivity of ‘good’...,” after which he embraced the view that value claims express subjective attitudes and preferences.<sup>28</sup>

Except for the opening paragraphs, which are new, the essay is a reprint of a three-part review of Russell's *Problems of Philosophy* and *Philosophical Essays* published in the *Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods*.<sup>29</sup> Santayana's discussion is the culmination of conversations with Russell, and to a lesser extent G. E. Moore, dating back to 1896–97 when Santayana spent a sabbatical year in Cambridge.<sup>30</sup> Until about 1914, Santayana met regularly with Russell and Moore, finding

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28 Bertrand Russell, “The Philosophy of Santayana” (*PGS*, 470). Nicholas Griffin questions Russell's claim, citing a letter written in 1912—before *Winds of Doctrine* appeared—in which he seems to favor an emotivist theory of ethics. Given that Santayana's review appeared in 1911 and Russell knew of it, the letter cited by Griffin is consistent with Russell's recollection. See Nicholas Griffin (ed.), *The Selected Letters of Bertrand Russell, Vol. I: The Private Years 1884–1914* [hereafter *SLBR*] (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1992), 412.

29 See George Santayana, “Russell's Philosophical Essays,” *Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods* 8, nos. 3, 5, and 16 (1911): 57–63, 113–24, and 421–32, respectively.

30 Santayana and Russell met in 1896, Russell having urged his brother Frank, with whom Santayana was good friends, to make the introduction. Later that year Russell wrote, “Santayana is really a nice person, genuinely cultivated through and through: Logan liked him very much, and so did I. His drawbacks are laziness and a tendency to aesthetic sentimentality” (*SLBR*, 175). Much later, Russell claimed to have “admired him [Santayana] as much as I disagreed with him” (*The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell, Vol. 1, 1872–1914* [Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1951], 347), though in 1906 he wrote that he found “[Santayana's] temperament very repulsive” (*SLBR*, 300).

them to be very helpful interlocutors. Their “views are near enough to mine to be stimulating to me, while the fact that they live in an atmosphere of controversy (which for myself I hate) renders them keenly alive to all sorts of objections and pitfalls which I need to be warned of, in my rather solitary and un-checked reasonings” (*LGS*, 2:95). Russell, he wrote, “is a logician and mathematician, strong where I am weakest, so that it is not always easy for us to understand each other... However, we feel sympathy even in our diversity” (*LGS*, 2:145).<sup>31</sup>

Santayana had already expressed much the same attitude directly to Russell when informing him of his forthcoming review:

It is rather late to thank you for your “Philosophical Essays”, but you may soon see unmistakable evidence of the great interest I have taken in them, as I am writing an elaborate review... You will not expect me to agree with you in everything, but, whatever you may think of my ideas, I always feel that yours, and Moore’s too, make for the sort of reconstruction in philosophy which I should welcome. It is a great bond to dislike the same things, and dislike is perhaps a deeper indication of our real nature than explicit affections, since

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For his part, Santayana found Russell on first meeting to be “very clever and nice” (*LGS*, 1:168). Years later he wrote: “There is a strange mixture in [Russell], as in his brother, of great ability and great disability; prodigious capacity and brilliancy here—astonishing unconsciousness and want of perception there. They are like creatures of a species somewhat different from man” (*LGS*, 2:172). Santayana’s respect for Russell persisted long after their working relationship ended. Upon learning that Russell had fallen on hard times, Santayana came to his financial aid, calling Russell “a perfectly ideal incumbent for that Fellowship [i.e., the pension Santayana paid him]... old and almost penniless, but still brimming with undimmed genius and suppressed immortal work’s! [*sic*]” (*LGS*, 6:53). “I don’t agree with him in politics or in philosophy,” Santayana noted, “yet we are good intellectual friends” (*LGS*, 6:54). Commenting on his own largesse, Santayana wrote, “in one sense, no doubt, it is generous: but we are dealing with superior people and with work that may go down in history: somebody said in public not long ago that there were only three important names in the history of British Philosophy: Locke, Hume, & Russell. As to my own part in the matter, I make no sacrifice: *je ne me prive de rien*; and, except on paper, I sha’n’t know the difference” (*LGS*, 6:61). Santayana counted Russell among the three best-educated people he had ever known (Santayana, *Persons and Places: Fragments of Autobiography* [hereafter *PP*], *The Works of George Santayana*, vol. 1, ed. William Holzberger and Herman Saatkamp Jr. [Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1986], 442) and as late as 1940 said that Russell was “a very old friend, apart from philosophical interests and we have always been good friends in spite of divergences in speculation and in politics. We can at least always laugh together” (*LGS*, 6:369).

31 “I feel as if I agreed with [Russell] pretty thoroughly, in spite of all differences in temperament and in knowledge. At least, disagreements with Russell don’t trouble me, because I feel them to be due to *additional* insights, now on his part now on mine: while disagreements with a haphazard person like James are more annoying, because they come from focussing things differently, from being *schief* [cockeyed]” (*LGS*, 1:379).

the latter may be effects of circumstances, while dislike is a reaction against them (*LGS*, 2:28).<sup>32</sup>

In his essay, Santayana views Russell and Moore as allies in his campaign to counter idealism—a philosophical tradition he takes to be represented in contemporary philosophy by F. H. Bradley, J. M. E. McTaggart, Henri Bergson and William James.<sup>33</sup> Russell was an advocate of idealism when he and Santayana met in 1896 but changed his view sometime in 1898–99, as a result of Moore’s influence and for technical reasons connected to his philosophy of mathematics, space, and time. Santayana credits Moore for initiating the break with idealism but takes Russell to be the more systematic thinker and, thus, the better spokesperson for the movement Moore initiated. While he thinks Russell’s propensity to shift ground as he moves from one technical problem to the next makes any definitive assessment of his views premature, he also thinks it shows the vitality of Russell’s mind and gives the lie to the claim, made by Bergson and others, that exact thinking deadens the soul.<sup>34</sup>

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32 Whatever common ground Santayana and Russell shared when this letter was written soon shifted. Shortly after *Winds of Doctrine* appeared, Santayana wrote: “[Russell and I] are very far apart, however, farther than I had supposed, in outlook. He wants certainty, and the narrowest deepest possible foundations for thought; I want judicious opinions and a just balance in the imagination” (*LGS*, 2:156). As Russell came to embrace neutral monism, Santayana wrote that his “philosophy seems to have taken a new turn—to construct the universe out of sense-data. If this be realism, it is marvelously like empirical idealism. It has the same minimizing and ‘nothing but’ quality; it is a substitution of means for ends and of an analysis of knowledge for the object of it. Since I discovered this I have largely lost my interest in Russell as a thinker: but he is a very amusing person” (*LGS*, 2:172).

33 It is worth noting that Santayana read Hegel with McTaggart, albeit to little effect: “We read aloud and discussed the beginning of the minor Logic, in the *Encyclopaedie der Wissenschaften*. I was then refractory to the transcendental point of view, and would continually transfer the matter in hand to the naturalistic plane, which MacTaggart [*sic*], with some contempt, called *psychological*. Nothing seemed to come of our effort, and we soon gave the thing up. He retained, however, a friendly attitude towards me (as Moore did not); and during my last visit to Cambridge, in 1923, he came one evening to sit next to me at dinner in Hall, and I soon found, when we began to talk about philosophy, that he had discovered that, apart from technicalities, I could be as transcendental as he. Only for me transcendentalism was a deliberate pose, a way of speaking, expressing a subjective perspective; whereas for him it revealed the metaphysical structure of all reality. He pinned his faith and hope of salvation on what I played with as an optical illusion, rendered harmless by being understood” (*PP*, 444–45).

34 By the time of Santayana’s essay, Russell had made substantial modifications to the views he had taken over from Moore. He had introduced and then abandoned his theory of denoting concepts in favor of his theory of descriptions, given up the view that all knowledge is by acquaintance in favor of the view that there is also knowledge by description, rejected his view of judgment as a dual relation between a mind and a proposition in favor of the view that judgment

Santayana takes four tenets to be basic to Russell's thought. First, Russell holds that the world is entirely independent of thought and experience. While it is unfair to say that idealists identify objects of experience and belief with experiences or beliefs themselves, they do insist that talk of objects presupposes the validity of certain principles that make cognitive experience and judgments possible. For them, talk of things-in-themselves—things as they are apart from the conditions under which they might be known or experienced—breaks the bounds of sense and is devoid of content. As a result, they take the conditions of objective judgment to enter into the very definition of what it is to be an object and what it is to be real. Russell rejects any such view because it implies that the nature of reality is in some sense dependent on the mind. He considers an object real only if it is self-subsistent—that is, if its being and nature are entirely independent of anything else, the judgments of knowers included. The reality of things-in-themselves is for him, then, a necessary condition of objectivity. To follow idealists in denying the possibility of knowing things-in-themselves is tantamount to denying knowledge altogether. But finding it easy to conceive of things persisting in the absence of minds, Russell maintains that the notion of things-in-themselves is neither an empty nor an incoherent notion.

The second tenet of Russell's philosophy that Santayana singles out is that certain general principles must be taken to concern, not only our thoughts, but also things apart from the mind. Russell has no quarrel with idealists who maintain that rational judgment is subject to principles that are necessary, universal, and *a priori*, and agrees with them, moreover, that the laws of logic are chief among these. What he disputes is the idealists' claim that the objective validity of the principles of rational judgment rests on their being essential to cognition, rather than being grounded in laws that govern the order of things apart from the mind. He takes idealism to imply that reality has a logical structure only because the mind cannot help judging things in a logical way and rejects this view, claiming it implies that the logical

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involves multiple relations between knowers and objects, and abandoned the view that truth and falsehood are simple and indefinable in favor of the view that truth is a relation between a judgment and a corresponding fact. Santayana does not take up any of these technical developments in Russell's work, nor does he discuss the problems they are intended to solve. Rather he criticizes certain of Russell's views in light of his own naturalistic conception of knowledge and reality.

structure of the world is merely a projection or fabrication. On the view he prefers, judgments have a logical form because they mirror a logical structure among things in the world. Indeed, it is because the laws of logic govern things—and are not merely laws of thought—that he thinks the logical analysis of judgments yields insight into the basic structure of reality.

The third basic tenet of Russell's philosophy, according to Santayana, is that relations are external to the things they concern. Russell thinks the philosophy of absolute idealism is derivable from the axiom that the identity of objects is constituted by the relations they enter into. Given this axiom, for example, it follows that each thing is what it is only by virtue of its relations to every other thing. This further implies that it is wrong to suppose that one bit of reality can subsist apart from the other bits—reality is an integrated whole. One reason Russell is inclined to reject this view is that objects of knowledge cannot be independent of the mind in the way he thinks objectivity requires if their nature is determined or constituted by their relations to knowers. Accordingly, he rejects the view that reality is a single, unanalyzable whole and holds instead that it comprises a plurality of independent (i.e., self-subsistent) individuals. Rather than falsifying the nature of reality, as idealists argue, he insists the method of analysis—the explanation of complex entities in terms of their self-subsistent parts—reveals the ultimate constituents of everything there is.

The final tenet of Russell's philosophy that Santayana notes is that questions about the nature of something are not to be confused with questions about its causal origins or about our beliefs concerning it. If, as Russell maintains, each object is what it is independently of every other thing, then uncovering the nature of an object is one thing and uncovering how it came to be—i.e., its relations to whatever caused it—is something else. Discerning the nature of an object is similarly different from discerning how it comes to be known. As noted, Russell thinks the only knowledge worthy of the name is knowledge of something as it is, unconditioned by the knowing mind. While knowers can only conceive objects falling within the scope of their understanding, to slide from this truism to the idealist's conclusion that the nature of objects is conditioned by the principles governing cognition is, for Russell, to conflate questions of ontology—questions about the nature of objects as they are apart from our knowledge of them—and ques-

tions of epistemology—questions of what makes knowledge of such objects possible.

As Santayana sees it, the chief consequences of Russell's views are:

- a) The mind is distinct from, and prior to, its thoughts. It can be identified neither with its various contents—ideas, feelings, or experiences—nor with the stream of consciousness taken in its entirety.
- b) There is a material world in space and time—a world beyond the mind and its contents.
- c) The substances in the material world—minds among them—comprise simple entities—entities with position and quality but no extension.
- d) There is an ideal world of objects (e.g., numbers, universals, logical laws) that are real and independent of the mind, though outside the actual world (i.e., the world of space and time). These objects are discovered, not created by us, and known by intellectual apprehension, rather than sensory perception.

In addition to endorsing Russell's basic outlook, Santayana praises the "scholastic rigor" of Russell's philosophical method: his insistence on the precise analysis of concepts and the logical relations among them and his penchant for the literal interpretation of truth claims. Here, presumably, he is alluding to Russell's view that the meaning of a judgment (or belief) is determined by the entities in the world that the judgment is about and not by the judger's thoughts, ideas, or mental contents (except in the case of judgments that are explicitly about thoughts, ideas, or mental contents). The entities that determine the meaning of the judgment that  $2+2=4$  are the (mind-independent) numbers 2 and 4, the addition operation, and the relation of equality. The entities that determine the meaning of the judgment "Socrates is dead" are Socrates, death, and the relation of predication. Were there no entities corresponding to the verbal expressions—no numbers 2 or 4, no Socrates, no death, etc.—Russell maintains they would be meaningless noises or marks.<sup>35</sup> While allowing that it is often far from

<sup>35</sup> I am simplifying Russell's account somewhat. Numbers, for Russell, are not primitive entities. Rather, they are identified with certain kinds of sets. Moreover, on his account "Socrates is dead" means "There is a unique  $x$  such that  $x$  is a teacher of Plato, who lived in ancient Greece, etc. and  $x$  is dead (at present)." The name "Socrates" in this sentence does not pick out an entity—taken on its own it is a meaningless expression. The sentence containing the name is meaningful and indeed true in virtue of Socrates' death but Socrates himself is not among the entities in the world that determine its meaning—these entities being the predicates involved in

obvious which objects a given judgment means, Russell staunchly maintains that for any meaningful expression (e.g., word, phrase, or sentence) there is some real entity meant.

Santayana takes Russell's account of meaning to be a refreshing antidote to views that construe talk of objects—e.g., people, chairs, numbers—as talk of things other than those objects—as talk about our experiences, in the case of idealism, or the conceivable consequences of actions, in the case of pragmatism (*WD*, 75). Still, while acknowledging that Russell's account gives a compelling analysis of the meaning of judgments that have little connection to problems of living—the propositions of logic and mathematics, for example—he thinks it proves one-sided when applied to moral and aesthetic judgments.

In “The Elements of Ethics,” Russell advances the view that the word “good,” being meaningful, stands for an entity—one that is abstract, known by non-sensory acquaintance, and a thing-in-itself.<sup>36</sup> On this view, the truth or falsity of a judgment that something is good depends solely on the relation that the thing in question has to good (the entity). Since, for Russell, such relations hold whether or not they are apprehended, he considers the goodness of things to depend on facts that obtain independently of human beings and their attitudes and practices. It is this consequence of Russell's view that Santayana singles out for criticism.

Santayana agrees with Russell that “good” applies to objects categorically. That is, he thinks there is a genuine distinction between what is really good and what only appears or is deemed to be good. However, he maintains that in taking evaluations to be true or false apart from us, Russell ignores the naturalistic backdrop that gives ethical judgments their proper context and force. The point is not that Santayana thinks moral judgments can be derived from facts concerning psychology or biology. To the contrary, he considers such reasoning fallacious. The point is rather that, for him, questions about the good involve questions about ultimate ends and, contrary to what Russell maintains, whether an end is worth pursuing or not depends on the

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the definite description, death, the existential quantifier, the conjunction relation, and the variable  $x$ . Even taking all these technical complications into account, it remains the case that, for Russell, where there is no entity associated with a symbol or expression, there is no meaning.

36 See Bertrand Russell, *Philosophical Essays* [hereafter *PE*] (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1966), 13–59. Also see G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

nature of the creature being considered—its capacities and the conditions required to realize them. Moral skepticism being unlivable for human beings, Santayana thinks “to choose, to love and hate, to have a moral life, is inevitable” (*WD*, 77). However, he adds, “Even to express justly the aim of our own life we need to retain a constant sympathy with what is animal and fundamental in it, else we shall give a false place, and too loud an emphasis, to our definitions of the ideal” (*WD*, 77). As Santayana sees it, Russell’s elimination of any reference to human capacities in his ethical reflections signals a failure to appreciate “the relative status of whatever is moral” (*WD*, 76). In claiming absolute truth for his ethical ideals, Santayana thinks Russell risks making his moral judgments “narrow, strident, and fanatical” (*WD*, 76).<sup>37</sup>

In the second section of his essay Santayana fleshes out his basic criticism by taking a closer look at the nature of concepts—or “essences” as he calls them.<sup>38</sup> He agrees with Russell on the need to posit such entities, arguing that “nothing can ever exist in nature or for consciousness which has not a prior and independent locus in the realm of essence” (*WD*, 79). This realm, he says, comprises all that is possible—distinguishable characteristics, objects, states of affairs, possible worlds, etc.—and these possibilities are neither created nor modified when contemplated by us. This realm is likewise eternal—abstract possibilities neither come into being nor cease to be—and distinct from both the mental and material worlds, since ontologically prior to, and more encompassing than, what is actual.

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37 Santayana makes much the same point in connection with Moore’s *Principia Ethica*. He writes, “I should more heartily agree with [Moore’s] logic if it were backed by some sense of the conditions in which it operates, some knowledge of human nature. His points become cogent only when the speaker forgets himself and makes his assertions irresponsibly forthright and categorical. So taken—as ready-made accidental judgments—they may well be what Moore says they are in respect to their form. Their substance, however, needs to be transformed by experience and culture. How little *wisdom* these metaphysicians have, and how punctiform and scholastic their vision of things is apt to become when they live in colleges or dwell in an atmosphere of technical controversy. In its rather insignificant sphere, however, I agree with Moore’s doctrine. Good is a unique predicate, quite distinct in meaning from pleasant, etc.; but its application is intelligible, and what things are good can be decided only by asking what things make a difference to somebody. The inanimate ‘beautiful’ universe Moore speaks of can be good only because it meets a *given* sense for harmony” (*LGS*, 1:275).

38 Santayana says that Moore and Russell “helped me, in 1897, to grind fine and filter Platonic Ideas into my realm of essence” (*PGS*, 587). The current essay is the first published statement of his view.



As Santayana observes, Russell often characterizes the contemplation of essences in spiritual and aesthetic terms. He claims, for example, that philosophy is valuable, not because of the answers to questions it provides, but rather because it requires communion with things that are greater than oneself. He likens the world of logical and mathematical objects to a sanctuary, entry to which affords refuge from mundane concerns. He even goes so far as to claim that these objects are beautiful to contemplate.<sup>39</sup>

However, Santayana worries that Russell's way of speaking is apt to engender the same doubts about essences that atheists have about claims to absolute truth in religion. The suggestion is that those who deny absolute truth to value claims may be led not only to question the objectivity of Russell's appraisals but to doubt the reality of the essences being appraised. For Santayana, however, such a conclusion is hasty. As he sees it, there is no denying that when we contemplate a mathematical proof, the notion of truth, or a hypothetical situation, there is something beyond the mind being contemplated, even when it is nothing actual. That there are essences is, thus, for him, beyond question. What is doubtful, he thinks, is Russell's claim that the value or beauty of essences is inherent in them, rather than being a function of how their contemplation figures in a reasonable human life. Whereas Russell takes our ability to know eternal essences to be a singular accomplishment, Santayana thinks it is not particularly noteworthy. He claims we could not have an experience or thought that did not realize some possibility or other, each such possibility being an essence. Inasmuch as knowledge of eternal essences is part and parcel of having thoughts or experiences at all, it is a relatively trivial feat. On the other hand, to uncover the precise combination of essences manifested in the actual world is, for him, anything but trivial. He thinks physics does its best, but its subject matter—the material world—extends far beyond the limits of our sensory experience and our cognitive capacities, such that only hubris or dogmatism leads us to claim that science reveals the constitution of nature as it is, apart from all human interests.

Moreover, Santayana thinks that, contrary to Russell, the value of eternal knowledge depends on its contribution to the fulfillment of the

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39 See, for example, Bertrand Russell, "The Value of Philosophy," in *The Problems of Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 153–61.

interests and ideals we have as organisms in the natural world. “Eternal truth [as disclosed in mathematics or logic] is as disconsolate as it is consoling, and as dreary as it is interesting” (*WD*, 78), which is to say that in and of itself it is none of these things. As human beings, we inevitably take a selective interest in essences, finding some more worthy of contemplation than others. We do not and could not contemplate all the essences there are, nor do we or could we exhaustively study the essences we do consider. If mathematical essences hold a particular fascination it is because, so far as we can tell, the natural environment in which we live has a mathematical form. But even then, not everyone finds the same satisfaction in contemplating mathematical and logical objects that Russell does. For Santayana, the value of contemplating a given essence is as variable as each person’s personal history and temperament. And even if certain essences are universally valued, it does not follow that their worth is inherent in them apart from all interests. The point Santayana is most concerned to stress, however, is that while there is every reason to be skeptical about Russell’s claims to an objective footing for his appraisals, this should not lead us to question the reality of essences themselves.

In the third section of his essay, Santayana examines pragmatism in light of Russell’s criticisms of it.<sup>40</sup> He views pragmatism, as he does Russell’s philosophy, less as a systematic doctrine than as a loosely connected set of tendencies and methods. But whereas he is hopeful about the general direction of Russell’s thought, he wonders whether a coherent system will ever emerge out of pragmatism.

As Santayana observes, Russell thinks pragmatism reflects certain tendencies characteristic of American culture. He finds, for example, a democratic tenor pervading James’s writing—a suspicion of authority that is not subject to the consent of the individuals over which it is exercised. For example, in “The Will to Believe,” Russell claims, James argues that it is reasonable not only to maintain religious beliefs in the absence of evidence for them, but also to deem them true in virtue of the emotional satisfaction they provide.<sup>41</sup> For Russell, such a view makes truth a matter of individual decision—the faith each person

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40 Santayana’s discussion is focused primarily on Russell’s “Pragmatism” and “William James’s Conception of Truth” in *PE*, 79–111 and 112–30, respectively.

41 William James, “The Will to Believe,” in *The Will to Believe and Other Essays*, The Works of William James, vol. 6, ed. F. Burkhardt *et al.* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), 13–33.

deems most satisfying is true and God's divinity rests on the reverence accorded him by believers, rather than that reverence being owed him on account of his divine nature.

Rather than pursue Russell's reading of pragmatism, Santayana turns his attention to an important tension Russell finds in the pragmatists' use of psychology in philosophy. He agrees with Russell that pragmatists accord far too much importance to the theory of experience in metaphysics. Instead of concerning themselves with the nature of objects as they are apart from us, pragmatists insist that the nature of an object is to be defined in terms of its experiential effects on us. Yet Santayana thinks it is no more obvious that philosophers interested in the nature of reality should begin by studying human experience than physicists interested in the nature of the planets should. While acknowledging that pragmatists include facts, and not just our experience of them, among the determinants of rational belief, Santayana claims that on the pragmatists' view a fact is nothing more than a belief that we find ourselves compelled to hold. Since pragmatists maintain that beliefs are fixed in part by such things as temperament, interests, and values, it follows that their conception of facts makes essential reference to the psychology of belief. Thus, Santayana insists that when pragmatists defer to facts, they are really appealing to our conceptions of things, rather than to the things themselves.

Santayana does not dispute the pragmatist's claim that passions, interests, and values play a significant role in generating and fixing beliefs. Where he thinks pragmatists go wrong is in taking this fact to undermine the notion that inquiry aims at an understanding of objects as they exist apart from experiences, and not merely of their experiential effects. What are called facts in common parlance, and what we are most concerned to negotiate even in our everyday practices, is, he says, nonpsychological in nature. Unlike compulsory beliefs (i.e., what pragmatists call "facts"), facts are not subject to change as knowledge grows. The world did not become (roughly) round when its shape was discovered and historical events are not altered in the rewriting of our accounts of them. In giving priority to psychology in philosophy, however, pragmatists end up conflating facts and our conception of them.

At the same time, Santayana acknowledges that pragmatists do not always succumb to the confusion just identified. He allows that in at least some cases they focus on the experiential effects of objects because they are interested in tracing the conditions that have led to

our current understanding of the world. Santayana has no problem with such a project; indeed, he pursued it in *The Life of Reason*.<sup>42</sup> However, he insists it assumes a natural world that is independent of our experience and is antithetical to any attempt to derive the order of the universe from the structure of human experience or thought. To determine how reality is known by means of experience is one thing; to argue that reality is constituted by, or built up out of, experience is something else. This latter view precludes objectivity and is at odds with the scientific view of the world.

Still, even when viewed charitably—as an attempt to account for knowledge in terms of natural processes—Santayana thinks pragmatists face serious unanswered questions. James, for example, denies there is a mind apart from the stream of individual consciousness and holds, moreover, that one object of experience knows another just in case it leads to, or is a reliable sign of, it. Instead of explaining the sort of connection between minds and objects that knowledge requires, Santayana thinks this view collapses the realm of thought and the realm of objects into a single realm of being—one constituted by relations among bits of experience. Santayana takes this to show that while pragmatists start by seeking to explain knowledge, they end up rejecting the world outside experience, taking the structure of the human mind to yield the structure of the world and viewing the nature of the world as dependent on experience, rather than experience being dependent on processes in a broader natural world.

In addition to highlighting confusions among pragmatists about the role of psychology in philosophy, Santayana thinks Russell also raises important questions about the scope of the pragmatic theory of truth. As Russell sees it, the pragmatic theory is based on an analysis of inductive methods of testing hypotheses. In the clearest cases, conjectures are tested by deriving experiential consequences from them, undertaking certain experimental procedures and verifying whether or not the predicted consequences occur. Hypotheses are accepted as true if predictive and so, the pragmatist holds, to claim a belief is true is, in the end, to claim that it meets with instrumental success in experimental tests. Russell argues that this account of truth fails as a general theory because the sort of inductive testing pragmatists take

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<sup>42</sup> *The Life of Reason, or, The Phases of Human Progress*, The Works of George Santayana, vol. 7, ed. Marianne Wokeck and Martin Coleman (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1986).

as the model of inquiry presupposes a notion of truth that cannot be explained in terms of the practical consequences of beliefs in test situations. As he sees it, pragmatists hold that the truth of a hypothesis *H* rests on claims about its predictive success—the claims that *H* implies a certain prediction *P* and that *P* is true. However, if the pragmatic theory is applied to every truth claim, then a vicious regress results. The truth of *H* depends on the truth of *P* but the truth of *P* in turn depends on the truth of claims about its predictive consequences—the claims that *P* implies *P'* and that *P'* is the case, where *P'* is some predicted event. The truth of these latter claims presupposes further claims about their predictive consequences and so on endlessly. *H* can never be verified on this view because its truth has an endless series of conditions and because these conditions concern events in the future—events to which we have no direct experiential access. In light of this, Russell concludes that it is possible to verify a hypothesis by appeal to its predictive powers only if there is some knowledge that is not attained through inductive testing and this knowledge must be true in some sense other than that required by the pragmatic theory of truth.

In contrast to Russell, Santayana thinks pragmatists do allow that there is knowledge that is not subject to the pragmatic account of truth and inquiry—specifically, knowledge of the logical relations among concepts (i.e., relations among essences) and knowledge of concrete facts immediately observed. However, he thinks pragmatists wrongly downplay the significance of these exceptions to their theory. He argues that the reliability of memory is presupposed both in the immediate apprehension of facts and in the experimental testing of hypotheses that pragmatists take to be the hallmark of truth. In the cases of immediate observation, what is known must be correctly categorized as similar to or different from phenomena previously experienced and correctly recalled. And in the case of experiments, an observation cannot test a hypothesis unless it is compared to a prior expectation that is accurately remembered. But if pragmatists must grant that both immediate knowledge and knowledge of the past (i.e., memory) are presupposed in testing the practical consequences of hypotheses, “this amounts to enough knowledge to make up a tolerable system of the universe, without invoking pragmatic verification or ‘truth’ at all” (*WD*, 87). Indeed, Santayana urges, if immediate knowledge is taken to include knowledge of all facts directly perceived by any human

being, then all of human history lies beyond the scope of the pragmatist account of inquiry and truth.

Santayana agrees with Russell that the pragmatic theory of truth works best in cases of beliefs that are open to doubt and thought to require verification through inductive testing—cases involving scientific laws or philosophical generalizations that are far from settled, for example. Pragmatists hold that the content of such beliefs is given by their practical consequences (i.e., the consequences that follow on the performance of experimental tests) and that believing a claim is a matter of being prepared to act on it—a matter of basing one’s conduct on expectations rooted in the predictions it affords. However, Russell argues that this notion of belief fails to distinguish cases in which one acts in the knowledge that a hypothesis is true and cases in which one adopts a belief as a working hypothesis without any firm evidence of its truth. In support of Russell’s point, Santayana observes that it is not always clear whether an idea is a fiction that is relied upon because it has proven useful to the believer—as in the case of the atomic theory in the nineteenth century or of people who cling to superstitions—or whether the idea is held because it is rooted in facts that any inquirer who lands on the truth must come to know. Both sorts of belief might well guide conduct reliably and thus meet the pragmatic test for truth but only in the latter sort of case are the instrumentally reliable beliefs properly true.

The confusion at the heart of the pragmatist’s view of belief mirrors a similar confusion in their claim to offer an analysis of theoretical knowledge. “Theory” might be applied to pictures or models of the world adopted in the absence of knowledge. Alternatively, the term might be applied to a systematic body of knowledge that has already been verified. Santayana claims that the pragmatist account of truth applies only to the first sort of case—cases in which a belief is adopted for its value in guiding conduct and relied upon until such time as (if ever) it is replaced by genuine knowledge. However, to view the criteria appropriate to the adoption of useful fictions—such as religious myths or speculative hypotheses in natural science—as criteria of truth in general is to deny knowledge an objective footing and embrace the very sort of subjectivism pragmatists claim to decry.

Santayana concedes that it seems odd to suppose pragmatists would use cases of beliefs held without warrant as a basis for their account of truth. However, he thinks this is not entirely unprece-

dented. Religions, he thinks, have long claimed that their metaphysical fictions are true and construed truth in light of them. Moreover, he thinks the pragmatists' confusion rests on a clear line of thought, however indefensible. Having come to the conclusion that eternal truth is impossible, he thinks pragmatists focus on the conditions for fixing beliefs, rather than for attaining truth, as the key to knowledge. Given this shift, they transfer both the term "true" and its honorific associations to warranted beliefs and shift the determinants of truth from objective facts—which they deem unknowable—to psychological determinants of beliefs that operate in the absence of knowledge of how things really are. The result, Santayana claims, is to conflate the conditions of truth with the conditions of belief or justification.

According to Santayana, the pragmatist's errors about truth are compounded by an ambiguity in their use of the term "science," an ambiguity related to their use of the term "theory." The word "science" is sometimes used to refer to knowledge that is firmly established. At other times, it refers to the theories scientists work with pending verification. Taken the first way, the scientific content of, say, Darwin's theory comprises his observations about organisms and their ancestry but excludes his conjecture that variation and natural selection explain these data. The theory of natural selection does not describe a process that is directly observed. It is rather a hypothesis offered to systematize, and fill gaps in, observed data. Santayana thinks science is so readily identified with speculative hypotheses of the latter sort that when someone like Henri Poincaré points out the paucity of the data underlying them, he is taken to show not merely that the higher reaches of scientific thought serve an instrumental function but rather that science has no claim to discern the way things are. He thinks pragmatists succumb to a similar confusion in mistaking an analysis of the instrumental value of speculative hypotheses in science and religious ideals for a proper analysis of the nature of truth.

In the final section of his essay, Santayana returns to Russell's account of the basic notions of ethics. Russell, he observes, characterizes the good independently of human conduct—good conduct, for him, being conduct that is a means to things good on their own account. This view highlights—rightly, Santayana thinks—that ethics is concerned with all values, not only those relating to morals or duties and that values inhere in a great variety of things and relations, all of

which we are obliged to respect and establish to whatever extent possible. Russell thinks philosophers run afoul of this latter point by oversimplifying the range of values in an effort to reduce ethics to one or two principles, while moralists ignore the former point in focusing on the value of actions as means to ends and ignoring the value of ends themselves.

Santayana sees Russell's critique of the tradition as opening the way for a moral philosophy that recognizes all the various sorts of values and reveals, moreover, which combinations of values are coherent. He thinks that unlike the ethical systems proffered in the past, an ethics of this sort, properly developed in light of the actual interests of human beings, stands a good chance of exerting influence over human conduct.

Much to Santayana's disappointment, however, Russell does not pursue this sort of ethical theory but rather focuses on the question of how "good" is to be defined. Not that Santayana has any problem with Russell's answer to this question; to the contrary, he accepts Russell's claim that "good" is indefinable. Definitions of the good in terms of what satisfies our desires, what yields the greatest happiness of the greatest number, what we have a duty to bring about, etc., cannot be right, he thinks, because the questions of whether it is good to satisfy our desires, whether it is good to bring about the greatest happiness of the greatest number, whether it is good to do our duty, etc., are substantive and not of the form "Is A, A?" These definitions are, at best, descriptions of properties shared by good things, not characterizations of good itself. However, Santayana sees no route from this point—a point he deems obvious, even trivial—to Russell's further claim that good is something real apart from us. He argues that "green" too is an indefinable quality, one that is known only through direct experience, and yet the things in which it inheres are not green absolutely but only under certain conditions—it being a common occurrence that one and the same thing is both green and not green at the same time, from different points of view. Taken as an essence—an abstract concept—being green precludes being not green. Yet an object in nature can be both green and not green, when circumstances are taken into account. The same holds, Santayana insists, of good and evil. Though good excludes evil conceptually, one and the same thing in nature can be both good and evil depending on the circumstances—nothing is good unconditionally.



In defending the objectivity of value claims, Russell makes much of the fact that in disagreements over what is good we are apt to consider one or both parties wrong, rather than conclude, as we do in cases where something appears both green and not green, that both are right given the circumstances. Were there no facts about what is good, independently of all interests, attitudes, and opinions, Russell claims it would no more be possible to reason with others about what is right and wrong than it is to reason with someone about whether or not oysters are tasty. For Russell, then, the very fact of moral reasoning shows that ethical claims, like claims in logic and physics, are true or false independently of us.

In response to this argument, Santayana acknowledged that the truth or falsity of evaluative claims can legitimately be debated when the value of something as a means to a given end is in question. In such cases, the issue turns on facts about cause and effect or the necessary connections among events in the world. But he insists that in debates of this kind certain ends are assumed as given. Disagreements about ultimate goods, by contrast, cannot be adjudicated objectively and claims about them do not have truth values. On his view, ultimate goods are chosen, found, aimed at, but not asserted to be true. Our basic ethical convictions arise out of feelings that it is neither right nor wrong to feel. We may pursue our ideals with more or less reasonableness and be more or less tolerant of those with preferences different from our own—people may be unable to endure another’s religious practices, while turning a blind eye to their failure to appreciate oysters. But that we show any tolerance at all—even tolerance of another’s taste for beef or shellfish, for example—is a relatively recent phenomenon in human history, one that Santayana hopes his view will encourage.

Santayana defends his view that values are rooted in ungrounded feelings against Russell’s objection that the good cannot be analyzed in terms of what is desired, since the notion of a bad desire is not contradictory. Santayana notes, first of all, that Russell himself concedes that differences about ultimate ends arise and although he nevertheless maintains that value claims are absolutely true or false, the only evidence he offers for this view is that people deem values at odds with their own to be incorrect. All this shows, Santayana insists, is that people tend to dismiss values they find uncongenial and are blind to the virtues of contrary ways of living. Such tendencies speak to the

intolerance of human beings, rather than to the objectivity of their evaluative judgments.

Moreover, Santayana insists that the notion of a bad desire can be made sense of even on a view that denies an objective footing for ultimate goods. Organisms may have desires that contradict their other interests. They may also have passing fancies that are inimical to interests and ideals associated with their sense of worth and dignity. But even when desires are deemed bad because self-defeating in these ways, it does not follow that their value is inherent in them. To the contrary, they are bad only when judged in light of other values. For Santayana, it makes no more sense to judge something good or bad apart from some set of interests or other than it does to think of something being inherently nutritious or intoxicating, apart from the constitution of some organism or other.

Santayana further argues that far from precluding debate about values, as Russell assumes, the view that values are relative to interests and capacities makes reasoned debate about them possible. As he sees it, values can be judged false only in light of some sort of evaluative criterion. Absent any reference to a set of interests and capacities, there is no criterion for assessing worth and so only brute force could make someone come to consider a value authoritative.

Finally, Santayana claims that Russell's way of arguing specific ethical claims itself betrays the relativity of value. In distinguishing the good from pleasure, for example, Russell asks whether a life of mindless pleasure would be better than the life of a rational human being and expects his readers to answer "no." He then takes the fact that we so readily agree on this to show that the human condition is inherently and self-evidently superior to a life that, however pleasing, lacks the capacity for such things as memory and reflection. Santayana sees this example differently, however. He thinks it is one thing to say a form of life is unfulfilling by human standards—that it is not befitting a human being—but quite another to say that it is inherently unfulfilling. If we are quick to condemn the sort of unreflective life Russell asks us to consider it is only because it fails to satisfy interests and ambitions that humans typically have. Santayana agrees an unreflective life is far from ideal given the capacities that human beings possess but there could well be an organism so constituted that such a life fulfills its highest capabilities and as such is good for it.

According to Santayana, Russell's failure to take the natural conditions of human life into account in ethics is particularly significant in his discussion of egoism in "A Free Man's Worship."<sup>43</sup> Russell argues that if egoism were true, then his good is the only good and anyone who fails to acknowledge this fact is mistaken. Yet, he observes, most people would readily agree that all things being equal it is better if two people's desires be satisfied than only one person's and, likewise, better to secure a greater good for one person than to secure a lesser good for someone else. Since these principles are deemed acceptable regardless of which people are being considered, Russell concludes that it wrong to think that his desires are the only goods and egoism is false.

Santayana thinks Russell is on solid ground as a matter of logic. He agrees, for example, that if two goods are of equal value, then it does not matter from a moral point of view whose goods they are. But there remains the question of how the value of things is to be determined in the first place. On Santayana's view, goods are appraised by examining their implications for some way of life or other. Whether we consider a set of values reasonable or not depends on our ability to sympathize with the broader life to which they contribute. As the capacity for such sympathy varies among people, so too do moral evaluations. This is not to say that agreement in values, even universal agreement, is impossible. It is merely to say that the grounds of moral consensus are not, as Russell's view implies, lying in wait apart from their being worked out or negotiated. Nor is agreement guaranteed to emerge. To the contrary, it is impossible for some creatures to cultivate sympathy for all forms of life—were a tiger, for example, to do this, it would cease to be ferocious and thereby surrender what for tigers is a preeminent virtue. In light of this, Santayana thinks an irreducible diversity of values is to be expected.

Far from being an antidote to egoism, Santayana fears Russell's view that moral claims are true or false independent of particular points of view will exacerbate it. There is nothing in Russell's case for the objectivity of values to prevent the egoist from thinking that his values have absolute authority and are binding on all others. Santayana suggests that even Moore and Russell manifest intolerance towards other people's values "and one trembles to think what it [this intoler-

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43 In Bertrand Russell, *Mysticism and Logic and Other Essays* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1950), 46–57.

ance] may become in the mouths of their disciples. Intolerance is a form of egoism, and to condemn egoism intolerantly is to share it" (*WD*, 99).

Santayana thinks his view, by contrast, would undermine intolerance. Each of us would still operate with his or her personal sense of justice, there being no higher duty to pursue and no choice but to live some way or other. But rather than view dissenters as vile and blind to facts, we would view them as moral agents on a par with us. Conflicts with others would be viewed as obstacles to overcome and negotiate. But even were such conflicts to prove unresolvable, Santayana thinks we would at least be chivalrous and acknowledge the sense of justice that inspires our opponents. The notion that our ideals have an absolute right to be realized is, for him, a vain indulgence, and to give up the right to condemn absolutely those who would destroy what we value is to appreciate that they have ideals of their own to achieve.

In closing his discussion of Russell's philosophy, Santayana reflects on the moral vision he thinks it implies. The notion that good is independent of what exists has traditionally been linked to belief in a divine creator or prime mover who is the origin of everything. Russell is no theist, however, and does not embrace the myth that good and evil have causal powers. However, he does imply that certain essences are inherently good and that these ought to exist (or, at least, that anything that does exist ought to conform to them). On Santayana's view, however, what exists is neither good nor evil and hence is "deaf to this moral emphasis in the eternal" (*WD*, 100). There is no purpose in nature—things do not exist because they ought to or because they fulfill some divine end. To think otherwise does not make existence more intelligible or less arbitrary; it merely shifts the locus of arbitrariness from what exists to the creator's choice of purposes. Russell retains belief in an absolute good but dispatches the idea of a god who directs the course of events and punishes those who are not good. He thus leaves it up to human beings to redeem the world. For Santayana, this view frees Russell's theodicy from the sanctimony and hypocrisy of traditional theism but in preserving the objectivity of values it maintains the rigidity of traditional theism. To this extent, Santayana thinks Russell's view of human life is a dramatic expression of the very sort of religious views he seeks to displace.

In rejecting Russell's claim to absolute knowledge of the good, Santayana makes clear that he is not out to decry the values that

Russell upholds. He focuses on the error of hypostasizing the good in order to separate Russell's genuine insights from his flawed account of their ontological and epistemological foundation. When we consider things from the moral point of view, Santayana thinks Russell is right to maintain that some things are more valuable than others, there are many such valuable things, their combinations yield values not belonging to their parts severally, and these values are both more specific than pleasure writ large and more diffuse than an individual life. These insights, he insists, are important and worth preserving even if they are wrongly founded in Russell's philosophy.

## V ~ Shelley: or the Poetic Value of Revolutionary Principles

To this point Santayana has considered and rejected Catholic modernism, Bergson's attempt to ground values in a progressive evolutionary metaphysics, and Russell's objectification of values as timeless, mind-independent entities. Against these views he has pressed the notion that values are expressions of human interests and aspirations, rather than representations of an objective good. The fact that ethics and religion do not issue in knowledge of the world as it is apart from us does not, for him, make them any less important to the life of reason. To the contrary, he thinks there is no more vital task than sorting out the spiritual ideals that best promote meaningful lives. On his view, however, the task of exploring and fashioning moral ideals falls to the poet, not the natural scientist or metaphysician. It is in light of this understanding of the connection between ethics and poetry that he takes up the work of Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822).

Santayana's views about Shelley took shape during the school year of 1910–1911, when the reading group of Harvard undergraduates he was in the habit of organizing devoted its attention to Shelley's work "from beginning to end, except [Shelley's play] *The Cenci*" (PP, 345). As for the essay itself, Santayana says, "It was a terrible piece of work getting it off, and took me all summer [of 1911]" (LGS, 2:111; see also *WD*, 316). He then presented it at Columbia University and Bowdoin, Bryn Mawr, and Williams Colleges before publishing the final version in *Winds of Doctrine*.<sup>44</sup>

44 Although he did not follow through on the idea, he also contemplated republishing the essay in a collection of essays alongside "The Absence of Religion in Shakespeare," "Hamlet," "The Poetry of Barbarism," and "Dickens" (LGS, 1:195).

Santayana opens the essay by claiming that appraisals of art—like all other value judgments—lack a basis in fact. There is, he says, no refuting a person who deems art good so long as someone takes pleasure in it, no matter what sort or for what reasons. However, anarchy of taste is untenable in practice. Artists must make decisions about what is better or worse in order to create at all. And to have lasting value, Santayana insists, art must speak to the deepest needs of human nature. For him, “technical proficiency, and brilliancy of fancy or execution... may dazzle for a moment, but they cannot absolve an artist from the need of having an important subject-matter and a sane humanity” (*WD*, 103).

In light of this principle of criticism, Santayana thinks Shelley poses something of a problematic case. On the one hand, Santayana agrees with Matthew Arnold’s characterization of Shelley as depraved and humorless<sup>45</sup> though, unlike Arnold, he considers such weaknesses typical of revolutionaries who, like Shelley, reject traditional values in favor of what they consider to be heroic ideals. In attempting to rid themselves of established conventions, they tend to lose sight of the fact that a stable tradition is necessary in order for art—and the life of reason more generally—to thrive. On the other hand, Santayana thinks Shelley’s poetry is a superb expression of the humanistic values that led to the Renaissance and continue to shape culture to this day. Shelley’s opposition to established authorities—the monarchy and church chief among them—his defense of free love and atheism and his abhorrence of violence and oppression in all its forms reflect a firm

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45 Arnold condemned Shelley for leaving his first wife and child in order to pursue Mary [Wollstonecraft] Godwin and took exception to Shelley’s defense of atheism and free love. In a well-known passage, Arnold wrote: “The man Shelley, in very truth, is not entirely sane, and Shelley’s poetry is not entirely sane either. The Shelley of actual life is a vision of beauty and radiance, indeed, but availing nothing, effecting nothing. And in poetry, no less than in life, he is ‘a beautiful *and ineffectual* angel, beating in the void his luminous wings in vain’” (Matthew Arnold, *Essays in Criticism: Second Series* [London: Macmillan and Co. Limited, 1913], 251–52). Arnold’s assessment is not idiosyncratic. While admiring Shelley’s style and imagery, the poet Francis Thompson said that he had an immature, indeed childish, mind (see his *Shelley: An Essay* [London: Burns, Oates and Washbourne, 1914]). The critic F. R. Leavis said, “The effect of Shelley’s eloquence is to hand poetry over to a sensibility that has no more dealings with intelligence than it can help; to a ‘poetic faculty’ that... demands that active intelligence shall be, as it were, switched off” (“Revaluations [VIII]: Shelley,” *Scrutiny* 4, no. 2 [September 1935]: 163). It is worth noting, however, that D. H. Lawrence considered Shelley to be among the greatest English poets and “a million thousand times more beautiful than Milton” (*The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, ed. James Boulton, vol. 1 [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981], 654, 120).

conviction in the perfectibility of human nature. In light of these assessments, it might seem that we must either agree with Arnold that Shelley's work is second-rate, since he lacks the seriousness and "sane humanity" of a great artist, or count him a brilliant poet but consider him an exception to the principle that seriousness and humanity are essential to great art.

Santayana rejects both of the options just canvassed in favor of a third view. He maintains Shelley is a great poet—one with all the humanity and seriousness of a brilliant artist. But, while granting Arnold's point that Shelley's behavior was far from exemplary, he disputes Arnold's claim that this shows a serious moral failing in Shelley, attributing it instead to the lack of a congenial culture in which to flourish.

According to Santayana, Shelley's genius is the product of an intense devotion to moral ideals combined with an equally intense horror at their failure to be realized. As Santayana observes, Shelley's moral sense developed early on. At a very young age he was insubordinate to authority figures and dismissive of religious dogma and social convention. These tendencies proved impervious to modification through schooling and personal experience. Rather than adapt his ideals to circumstances, Shelley devoted himself to crafting visions of how things ought to be and protesting any obstinacy that he thought stood in the way of a better world. He was, in Santayana's estimation, too sensitive and unaccepting to be at home in the world in which he lived but also too highly endowed for it.

Despite his contempt for contemporary culture, Shelley, Santayana notes, does not view reform as a lost cause. Nor, like some reformers, does he reject the status quo without giving thought to what should replace it. Shelley is, rather, a "utopian or visionary" moralist (*WD*, 106), one who views goodness as a force that is capable of overcoming any obstacle to its realization. Unlike those Hegelians who view imperfection as necessary to the goodness of reality as a whole, Shelley refuses to accept corruption and injustice as inevitable. Evil, for him, is inexplicable and unnatural, the result of forces that are arbitrary, accidental, and temporary. His poetic imagery is calculated both to vent outrage at the madness of war, famine, greed, and cruelty (which he condemns with an intensity that, Santayana thinks, risks inciting pessimism) and inspire the conviction that suffering and

oppression can be overcome and life rendered perfect. For Shelley, love kindled by the force of reason is sufficiently powerful to transform society and even human nature.

Santayana contends, however, that Shelley's attraction to human perfection leaves him unable to understand things as they are. He views any obstacle to his ideals, however immovable, as unnatural or perverse and is, in light of this, naive about the prospects for reform. Moreover, Shelley commits the cardinal sin of mistaking his vision of what human beings ought to become for an account of what, deep down, they truly are. But even in succumbing to these illusions, Santayana thinks Shelley proves no more sentimental than any other modern poet. As he sees it, "all other poets also have been poets of illusion. The distinction of Shelley is that his illusions are so wonderfully fine, subtle, and palpitating; that they betray passions and mental habits so singularly generous and pure" (*WD*, 112).

Contrary to Arnold, then, Santayana believes Shelley has a serious subject-matter. The images he offers up are not idle fancies. Nor are they aimed, as Francis Thompson argues, at dressing up nature in beautiful verse. To the contrary, Shelley is driven by a vision of what is supremely important in life and the beauty and force of his work derive from the depth of his insight. If Shelley's poetry is at all ineffectual, as Arnold claims it is, it is because it projects an ideal to be attained, rather than considering the means by which it is to be realized.

Still, Santayana thinks it is one thing to admire Shelley's poetry as an expression of human values, quite another to view it, as Shelley himself did, as an account of human nature. As noted, Santayana insists that unlike perceptual and theoretical knowledge poetry does not purport to describe what is the case. He thinks Shelley has a gift for expressing the best human ideals but determining which among our capacities and needs are most worthy of development and fulfillment is, from the point of view of an indifferent material world, a contingent, arbitrary, and *a priori* matter. When, following Shelley, imagined ideals are mistaken for descriptions of fact, "fiction becomes deception, poetry illusion, morals fanaticism, and religion bad science" (*WD*, 113). For Santayana, Shelley's claim to objectivity for his ideals is dogmatic. It leaves him unable to view sympathetically the lives of people who do not share his vision and blinds him to the cruelty that arises from this intolerance.



To illustrate his point, Santayana cites Shelley's discussion of selfishness and evil. Drawing on Russell's case against egoism, Santayana claims that, all other things being equal, it is better to secure a great good for one person than a lesser good for another and that this is so no matter who the people are. This, for him, is tantamount to claiming that we should love our neighbors as we do ourselves because their good is not any less good simply in virtue of being theirs and not ours. Santayana agrees with Shelley that if such a principle were to be taken to heart, the evils of our competitive society would melt away. Being unable to imagine why this sort of love is not pervasive, Shelley can only grieve and rage at the irrationality of his contemporaries. For him, the persistence of selfishness, being a violation of the true nature of human beings, is monstrous and unintelligible. Indeed, on his way of thinking, Santayana insists, evil can only ever be viewed as senseless and gratuitous.

Against this view, Santayana argues that selfishness is neither inexplicable nor the result of groundless malice in the human heart. It is, he claims, to be expected where there is insufficient room and resources for all things to prosper simultaneously. Under such conditions, what is necessary to the flourishing of one creature constitutes an evil to any creature for whom that flourishing spells defeat. While Shelley seems to acknowledge that evil arises where the pursuit of different lives proves irreconcilable, Santayana thinks he fails to draw the proper conclusion from this. Given that human beings are animals in the natural world, Santayana thinks it is unreasonable to expect them to be entirely void of self-interest. While people are certainly capable of personal sacrifice—for the sake of their religious convictions, their communities, their children, etc.—they are not capable of sacrificing themselves to something in which they have no interest at all. In taking the pursuit of one's interests to be perverse, Shelley shows his ignorance of human beings and ends up protesting against nature. At the same time, however, Santayana claims that the more Shelley resists facts about human nature, the more he reveals about his own deepest needs and the more truly do his political vision, his brief in behalf of the power of love, and his judgments of other people express his true inner nature. Had Shelley understood reality better, Santayana surmises, he would not have written as he did and we would all be the

worse for it, since Shelley's "was...the purest, tenderest, richest, most rational nature ever poured forth in verse" (*WD*, 116).

Having concluded that Shelley's subject-matter is worthy of first-rate poetry, Santayana considers whether Shelley meets his second criterion for greatness in art—whether he has the "sane humanity" that artistic genius requires (*WD*, 103). If sanity requires acuteness of external perception, adaptability to circumstances, and regard for matters of fact, Santayana thinks Shelley fails to make the grade. But Santayana does not view Shelley's imperviousness to fact as a personal shortcoming or eccentricity. He insists that Shelley's logic is that of a visionary, not a lunatic—one who dreams so that others may strive for something better. As Santayana sees it, it is commentators like Arnold who are more apt to distort their inner natures, since their imagination is stunted as a result of their acceptance of what is perverse because it has become the norm. Practical souls—those who reconcile themselves to the way things are—are insightful as reflections of the times in which they live but, in Santayana's estimation, they are "wretched expression[s]" of the possibilities open to human beings (*WD*, 116). However obtuse about facts of human nature Shelley may be, he "shows us the perfect but naked body of human happiness" (*WD*, 117).

Given a world so staunchly opposed to his ideals, Santayana thinks it unsurprising that Shelley would view freedom as a panacea. The freedom Shelley craves, however, is not merely political—freedom of the press and participation in free elections, Santayana avers, "do not greatly help us in living after our own mind, which is, I suppose, the only positive sort of liberty" (*WD*, 117). True freedom, for Shelley, involves the chance to thrive in a congenial community, as opposed to being forced to live in circumstances one cannot abide. Viewed in this light, his advocacy of free love, to which Arnold objects so vociferously, is but a reflection of his general impatience with imperfection and his conviction that the spontaneous pursuit of love liberates the spirit.

For Santayana, however, the difficulties of practicing free love are evident in Shelley's own life. Though Shelley married his first wife to save her from domestic abuse, rather than for love, he still took exception when his best friend set his sights on her.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, when Shelley practiced what he preached and left his first wife to marry Mary

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46 As suggested by various writers, such as Edward Dowden (*The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, 2 vols. [London: Kegan Paul, Trench & Co., 1886]).

Godwin, his abandoned spouse was driven to suicide. Mary Shelley, as his wife, had to cope with Shelley's attraction to other women. Free love, Santayana concludes, is not freedom from difficulty, jealousy, or tragedy. However ripe for reform conventions may be, Santayana insists, *pace* Shelley, that they are indispensable. And while free love inspires sublime poetry, it is not a policy suited to this world.

As for the alleged depravity of Shelley's atheism, Santayana thinks the case far from clear. While Shelley denied the existence of a personal god who created the universe and presides over it as legislator and judge, Santayana claims he was nevertheless drawn to Christian ideals whenever they were presented to him as moral insights, rather than as dogmatic pronouncements. Thus Shelley's renunciation of Christianity is not as wholesale as it first appears to be.

As for those who view Shelley as some sort of pantheist, Santayana thinks they go too far. While Shelley views reality as fluid and vital, rather than mechanical, he does not hold, as pantheists do, that the world has a conscious plan, that events unfold by logical necessity, that the individual is subordinate to the greater good of the cosmos, or that ideals should be sacrificed in the face of physical necessity. Moreover, Shelley departs from pantheism in taking the seat of moral authority to be internal, even though it is diffused among all individuals and stems from a natural love of beauty and goodness that persists even in the face of obdurate reality.

This is not say, Santayana is careful to point out, that Shelley's atheism is of the narrow materialistic sort. For all his godlessness, Shelley retains a Platonic view of the eternal—his ideals being timeless and enduring—and his condemnation of religious idolatry and hypocrisy are rooted in sentiments that are themselves deeply spiritual, not mundane.

As noted, Santayana acknowledges Shelley's lack of appreciation for the world as it is. His poetry has nothing to say about history or nature or human psychology. His critical stance is informed, not by patient attention to the details of human life and its social and natural conditions, but rather by ideals that have never been realized and are not apt ever to be. To those, like Arnold, who insist good literature requires insight into real life, Shelley's utopian views are seriously flawed and lack any solid footing. But Santayana rejects this conception of artistic merit. Music, he thinks, can hardly be viewed as a commentary on the conditions of life yet it still touches us and

“stimulates...the formal and emotional possibilities of living which lie in the spirit” (*WD*, 121).

Moreover, Santayana sees no good reason to think the conditions of human life exhaust the conditions in which spirituality might flourish. He does not see how the possibility that there are organisms in the universe engaged in spiritual pursuits of which human beings are utterly ignorant can be ruled out. Nor does he think we can preclude the possibility that in the future there will be forms of life that we have yet to imagine or consider. There is no call for artists to reflect on such possible life forms. Even if they could, the only reason for doing so would be to improve the lot of human beings by guiding them to attainable goods.

For Santayana, investigation of the material circumstances of life reveals nothing more than the means by which certain lives are lived. However, the path to human fulfillment lies, not in the acquisition of such knowledge, but rather in the fullest expression of the human spirit. One cannot hope to improve life by means of the sort of criticism Arnold defends unless one's judgments about the worth of various pursuits are guided by an ideal conception of human fulfillment. Contrary to what Arnold supposes, poetry is no more a reflection on the circumstances of life than music is a commentary on the instruments through which it is played. The poet's aim is to open us up to the contemplation of ideal worlds that transcend the material limits of human life and challenge our tendency to make human affairs the measure of all value. On this view, artists are in league with saints, mystics, and prophets. Their primary aim is not to describe life. It is rather to imagine it as it might be, to explore possibilities in the realm of essence. Contemplating such ideals is valuable, not because it issues in reliable predictions of what will come to pass and not because ideal essences are embodied in divinities that stand in judgment of us and control our destinies. Ideal essences are nothing more than possibilities that lie in wait for anyone who seeks to consider them. Those we find inspiring are those that resonate with our deepest hopes and needs. They are the ones that great poets draw attention to so that people of a like mind and spirit may delight in their contemplation. In Shelley's case, his poetic visions are “so purely ideal and so deeply human” that Santayana thinks he merits “the epitaph which a clear-sighted friend wrote upon his tomb: *cor cordium*, the heart of hearts” (*WD*, 123).

## VI ~ The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy

In his discussion of Shelley, Santayana defended the importance of contemplating spiritual ideals for their own sake, independent of their practical benefits, even though they lack grounding in facts that are independent of our natures. With this view of the status and significance of spiritual values in hand, Santayana returns, in the last chapter of *Winds of Doctrine*, to the topic that opened the book: the state of philosophy in the United States.

“The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy” is a reprint of an address given to the Philosophical Union of the University of California on August 25, 1911, and published shortly afterwards.<sup>47</sup> Delivered just months before Santayana left the United States for good, the essay is something of a swan song. It is also the jumping-off point for his book *The Genteel Tradition at Bay*, a work that drew considerable attention in philosophical circles when it appeared.<sup>48</sup>

The main theme of this essay is the lack of fit between the moral tradition the United States inherited from European philosophy – what Santayana calls “the genteel tradition” – and its emerging, homegrown morality. The United States, he thinks, is caught between the ossified, old-world ideals that prevail in intellectual domains – religion, literature, and academic philosophy – and the spontaneous, newer moral vision that dominates practical affairs – industry, enterprise, and social organization. He undertakes to trace the roots of this split in American culture and discern its trajectory.

On Santayana’s analysis, America’s genteel tradition is the progeny of Calvinism – the dominant philosophy of America’s earliest settlers – and post-Kantian idealism. The root of Calvinism, as he defines it, is an “agonised conscience” resulting from the conviction that while human beings are sinful and will be punished, it is beautiful that sin should exist to be punished inasmuch as it makes evident the superiority and purity of the infinite and drives home the importance of living as we ought to. To be a Calvinist in this sense is to tack back and forth between lamenting one’s degraded state as a human being and delighting in the perfection and holiness that this depravity makes manifest (*WD*, 127).

<sup>47</sup> See *The University of California Chronicle* 13 (1911): 357–80.

<sup>48</sup> New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons; London: “The Adelphi,” 1931.

Santayana thinks Calvinism was well suited to early America, where communities were small and isolated and survival required strict adherence to social norms. Once the early colonies established themselves and the pressures of meeting basic material needs eased, however, Calvinism gave way to “the second and native-born American mentality” (*WD*, 128). The concept of sin “totally evaporated” (*WD*, 128). People remained honest and helpful but more out of common sense than respect for strict principles or the sanctity of law. Nature, meanwhile, came to be seen as not only abundant but beautiful and worthy of reverence, and human beings were viewed as inherently good-natured, cooperative, and naturally blameless, rather than as enemies of God. With the advent of this new outlook, Calvinism lost its foothold in the ordinary lives of Americans.

Although Calvinist ideas continued to be influential, some intellectuals began to search for a philosophy more in tune with real life—among them, America’s foremost literary minds: Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Ralph Waldo Emerson. Finding the ideals of the genteel tradition too far removed from their experience and finding little else in early American culture to feed their souls, these writers turned their attention inward. They explored their idiosyncratic inner lives, rather than their place in history or the broader culture. While distancing themselves from the genteel tradition, their writing remained personal and, as a result, it did not issue in a public morality to displace the genteel tradition.

Nor was anything new in the way of a moral philosophy forthcoming from America’s churches. They dealt with the widening gap between the genteel tradition and ordinary life by repackaging Calvinism, rather than replacing it. Talk of hell-fire and damnation was downplayed and “a Christian tenderness and a hope of grace for the individual” were emphasized instead (*WD*, 129). Still, the basic outlook of the genteel tradition remained intact.

Santayana claims that the genteel tradition was bolstered by the rise to dominance of transcendental idealism in American academic circles. To properly appreciate the impact of idealism, Santayana thinks it crucial to distinguish between transcendentalism as a method—a view about how philosophy is to be done—and transcendentalism as a metaphysical view—a theory of the nature of reality.

The transcendental method, Santayana says, is “the critical logic of science” (*WD*, 130). It involves the examination of the

scope and limits of the principles and concepts that make it possible for human beings to develop a systematic view of the world. By reflecting critically on human subjectivity, proponents of this method uncover presuppositions that, while necessary for knowledge, are grounded in human nature, rather than in features of the world as it is in itself.<sup>49</sup> This method is not only “correct” in Santayana’s estimation but also “the chief contribution made in modern times to speculation” (*WD*, 130).

As a metaphysical view, however, Santayana thinks transcendentalism is seriously flawed. For him, it is a deep confusion to take the presuppositions of human knowledge to imply a “transcendental logic” – an inventory of principles governing the order of things in the universe. Such an approach wrongly assumes that nature is constrained or determined by the conditions of human understanding. It turns genuine insights about human subjectivity gained through transcendental reflection into “transcendental myth” about evolution or history and thereby transforms a “conscientious critique of knowledge” into “a sham system of nature” (*WD*, 131).

Santayana thinks it unsurprising that transcendentalism in both its forms – the method of critical reflection he admires and the metaphysics he rejects – found a welcome audience in America. For one thing, transcendental idealism seemed to provide a metaphysical foundation for the genteel tradition. Kant himself exploited transcendental idealism to limit science so as to make room for his faith – a faith Santayana claims is Calvinist to the core. By construing empirical facts as human constructions, Kant hoped to keep religious views isolated from the corrosive influence of empirical knowledge. For proponents of the genteel tradition in the United States, transcendental idealism offered a means of defending Calvinism in the face of its growing detachment from the lives of ordinary Americans. Indeed, Santayana takes the rise to dominance of idealism as an indication that the heirs to the genteel tradition felt it to be weak and in need of support.

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49 As he later explains, “Transcendental logic serves to render articulate certain special perspectives necessarily confined to the subjective or poetic sphere. Whether it shall have any validity or appropriateness in relation to further facts remains an open question.... Whether, in any instance, this logic corresponds at all to the articulation of events or even to the history of ideas, can never be discovered by this logic from the inside.... That this logic should claim to be a *universal law*... betrays its non-logical origin” (*PGS*, 506–7). *Scepticism and Animal Faith* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1923) is Santayana’s main contribution to the transcendental critique of knowledge.

Quite apart from its metaphysical implications, Santayana thinks the transcendental method fit with the individualistic and revolutionary character of American culture. He thinks pursuit of the method leads to the view that morality and faith are matters involving the determination of the Will—the root of action—rather than the Intellect—the basis of cognitive understanding. Moreover, the method puts reflection on one's present situation ahead of appeals to established authority and historical precedent as the main source of philosophical insight. Both of these tendencies, Santayana claims, "are truly American" and form the core of what Emerson called "self-trust" (or "self-reliance") (*WD*, 131–32).

Santayana considers Emerson an important figure in American philosophy because he "practised the transcendental method in all its purity" and "more, perhaps, than anybody that has ever lived" (*WD*, 132). Avoiding the idealist's error of mistaking principles of human understanding for principles of nature, Emerson's reflections are personal and not to be viewed as resting on scientific facts. Rather than construct a philosophical system, he merely records how various things in experience, history, poetry, and natural science strike him. Any insights he has are offered up as poetic myths—expressions of human imagination comprising a "human soliloquy," rather than as discoveries of the workings of things as they are apart from us (*WD*, 133). Still, for all his focus on subjectivity, Emerson retains a deep commitment to truth. Although concerned with matters that are deeply personal, his reflections remain "detached, unworldly, contemplative" (*WD*, 133). Recognizing that "our dignity is not in what we do, but in what we understand," Emerson "[breaks] away from all conditions of age or country and represent[s] nothing except intelligence itself" (*WD*, 133).

It might seem hard to square Emerson's view of nature as something worthy of reverence with commitment to the transcendental method, as Santayana characterizes it. However, Santayana rejects the suggestion of any tension in Emerson's views. He allows that Emerson was "particularly ingenious and clear-sighted" in expressing his spiritual connection to the natural world and even claims that this is the "most genuine and spontaneous part of modern taste, and especially of American taste" (*WD*, 134). However, he insists that there remains all the difference in the world between expressing a spiritual connection to nature and grounding that expression in a theory of reality. Since Emerson's attitudes



toward nature have no metaphysical underpinning, Santayana claims they are not beset by the confusions that pervade transcendental idealism.

Although Emerson was proficient in the transcendental method, Santayana claims he did not entirely free himself from the grip of the genteel tradition. On Santayana's view, poetry and religion have their roots in a deep human need for consolation in a morally challenging and dispiriting world—they are the product of “an unhappiness that confesses itself” (*WD*, 134). He thinks proponents of the genteel tradition dismiss any grounds for human dissatisfaction when they insist that what seems to be evil or imperfect proves on deeper analysis to be necessary to the perfection of the universe as a whole and thus only apparently bad. Such a view, he claims, forbids and even stigmatizes the open expression of human unhappiness and in so doing cuts people off from serious poetry and profound religion. The imagination is redirected to reflection on one's place in the grand scheme of things, reflection that occurs at a level so abstract that “human circumstances are lost sight of, and human problems dissolve in a purer medium” (*WD*, 134). To Santayana's way of thinking, such a view seeks to ease human disquiet by diverting attention from it, rather than by understanding and coming to terms with it. To know oneself is “the classic form of consolation,” whereas to “elude oneself” is the romantic form (*WD*, 134). Though it is free of metaphysical underpinnings, Santayana thinks Emerson's spiritual devotion to nature is in the end romantic and, as such, allied to the genteel tradition.

Has any American writer completely broken with the genteel tradition? Santayana thinks perhaps not. However, he suggests that there are indications that a new, “truly native philosophy and poetry” lies on the horizon (*WD*, 134). He observes that certain humorists—Mark Twain, perhaps also Josh Billings and Artemus Ward—are adept at pointing out incongruences between the ideals of the genteel tradition and facts of American life. They have not broken entirely free of this tradition—their humor relies on a certain respect for it—but the fact that they find these incongruences comic, rather than tragic or disconcerting, suggests that they have a critical distance from it. Their work suggests that the genteel tradition, though “present pervasively,” is “everywhere weak” (*WD*, 135).

Santayana cites the work of Walt Whitman as further evidence that the dominance of the genteel tradition is waning. He thinks Whitman's

work is so at odds with this tradition that many view it as entirely unrepresentative of American culture. Whitman, he says, is a consummate democrat in psychology and morals. He considers all emotions, moods, and feelings to be of equal value and puts the commonplace moments of life on a moral par with all others. Indeed, Whitman goes so far as to accord human and non-human creatures equal moral status. In leveling moral perspectives in this way, Whitman challenges the notion—central to the genteel tradition—that there is an overarching or transcendental moral authority.

Still, Santayana thinks that for all his importance as a critic of conventional morality, Whitman fails to supply a positive moral vision to rival that of the genteel tradition. He grants that “an American in the nineteenth century who completely disregarded the genteel tradition could hardly have done more” than Whitman did but insists that his rebellion did not issue in “the reconstruction that alone can justify revolution” (*WD*, 136).

Santayana ranks William James alongside Whitman as an important critic of the genteel tradition and, moreover, the best representative of the homegrown American morality. While starting from ideas drawn from the genteel tradition, Santayana thinks James ends up with a view that is radically at odds with it. He is thus to be credited with finally breaking the stranglehold of the genteel tradition on American intellectual culture.

On Santayana’s reading, James begins somewhat like proponents of the genteel tradition by defending faith from challenges rooted in secular experience and science. However, in stark contrast to the genteel tradition, his notion of faith is expansive and pluralistic. He treats with great sympathy all manner of “sentimentalists, mystics, spiritualists, wizards, cranks, quacks, and impostors” and as a result is the spokesman in academic circles for anyone disaffected from the genteel tradition (*WD*, 137).

At the same time, James’s pragmatism finds favor with people immersed in the morality of everyday American life, the morality that Santayana opposes to the genteel tradition—especially, anti-intellectualists and those who take material well-being to be of paramount importance. For James, intelligence is like any other biological capacity or organ. It arises as a practical adaptation to the natural environment and evolves in directions that prove beneficial. Cognition does not copy or mirror reality; rather, it uncovers connections among

things that can be exploited to practical advantage. Theory is thus an extension of practice, rather than entirely apart from it. True ideas—religious as well as scientific—are those that facilitate conduct and subserve practical ends.

Santayana thinks James's account of intelligence is seriously flawed. As he sees it, James mistakes an analysis of the causes and conditions of theorizing for an analysis of its content and function. While he thinks James is right to view intelligence as a natural capacity, he also thinks James ignores the fact that intelligence includes the capacity for pure contemplation, independent of practical concerns. Still, whatever the problems with James's view, it is clear that in questioning the value of detached reflection, he departs radically from the genteel tradition.

James is also at odds with the genteel tradition in rejecting mind-body dualism in favor of the view that cognitive capacities reside in physical organisms alongside other natural processes. Here, too, Santayana expresses reservations. He thinks James's notion that cognition is a means of fulfilling an organism's practical interests commits him to the view that at least some natural processes are directed to the realization of ends. Taken alongside the claim that the mind is ontologically on a par with the body, this view implies the "vitalistic" doctrine that matter acts in behalf of certain purposes (*WD*, 138).

If Santayana's analysis is correct and James is committed to the view that reality unfolds to realize certain ideals, it might seem that he ought to be viewed as defending the sort of transcendental idealism that proponents of the genteel tradition promote, rather than as a critic of it. However, Santayana rejects this suggestion. As he observes, James denies that the universe tends towards fixed, timeless, "self-unfolding destinies" (*WD*, 139). The ideals operative in James's universe are concrete aims of finite creatures, creatures acting to transform their environment in ways they find congenial, while adapting their interests to the effects of the environment in which they act. For James, such purposes as there are in the world are contingent, incomplete, indeterminate, and subject to renegotiation and redirection. In contrast to the transcendental idealist, James denies the world has a fixed or ultimate end. "It embodies no formula or storable law.... What a day may bring forth is...uncertain even to God" (*WD*, 139). On his view, God is a poet—acting spontaneously and creatively—rather than an accountant calculating outcomes according to formulae. God can

work miracles—the laws of nature admitting of exceptions—but he is not omnipotent (there being no other way to excuse his failure to obliterate evil). Though a defender of faith, the faith James defends is apt to be viewed by members of the genteel tradition as thin and disconcerting.

Santayana does not try to determine whether James's philosophy of religion is closer to the truth than orthodox Christianity or transcendental idealism is. For him, all three of these views are poetic myths and in deciding among them the question is not which is most probable but rather which is most worthy of pursuit. But rather than enter into a detailed comparison of these views, Santayana rests content with observing that the importance of James's view lies, not in its truth—there being no way to establish this—nor in its having obliterated the ideals of the genteel tradition—there being corners of American culture in which they still thrive. Its importance lies rather in its providing an alternative that ends the genteel tradition's "illegitimate monopoly... over what ought to be assumed and what ought to be hoped for" (*WD*, 141).

In light of his analysis, Santayana thinks philosophy in the United States is entering a new phase. The influence of Calvinism has been progressively weakened by the shift in values accompanying changes in the conditions of workaday life. At the same time, the influence of transcendental idealism has been diminished both in the broader culture, by a growing preoccupation with science and technology, and in academic circles, by the intellectual revolution begun by Emerson and Whitman and brought to fruition in the work of James. Given these developments, Santayana thinks America is poised to reject the egotism and anthropocentrism of the genteel tradition once and for all.

As Santayana sees it, the focus of contemporary American culture on efforts to transform nature to suit its purposes makes it harder to view reality as constituted by human understanding and created ready-made to suit human needs. The experience of catastrophic natural disasters—the San Francisco earthquake of 1906, for example—also drives home the view that human beings are only a part of the world, not its source. Finally, experience of vast natural landscapes makes evident nature's "non-human beauty" and its indifference to human concerns (*WD*, 142). Rather than supplying evidence of "deliberate morality seated in the world," they speak to the superficiality of claims to literal understanding, to the vanity of the idealist view that human

reason and values are the center and pivot of the universe and to the great diversity of the forms of flourishing that nature allows. “It is,” he predicts, “the irresistible suasion of this daily spectacle... so different from the verbal discipline of the schools, that will, I trust, inspire the philosophy of [America’s] children” (*WD*, 142–43).

For Santayana, casting aside the genteel tradition in favor of the view that humanity is part of nature does not require that traditional values be deemed unworthy of respect. To deny that human values can be grounded in terms of a broader cosmic purpose is not to deny their seriousness or importance in our lives. It does, however, require that humanity’s sense of its own importance give way to the recognition of its modest place in the “wild, indifferent, non-censorious infinity of nature” (*WD*, 143). On his view, human actions must be seen as counting for very little in the grand scheme of nature. At the same time, it must not be forgotten that what sets human beings apart from the rest of nature is their capacity for speculation and contemplation. To Santayana’s way of thinking, it is “the interest and beauty of this inward landscape, rather than any fortunes that may await [man’s] body in the outer world, [that] constitute his proper happiness” (*WD*, 143).

True to his philosophy, Santayana thinks his view of the place and value of speculative thought in human life is itself a poetic ideal—an imaginative conception of ends worthy of human striving. This ideal is neither subject to proof nor derivable from a metaphysical view about the ends reality is destined to achieve. It is rather to be defended by thinking through its implications in light of critical reflection on human beings and their place in nature and critically comparing it with alternative views. Having exposed the limitations of rival accounts throughout *Winds of Doctrine*, Santayana closes his book with an injunction to pursue the line of thought he has developed, to be “frankly human” and “content to live in the mind” (*WD*, 143).

In *Winds of Doctrine* Santayana presents a careful and perceptive critique of the major philosophical currents of its day. While none of the views he considers now has anything like the influence on philosophy that it had in 1913, it would be a mistake to think that his discussion of them is *passé*. The questions associated with realism, idealism, and pragmatism; fact and value; reason and faith; science and art that he engages are hardly peripheral in philosophy. Nor are they specific to the figures he discusses or the product of a bygone era. What is

more, Santayana does far more than expose hitherto unnoticed problems with philosophical doctrines prominent in the early twentieth century. He also develops a systematic philosophy of his own and demonstrates its originality, breadth, and power. The lines of thought—both critical and constructive—that Santayana pursues in *Winds of Doctrine* contain a wealth of insights, not only important to the thought of his day, but to ours as well.





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