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NORMAL MADNESS OR THE OTHER FACE OF *THE LIFE OF REASON*

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Abstract: Ten years before writing *The Life of Reason*, George Santayana felt a «romantic inspiration» stemming directly from the influence of Greek tragic spirit, being Nietzsche still little known in his academic environment. A few years later, while at Trinity College, Cambridge, he discovered Plato and Aristotle and the composition of *The Life of Reason* was the consequence of it, as he himself asserted. Starting from Santayana's retrospective analysis of the development of his thought during these years, this article aims to show how «normal madness», the central theme of *Dialogues in Limbo* and a leitmotiv of his philosophy, is for Santayana the other side of the life of reason and the spiritual life. Furthermore, it seeks to demonstrate how he believes, following the wisdom of the Greeks, that it is nothing more than the exercise of rational control over the «subterranean forces» of the human soul, resulting in an imperfect but healthy and vital harmony.

Keywords: Normal madness, Dionysiac spirit, Animal life, Reason, Illusion.

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1. The symbiosis of reason and madness

«Normal madness» is an apparent oxymoron coined by Santayana to define a problematic state of mind that is neither entirely within the bounds of reason nor completely outside of it. In fact, inasmuch as its contents are all magical, religious, philosophical, psychological beliefs, or even scientific beliefs, accepted as literal and existing realities, they are expression of a foolish pretense; since they are accompanied, however, by the awareness that their illusory nature does not eliminate their necessity, their madness falls into the normality of a sentiment that I would call «rational» borrowing from W. James[1].

Santayana's philosophy arises on this ground, along with its main principles such as naturalism and idealism, rationalism and spiritualism, which, according to some commentators, are improperly linked together. Yet, in my opinion, the contrast existing between them is something that Santayana copes reliably and honestly, because he does not want to turn away from these and other oppositions he considers typically inherent in the texture of human life, by virtue of which he speaks of the «the amphibious character of existence»[2].

Leaving aside the ontological and epistemological issues this theme also entails, here I want to consider how Santayana identifies a close, albeit contrasting, relationship between impulses, instincts and passions – what he calls «animal life» – and reason and spirit on the

[1] Indeed, in a more general and less dramatic context, W. James describes «the sentiment of rationality» as «a strong feeling of ease, peace, rest» the philosopher can perceive when he experiences «the transition from a state of puzzle and perplexity to rational comprehension». So a feeling, not a rational arguing, that accompanies the awareness of the rational understanding of some tangle of mental contents. In this sense, normal madness can be included in a sentiment of rationality. See W. James, *The Sentiment of Rationality*, in «Mind», IV (1879), 15, p. 318.

[2] G. Santayana, *Realms of Being*, 4 voll., London, Constable, 1930; *The Realm of Matter. Book Second of Realm of Beings*, p. VI.

other, as they all are part of nature[3]. This latter, on his turn, must be recognized as the only ground on which the physiological development of human faculties can take place. Outside of it, only pathological distortions arise, namely when illusory beliefs, accepted as literal realities, issue in madness or insanity. Hence normal madness is the acquired awareness and acceptance of the inevitability of the vital tension between animal life and rational and spiritual life, accompanied by the awareness of the illusory nature of its own removal.

This is the reason why normal madness, in my opinion, besides being a theme explicitly and extensively addressed in the *Dialogues in Limbo*, can be considered the other side of the life of reason and spiritual life, and thereby as a leitmotiv of Santayana's philosophy until its final formulation. In support of this point, it is helpful to recall that Santayana himself, in the later stage of his philosophical development, wrote in one of his letters: «The symbiosis of reason and madness is a good subject for philosophic reflection»[4]. And a few years later he described it in *The Realm of Spirit*, one of his later books expressing, according to many scholars, the peak of his spiritualism at the expense of the initial naturalism and rationalism. Yet, here we read that the claim to ignore one of the two opposing sides of the contrast between spirit and body leads to a particular condition of the spirit that can be called «distraction». Explaining the literal meaning of the word, Santayana maintains that «we are distracted or distraught when we torn asunder by contrary and inescapable commitments», thus falling on a form of self-destructive madness. Then, in this context, the «sanity» of normal madness is so described:

> Therefore mature moralists [among whom Santayana surely includes himself], when morality was not itself a mere ignorant emotion, talked about the *madness* of passion, the *guilt* of sin, the *folly* of fashion. Yet this is a normal madness, an original sin, a sprightly and charming folly. Life could not have begun or grown interesting without them. The evil involved is constitutional, and the spirit suffers this distraction because it exists, and is a natural being, an emanation of universal Will[5].

He concludes that «spirit cannot escape these conditions and this imperfection»[6]. Such reference, however, is only apparently incidental, because normal madness is introduced within the long chapter dedicated to distraction as its counterpart and, in this role, it gives meaning to the madness of distraction of the spirit in all its forms, namely its annihilation in the face of the seductions of the body, the world, and of its own false idol of omnipotence and omniscience. Furthermore, even in a few lines, Santayana treats normal madness as an object of philosophical reflection, all the more significant within the systematic exposition of his philosophy.

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[3] In this perspective, the opposition between rationalism and spiritualism, often identified by critics as an inconsistency in Santayana's philosophy, is irrelevant, since rational life and spiritual life are both modes of existence standing on the same side, in opposition to animal life.

[4] In particular, he writes this reflection in a letter to the author of *Off with Their Heads*, a book about Ecuador's Jivaro Indians, hence commenting on a harsh subject matter in this way: «It occurs to me that their mad head-hunting may have been a condition of their domestic peace». See G. Santayana, *To Victor Wolfgang von Hagen*, 16 November 1937, in *The Letters of George Santayana*, 8 voll., eds. William G. Holzberger and Herman J. Saatkamp, Jr., Cambridge, Mass., The MIT Press, 2001-08, Book 6, p. 90. (Hereafter, cited as L, followed by the volume number and page number).

[5] G. Santayana, *The Realm of Spirit. Book Fourth of Realm of Beings*, New York, Scribner's, 1940, p. 124. In this context, he also writes (ivi, p. 166): «The devilishness of a Caliban or an Iago, of a Lucifer or a Mephistopheles, presupposes a normal psyche deranged, the higher faculties having reversed their function and become sycophants to the lower, or else having declared themselves independent in an insane ambition to live by themselves».

[6] Ivi, p. 124.

2. How Santayana reconstructs his philosophy

In light of this final step, upon which we intentionally directed our attention first, the importance of normal madness gains greater significance. The theme, indeed, is always present in Santayana's reflections, but in his early writings in a rather latent form, occasionally finding fleeting expression here and there. When later it emerges as a central theme in *Dialogues in Limbo*, it takes the form of a literary divertissement. A literal formulation, prior to the final one presented in *The Realm of Spirit*, is also significantly occurring in some of his letters. Therefore, since normal madness like other topics has given rise to various misunderstandings, it seems preferable to consider what Santayana himself writes in response to his critics, clarifying the origin of this conception, its meaning and its role in determining his early philosophical steps, before considering how the theme is formulated in his writings of the early twenties – to which section 3 will be dedicated – and then, more extensively, in *Dialogues on Limbo* that will be analyzed in the last three sections.

In a letter to Sterling P. Lamprecht, who reproached him for the inherent inconsistence of normal madness, Santayana emphasizes the «satirical» nature of normal madness as it is portrayed in the *Dialogues*, stating that it was a «joke»[7]. Regarding this, he does not mean that it was a trivial mockery; in fact we know that irony constitutes a serious philosophical stance for Santayana and, besides, it is the philosophical style of one of the protagonists of the *Dialogues*, who, not by chance, is Socrates. Moreover, many years later, to a young student who wrote to him about how deeply he was involved with the idea of normal madness, Santayana replies, pleased: «you are only twenty-one, live in Texas, and have struck the bull's eye, as far as my heart is concerned». He also emphasizes the «challenge» implied by his idea, complaining however that it had been noted by the critics only to «coldly» remark that «if normal it cannot be madness and if madness it cannot be normal». Thus they showed that they had not perceived the «force of the paradox»[8].

Therefore, Richard C. Lyon (who was the young student previously mentioned) is right when, much later, he asserts that starting from the 1910s, Santayana gives voice to a sort of «self-recovery» of what presumably «had always been within him to say, implicit or latent in his earlier discourse and experience, but meant explicitly and boldly now»[9]. Lyons also sees rightly a liberating turning point in this «middle span» of Santayana's philosophy and attributes it to «a squaring of old troubled accounts with America and the German philosophers» and, more in general, a reassessment of his own philosophical beginnings.

In this regard, it is worth recalling another letter, in which Santayana reckons with his early philosophical steps, expressed in form of poetry in the sonnets dating back to 1894. Referring to one of his most remembered and popular verses [10], «It is not wisdom to be only wise», he explains that his verse was inspired by the phrase in *The Bacchae* of Euripides, τὸ σοφὸν οὐ σοφία (that now he translates, more literally, «knowingness is not wisdom»), rather than by Catholic faith which he was experiencing at that time. Now, looking back at his state of mind, he highlights different components of it. He claims, in particular, that his Catholicism was «deeply tinctured with desperation» and that the skepticism about human cognitive faculties inspiring the verse clashed with the Bacchic spirit. But, for him, it was

[7] G. Santayana, *To Sterling Power Lamprecht*, 15 November 1933, L 5, 61.
[8] G. Santayana, *To Richard Colton Lyon*, 6 May 1948, L 8, 58.
[9] R.C. Lyon, *Normal Madness*, in «The Southern Journal of Philosophy», X (1972), 2, p. 131.
[10] *Letter to Nancy Saunders Toy*, 21 December 1938, L 6, 191. Ironizing on such popularity, Santayana writes that his verse filled the pages of religious calendars and anthologies.

the Bacchic spirit that expressed the strength of instinct and the animal faith, which in his opinion «went with life, however completely it might fool us»[11].

Within such a complexity of philosophical inclinations, first of all it is important to focus on Santayana's predilection for the tragic force and madness associated with the Bacchic spirit, because he returns to this attachment several times, restating his distance from Christian religion and, in the same time, his affection for «Dionysiac revels»[12]. An equally significant point is that, in another letter, he emphasizes his independence from a presumed influence of Nietzsche, the latter still being little known, and defines its fondness as «a romantic inspiration», directly influenced by the tragic spirit[13]. Still, in the retrospective analysis presented in *A General Confession*, Santayana adds another point that reveals how the tragic spirit was only a part of Greek culture's influence during these years[14]. He recognizes that his mind was enriched by the «systematic reading of Plato and Aristotle» (also little known at Harvard in that period) only in the years 1896-1897 he spent at Trinity College, Cambridge, and concludes: «I am not conscious of any change of opinion supervening, nor of any having occurred earlier; but by that study and change of scene my mind was greatly enriched; and the composition of *The Life of Reason* was the consequence»[15].

What I am most interested in picking out, among the previous observations, is that Santayana wants to eliminate any possibility of misunderstanding between his «romantic inspiration» and Nietzsche's analogous inspiration. This is indeed reiterated by him in the preface to the second edition of *The Life of Reason*[16], where he states: «I was utterly without the learning and the romantic imagination that might have enabled some emancipated rival of Hegel, some systematic Nietzsche or some dialectical Walt Whitman, to write a history of the Will to Be Everything and Anything. An omnivorous spirit was no spirit for me, and I could not write the life of reason without distinguishing it from madness»[17]. Finally the explanation of this need can be found in Santayana's autobiography where, once again referring to the *Bacchae*, he acknowledges the coexistence of two opposite inspirations in his thought:

> The *Bacchae*, however, was a revelation. Here, before Nietzsche had pointed it out, the Dionysiac inspiration was explicitly opposed to the Apollonian; and although my tradition and manner are rather Apollonian, I unhesitatingly accept the Dionysiac inspiration as also divine. It comes from the elemental gods, from the chaotic but fertile bosom of nature; Apollo is the god of measure, of perfection, of humanism. He is more civilised, but more superficial, more highly conditioned. His worship seems classic and established forever, and it does last longer and is more often revived than any one form of Dionysiac frenzy: yet the frenzy represents the primitive wild soul, not at home in the

[11] L 6, 190.

[12] *Letter to Charles G. Spiegler*, 2 September 1939, L 6, 265.

[13] Commenting further on his sonnet with a critic, he indeed specifies: «Nietzsche had not then been heard of, but the Bacchae is Dionysiac, and I was not blind to that romantic inspiration». Letter to Winfred Overholser, 20 April 1952, L 8, 437.

[14] Incidentally, I want to remind that the question of tragic and its relation to comic in Santayana's philosophy has sparked an important debate among Santayana's scholars. Yet, the approach presented here addresses a different aspect of Santayana's perspective on the tragic spirit.

[15] G. Santayana, *A General Confession*, in P.A. Schilpp, *The Philosophy of George San*tayana, Evanston and Chicago, Northwestern University Press, 1940, p. 13.

[16] Written in the same period called "middle spam" by R.C. Lyons.

[17] G. Santayana, *The Life of Reason: or the Phases of Human Progress* (1905-06), 5 voll., eds. M.S. Wokeck and M.A. Coleman, Cambridge, Mass., The MIT Press, 2013-16, Book 1 *Introduction and Reason in Common Sense, Preface to the Second Edition* (1922), p. 186.

> world, not settled in itself, and merging again with the elements, half in helplessness and half in self-transcendence and mystic triumph[18].

In light of this, it appears that the rationalism interpreted by critics as the guiding principle of *The Life of Reason* is more the goal of a quest than a possession acquired, and that it can only be achieved to the extent that one understands that reason cannot disregard, indeed it must assimilate, a substratum made up of different, strong, unbridled instincts and passions. This is what Santayana seems to imply when, introducing his work, he asserts:

> Reason accordingly requires the fusion of two types of life, commonly led in the world in well-nigh total separation, one a life of impulse expressed in affairs and social passions, the other a life of reflection expressed in religion, science, and the imitative arts. In the Life of Reason, if it were brought to perfection, intelligence would be at once the universal method of practice and its continual reward[19].

This life of impulse is also defined as the «groundwork» on which reason must work: «The same primacy of impulses, irrational in themselves but expressive of bodily functions, is observable in the behaviour of animals, and in those dreams, obsessions, and primary passions which in the midst of sophisticated life sometimes lay bare the obscure groundwork of human nature. Reason's work is there undone»[20]. Finally, although here Santayana does not yet use the phrase «normal madness», he refers to form of madness, as for him are love, the passion for the glories of war and, more in general, the enjoyment of others' misfortune, that cannot be considered pathological. Indeed, he states: «To find joy in another's trouble is, as man is constituted, not unnatural, though it is wicked; and to find joy in one's own trouble, though it be madness, is not yet impossible for man. These are the chaotic depths of that dreaming nature out of which humanity has to grow»[21].

3. Natural philosophy and Dionysiac spirit

If *The Life of Reason* is the work in which Santayana intended to distinguish reason from madness, in the writings published in the early 1920s madness makes its way as an indispensable characteristic of human life, due to its own limitations. For example in a significant passage Santayana, concluding with a quote from Goethe's *Faust*, he states: «It was not the stars but the terrestrial atmosphere that the eyes of the flesh were made to see; even mother Psyche can love the light, when it clothes or betrays something else that matters; and the fleshly-spiritual Goethe said most truly: *Am farhigen Abglanz hahen wir das Leben*»[22]. And, what more than twenty years earlier he had written with his usual aphoristic tone: «Sanity is a madness put to good uses; waking life is a dream controlled»[23],

[18] G. Santayana, *Persons and Places: Fragments of Autobiography* (1944–53), eds. W.G. Holzberger and H.J. Saatkamp Jr., Cambridge, Mass., The MIT Press, 1986, p. 231.

[19] G. Santayana, *Reason in Common Sense*, cit., p. 3.

[20] Ivi, p. 29.

[21] G. Santayana, *The Life of Reason*, Book 2, *Reason in Society*, cit., pp. 53-54.

[22] G. Santayana, *Soliloquies in England and Later Soliloquies*, New York, Scribner's, 1922, p. 18 (emphasis in original).

[23] G. Santayana, *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion* (1900), eds. William G. Holzberger and H.J. Saatkamp Jr., Cambridge, Mass., The MIT Press, 1989, p. 156.

finds clarification in the following passage, titled *Imagination*, which seems important to quote extensively:

> Men are ruled by imagination: imagination makes them into men, capable of madness and of immense labours. We work dreaming. Consider what dreams must have dominated the builders of the Pyramids – dreams geometrical, dreams funereal, dreams of resurrection, dreams of outdoing the pyramid of some other Pharaoh! What dreams occupy that fat man in the street, toddling by under his shabby hat and bedraggled rain-coat? Perhaps he is in love; perhaps he is a Catholic, and imagines that early this morning he has partaken of the body and blood of Christ; perhaps he is a revolutionist, with the millennium in his heart and a bomb in his pocket. The spirit bloweth where it listeth; the wind of inspiration carries our dreams before it and constantly refashions them like clouds. Nothing could be madder, more irresponsible, more dangerous than this guidance of men by dreams. What saves us is the fact that our imaginations, groundless and chimerical as they may seem, are secretly suggested and controlled by shrewd old instincts of our animal nature, and by continual contact with things[24].

In addition, in spite of distancing himself from Nietzsche many a time[25], in these writing Santayana uses many topics and expressions famously employed by Nietzsche, albeit leading to different outcomes. For example, metaphors such as «mask», «white sepulchers», «the scent of philosophies», and some conceptual frameworks, like the relationship between appearance and reality, science and illusion, dream and wakefulness, love and madness, madness and reason are recurrent [26]. It is true that one might think that, after all, this could be only a superficial affinity, only a casual correspondence of terms, especially since Santayana stigmatizes Nietzsche's philosophy with decidedly disparaging epithets. Yet, he also shows a certain consideration when he states: «Nietzsche, in his genial imbecility, betrays the shifting of great subterranean forces. What he said may be nothing, but the fact that he said it is all-important. Out of such wild intuitions, because the heart of the child was in them, the man of the future may have to build his philosophy»[27].

A somewhat modest and insufficient appreciation, naturally, to lead us to think that Santayana's philosophy could be that development, but sufficient to reveal, once again, that he shared with Nietzsche a strong sensitivity to the Dionysian spirit as a powerful inspiration. It is also true that this inspiration brings Santayana to a profound distance from Nietzsche's irrationalism, and this happens because he succeeds in weaving, in a singular way, the Dionysian irrationality of animal life with the naturalism of Democritus' philosophy and the rationalist humanism of Socrates and Plato. This solution emerges in *Dialogues in Limbo* of which an analytical commentary seems worthwhile since, as Santayana himself suggests, it is in a satirical and metaphorical form that this core theme of his philosophy is expressed.

4. The origin of madness

Normal Madness is the title of a dialogues among Democritus, Aristippus, Alcibiades, Socrates, and Dionysius the Younger, tyrant of Syracuse that are shades dwelling in Limbo – the place in Dante's mythology housing the souls of pagans – and The Stranger, a live

[24] G. Santayana, *Soliloquies in England*, cit., p. 122.

[25] See, for example, Santayana, *To John Middleton Murry*, 11 December 1929, where he writes (L 4, 145): «I am not able to share your enthusiasm for D.H. Lawrence, Dostoevsky, Nietzsche, or even Goethe».

[26] And, just to mention it, the significant influence of Goethe and Schopenhauer on both them, since it is not however the subject of this study.

[27] G. Santayana, *Egotism in German Philosophy*, New York, Scribner's, 1916, p. 117.

man belonging to modern times, in search of the wisdom he does not find in his world. The content of the debate concerns many aspects of philosophical reflection, as it has been shown by many scholars in their studies. Moreover, the interpretation of the various viewpoints is far from being straightforward, because in the dialogue the characters hold opinions that are only partially consistent with the interpretations handed down over the history of philosophical thought. This is because Santayana, with subtle and skillful adjustments, makes them express ideas that align with the thesis he ultimately wants to reach.

Democritus is the main character and Santayana assigns him this role likely because, as he later points out, in this phase of his philosophical development, «natural philosophy» has become an essential pillar of his system[28]. However, contrary to expectations[29], the content of the dialogue shows that Santayana does not take Democritus as the spokesman of his positions. First of all, because the reductionist naturalism, as Democritus' could be defined today, is not the one adopted by Santayana, who in fact presents him, sarcastically, as someone who recognizes philosophies by their smell or, more seriously but still disapprovingly, as someone who considers madness as the result of a disordered movement at the level of the atomic structure of animal sensitivity[30]. Secondly, because Democritus asserts that «science has means of penetrating to the most hidden things» (DL, 7-8). This scientific dogmatism is indeed foreign to Santayana's mentality. In *The Life of Reason* Santayana had already emphasized the limits of scientific explanations in certain areas of human experience as, for example, dreams or religious beliefs[31], and in *Winds of Doctrine* he had stigmatized B. Russell's faith in the «absolute necessity» of mathematics as it were a religion[32]. A similar comment is applied to the philosopher from Abdera: «Democritus, having thought he discovered "Reality", thought he must worship it. I am in that respect a disciple of his enemy Socrates, and worship only the beautiful and the good»[33].

The objections against Democritus come from Alcibiades, Aristippus, and Dionysius, but it is especially the last one who plays the role of major opponent. Dionysius, indeed, enthusiastically embraces the thesis of Democritus, according to which «the whole life of mind is normal madness» and «all human philosophy [...] is but madness systematic» (DL, 16), but in order to turn it to an opposite result. For Democritus madness, although being a natural phenomenon like any other, creates only «masks» and «illusions» that cover the true reality of nature, that is its atomic structure known exclusively by science. For Dionysius, who by virtue of his name presents himself as a descendant of Dionysus, on the contrary madness has a divine origin and he supports authoritatively his opinion referring, of course, to Plato's «divine madness»[34] and the Bacchic spirit of Euripides (DL,17-19).

[28] In particular he maintains: «in spite of the war then raging, fancy in me had taken a new lease of life. I felt myself nearer than ever before to rural nature and to the perennial animal roots of human society». See G. Santayana, *A General Confession*, cit., p. 23.

[29] Given that Santayana had celebrated Democritus, in virtue of his atomism, as the forerunner of a scientific theory of substance. See G. Santayana, *Three philosophical Poets: Lucretius, Dante, and Goethe* (1910), eds. K. Dawson and D.E. Spiech, Cambridge, Mass., The MIT Press 2019, pp. 16-17.

[30] G. Santayana, *Dialogues in Limbo*, London, Constable, 1925, pp. 3-5. (Hereafter DL, followed by page number in the body of the text).

[31] G. Santayana, *The Life of Reason*, Book 5, *Reason in Science*, cit, p. 5 ss.

[32] G. Santayana, *Winds of Doctrine. Studies in Contemporary Opinion* (1913), ed. M.S. Wokeck, M.A. Coleman, D.E. Spiech, F.L. Weiss, Cambridge, Mass., The MIT Press, 2023, p. 78.

[33] G. Santayana, *To Sterling Power Lamprecht*, L 5, 61-62.

[34] Another topic dear both to Santayana and Nietzsche.

One might therefore be tempted to think, knowing how much Santayana appreciated this state of mind, that this can be, for him, the alternative to the reductionist naturalism of Democritus. Yet Alcibiades introduces a different perspective, albeit equally anti-reductionist: stigmatizing the beastly nature of Dionysius' madness, he instead argues that «if a divine inspiration sometimes descends on us in madness, whether in prophecy or love, it comes to dissipate that madness and to heal it», and evokes the teachings of his master Socrates, according to which «the best inspiration that can visit the soul is reason» (DL, 20). Still, Santayana concludes this first dialogue aporetically, giving the last word to Democritus, who maintains that «in the sphere of nature, where there is no better or worse, reason itself is a form of madness» (DL; 20).

In the subsequent dialogues, the tension between the Dionysian spirit and reason takes on a further form that reveals Santayana's view more closely.

5. The new religion and the traditional religion

In the dialogue entitled *Lovers of Illusion*, by this label Santayana brings together Aristippus, Alcibiades, and Dionysius against Democritus, who is the defender of truth and science, and present them as devotees of a new cult dedicated to a new god, Autologos, who embodies illusion (DL, 58). The most significant role is again played by Dionysius, because he claims to be the priest of a «new religion» arguing the superiority of illusion over truth and science.

It is worthwhile to consider in what sense the new religion constitutes a novelty when compared to the classical Dionysian cult. After all, Nietzsche, who had already claimed to be the last disciple of Dionysius[35], had previously undermined the philosophical basis of truth and its alleged connection with good, highlighting its potential danger indeed, and asking famously «how much of the "truth" one could still barely endure – or to put it more clearly, to what degree one would *require* it to be, thinned down, shrouded. sweetened, blunted, falsified»[36]. Interestingly, Santayana agreed with this passage, at least in its first part, because in one of his letters he recalls that Nietzsche said: «The great question is whether mankind can endure the truth»[37].

Still there is a novelty not irrelevant in the new religion of illusion and its relationship with science and truth, which does not match ultimately either Dionysius' opinion or Democritus'. It is that Autologos, in the myth narrated by The Stranger, is a naive child who can live in a world of illusion only as long as he leaves room for the world of science, even by disregarding it. A similar tolerance should be shown by the «eliminativist» scientist (so he could be labelled today): instead, by destroying Autologos' belief that names express the soul of the flowers in his garden, the scientist disrupts a balance whose result is the death of

[35] F. Nietzsche, *What I Owe to the Ancients*, in Id., *Twilight of Idols* (1989), Indianapolis, Cambridge, Hackett Publishing Company, 1997, § 4, p. 89.

[36] He also questioned: «Indeed, what forces us at all to suppose that there is an essential opposition of "true" and "false"? Is it not sufficient to assume degrees of apparentness and, as it were, lighter and darker shadows and shades of appearance-different "values", to use the language of painters?». See F. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*. *Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future* (1886), ed. W. Kaufman, New York, Random House,1966, §§ 34-39, pp. 46-49, (emphasis in original). And, in virtue of his famous «inverted Platonism» (See F. Nietzsche, *eKGWB/NF-1870*,7 [156] – *Nachgelassene Fragmente Ende 1870 – April 1871*), he could say: «Fundamentally, Plato, as the artist he was, preferred appearance to being! lie and invention to truth! the unreal to the actual!». F. Nietzsche, *The Will of Power* (1895), ed. W. Kaufman, New York, Random House, 1967, § 572, p. 321.

[37] G. Santayana, *To Bruno Lind (Robert C. Hahnel)*, 3 October 1951, L 8, 390.

both Autologos – his only interlocutor – and himself. The mutual tolerance would in fact turn their destructive madness into a normal madness, in harmony with the life of the reason[38].

This shows how for Santayana, unlike Nietzsche, illusion does not cancel the value of reality, nor falsehood is equivalent to truth. In fact the new religion of illusion gives rise to «normal» madness, but this is compliant with a «normal» life, according to Democritus, a view that Dionysus, adhering to the new cult, does not accept. Hence a great divide arises between them, which mirrors in some way that between Santayana and Nietzsche (DL, 73).

The crucial point of Democritus' discourse on madness is focused precisely on the distinction between madness and «normal» madness. In particular he maintains that «belief in the imaginary and desire for the impossible will justly be called madness; but those habits and ideas will be conventionally called sane which are sanctioned by tradition and which, when followed, do not lead directly to the destruction of oneself or of one's country. Such conventional sanity is a normal madness like that of images in sense, love in youth, and religion among nations» (DL, 46). Furthermore, he says that this process of normalization is supported by two deities: an implacable Punishment that «daily removes the maddest from the midst of mankind», and can lead to isolation or death of the madman, and a benevolent Agreement who teaches the madman to control itself «like a young colt broken in and trained to gallop in harness» (DL, 47) In this last «normal» form, madness is a healthy condition of human coexistence and prosperity, since it conveys illusions fostering mutual benevolent feelings, as it happens in friendship («agreement in madness» for Democritus) and in Greece's games «in which peace was made keen and glorious by a beautiful image of war» (DL, 47-50).

All these claims would let misunderstand Democritus as just a utopian believer in the dominance of spontaneous benevolence among humans, and this would render him an incongruous «lover of illusions». However, this is not the case because Santayana anchors his character coherently with the historical figure, by letting him underline the ontological – materialist – premises of his discourse. In fact Democritus states that «the most action-dyed illusion, if interwoven with good habits, can flourish in long amity with things» (DL, 48). Just on this point, Dionysius coherently plays his role, diminishing Democritus' «knowledge of herbs and atoms», a «knowledge of no importance to monarchs or liberal minds» and imputing to him the great limitation of not being versed «in the higher things of spirit». Furthermore, he says:

> The value of madness is not such as you attribute to the normal illusions of sense or opinion, which Punishment and Agreement bring into a blind and external harmony with nature. On the contrary, such madness is almost sane, and quite uninspired; but divine madness wafts the soul away altogether from the sad circumstances of earth, and bids it live like a young god only among its own chosen creations (DL, 72-73).

[38] For this reason, while agreeing with E.W. Lovely that «Santayana's interpretation suggests that a mutual agreement between the botanist and Autologos would be consistent with the life of reason», I do not agree with many important details of his argument. I will limit myself to recalling two points relevant to the topic discussed above: Autologos does not exemplify normal madness «at its extremes», but rather a pathological form of madness. Democritus, like the botanist, exemplifies hard science, another form of madness for Santayana, never leaving room for illusion except ironically, such as when he wants to challenge his interlocutors or when he utters the famous words «The young man who has not wept is a savage, and the old man who will not laugh is a fool». Actually, these words likely express not Democritus' own sentiment, but Santayana's. (About this point I will provide additional insight at the conclusion of the article). See E.W. Lovely, *Considering Santayana's Anti-Modernism - Two Tales of Conflict*, in «Overheard in Seville, Bulletin of the Santayana Society», XXXIII, Fall 2015, 5-15, pp. 12-13.

A brief parenthesis seems necessary at this point to show how this clash between two opposing forms – the tamed form of conventional sanity[39] and the untamable free form of the Dionysian spirit – is thought by Santayana as a vital necessity, out of a satirical form, in his last work, *Dominations and Powers*, where once again he describes the life of reason and its «underground souls» as necessary components of a natural and rational process of the human mind in search of its equilibrium. It is a philosophical explanation, but some contemporary psychoanalysts might consider it at least metaphorically valid, and therefore it seems appropriate to quote the following long passage:

> The soul or life of the individual is formed by a harmony in his composition and motion. This harmony, in so far as it is achieved, is health and (on the intellectual side) sanity; so that sanity and not madness is the constitutional principle of psyche, and of all her organs. But this vital harmony is always imperfect, a sort of crust beneath which might chaotic forces are at work, as yet imperfectly unified or transmuted into the life of reason. Each of these parts is breeding an inchoate spirit with an incipient rationality of its own. Each slumbers or flares up with its special imagery and method; and it is from one or another of these subterranean souls that dreams and inspirations break in upon the rational man. It is for him, in his sober equilibrium, to accept, use, interpret, and control these promptings. Hi is not mad for having them; they are the material for his rational synthesis. But if he lets any of them become dominant he is lost, and they also; because after all the organ or member cannot endure, if it spreads out and swallows up the rest of the body. To be all hand or belly or head, all will or all lust or all fancy, would make a horrible amputated monster, dying, not being born[40].

Yet the more challenging and suggestive version of normal madness remains the one expressed in *Dialogues in Limbo*, to which it will be returned for the conclusion.

6. Normal madness as enduring conflict between madness and rationality

Despite Santayana putting something of himself into every character, there is no doubt that he identifies with The Stranger, primarily because in the aforementioned letter to Lamprecht he explicitly states: «my position is that of The Stranger, which Democritus disowns». Furthermore, The Stranger's personality and ideas are quite consistent with wellknown Santayana's views. Thus he seeks in Limbo that companionship he cannot find among the living beings and a cure for his madness, which is nothing but the disillusion and strangeness of a homeless wanderer. But his first encounter with the «venerable sage» does not reveal the understanding that one might expect for reasons that have partly emerged in the previous sections, but are partly still to be clarified.

Democritus' idea of normal madness as conventional sanity cannot make The Stranger his adherent, since it entails, as Democritus insists, the repressive action of Punishment against the untamable spirits and, at the same time, an active public commitment, since the philosopher fulfills the mission commissioned by the gods, and by men, to act according to his nature, as a «fighting animal». Indeed, for Democritus The Stranger is a «private» and «obscure» person because «he sits in his closet fancifully rebuilding the universe or reforming the state» and from this secure position «he tolerates the spectacle, he is like a woman in the theater shuddering at tragedies and eating sweets» (DL, 31).

[39] This point has been deeply analyzed in relation to the present "age of terrorism" by C. Estébanez, in his *Santayana's Idea of Madness and Normal Madness in a Troubled Age*, in *The Life of Reason in an Age of Terrorism*, ed. Ch. Padrón and K.P. Skowroński, Leiden, Boston, Brill Rodopi, 2018, p. 232.

[40] G. Santayana, *Dominations and Powers. Reflection on Liberty, Society and Government*, New York, Scriber's, 1954, pp. 235-236.

This disagreement between the two is not surprising if we duly consider, alongside the naturalistic inspiration, the idealistic or spiritualistic inspiration which, for Santayana, has always been complementary to the former, and which Democritus ironically jests about. The Stranger focuses on the point by saying that he can be Democritus' disciple as regards the origin of things, which is the atomic substance, while he is Plato's follower[41] «when he closes his eyes on this inconstant world» and turns out to be «a great seer» (DL, 29). It is not, however, a matter of preferences. The Stranger has a serious argument about the truth of science and its principles, that expresses Santayana's firm conviction according to which science and any other human form of communication, «speak in symbols»[42], which are nothing but appropriate representations of material objects created successfully by human imagination and genius. Yet Democritus attributes to his geometrical forms an existence they do not have, as they are merely a construct of his mind. For this reason The Stranger can reply to his master: «If you meant that by a sort of revelation the eternal atoms and void and motions, exactly as they are have appeared in your mind's eye [...] then I should agree with Dionysius that you are making idols of your Ideas and forgetting that reason, as you yourself maintain, is a form of madness» (DL, 85).

It is useful at this point to refer once again to Santayana's letter to Lamprecht for two reason. The first is to comment on a point that has been overlooked so far, that is Lamprecht's criticism of Santayana's naturalism. In the light of the previous argument, it is evident that Lamprecht, charging Santayana's naturalism of agnosticism misunderstands him altogether: inasmuch as naturalism is based on animal faith, Santayana does not make room for agnosticism – rather for his special «form of dogmatism»[43], related to the faith in the existence of things, namely the animal faith. Still Santayana is not agnostic about science or knowledge, because he attributes to science and knowledge the function of representing almost successfully the nature and the world in general. He is, on the other hand, wholly critical towards the dogmatism of science and metaphysics, relegating these kinds of approach within the field of illusion.

The second reason is to refer again to Santayana's words in this letter because they suggest how to proceed on a different front of the clash between madness, illusion and rationality. In fact, Santayana writes: «Democritus, having thought he discovered "Reality", thought he must worship it. I am in that respect a disciple of his enemy Socrates, and worship only the beautiful and the good»[44].

For this reason, a final version of the tension between existence and ideal reality, passions and reason, nature and spirit, that seems worthwhile to consider, is the one that Santayana brings out through two dialogues between The Stranger and Socrates. The first concerns the question of «self-government». Interestingly the focus is on the social or public dimension of the relationship between irrationality and madness in the modern age. The Stranger, by apparently embracing current opinions, merely conceals his own disillusionment. Specifically, he advances the idea that fashion functions as «an unwritten and plastic law in the modern world», to which individuals, the more they conform their choices to it, the more they feel free to do so (DL, 94).

[41] As regards Santayana's interpretation of Plato's ideas as essences, see his *Platonism and Spiritual life*, New York, Scribner's, 1927, p. 88.

[42] G. Santayana, *Scepticism and Animal Faith. Introduction to a System of Philosophy*, New York, Scribner's, London, Constable, 1923, p. 102.

[43] G. Santayana, *Scepticism and Animal Faith*, cit., p. 6.

[44] See note 6.

It's evidently a paradox, but The Stranger explains that such choices are dictated by a passing whim only seemingly. Actually «this caprice is grafted upon an habitual passion, namely, on a rooted instinct to lead, to follow, or somehow to lose oneself in a common enjoyment of life with one's fellow-men, especially those of one's age and class». And the strength of this passion is such that it leads one to believe that «life itself, in its pervasive immediacy», made of whims and instinctual desires constitutes the ultimate good (DL, 94). To Socrates' obvious objection, according to which instructors and legislators in Greece appropriately prevented the potentially ruinous establishment of a social order governed by incompetent leaders[45], The Stranger replies with a flawed form of naturalism, saying: «there is an automatism in nature, Socrates, more fruitful than reason», furthermore suitable for giving rise to a spontaneous organization of the community's life in religious, scientific and political institutions (DL, 98). Of course, Socrates objects that this automatism is typical of the way animals live and that the privilege of possessing reason is rather «to turn us into philosophers, by teaching us to survey our destiny and to institute, within its bounds, the pursuit of perfection» (DL, 99). His conclusion is, of course, that «without knowledge there is no authority in the will, either over itself or over others, but only violence and madness» (DL, 105).

The second dialogue, on the «philanthropist», takes on a more personal tone, and The Stranger's disillusionment is even stronger. Socrates is «a narrow philanthropist», but when he provokes The Stranger by emphasizing their shared preference «for the plastic and generous temper of young men, who embody human health and freedom to perfection», the latter says that their preference «in this matter is three-quarters illusion. (DL, 131). While Socrates, as is well known, addressed Alcibiades in his youth believing that he was the most suitable to undertake a proper «care of self», The Stranger defines the young men as «tadpoles» and odious for their presumption «when they have some cleverness and transgress their sphere». The Stranger's disillusionment, moreover, is worse as regards mature men, inasmuch as for him «men in middle life are for the most part immersed in affairs to which they give too much importance, having sold their souls to some sardonic passion and become dangerous and repulsive beasts». Furthermore, it also extends his disdain to the female gender (DL, 131).

In this respect, it is appropriate to make a twofold reflection. Firstly, truth be told, such a generalized feeling of disillusion towards human beings, as expressed by The Stranger, is a controversial point as regards Santayana's real life. His former students, friends, biographers, and scholars tell of his coldness and indifference, but also of his generosity and warmth[46]. Still what emerges from his letters and autobiography, reveals an uncommon richness and intensity of social relationships[47]. It is also true that in his writings Santayana displays an almost always critical attitude towards his contemporaries, often accompanied by a sharp irony and detachment that becomes increasing with age[48].

[45] In passing, it is worth noting that here Socrates gives one of his classic examples: the pilot who steers a ship must know his craft.

[46] All this is apparent from an informal conversation that took place among a group of American philosophers and was published a few years after his death. See *Dialogue on George Santayana*, ed. Corliss Lamont, New York, Horizon Press, 1959.

[47] Herman J. Saatkamp, the major contemporary scholar of Santayana, has been consistently stressed this point. See H.J. Saatkamp, Jr., *Santayana: Biography and the Future of Philosophy*, in «Pragmatism Today» XI (2020), 2, p. 127.

[48] Yet «Detachment» and «disillusion» are ways of life about which a wide debate is still open, but they open another field of analysis which deserves a separate study.

Secondly, the philosophical important point is that the construction of the dialogue hinges on the contrast between Socrates' thesis, according to which the human being can and must strive for improvement through self-knowledge, and The Stranger's thesis, which states that loving the human beings means loving them as they are. But this latter thesis, apparently incongruent with The Stranger's previous sentences on human beings, becomes understandable if one grasps that neither the self-knowledge sought by Socrates, nor the idealism of Plato, of which The Stranger declared himself a disciple, can lead for Santayana to an improvement of the human beings.

For him, as for The Stranger, the true philanthropist loves men as they are, inasmuch as «their real nature is what they would discover themselves to be if they possessed self-knowledge or, as the Indian scripture has it, if they became what they are» (DL, 133), that is, they are finite beings, subject to error, but capable of facing their limitations, of making error and illusion part of truth, and of living with sorrow and joy[49]. Here Santayana himself can actually bring «a squaring of old troubled accounts»[50] with Nietzsche, embodying the complementarity between the opposing sentiments of joy and sorrow, and with Democritus – the materialist – making him say such complementarity with well-known words that, although echoed many times, do not lose their fascination: «Shed your tears, my son, shed your tears. The young man who has not wept is a savage, and the old man who will not laugh is a fool» (DL, 57)[51].

[49] Interestingly, Horace Kallen underlines how Santayana became himself through his works: «The Self he then became would be the Self of *The Life of Reason*, of *Scepticism and Animal Faith*, of *Realms of Being*, and of all the soliloquies and communications that come between and are gathered into books». See H.M. Kallen, *The Laughing Philosopher*, in «The Journal of Philosophy», LXI (1964), 1, p. 28.

[50] Nietzsche famously, with a different and violent intent, had said: «Become the one you are!». See F. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883-1892), ed. W. Kaufmann, New York, Penguin Books ,1978, Fourth and Last Part, p. 239.

[51] On the liberating function of the laughter about the contingency of existence in Santayana's philosophy, see L. Amir, *The Special Case of Laughter*, in «Overheard in Seville. Bulletin of the Santayana Society», XXXVIII, 2019, p. 57.