REALISM IN SANTAYANA'S *LIFE OF REASON*

I

Santayana is the most famous philosopher directly associated with the realist movements in American philosophy. In a recent critical survey of theory of knowledge in the United States, Roderick M. Chisholm has designated Santayana's *Realms of Being*, published in one volume in 1942, as "the last great work of this phase of American epistemology."¹ Usually overlooked by the historians of philosophical realism is the masterpiece of Santayana's middle period—*The Life of Reason* (1905-1906).² Certainly the influence of this work on American realists cannot be minimized. F. J. E. Woodbridge once confided that "the *Life of Reason* is a book I wish that I could have written myself";³ and Morris Cohen, whose critical powers were never weakened by enthusiasm, has hailed it "as the only comprehensive, carefully articulated, philosophy of life and civilization which has been produced on these shores."⁴

There are many reasons for the decline in estimation suffered by *The Life of Reason*, and particularly for its absence from the ordinary contexts in which realism is discussed. First, philosophical

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² In *The Mind of Santayana* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1955), Richard Butler, who takes the doctrine of essence to be "the keystone" of Santayana's philosophy and who discusses what he calls "Critical Neo-Realism" as the particular occasion which brought this doctrine forth, cites only one passage of *The Life of Reason*. In future references Butler's study will be designated MS.
realism is usually interpreted to be strictly epistemological, and *The Life of Reason*, although it contains an epistemology, is mainly a contribution to moral philosophy. Then, too, Santayana's style is not one which endears him to contemporary philosophers, who are inclined to share the judgment of G. E. Moore, whose review of *The Life of Reason* in the *International Journal of Ethics* dismissed the work as too ambiguous to be of much use. Finally, the work itself resists easy classification. Santayana, of course, would have allowed—indeed, approved—the application of the label 'materialist' or 'naturalist', and in the same vein Howgate has treated it as "the culmination of nineteenth-century rationalism." But other critics have rightly discerned that *The Life of Reason* is more than naturalism in the standard sense of the term. Charitably perhaps, Morris Cohen has called it a fusion of naturalism and idealism. And Santayana himself came to feel such grave misgivings about the tenor of his masterpiece that he seized the opportunity to revise it for a one volume edition, and with the assistance of his disciple, Daniel Cory, he set out to prune from it passages which were too mechanistic or too subjectivistic.

To appreciate the complexity of *The Life of Reason*, neither idealism nor naturalism would serve, and to urge the fusion of these two rivals is to invite confusion. To grasp the merits of this work, it may be helpful to see it in its historical setting. Here it is useful to turn to Ralph Barton Perry's *Present Philosophical Tendencies*, published in 1912, for it provides an unsurpassed account of philosophy during the decade Santayana wrote *The Life of

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7 Daniel M. Cory, "Preface" to Santayana's *Life of Reason* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), pp. v–vi. Butler also cites Santayana's misgivings about *The Life of Reason* in explanation of his own dismissal of that work: "Santayana deprecated the whole work as immature and asked me not to use it, insisting that there was hardly a word in it he would not change after mature reflection. Scribner's has brought out posthumously a revised edition, abridged into one volume. But Santayana told me that he had no enthusiasm, and too little energy, to do much work on this revision during the last year of his life. The task fell to Cory, for the most part, and was completed by constant cross-reference to Santayana's mature synthesis." (MS, p. x.).
Reason. According to Perry, there were four tendencies: naturalism, idealism, pragmatism, and realism. He defined naturalism as "the philosophical generalization of science—the application of the theories of science to the problems of philosophy," and idealism as "a form of spiritualism in which man, the finite individual, is regarded as a microcosmic representation of God, the Absolute Individual." Clearly, *The Life of Reason* is neither idealism nor naturalism alone, although it may be said to 'fuse' the two in the sense that it attends to both science and religion, the sources of naturalism and idealism respectively. Perry went on to define pragmatism as the philosophy which accepts "the categories of life as fundamental," and although Santayana is second to none in acknowledging the primacy of the categories of life in regard to values, he has maintained that life has nature as its origin and environment, and that nature is fundamental in regard to reality.

Thus realism remains the philosophical type which *The Life of Reason* best exemplifies. True, the term 'realism' did not name a philosophical movement until several years after the publication of *The Life of Reason*, but as early as 1901 the first shots of American realism had been fired, in the form of two articles, one by William P. Montague and the other by R. B. Perry, both directed against Royce's refutation of realism in *The World and the Individual*. Nor, if realism is to serve as a basis for the interpretation of *The Life of Reason*, can it be confined to epistemology. Here, again, Perry has led the way. Realism, he has insisted, is both polemic and philosophical reconstruction. As polemic, it has sought to "discredit romanticism; that is the philosophy which regards reality as necessarily ideal, owing to the dependence of things on knowledge." As philosophical reconstruction, realism offers, in addition to a theory of knowledge, a philosophy of mind and a philosophy of life (or human values).

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9 Perry, *PPT*, p. 197.


Santayana's own statements concerning the composition of *The Life of Reason* reveal its essential realism. The idea for the work first dawned on Santayana when as a student in Royce's seminar he read Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind*.\(^\text{12}\) Though excited by the prospects of tracing the stages of human progress in society, art, religion and science, Santayana found Hegel's dialectic flawed by an excessive idealism which strung all ideals along into an all-embracing pattern in which the historically later is necessarily superior to the historically earlier, and which located reason not in the ideals themselves but in the transitions between them. Hegel, remarked Santayana, "was sure it all culminated in something, and was not sure it did not culminate in himself. The system, however, as it might strike a less egotistical reader, is a long demonstration of man's ineptitude and of nature's contemptuous march over a path paved with good intentions."\(^\text{13}\) But it is one thing to underscore the flaws of Hegel's system; it is quite another thing to do better—in this case, to give an account of human ideals which, while invented by the imagination, is nonetheless tested by objective criteria.

Years passed before Santayana found the touchstone he needed. He acquired it first by way of special learning. The study of Greek philosophy, in particular of Plato and of Aristotle, acquainted him with the conditions and goals of rational life, not merely for the Greeks but for all men in all times. But what enabled Santayana to write *The Life of Reason*, better even than his knowledge of the Greek philosophers, was self-knowledge. "All that was needed," he declared in the Preface to the second edition of *The Life of Reason*, "was to know oneself. No unnatural constancy need be imposed on human nature at large: it sufficed


\(^{13}\) Santayana, *Life of Reason*, 5: *Reason in Science*, p. 147. *The Life of Reason; or Phases of Human Progress* was published in five volumes by Scribner's in 1905 and 1906; a second edition was published in 1922. In 1962 a Collier paperback printing of the 1922 edition appeared. All references in the present essay, unless otherwise indicated, are to the Collier paperback printing. The volumes are cited separately by means of the indicated abbreviations henceforth: *Reason in Common Sense* designated *RCS*, *Reason in Society* designated *RSO*, *Reason in Religion* designated *RR*, *Reason in Art* designated *RA*, and *Reason in Science* designated *RS*. 
that the critic himself should have a determinate character and a sane capacity for happiness."  

At last Santayana was ready to write *The Life of Reason*. It was, he later wrote, "intended to be a summary history of the human imagination, expressly distinguishing those phases of it which showed what Herbert Spencer called an adjustment of inner to outer relations; in other words, an adaptation of fancy and habit to material facts and opportunities."  

This last sentence succinctly expresses Santayana's realism. Approaching Santayana's *Life of Reason* as a document of realism will not only render it accessible for re-assessment and renewed appreciation; it will also illuminate the comprehensiveness of realism which so many realists felt but which their preoccupation with epistemology obscured. Thus the elements of realism in *The Life of Reason*, whether stated or implied, are to be examined here in the fields of theory of knowledge, of philosophy of mind, and of philosophy of life.

II

When the realistic philosophies emerged in the beginning of the twentieth century, philosophers were preoccupied with the problems of knowledge. In fact, realism itself arose in response to the problem of relating the knower to the object known. So it has been customary to consider realism primarily in the context of epistemology. Certainly Santayana did so.

In his contribution to *Essays in Critical Realism* (1920), entitled "Three Proofs of Realism" and incorporated later with modification in Chapter XVIII of *Scepticism and Animal Faith* (1923), Santayana circumscribed the range of realism. While "the minimum of realism" consists in the "presumption that there is such a thing as knowledge; in other words, that perception and thought refer to some object not the mere experience of perceiving and thinking"; and "the maximum of realism" consists in the "assurance that everything ever perceived or thought exists apart from apprehension and exactly in the form in which it is

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14 Santayana, *RCS*, p. 11.

believed to exist”; Santayana insisted that “any reasonable theory of knowledge—any theory that does not abolish its own subject-matter—will occupy some point between these extremes, and will be more or less realistic.” Realistic philosophy, therefore, faces two questions: “one, what measure of independence or separate existence shall be ascribed to the object? and the other, what degree of literalness and adequacy shall be claimed for knowledge?”

Of course answering these questions realistically runs the risk of self-contradiction, for the answer to the first question introduces the opposition of appearance and reality, while the answer to the second question may identify the two.

The first volume of The Life of Reason, Reason in Common Sense, presents Santayana’s earliest foray into epistemology. Although Santayana failed to discriminate the main strands of argument for realism, and although he wavered between maximal realism and minimal realism, and even at moments in his modes of expression flirted with idealism, the outline of a realistic epistemology is discernible. Of course, Reason in Common Sense contains more than epistemology; it includes a philosophy of mind as well as a theory of value. In truth, it places epistemological realism in the broad context of moral philosophy. This does not mitigate the fact that the theory of knowledge in Reason in Common Sense is quite imperfect; nevertheless, Cory’s judgment that The Life of Reason is as a whole caught in an “epistemological fog” seems far too harsh.

The epistemology in Reason in Common Sense is primarily genetic. Santayana undertook to show how knowledge of objective nature and of other conscious beings develops in subjective consciousness. His discussion is controlled by the common sense belief that there exists a reality independent of our cognitive processes. His task is to explain how, beginning with subjective consciousness, man achieves knowledge of objective reality. Whereas in the


order of being nature precedes mind, in the order of knowing mind precedes nature. Place Santayana's early epistemology in its historical context, a context in which idealism is dominant, pragmatism is ascendant, and realism, though in the air, had not yet received the exact formulations that were to split asunder into new realism and critical realism; and this epistemology begins to make sense.

Berkeley's case for idealism was summed up in the succinct formula: *esse est percipi*. Realists, like G. E. Moore and R. B. Perry, took this formula as a target for attack, and Santayana did so, too. This formula, he contended, is a piece of sophistry. It rests on an ambiguous argument, in one sense a truism, in another sense an absurdity, so that the acceptance of its truistic sense is disguised as a demonstration of its absurd sense. As Santayana stated: "It is a truism to say that I am the only seat or locus of my ideas, and that whatever I know is known by me; it is an absurdity to say that I am the only object of my thought and perception." 18 By means of this analysis Santayana not only repudiated the basis of realism; he also exhibited a kind of realism distinct from new realism, a kind which he himself on one occasion simply called "Old Realism" 19 and which came in later years to be known as critical realism. With the realists, he held that the object of perception or of thought may exist apart from the perceiver or thinker. Yet with the idealists, he also maintained that the "only seat and locus of my ideas" and perceptions is my own consciousness. At first these two propositions may appear incompatible; nevertheless, Santayana held them together in a consistent view. Accordingly, perceptions and ideas, though existing in the individual consciousness, stand for objects that exist outside that consciousness.

Santayana's epistemology in *Reason in Common Sense* occupies a middle ground between idealism and new realism. At the same time, it differs radically from both idealism and new realism. First, for Santayana cognition does not encompass its objects, drawing them into the receptacle of consciousness. On the contrary,

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18 Santayana, *RCS*, p. 81.
cognition is a transitive relation whereby perceptions and ideas internal to consciousness refer to objects external to consciousness. As Santayana said: "Knowledge is not eating, and we cannot expect to devour and possess what we mean. Knowledge is recognition of something absent; it is a salutation, not an embrace."  

Second, for Santayana "the core" of consciousness is not perception, but "an irresponsible, ungoverned, irrevocable dream." He continued:

Perception is in fact no primary phase of consciousness; it is an ulterior practical function acquired by a dream which has become symbolic of its conditions, and therefore relevant to its own destiny. Such relevance and symbolism are indirect and slowly acquired; their status cannot be understood unless we regard them as forms of imagination happily grown significant. In imagination, not in perception, lies the substance of experience, while knowledge and reason are but its chastened and ultimate form.

Hence, the crucial question is: How does the dream become symbolic of reality? To answer this question Santayana traced the steps by which individual consciousness ascribes objective relevance to its ideas.

In *Reason in Common Sense* Santayana explained the genesis of knowledge by reference to psychological hedonism. The explanation discloses at once the intimate relation between knowing and valuing and the dependence of consciousness on a physical organism with pleasure-pain potential. Now since ideation is for Santayana intrinsically pleasant by virtue of its aesthetic quality, consciousness is tempted to indulge itself in the purely aesthetic enjoyment of its own ideas. But seeking values more permanent than these transient aesthetic ones and more integral to its organic foundations, consciousness selects portions of experience according to their pleasure-pain components and takes them to be symbolic of more enduring objects which exist apart from experience. As Santayana remarked: "The first step in making pleasure intelligible and capable of being pursued is to make it pleasure in something." 

\[\text{20 Santayana, RCS, p. 59.}\]
\[\text{21 Santayana, RCS, p. 44.}\]
\[\text{22 Santayana, RCS, p. 48.}\]
Thus perceptions and thoughts become symbolic when they are so linked to expectations of pleasure and pain as to become factors in action.²³

Unquestionably, Santayana’s theory of the genesis of knowledge is affiliated with pragmatism; the origin and the test of knowledge are practical. By assigning the potentialities to produce pleasures or pains to enduring or recurring external objects, consciousness evaluates the relevance of its own internally flowing ideas and perceptions to such objects; they are deemed relevant or truly symbolic or representative to the extent that they reliably forecast pains or pleasures and guide action according to such forecast. The pragmatism, however, culminates in a realism. Though “a born hermit” indulging itself in the play of its own ideas and initially oblivious to the interests of its organism and the objects in its environment, consciousness comes, through the discipline of pain and pleasure, to posit a world of objects.

The “first task of intelligence,” according to Santayana, is “to represent the environing reality, a reality actually represented in the notion, universally prevalent among men, of a cosmos in space and time, an animated material engine called nature.”²⁴ The elucidation of this common sense principle involves nothing less than a reversal: the flux of immediate experience, once the sole reality, is now appearance only, whereas reality is identified with “a stable and unequivocal object.”²⁵ Santayana’s account of the genesis of knowledge thus enters a new phase: a Platonic system is erected on the flux of experience. The object is “a complex and elusive entity, the sum at once and the residuum of all particular impressions which, underlying the present one, have bequeathed to it their surviving linkage in discourse and consequently endowed it with a large part of its present character.”²⁶ On this analysis, the object is “hybrid”; it is “sensuous in its materials and ideal in its locus.”²⁷ Each perception of the object is interpreted to be an appearance of it. In reality the object is the ideal

²³ Santayana, RCS, p. 49.
²⁴ Santayana, RCS, p. 52.
²⁵ Santayana, RCS, p. 61.
²⁶ Santayana, RCS, p. 63.
²⁷ Santayana, RCS, p. 63.
The discovery of fellow-minds parallels the discovery of a world of objects. "The fundamental reason," Santayana asserted, "why we attribute consciousness to natural bodies is that those bodies, before they are conceived to be merely material, are conceived to possess all the qualities which our own consciousness possesses when we behold them."\(^{28}\) At this juncture Santayana advanced his theory of tertiary qualities. "The moving image is . . . impregnated not only with secondary qualities—colour, heat, etc.—but with qualities which we may call tertiary, such as pain, fear, joy, malice, feebleness, expectancy."\(^{29}\) Consciousness, of course, is made up of such tertiary qualities, so that to attribute these qualities to other bodies is to assert that these bodies have consciousesses. Naturally such attributions are made; and on them is grounded our knowledge of other minds. Needless to say, this account of the knowledge of other minds is an instance of the pathetic fallacy, but Santayana was quick to note: "There is evidently one case in which the pathetic fallacy is not fallacious, the case in which the object observed happens to be an animal similar to the observer and similarly affected."\(^{30}\)

Now the starting point of knowledge, whether of nature or of other minds, is, for Santayana in *Reason in Common Sense*, a continuum of immediate experience construed as a Jamesian stream of consciousness. Knowledge occurs when ideas and perceptions in the flux come to represent objects beyond experience. Chapter 7 of *Reason in Common Sense* contains Santayana's explanation of the psychological mechanisms by means of which consciousness of stable objects arises in the flux of experience. The discussion is, of course, pervaded by a serious ambiguity because of linguistic looseness: objects are carved out of the flux, they are constituted from factors in the flux by the activities of consciousness, they are recognized by consciousness which infers their reality from elements in the flux. Yet despite such confusion, Santayana's theory is emphatically realistic.


\(^{29}\) Santayana, *RCS*, p. 99.

\(^{30}\) Santayana, *RCS*, p. 103.
Actually, Santayana's task in Chapter 7 is to ascertain whether the objects of experience and knowledge are individual entities solely, or whether such objects may also be universals. His conclusion is that there are both kinds of objects: "concretions in discourse and in existence." Individuals are concretions in existence. Different qualities which come and go together repeatedly are merged together in one part of space; they are fused together to constitute an individual thing—a concretion in existence, having one local habitation and one name. The psychological mechanism responsible for the discovery or construction of concretions in existence is the principle of association by contiguity. The principle of association by similarity accounts for universals—concretions in discourse. These arise from a "fusion of impressions merging what is common in them, interchanging what is peculiar, and cancelling in the end what is incompatible." As Santayana summed up the matter: "A concretion in discourse occurs by repetition and mere emphasis on a datum, but a concretion in existence requires a synthesis of disparate elements and relations."

Hence Santayana's position in *Reason in Common Sense* is not only epistemological realism: knowledge refers to objects which exist independently of consciousness; it is also metaphysical realism: universals are as real as individuals. Knowledge for Santayana involves both kinds of objects, and despite the gulf that traditionally divides the two, thought for Santayana moves easily from one kind to the other. After all, both kinds of concretions inhabit the flux of experience; a consciousness dominated by practical interests and functioning according to psychological principles of association draws them out of a common field. Then, too, thought itself moves easily from one kind of concretion to the other. For example, concretions of discourse, the universals manifest as the recurring qualities given in experience (Santayana had not yet formulated his doctrine of essence), antecede the discovery of things, while in turn concretions in existence precede secondary concretions in

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31 Santayana, *RCS*, p. 113.
33 Although the term "essence" appears several times in *The Life of Reason*, it is never endowed with technical meaning. Not until the publication of the *Winds of Doctrine* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913) did Santayana employ the term in its technical sense and begin to elaborate his famous doctrine.
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discourse, such as proper names. Implicit here is the metaphysical assumption that things are essentially collections of universals, the recognition of which is prerequisite to knowledge of things. Also operative is the metaphysical assumption that any recurrent quality, structure, relation, even when it is tied to an individual, is a universal.

One further element of realism in the epistemology of *The Life of Reason* is noteworthy. Santayana’s affinity with pragmatism has already been noted. Ideas are tested by reference to pleasure and pain, and the very formation of knowledge is engineered by the practical interests dominating consciousness. The test for true knowledge is, then, pragmatic, but beyond this point Santayana’s pragmatism does not go. Although *The Life of Reason* does not contain the full blown theory of timeless truth, later enunciated by Santayana in *The Realm of Truth* (1938), it does contain the germ of that theory. As Santayana declared in *Reason in Science*:

The hypostasised total of rational and just discourse is the truth. Like the physical world, the truth is external and in the main potential. Its ideal consistency and permanence serve to make it a standard and background for fleeting assertions, just as the material hypostasis called nature is the standard and background for all momentary perceptions.34

III

In *The Life of Reason* Santayana offers a theory of mind. This theory, as should be evident from the theory of knowledge, aims to draw a distinction between mind and its objects, so that Santayana, far from being tempted to define mind as a relation between neutral objects in the manner of neo-realism, was hostile to such definitions.35 Like Santayana’s theory of knowledge in *Reason in Common Sense*, his theory of mind offers a kind of genetic explanation of the development of mind from the flux of immediate experience. Here, too, much of Santayana’s discussion is defective

34 Santayana, RS, p. 130.
because of linguistic looseness: terms like "consciousness," "reason," "thought," "mind," "spirit," are used as synonyms in some contexts and otherwise in other contexts. Further, Santayana's mode of expression often confuses the development of an idea or concept with the genesis of its object. Consider the following statement which he was careful to caution against in the Preface to the 1922 edition of *The Life of Reason* and which was deleted from the 1953 one volume edition: "Nature is drawn like a sponge heavy and dripping from the waters of sentience." 36 "Obviously," as Santayana remarked in the second edition Preface, "the 'nature' in question is the idea of nature, vague at first and overloaded with myth, then growing distinct, constant, articulate." 37

Santayana's philosophy of mind is based on the common sense conviction that undergirds his theory of knowledge—that there is an objective world, nature, external to mind and even prior to it. Indeed, Santayana castigated the Kantian philosophy, calling *The Critique of Pure Reason* "the product of a confused though laborious mind," 38 for proposing that mind establishes the a priori conditions of nature. As Santayana asserted:

> Nature is the sum total of things potentially observable, some observed actually, others interpolated hypothetically; and common sense is right as against Kant's subjectivism in regarding nature as the condition of mind and not mind as the condition of nature. 39

The first chapter of *Reason in Common Sense* sketches, in the words of its title, "The Birth of Reason." It opens with the question whether nature is originally chaos or order. Now for Santayana a totally ordered physical world signifies an immanent teleology or purposiveness in nature; the terminal values, goals, or aims would determine the course of nature. Plainly nature is not an order in this sense, although it is not absolute chaos, either. After all, values are realized in the course of nature, and antecedent states of nature do support the realization of such terminal consummations. Hence, for Santayana, nature is "a relative chaos."

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36 Santayana, RCS, p. 89.
37 Santayana, RCS, p. 9.
38 Santayana, RCS, p. 73.
39 Santayana, RCS, p. 76.
While nature allows means-ends relationships which terminate in values, these relationships are not necessary, but fortuitous.

Prior to the advent of life, the physical world was ordered in the limited sense that it contained the potentialities for life. But with the advent of life, additional order is imposed upon the world. For the living organism contains needs, desires, instincts, and intent on satisfying these needs, desires and instincts, it behaves purposively.

Human experience is one form in which life exists. Now the experience of the human individual begins in chaos. For Santayana, following William James, the "immediate is in flux."40 Experience becomes distinctively human when the flux is organized. Otherwise human life would exhibit no more order, no more purposiveness, than animal life. Although the flux of experience cannot be halted physically, it can be arrested ideally by "the fixing of some point in it from which it can be measured and illumined."41 One of thought's functions for Santayana "is to fix static terms and reveal eternal relations" within the flux of experience.42 Without the definition of meanings and of goals, the fixing of ideal points of rest in the flux, human life would be formless, purposeless, irrational.

Experience is humanized when reason supervenes upon life. This supervention occurs "at the last stage of an adaptation which had long been carried on by irrational and even unconscious processes."43 "Reason was born," as Santayana said, "into a world already wonderfully organised, in which it found its precursor in what is called life, its seat in an animal body of unusual plasticity, and its function in rendering that body's volatile instincts and sensations harmonious with one another and with the outer world on which they depend."44 Harmony is the core of reason: the harmony of impulses, instincts, needs, desires within the living organism, and the harmony of the organism with nature.

Santayana's conception of the relation of mind to the physical

40 Santayana, RCS, p. 38.
41 Santayana, RCS, p. 40.
42 Santayana, RCS, p. 54.
43 Santayana, RCS, p. 38.
44 Santayana, RCS, p. 38.
organism to which it belongs is one of the most problematic features in his philosophy. For enlightenment Santayana's later works are customarily studied; but much is expressed in *The Life of Reason* which remains illuminating. In one passage, for example, Santayana suggested that the dialectical study of either mind or matter makes the other "superfluous" or "embarrassing," and that, consequently, the solution of the problem of the relation of mind to body should be referred to immediate experience. Thus while consciousness "is something intimately felt by each man in his own person," and while even the fact that consciousness accompanies changes in the individual's body and the world is "not an inference but a datum," as Santayana said, "The addition of a physical substratum to all thinking is only a scientific expedient, a hypothesis expressing the faith that nature is mechanically intelligible even beyond the reaches of minute verification."¹⁴⁷

The intimacy between mind and body felt in immediate experience and explained hypothetically by reference to an imputed "physical substratum" conceived to be the causal basis of mentality is explored in terms of a functional analogy borrowed from Aristotle. In Chapter 9 of *Reason in Common Sense*, omitted from the one volume edition, Santayana discussed, in the title of the chapter, "How Thought Is Practical." In this chapter Santayana stated:

> Nature is reason's basis and theme; reason is nature's consciousness; and, from the point of view of that consciousness when it has arisen, reason is also nature's justification and goal.⁴⁹ [He continued:] Mind is the body's entelechy, a value which accrues to the body when it has reached a certain perfection, of which it would be a pity, so to speak, that it should remain unconscious; so that while the body feeds the mind the mind perfects the body, lifting it and

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⁴⁶ Santayana, *RCS*, p. 137.

⁴⁷ Santayana, *RCS*, p. 139.

⁴⁸ M. M. Kirkwood says that this chapter "may . . . have been omitted as primarily academic. . . ." See her *Santayana: Saint of the Imagination* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961), p. 221.

all its natural relations and impulses into the moral world, into
the sphere of interests and ideas.50

In following Aristotle so far, Santayana was yet prepared, in a
passage in the chapter on psychology in *Reason in Science*, to
underscore what he considered Aristotle's mistake. Aristotle, San­
tayana insisted,

> treated the soul, which should be on his own theory only an ex­
> pression and an unmoved mover, as a power and an efficient
> cause. Analysis had not gone far enough in his day to make evident
> that all dynamic principles are mechanical and that mechanism can
> obtain only among objects; but by this time it should no longer
> seem doubtful that mental facts can have no connection except
> through their material basis and no mutual relevance except
> through their objects.51

A. W. Moore, a member of the Chicago school of instru­
mentalist, reviewed Santayana's *Life of Reason* for the *Journal
of Philosophy, Psychology, and Scientific Methods*. Moore raised
the issue which was to haunt all later discussion of Santayana's
philosophy of mind. In the light of Santayana's conception of
mind as separate from the mechanical chain of material causes,
Moore focussed his most probing critical strictures against Santa­
yana's treatment of "the relation of reflection to impulse. In other
words, on the sort of 'efficacy' ideals have."52 According to Moore,
Santayana's theory of mind wavers between an epiphenomenalism
which regards mind and its contents as the important effects of
physical causation and an instrumentalist view which considers
mind to consist in its doing, in its guidance of conduct and action
through the control or organization of impulses.

A careful reading of Santayana's Chapter 9 of *Reason in Com­
mon Sense*, "How Thought is Practical," discloses that its author
was bent, above all, on demolishing the instrumentalist view of
mind and on restoring mind to its classic position as the end of
all natural processes. Indeed, the concluding pages of this chapter

50 Santayana, RCS, p. 137.
51 Santayana, RS, p. 107.
are devoted to demolishing the theses then current among pragmatists and instrumentalists—e.g., that situations of pain initiate remedial actions, that consciousness originates in conflict and depends upon conflict to survive, that, in effect, ideas are mere instruments employed by the organism in its struggles with its environment. Unfortunately, Santayana was so exercised by the avoidance of instrumentalism that his theory has been interpreted to signify the futility of mind, of reason, of spirit.

Santayana immediately apprehended the injury of Moore's attack, and so he prepared his courteous, but vigorous reply. Still concerned to avoid even the semblance of an instrumentalist interpretation of mind, Santayana stressed the aesthetic quality of thought, further insisted that thought has contemplative, cognitive and dialectical functions, but denying that thought has any magical powers to cause events in the physical world, or even the power to affect subsequent thought or feeling, he denounced this conception of thought's efficacy as a superstition. However, he acknowledged that thought is "efficacious in the only sense, not magical, in which its efficacy would be at all congruous with its intent; namely, through the natural efficacy of the creature whose life it expressed." In a catching phrase which sums up his position in contrast with pragmatism and instrumentalism, Santayana proclaimed: "consciousness is a lyric cry, even in the midst of business . . ." 56

Santayana's repudiation of pragmatism and instrumentalism is linked with his positive thesis that mind has come to fulfill nature. It is ironic that this theory should have been taken to signify the utter impotence of mind in its various forms as consciousness, thought or reason. Santayana was not ready to draw clearly the sort of distinction between, for example, psyche and spirit to be found in his later works. But it should be clear from a careful reading of The Life of Reason that reason, like psyche, is a form

54 See, for example, Eliseo Vivas, "From The Life of Reason to The Last Puritan," The Philosophy of George Santayana, p. 315.
56 Ibid., p. 412.
of physical life in the natural world, yet it also partakes of the ideal world in which spirit dwells. Thus Santayana described reason as "an operation in nature," having "its roots there." It is, he said, "an ideal expression of instinct," "an unintelligible instinct." "Reason is a human function." Its function is "to dominate experience." "Reason is a principle of order appearing in a subject-matter which in its subsistence and quantity must be an irrational datum. Reason expresses purpose, purpose expresses impulse, and impulse expresses a natural body with self-equilibrating powers."

Thus reason seems to stand between a material nature caught up in a mechanical flux and a realm of mind gripped in the trance of pure ideals. With this difference, however: until reason supervenes upon life, there are, according to Santayana in The Life of Reason, no ideals. As he declared: "Human reason lives by turning the friction of material forces into the light of ideal goods." How reason performs this task in the world will be made clear through an exploration of Santayana's philosophy of life (or values). Here it suffices to observe that reason is tantamount to the drive for or instinct of harmony in the living organism. As Santayana asserted: "Reason as such represents or rather constitutes a single formal interest, the interest in harmony." And harmony, interpreted as the adjustment of inner impulses and desires to one another and to their outer relations, is the keynote of realism in moral theory and practice.

IV

Santayana wrote The Life of Reason not as an epistemologist,
nor as a philosophical psychologist, but as a moral philosopher. 68 Although realism historically has been identified mainly with theories of knowledge, and to a lesser extent, of mind, it has also dealt with the problems of moral philosophy. 67 Certainly, one of the intentions of realism was to undermine the romantic inclination of idealism to infer, from its epistemological basis, that the real (nature) is the ideal. Santayana’s Life of Reason, while it is a part of the general realistic gravamen against excessive emphasis on the ideal, has yet stressed the role of ideals. As in the philosophy of mind, so in the philosophy of life, in moral philosophy, Santayana’s thought is dualistic as well as realistic.

In The Life of Reason, as the sub-title indicates, Santayana was concerned with the phases of human progress. Of course, these phases should not be construed as historical stages in an evolutionary process, despite the fact that some readers have interpreted the work in this vein. Rather Santayana surveyed the full sweep of the human enterprise in values—in common sense, in society, in art, in religion, in morality, in science, and not only do stages in these various areas co-exist, but also the later are not necessarily superior to the earlier. Indeed, Santayana singled out the Greeks for formulating the ideal of rational ethics, an ideal, which has yet to be realized. As Santayana said: “The Life of Reason will be a name for that part of experience which perceives and pursues ideals—all conduct so controlled and all sense so interpreted as to perfect natural happiness.” 68 And he added a few paragraphs later:

The Life of Reason is the happy marriage of two elements—impulse and ideation—which if wholly divorced would reduce man to a brute or to a maniac. The rational animal is generated by the union of these two monsters. He is constituted by ideas which have ceased to be visionary and actions which have ceased to be vain. 69


68 Santayana, RCS, p. 16.

69 Santayana, RCS, p. 18.
The phases of human progress pivot on the fundamental duality of ideals and nature. As a moralist Santayana was bent on analyzing the human situation and clarifying its conditions and principles. The heart of Santayana's moral philosophy is borrowed from Aristotle: "everything ideal has a natural basis and everything natural an ideal development." This maxim tacitly guides Santayana's critique and interpretation of human ideals and institutions throughout *The Life of Reason*.

*Reason in Society* appropriately opens with a chapter on love. Love not only exemplifies the principle that nature and ideality are two, yet entwined: as Santayana says, "love has an animal basis," and "an ideal object." Love also is the cohesive force from which society in its various forms springs. Now it is beyond the compass of the present paper to discuss the particular forms of society, such as the family, business, etc., but it is worthy of note that Santayana distinguished three main types of society: natural, free, and ideal. Natural society, uniting beings in time and space, as in marriage, industry or war, involves

a primacy of nature over spirit in social life; and this primacy, in a certain sense, endures to the end, since all spirit must be the spirit of something, and reason could not exist or be conceived at all unless a material organism, personal or social, lay beneath to give thought an occasion and a point of view, and to give preference a direction.

By contrast, free society, which is exemplified in friendship, "turns exclusively to unanimities in meanings, to collaborations in an ideal world. The basis of free society is of course natural . . . . but free society has ideal goals." Finally, there is ideal society—"the society of symbols." What are these symbols? Santayana wrote:

Symbols are presences, and they are particularly congenial presences which we have inwardly evoked and cast in a form intelligible and familiar to human thinking. Their function is to give flat experi-

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74 Santayana, *RSO*, p. 152.
ence a rational perspective, translating the general flux into stable objects and making it representable in human discourse. They are therefore precious, not only for their representative or practical value, implying useful adjustments to the environing world, but even more, sometimes, for their immediate or aesthetic power, for their kinship to the spirit they enlighten and exercise.  

The remaining three volumes of *The Life of Reason* are devoted to "the chief spheres" of ideal society: religion, art and science. Since, for Santayana, "The Life of Reason is the seat of all ultimate values ... an ideal to which everything in the world should be subordinated," religion, art and science find their place within the life of reason; they in effect fall under its dominion.

Of course religion vies with the life of reason for final authority concerning moral values, and it even seems, in explaining events and assigning causes, to substitute for science. Here, according to Santayana, lies the particular failing of religion. While its aims are the same as reason's, its methods differ: religion proceeds "by intuition and unchecked poetical conceits." Like poetry, religion is intimately related to life; but like poetry, it is symbolic, not literal, in its meanings. Unfortunately the temptation to interpret religion literally is strong, and so religion becomes irrational, issuing in magic and superstition.

Religion differs from reason in still another respect. Reason, after all, is essentially a formal principle, an order or ideal harmony which experience more or less embodies. Religion, however, is "a changing and struggling force"; it is "a part of experience itself, a mass of sentiments and ideas"; so that "religion brings some order to life by weighting it with new materials."

It should be no wonder, then, that Santayana sharply distinguished religion from theology, and uttered harsh words about

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76 Santayana, *RSO*, p. 152.
76 Santayana, *RSO*, p. 159.
77 Santayana, *RR*, p. 11.
78 Santayana, *RR*, p. 11.
the latter. He denounced theology as the refuge of those for whom religion, instead of being spontaneous and primary, is imitative and secondary; it is, he said, "simply a false physics, a doctrine about eventual experience not founded on the experience of the past." He found little use for the traditional proofs of the existence of God. Indeed, he deemed "the grand characteristic and contradiction" of Christian theology to be "the idea that the same God who is the ideal of human aspiration is also the creator of the universe and its only primary substance." 83

Nevertheless, Santayana sought to retain religion as rational; and his treatment of rational religion further illustrated the dualistic character of his thought concerning human values. "Rational religion," he said, "has these two phases: piety, or loyalty to necessary conditions, and spirituality, or devotion to ideal ends." Whereas piety looks to "the conditions of progress and to the sources from which we draw our energies"—parents, family, ancestors, country, humanity, and, finally, the whole cosmos, spirituality "looks to the end toward which we move." 85 "A man," said Santayana, "is spiritual when he lives in the presence of the ideal. . . . He is spiritual when he envisages his goal so frankly that his whole material life becomes a transparent and transitive vehicle, an instrument which scarcely arrests attention but allows the spirit to use it economically and with perfect detachment and freedom." 86

Art, like religion, finds its place within the life of reason. It is "the most splendid and complete" of "reason's embodiments." 87 Santayana has conceded that art "has met, on the whole, with more success than science or morals. Beauty gives men the best hint of ultimate good which their experience as yet can offer." 88 Santayana's high praise of art here, as well as in his other works on art and aesthetics, has led some readers to suppose that he exalted

82 Santayana, RR, p. 110.
83 Santayana, RR, p. 111.
84 Santayana, RR, p. 188.
85 Santayana, RR, p. 135.
86 Santayana, RR, p. 135.
87 Santayana, RA, p. 15.
88 Santayana, RA, p. 150.
art above all else, above—for example—the moral life.\textsuperscript{89} Such a supposition is mistaken. Although Santayana admitted that the "value of art lies in making people happy,"\textsuperscript{90} and that to date "art . . . is the best instrument of happiness,"\textsuperscript{91} he stressed the basis of art in experience and its consequent subordination to reason and to morality.

Art, for Santayana, is applicable to all manufacture in which the product satisfies some interest. Artistic processes are initially expressions of instinctive animal behavior. When successful, they terminate in material products. Art, of which fine art is a small part, embodies mind in matter, and so it creates material foundations upon which progress, the advance of reason in life, depends. As Santayana said:

Until art arises, all achievement is internal to the brain, dies with the individual, and even in him spends itself without recovery, like music heard in a dream. Art, in establishing instruments for human life beyond the body, and moulding outer things into sympathy with inner values, establishes a ground whence values may continually spring up. . . .\textsuperscript{92}

Hence art, too, illustrates Santayana's fundamental dualism of mind and matter, of ideality and nature, and furthermore his conviction that the two are or ought to be intimately entwined in the rational life.

Moreover, since, according to Santayana, art is a part of the life of reason, it is subject to criticism from the rational standpoint, which is ultimately tantamount to the moral standpoint. Aesthetic values, he held, are simply abstractions from the actual object, which has many non-aesthetic functions and values. To separate the aesthetic element, abstract and dependent as it often is, is an artifice which is more misleading than helpful; for neither in the history of art nor in a rational estimate of

\textsuperscript{89} See, for example, John E. Smith, \textit{The Spirit of American Philosophy} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. x.

\textsuperscript{90} Santayana, \textit{RA}, p. 150.

\textsuperscript{91} Santayana, \textit{RA}, p. 155.

\textsuperscript{92} Santayana, \textit{RA}, p. 15.
its value can the aesthetic function of things be divorced from the practical and the moral.93

Furthermore, although Santayana acknowledged that “art is *prima facie* and in itself a good,” he added that “the function of ethics is precisely to revise *prima facie* judgments of this kind and to fix the ultimate resultant of all given interests, insofar as they can be combined.”94 As Santayana insisted: “Art being a part of life, the criticism of art is a part of morals.”95

The life of reason culminates in science, not in the narrow naturalistic sense which would discard religion and art, but in the broad sense which, attending to knowledge and conduct, locates the promise of achievement in science. Here Santayana’s realistic epistemology is relevant; it sufficiently underscores the difference between naturalism as held by Santayana and nineteenth century naturalism. Science, he elaborated, is “common knowledge extended and refined. Its validity is of the same order as that of ordinary perception, memory, and understanding. Its test is found, like theirs, in actual intuition, which sometimes consists in perception and sometimes in intent.”96 In perception various qualities and relations are combined into single complex objects, called concretions in existence. In intent recurrent similarities are noted as universals or meanings or ideals, called concretions in discourse. Corresponding to these cognitive objects are two types of sciences: physics and dialectic. While physics, “by tracing concretions in existence . . . has reached the various natural and historical sciences,” dialectic, by refining concretions in discourse, “has attained to mathematics, logic, and the dialectical development of ethics.”97 Hence, Santayana’s conception of science, in which the life of reason finds its fullest expression, has no counterpart in standard naturalism; dialectic is as important as, if not more important than, physics. Rather it suits Santayana’s realistic dualism of nature and ideality.

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93 Santayana, *RA*, pp. 16-17.
95 Santayana, *RA*, p. 122.
96 Santayana, *RS*, p. 29.
Reason in Science examines both physics and dialectic. Its topic, then, is not science in the modern sense of the term, but science in the classic sense—i.e., organized knowledge.

Of course Santayana adopted the standpoint of nineteenth-century naturalism with respect to physics insofar as he held mechanics to be the highest development of physics, the science which describes and explains all concretions in existence in accord with cause-effect laws. Further, he accepted the materialistic interpretation of mechanics, although his materialism is not absolute but combined with a classic concept of form. Indeed, the formal elements in the world establish the limits of physics and the beginning of dialectic.

Dialectic studies not only the forms of nature, in which case it is mathematics, but also it studies the forms of the will, the ideals of rational intent, in which case it is ethics. In effect, the dialectical examination of human ideals is a branch of science, moral philosophy. Indeed, the entire multivolume Life of Reason may be viewed simultaneously as a specimen of science as dialectic and a contribution to moral philosophy.

Since moral philosophy is a branch of science for Santayana, he devoted some of the best pages of The Life of Reason to a consideration of ethics. His distinction between the three phases of prerational, rational, and postrational morality is now widely accepted. One point should be clear: Ethics proper is for Santayana concerned not with why a thing is considered good, but with whether it is good or not. The answer to the question why a thing is called good falls within the compass of physics, whereas the "science of ethics" takes the physical as the starting point for its own dialectical quest concerning the nature of goodness. "Goodness, in this ideal sense, is not a matter of opinion, but of nature. . . . [The] good, when once the moral or dialectical attitude has been assumed, means not what is called good but what is so; that is, what ought to be called good." Prerational morality, of course, fails to attain the adequate expression of ethics; as primitive or intuitive it lacks "the impulse to reflect." Once that impulse is

98 Santayana, RS, p. 136.
100 Santayana, RS, p. 177.
satisfied, rational ethics, "founded on impulse" and formulating "a natural morality" like prerational ethics, appears. Rational ethics, an ideal entertained by the classic Greeks though never embodied in a concrete morality, is the ethics of happiness. As Santayana declared: "The direct aim of reason is harmony; yet harmony, when made to rule in life, gives reason a noble satisfaction which we call happiness." Postrational systems, manifest in the great religions and involving faith in the supernatural, arise when the ideal of rational ethics has lost its lustre; they "... are the work of men who more or less explicitly have conceived the Life of Reason, tried it at least imaginatively, and found it wanting. These systems are a refuge from an intolerable situation; they are experiments in redemption." Santayana's estimation of the rational superiority of rational ethics and his accompanying recognition that this ideal has nonetheless been historically superceded by inferior post rational systems amply demonstrate that *The Life of Reason* offers no doctrine of inevitable moral evolution. Santayana did not yield to the romantic illusion that the ideal ultimately triumphs at the end, if not at the beginning, of the natural flux. On the contrary, he was a realist in acknowledging the reality of ideals and equally a realist in appreciating the power of matter to realize or not to realize ideals.

Just as the dialectical moral science of rational ethics has surrendered so much of the field of human action to postrational systems of morality, so may it be with the physical science of nature. In this connection Santayana apprehended what few naturalists dared imagine—that natural science itself may succumb before the impact of nonrational natural forces. The concluding chapter of *The Life of Reason* takes up the question of the validity of science. Although Santayana believed that the validity of science could be "established merely by establishing the truth of its particular propositions, in dialectic on the authority of intent and in physics on that of experiment," he perceived that the sciences were not yet a coherent system representing "nature to be, as it doubtless is, all of one piece" and that, moreover, "the moral

103 Santayana, *RS*, p. 223.
sciences especially are a mass of confusion." Yet Santayana did not despair of future achievement in the life of reason. For, as he asserted in the realistic mood of his middle period, "while the reward of action is contemplation or, in more modern phrase, experience and consciousness, there is nothing stable or interesting to contemplate except objects relevant to action—the natural world and the mind's ideals."

V

The themes expressed in Santayana's Life of Reason recur in his later works, so much so that the early formulations are often eclipsed. Re-examination of The Life of Reason in relation to the later works, however, reveals the extent to which the earlier work remains an achievement in its own right as well as the foundation of much that was to follow. Certainly, The Life of Reason is an historic monument of philosophical realism.

As regards epistemology, The Life of Reason presents a realistic viewpoint which, while it exhibits certain features of neo-realism, is yet directed toward critical realism. Better than Scepticism and Animal Faith, which in terms of clarity, organization, and originality is assuredly Santayana's most important contribution to epistemology, Reason in Common Sense furnishes the common ground from which the varieties of realism could proceed. Fundamentally, of course, Santayana conceived knowledge to be transitive, representative, symbolic, and so his theory was critical realistic even before the terms "new" and "critical" realism came into usage. Then, too, although some commentators have contended that critical realism necessarily entails a doctrine of essence, that doctrine is absent from The Life of Reason, or rather it is obscurely present in the conception of concretions in discourse. But, further, concretions in discourse do not perform the epistemological function of essence, although they enjoy an analogous ontological status. Nor did Santayana in The Life of

104 Santayana, RS, p. 223.
105 Santayana, RS, p. 224.
Reason qualify knowledge of things and of others as animal faith; that too was formulated only in the later works. Now the epistemology of The Life of Reason, while it may be read merely as a prelude to Santayana's later epistemology, may just as rightly be accepted on its own terms. Purged of its inconsistencies and its ambiguities, it appears to be a member of the family of critical realisms which are devoid of the doctrine of essence—for example, the epistemologies of Roy Wood Sellars and A. O. Lovejoy. 107

The Life of Reason propounds, to borrow Lovejoy's terms, both an epistemological dualism and a psychophysical dualism. Just as Santayana distinguished the elements of knowledge: perceptions and ideas, from the objects of knowledge: events, things, persons, he located the former in mind (or consciousness) and the latter in the physical order of nature. Santayana never once doubted that mind has its basis in nature; yet at the same time he insisted that mind is the consummation of natural processes—nature's goal. Thus, over against pragmatism and instrumentalism, Santayana upheld the philosophy of mind to be found in classic realism. Unfortunately, his modes of expression entangled his theory in a contradiction between mind as consummation and reason as efficacious, a contradiction somewhat mitigated, if not exactly eradicated, by his later distinction between spirit and psyche.

The Life of Reason offers mainly a philosophy of life, of values, of civilization as embodied in society and the higher institutions of religion, art, and science; and this philosophy is emphatically realistic, unfolding in a context which posits two levels of being—nature as flux and ideals as eternal, matter and form. In this respect The Life of Reason is unsurpassed by Santayana's later writings, and, indeed, by the writings of all the other realists.

Today when American philosophers, with a few remarkable exceptions, concentrate their intellectual energies on narrow issues, study of Santayana's Life of Reason is invigorating. It stirs the philosophical imagination by affording a comprehensive vista not only of what philosophy has been and may still be but also of all the major cultural activities and ideals of man. And while it has

107 For a discussion of their epistemologies, see Andrew J. Reck, Recent American Philosophy (New York: Pantheon Books, 1964), Chaps. 7 and 8.
come out of a specific historical epoch and may be understood, in parts where it might otherwise be obscure, by reference to the philosophical currents in that epoch, nonetheless it has succeeded in transcending its historical setting. No matter what philosophies in their passing may claim or deny, the wisdom in The Life of Reason should command the attention of serious thinkers in any time, almost as much as the wisdom of the Greeks commanded Santayana's.

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