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n. 15 / 2024



GEORGE SANTAYANA:
UN PENSATORE COSMOPOLITA

a cura di
José Beltrán e Giuseppe Patella

rocinante

RIVISTA DI FILOSOFIA IBERICA, IBEROAMERICANA E INTERCULTURALE

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ISSN: 2531-6451 (digitale) | 1971-2871 (stampa)

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Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche, 2024

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PROGETTO GRAFICO DELLA COPERTINA: Diego Scimone

RIVISTA PATROCINATA DA:

Dipartimento di Studi Umanistici - Università degli Studi di Napoli "Federico II"

Fondazione I.S.L.A. per gli Studi Latinoamericani - Università degli Studi di Salerno

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I

SAGGI E ARTICOLI

INTRODUZIONE

GEORGE SANTAYANA: UN PENSATORE COSMOPOLITA*

José Beltrán, Giuseppe Patella

* * *

A man's feet must be planted in his country, but his eyes should survey the world.

George Santayana, *Reason in Society*, 1905

La citazione che apre questa introduzione ci è stata suggerita da Herman J. Saatkamp – che qui pubblicamente ringraziamo – e ci è parsa subito un «atom of thought», come direbbe Santayana, molto appropriato come frontespizio di questo numero monografico. George Santayana (Madrid 1869 – Roma 1952) è, infatti, un filosofo universale di origine spagnola. Ha svolto la maggior parte della sua carriera negli Stati Uniti e l'ha completata in Europa e a Roma, quando decise di abbandonare una brillante vita accademica a Harvard per fare della filosofia una forma di vita. A cavallo tra due secoli, dei quali fu testimone e partecipe privilegiato, ha realizzato una vasta e originale produzione che continua ad essere oggetto di un interesse crescente nel panorama culturale statunitense, iberoamericano, europeo e oltre. Da alcuni decenni le sue opere, scritte originariamente in inglese, continuano ad essere ripubblicate con traduzioni in spagnolo, italiano, francese, tedesco, polacco, turco e persino cinese, in un costante lavoro di recupero. L'eredità che implica la numerosa e diversificata opera di Santayana è enorme. Le sue continue reinterpretazioni sono una prova dell'attualità di un pensiero originale che, per essere un classico, è straordinariamente contemporaneo. Oggi possiamo leggere molti dei testi del filosofo spagnolo come se li avesse scritti oggi stesso.

Un'opera poliedrica come quella di Santayana risveglia nell'attualità rinnovati interessi di ordine culturale, letterario, filosofico ed estetico. Santayana ha coltivato l'arte della conversazione con i pensatori del passato e con i suoi stessi contemporanei, e la sua filosofia, esercitata con una stupefacente libertà, si è nutrita di tutti costoro. Pensatore intempestivo, viaggiatore infaticabile, osservatore attento di persone e luoghi, ha coltivato una estetica mediterranea, ha scritto con una prosa invidiabile e ha affrontato con una straordinaria lucidità le questioni centrali della filosofia di tutti i tempi: la bellezza, la ragione, la materia, la scienza, l'arte, la società, la religione e la vita come risultante di tutto questo. All'interno di questo ventaglio di questioni, non sono poche le occasioni in cui il pensatore spagnolo ha prestato attenzione alla figura del Quijote, come una potente metafora espressiva della sua filosofia. Nelle sue pagine incontriamo lezioni magistrali di una tradizione rinnovata e una ispirazione costante per pensare con lucidità il nostro fragile presente.

* È possibile leggere questa introduzione anche in lingua spagnola e inglese al seguente indirizzo web: Está introducción también se puede leer en español e inglés en la siguiente dirección web: This introduction can also be read in Spanish and English at the following web address: <https://internationalconferenceonsantayana.blogspot.com/>

Con questo numero monografico dedicato a Santayana, «Rocinante» intende richiamare l'attenzione sulla sua opera e rendere omaggio a un pensatore cosmopolita, che non smette di guadagnare attualità, riunendo voci plurali del panorama internazionale. Per questo, nel numero 15 di «Rocinante» vengono affrontati il pensiero e la produzione di Santayana a partire dalle molteplici prospettive e possibilità interpretative che i suoi testi offrono. I contributi che troviamo in queste pagine riflettono gli approcci filosofico, letterario, culturale, sociale, estetico e interdisciplinare. E i temi affrontano questioni diversificate che mostrano l'attualità della sua opera, il dialogo intellettuale che ha tenuto con pensatori del passato e del presente, l'impronta della Spagna e dell'Italia nel suo pensiero, gli aspetti centrali della sua filosofia nei suoi molteplici registri – saggistico, epistolare, poetico, romanzesco... – e tutte quelle questioni culturali che senza dubbio destano l'interesse dei lettori attenti delle sue pagine.

Di seguito troviamo i contributi di dieci autori prestigiosi – tutti accademici esperti dell'opera di Santayana – provenienti dalle due sponde dell'Atlantico: da un lato, due testi dagli Stati Uniti e uno dall'Argentina, dall'altro, due articoli dall'Italia, uno dalla Polonia e quattro dalla Spagna. Tutti gli autori sono propulsori instancabili del pensiero di Santayana, alcuni da decenni, sia come studiosi sia come traduttori o curatori. I saggi presentati rispettano la lingua originale in cui sono stati scritti: inglese, italiano e spagnolo. Santayana conosceva bene le tre lingue: l'inglese fu la lingua appresa da piccolo e adottata come mezzo di espressione di tutta la sua opera; l'italiano lo praticò nell'ultimo periodo della vita quando decise di stabilirsi definitivamente a Roma; e lo spagnolo fu la lingua abituale durante i primi anni di vita, essendo nato a Madrid, e con cui comunicava frequentemente per via epistolare, una volta stabilito negli Stati Uniti, con suo padre e i suoi familiari in Spagna, e oralmente con tutti loro durante i suoi frequenti viaggi nel paese di nascita.

L'insieme di tutti questi testi potrà essere considerato – in maniera plastica – come una sorta di conversazione aperta intorno a una molteplicità di temi centrali che sono universali ma anche terribilmente contemporanei. Questa conversazione si svolge nell'*agorà* che ci offre la rivista «Rocinante». L'*agorà* è del resto lo spazio fondativo della democrazia nella quale si riunivano i cittadini della *polis* per scambiarsi le parole e creare una cultura comune: un *cosmos*. Così, queste pagine diventano un luogo di incontro, in cui le riflessioni che Santayana – pensatore cosmopolita – ha espresso in solitudine vengono ora condivise in società, mostrando la loro validità e acquisendo nuova attualità.

Il primo contributo che presentiamo è quello di Herman J. Saatkamp Jr. dal titolo *George Santayana: A Cosmopolitan*. Dobbiamo anzitutto ringraziare Herman J. Saatkamp per aver lavorato al suo articolo in condizioni di salute poco favorevoli, il che rende ancor più meritorio il suo testo, che inquadra e dà inizio anche al resto dei contributi. Il professor Saatkamp è indubbiamente la principale autorità accademica sulla vita e l'opera di Santayana a livello mondiale. Ha svolto una carriera prestigiosa in diverse università statunitensi, sia come ricercatore e docente che come dirigente. È stato propulsore e curatore delle opere complete di Santayana presso la prestigiosa MIT Press, impresa iniziata nel 1987 e che continua ancora oggi. Qui affronta il tema che fa da filo conduttore al numero monografico di «Rocinante» e al quale aveva già prestato attenzione in occasioni precedenti, come si può verificare anche nel suo recente volume *A Life of Scholarship with Santayana: Essays and Reflections*, a cura di Charles Padrón e Krzysztof Piotr Skowroński (2021). La tesi che qui avanza è che il cosmopolitismo di Santayana non lo è nel senso tradizionale che legittima un codice morale o politico universale, quanto piuttosto in un senso contemporaneo prossimo al pensiero di Kwame Appiah, che sostiene che gli individui si

rispettano gli uni con gli altri senza necessariamente essere d'accordo tra di loro. Il cosmopolitismo è una delle caratteristiche peculiari del profilo di Santayana: il suo contesto familiare, il suo percorso biografico e la sua opera plurale – aperta a influssi classici e contemporanei – hanno fatto di Santayana un pensatore unico e originale, in cui gli elementi locali e universali si intrecciano. Il suo insuperabile naturalismo e la sua attenzione alle correnti filosofiche e culturali del suo tempo, riflesso di circostanze contingenti, lo hanno trasformato in un testimone distante, ma filosoficamente attento alla molteplicità dell'esperienza umana. Santayana seppe comprendere e rispettare la diversità umana e i suoi aneliti verso la perfezione. Allo stesso tempo, le sue riflessioni anticipano temi e ricerche molto attuali nell'ambito degli studi sulla coscienza e le neuroscienze.

Strettamente legato al testo precedente, il contributo di Krzysztof Piotr Skowroński viene dedicato al *Santayana's Pluralism of Cultures as a Multiple of Cultural Perfections*. Docente nella università di Opole in Polonia, Skowroński è cofondatore del Berlin Practical Philosophy International Forum e.V., ha scritto e curato opere sulla filosofia americana, alcune delle quali dedicate espressamente a Santayana, ed è stato l'organizzatore della II International Conference on Santayana svoltasi a Opole (Polonia) nel 2006 e della V International Conference on Santayana tenutasi a Berlino nel 2016. Nel suo articolo egli affronta lo scenario contemporaneo caratterizzato dalle guerre culturali, il multiculturalismo, la diversità culturale e il cosmopolitismo nelle sue molteplici espressioni. Skowroński sostiene che l'opera di Santayana offre una prospettiva decisiva per il dibattito su tali questioni. E per questo, propone una interpretazione in chiave contemporanea delle riflessioni di Santayana sulla pluralità delle perfezioni culturali. Oltre al valore delle conquiste culturali, materiali e intellettuali, Santayana offre modelli di vita buona in contesti culturali specifici. Questi modelli servono per il nostro stesso tempo se riconosciamo i beni che comportano e la gioia che possono offrire.

Il terzo contributo è quello di Manuel Ruiz Zamora – storico dell'arte e filosofo oltre che coeditore della rivista «Fedro» – dal titolo *Desde la proximidad de la distancia: la escatología espiritual de George Santayana*. Zamora ha dedicato non pochi testi all'opera di Santayana, sia come autore che come curatore e in questa occasione affronta l'idea centrale di «distanza», presente in maniera costante in tutta l'opera del filosofo spagnolo, come maniera ideale di stare nel mondo. Una maniera comune agli stessi filosofi antichi, «solitamente in esilio, ma sempre a un passo dal mercato e dal teatro», come scrive Santayana in *Persons and Places*. La nozione di «distanza» qui gioca non solo un ruolo chiave dal punto di vista epistemologico e morale, ma è una maniera di esercitare la filosofia come attitudine vitale e come forma di vita. In questo senso potremmo dire che qui non si tratta di una idea di distanza che separa, quanto piuttosto che unisce. In pochissimi filosofi come Santayana, afferma Zamora, si realizza una intima coerenza tra le idee che sostiene nella sua riflessione e la sua maniera di vivere, così che la sua esistenza si trasforma in una ammirevole «esemplificazione» delle sue idee, in una nobile esemplarità morale del suo pensiero.

Continuando, Carmen González Marín, docente di filosofia presso la Universidad Carlos III di Madrid – che nella sua ampia produzione saggistica ha dedicato non poche riflessioni alla figura di Santayana, oltre a partecipare a congressi internazionali sull'autore – firma un contributo dal titolo *Puritanismo y vida espiritual o el error de Platón*. Nel suo testo affronta il personaggio tragico di Oliver Alden, il protagonista del romanzo di Santayana *L'ultimo puritano* (1937), alla luce del platonismo e della sua visione equivoca dell'amore. Il puritanismo sostiene infatti l'impossibilità di esercitare l'amore e la sensualità. E la

filosofia deve ricorrere a strategie o supplementi narrativi – è il caso di questa finzione filosofica, che adotta la forma di una «Memoria in forma di romanzo», come recita il sottotitolo dell'opera – per mostrarci la nuda verità là dove gli argomenti non sono sufficienti per svelarla.

Il quinto contributo, firmato da Mattia Manzoni – cui si deve la recente traduzione in italiano de *Il Regno dell'Essenza* (*The Realm of Essence*, il primo dei libri de *The Realms of Being*) – risponde al titolo *Verso un'eco-ontologia: per una rilettura contemporanea dei Realms of Being*. Nel suo articolo Manzoni mette in evidenza l'aspetto, secondo l'autore poco esplorato, che riguarda l'ontologia di Santayana, che egli mette in relazione non solo con i temi dell'ontologia contemporanea (per esempio la Object Oriented Ontology), ma soprattutto con la riflessione filosofica sulla natura, l'ambiente e il ruolo dell'uomo nel mondo. Il presupposto è che l'ontologia naturalistica di Santayana ritiene che ogni ente sia sempre situato da un punto di vista ecologico e che l'essere umano sia parte integrante di un ecosistema. In questo senso diventa opportuna una nuova lettura filosofica della sua opera centrale, che la rende molto più attuale e prossima ad approcci come l'ambientalismo o il realismo speculativo, nonché alla cosiddetta «ecologia profonda». In ogni caso, questa prospettiva mostra il carattere «pratico» della filosofia di Santayana sempre legata a questioni e problemi del nostro tempo, anche perché il suo sistema ontologico non ha una funzione meramente teoretica o speculativa, ma svolge una più ampia finalità etico-morale.

A Martin A. Coleman, docente nel Dipartimento di filosofia della Indiana University a Indianapolis, si deve il suggestivo testo *Masks and Madness*. Coleman è anche direttore e curatore della Santayana Edition, ha realizzato un'ampia produzione dedicata all'opera di Santayana e ha partecipato a numerosi incontri internazionali dedicati al filosofo spagnolo. In questa occasione affronta in maniera originale un tema inedito. Sostiene che le «maschere» svolgono un ruolo importante nella filosofia di Santayana, come risorsa per interpretare il mondo, e noi come parte di esso, a partire da un'identità adottata. La maschera è la persona o il personaggio che costruiamo per avvicinarci, a debita distanza, alla realtà che intendiamo conoscere. Al fine di analizzare come opera questa strategia di osservazione della realtà, Coleman fa riferimento al supereroe del celebre fumetto *Watchmen*, creato dallo scrittore e sceneggiatore Alan Moore e dal disegnatore Dave Gibbons, per avvicinarsi da una prospettiva inedita all'opera di Santayana. E, in maniera reciproca, sostiene che l'opera di Santayana contribuisce a fornire nuove interpretazioni sulla serie di *Watchmen*. Le maschere nei comics – il cui nome serve anche a designare gli eroi o supereroi – consentono di vedere la realtà in maniera diversa. Le immagini nei fumetti si espandono attraverso un'apparente semplificazione, e non si tratta solo di un modo di disegnare, ma di una maniera di vedere. I vigilanti di *Watchmen* eseguono un compito, svolgono una missione di «vigilanza epistemologica», simile a quella dei filosofi. In *Supergods: Our World in the Age of the Superhero* (2012), Grant Morrison afferma che, con Alan Moore «grazie alla sua abilità clinica e alla sua fredda analisi delle egoistiche decisioni americane in materia di politica estera, e travestito da storia alternativa di superuomini e giustizieri mascherati, *Watchmen* è andato direttamente al cuore della DC Comics, per così esplodere nel cuore dell'Uomo». Allargando e concentrando il fuoco del loro sguardo, i vigilantes, eroi con superpoteri e filosofi con supercoscienza, sono in grado di percepire e svelare la «normale follia» delle convenzioni umane. Questo compito, che eseguono protetti da maschere, serve a chiederci come vivere e convivere con una buona dose di buon senso.

Anche Leonarda Vaiana – docente presso l'Università di Messina e autrice di un'ampia produzione accademica dedicata anche all'opera di Santayana, sul quale ha scritto diversi saggi e ha svolto un importante lavoro di diffusione e traduzione di alcune sue opere – affronta il tema della follia nel suo articolo intitolato *Normal Madness or the Other Face of The Life of Reason*. In questa occasione, la studiosa italiana sostiene che il concetto di «Normal Madness», che Santayana sviluppa in *Dialogues in Limbo*, può essere interpretato come l'altro lato della «vita della ragione», concetto ispirato dalla lettura di Platone e Aristotele, che si aggiunge all'influenza iniziale di Nietzsche, dalla cui ispirazione romantica intese tuttavia prendere le distanze. L'espressiva metafora dell'«altro lato» serve a Vaiana per prestare attenzione al ruolo della ragione nel controllare gli impulsi e le passioni dell'essere umano e a perseguire la saggezza che consiste in un sano equilibrio, un'armonia vitale, per quanto questa sia fragile e incompleta. Il concetto di «normale follia» esprime in maniera eloquente la dialettica tra follia e sanità, la tesa alleanza tra la dimensione dionisiaca e quella apollinea, nonché la presenza e l'ambivalenza di entrambe nell'essere umano. Per aspirare ad una vita razionale e spirituale dobbiamo riconoscere il sostrato materiale che ci sostiene insieme agli ideali la cui contemplazione ci ispira e ci spinge a renderli praticabili e sani.

Laura Elizia Haubert insegna presso la Universidad Católica di Córdoba (Argentina), è esperta dell'opera di John Dewey e di Santayana, cui ha dedicato la sua recente produzione incentrata sul campo dell'estetica. Nel suo testo traccia esattamente *A Bridge Between Traditions: The Sense of Beauty in the Aesthetic Theories of Francis Hutcheson and George Santayana*, in cui esplora la riflessione di Santayana sulla bellezza nel contesto della formazione dell'estetica americana. Quest'opera, scritta nel 1896, che fu uno dei primi trattati di estetica degli Stati Uniti, è stata fondamentale per l'emergere di una tradizione che proveniva dalla teoria estetica continentale del XVIII secolo. Per stabilire questo legame, Laura Elizia Haubert indaga la fonte di ispirazione che l'opera di Francis Hutcheson ha rappresentato nelle riflessioni dell'allora giovane filosofo Santayana all'Harvard College. Benché Santayana non citi in maniera esplicita Hutcheson, non c'è dubbio che egli abbia letto il suo trattato *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*, del 1725, mentre teneva una serie di seminari di estetica tra il 1892 e il 1895, di cui dà conto nei frammenti della sua autobiografia *Persons and Places*.

Se le riflessioni sull'estetica sono state presenti fin dal principio nell'opera di Santayana, le esperienze estetiche hanno giocato un ruolo fondamentale nel suo percorso intellettuale e nella sua esperienza di vita. Non è strano che, nella sua biografia, elevi a categoria i «luoghi» da lui abitati insieme alle «persone» che ha incontrato. Dire luoghi è dire città, tra le quali alcune spiccano molto più di altre. Tra queste vi è, senza dubbio, Parigi, alla quale Charles Padrón dedica il suo testo dal titolo *Santayana and Paris: An Unconsummated Affair*. Padrón è un ricercatore specializzato nell'opera di Santayana che, oltre a scrivere numerosi saggi sul suo pensiero, è stato traduttore e curatore di importanti opere di riferimento di e su Santayana. Il suo contributo mette in evidenza l'influenza centrale della città di Parigi per più della metà della sua vita (54 anni), dal 1883 al 1936. Viaggiatore impenitente, più che turista accidentale, Santayana seppe cogliere in Parigi lo spirito (e la materia) di una emergente modernità, piena di novità e di stimoli intellettuali. L'autore registra in maniera esaustiva tutte le volte in cui Santayana ha visitato e vissuto a Parigi, essendo per lui una delle possibili opzioni di residenza in Europa – che alla fine ha tuttavia escluso – prima di optare definitivamente per Roma. In ogni caso, Parigi ha rappresentato uno degli scenari vitali e intellettuali che hanno lasciato una impronta decisiva in Santayana,

insieme alle città di Ávila e Roma. Le tracce di questo paesaggio emotivo sono state catturate nelle pagine di una filosofia che è stata anche espressione di uno stile di vita, arricchito dall'esercizio e dalla testimonianza della scrittura.

Infine, nell'ultimo contributo, Daniel Moreno Moreno presenta una *Bibliografía reciente de y sobre Santayana. Últimos cinco años*. Daniel Moreno è attualmente il maggior esperto dell'opera di Santayana in Spagna. Segretario di «Limbo. Boletín internacional de estudios sobre Santayana», collaboratore abituale di «Overheard in Seville. Bulletin of the Santayana Society», ha scritto la sua tesi dottorale sull'opera di Santayana che ha adattato per la pubblicazione nel 2007 del libro *Santayana filósofo. La filosofía como forma de vida*, che è stato tradotto anche in inglese. Ormai da decenni svolge un lavoro costante e infaticabile di diffusione e riconoscimento istituzionale, di traduzione e curatela delle opere di e su Santayana. In questo articolo attualizza in modo esaustivo le pubblicazioni dell'ultimo lustro di e sul pensatore cosmopolita in sette lingue nel panorama internazionale, un panorama che appare assai promettente e nel quale si prevedono nuovi contributi nei prossimi anni.

Non possiamo concludere questa introduzione senza ringraziare tutti gli autori che hanno accettato con entusiasmo fin dall'inizio di prendere parte a questo numero monografico dedicato al pensiero di Jorge/George Santayana. Esprimiamo il nostro più sincero ringraziamento al professor Guillermo Quintás Alonso, che ci ha suggerito per primo l'idea di rivolgerci alla rivista «Rocinante» come spazio di incontro idoneo per proporre nuove interpretazioni contemporanee dell'opera del filosofo universale. E, naturalmente, siamo grati per l'accoglienza e l'aiuto prezioso al Direttore e coordinatore di redazione di «Rocinante. Revista di filosofía iberica, iberoamericana e intercultural», Armando Mascolo. Infine, tra questi riconoscimenti, non possiamo non includere la comunità internazionale dei lettori che, «under any sky», rimangono attenti alla scia di Santayana, confermando che l'eredità della sua filosofia è uno stile di vita, un'espressione chiara e profonda della vita della ragione: la sua è una filosofia che continua ad ispirarci, in maniera straordinaria, nel modo di migliorare la nostra umanità per diventare degni ospiti del nostro anfitrión il mondo.

GEORGE SANTAYANA: A COSMOPOLITAN

Herman J. Saatkamp, Jr.

Abstract: Santayana is a cosmopolitan who does not endorse cosmopolitanism in the traditional sense of sanctioning a universal moral or political code. Santayana has more in common with the contemporary cosmopolitanism of Kwame Appiah where individuals respect each other without necessarily agreeing with each other. Being cosmopolitan is central to Santayana's philosophical outlook. His family background is enriched by his parents' Spanish diplomatic history. His personal, philosophical, and literary ventures are also international using classical terms and extend through centuries, bringing an impact of contemporary relevance and a decided bearing on present-day issues. His non-reductive naturalism led him to focus on individual achievements in varying and contingent political and environmental contexts rather than considering every human as a member of a universal community guided by universal standards. Santayana was ahead of his time appreciating the diversity of human life and its many perfections, and his account of consciousness resonates with current neurological research.

Keywords: Appiah, Autobiography, Materialism, Moral relativism, Respect, Universal Concern.

* * *

1. Introduction

Santayana is cosmopolitan in the sense of having an international perspective on world events and not being bound by the narrower viewpoint of one nation or region. He does not endorse a cosmopolitanism that advocates one universal moral or political code for all human beings. In that respect his views are more like that of Kwame Appiah and not like that of Immanuel Kant. As shall be discussed later, Appiah endorses a world view where people respect each other without necessarily agreeing on political or moral perspectives. Whereas Kant envisions a cosmopolitanism where the entire world is governed by a representative global institution and armies are abolished. In the strict sense traditional cosmopolitanism proposes that humans should form a cohesive and unified community under a universal code. In contrast, Santayana views the world and human beings as natural entities in which their heritage and environment nurture various actions and outlooks that may well conflict with one another. Humans are animals that behave in a manner structured by their environment and physical makeup, just like all other living creatures. That humans live in different social, political, and moral structures does not mean that one structure is right and the others are wrong, or even that one is better and the others are not. Humans should structure their lives as best they can, and in a manner that individuals living in their societies can flourish as much as is possible given the environment and their individual capabilities. As a result, our inherited environmental circumstances and our physical interaction with them will vary and sometimes may result in dramatically different social, political and moral structures that depend on specific circumstances and individual characteristics. As we shall see, Santayana's focus on the individual may raise questions regarding how one may best engage in bringing about societal goals.

His family background is enriched by his parents' Spanish diplomatic history that had a major impact on his birth, childhood, and his arrival in Boston. His personal, philosophical, and literary ventures are international and extend through centuries, bringing their impact to

contemporary relevance and a decided bearing on present-day issues¹. His non-reductive naturalism led him to focus on individual achievements in varying and contingent political and environmental contexts. And in many ways, Santayana was ahead of his time by appreciating the diversity of human life and its many perfections. Even his account of human/animal consciousness is surprising and was rarely taken seriously during his day, but now in the twenty-first century his account of consciousness resonates with current neurological research.

In his autobiography, *Persons and Places*, Santayana describes the development of his life and thought as divided into three parts: (1) background (1863-1886), (2) America and Europe (1886-1912), and (3) Europe (1912-1952). The background of his life basically spans his childhood in Spain through his undergraduate years at Harvard. Santayana's trans-Atlantic penchant for traveling led him to describe his years as a graduate student and professor at Harvard as on both sides of the Atlantic, a description he suggested as a title for the second part of his autobiography. Likewise, the third part of his life he described as all on the other side, indicating the forty years he spent as a full-time writer in Europe after retiring from Harvard in 1912. His Spanish background and his parents' diplomatic roles provide the origins for his being a cosmopolitan even during his early childhood and eventually leading to his life in Boston as being both in Europe and the U.S. Let us first turn to his heritage and outlook that led to the development of his cosmopolitan views.

2. Santayana's Family Background²

Santayana was a child of Spanish diplomats whose outlook were shaped by their lives in various countries and cultures while rooted in their Spanish heritage. Agustín Santayana, Santayana's father, was born in 1812. He practiced law for a brief time before entering the colonial service where he was posted in the Philippines. Even while studying law he served as an apprentice to a professional painter of the school of Goya. His reading was extensive as was his library, and he translated four Senecan tragedies into Spanish and wrote an unpublished book about the island of Mindanao. He made three trips around the world. He became the governor of Batang, a small island in the Philippines. One of the remarkable contingencies of Santayana's background is that Agustín took over the governorship from the recently deceased José Borrás y Bofarull, who was the father of Josefina Borrás. Josefina later becomes Agustín's wife in 1861 and the mother of Jorge Agustín Nicolás Santayana y Borrás (George Santayana) on December 16, 1863. In the normal course of events, one might have expected Agustín and Josefina to begin their courtship at this point since she was the only Spanish woman on the island. But this diplomatic happenstance did not follow that path. Why Josefina left the island after Agustín arrived is not clear. Perhaps she was uncomfortable with the situation when she left for Manila. There she met and married a Boston businessman. In 1856, Agustín again met Josefina while traveling on board ship from Manila for Spain. She was with her husband George Sturgis and their three surviving children were with them. This time Agustín traveled to Boston and Niagara, then to New York City and to England. His final post was as the Financial Secretary to General

¹ See H.J. Saatkamp Jr., *Santayana: Philosopher for the Twenty-First Century*, in M.A. Coleman, G. Tiller (ed.), *The Palgrave Companion to George Santayana's Scepticism and Animal Faith*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2024, for more information.

² For more detailed information on this see H.J. Saatkamp Jr., *Autobiography*, in *Oxford Handbook on Santayana*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, forthcoming.

Pavia Marqués de Novaliches, Governor-General of the Philippines. The tropics were not good for his health and he retired early in his late forties at an age similar to his future son's (George Santayana) retirement from Harvard at the age of forty-eight. In 1861 he returned to Madrid and fortuitously again met the widow Josefina Borrás Sturgis. They married that year.

Josefina Borrás life was also filled with happenstance and dramatic forces. Spanish in background, she was born in Glasgow, Scotland, around 1826-1828. Interestingly, she spent her early life in Virginia (U.S.A) and Barcelona (Spain). As an adult she spent her life in the Philippines, Spain, and the last 43 years of her life in Boston, Massachusetts. Her father's political views caused him to leave Spain for Scotland, and ironically when they moved to the U.S., he became the American Consul for Barcelona, Spain. The Spanish government later turned more in his direction, and he was appointed to a lucrative post in the Philippines. But it was not a simple voyage. Six months passed during their travel from Cádiz to Manila around the Cape of Good Hope, complicated by a storm the captain described as the worse he had ever experienced. During their travel, the Spanish government had changed again, and he was no longer to be appointed to the high paying position, but a small post as Governor of Batang was now his. When her father died, Josefina was now without family on the island, but she was resourceful and established a modestly profitable export business. However, she left for Manila when Agustín Santayana arrived. In Manila she met George Sturgis, a Boston aristocrat and businessman and they married, had five children, two died in early childhood, and then George Sturgis died. He was young when he died and his business was failing. Josefina once again was stranded in the Philippines but this time with several children. A brother of her husband offered her \$10,000 to help and she moved to Boston. Interestingly, the funds were the same amount she would leave to each of her surviving children when she died in 1912. She met Agustín again in Madrid in 1861 and they married. He was close to fifty years old and she was probably thirty-five. George Santayana was born in 1863, and they decided to move to Ávila sometime between 1864 and 1866. Although a beautiful walled city, Josefina found Ávila not the best place to raise her Sturgis children, and first her one surviving son from her first marriage returned to Boston. And then in 1869 she left for Boston with her two daughters. From 1869 until 1872 Agustín and his son, Jorge (George), lived in Ávila. But in 1872 Agustín decided that his son would have a better life in Boston as well. According to letters, Agustín made an effort to adjust to Boston and American life, but he preferred Spain and Ávila. After a few months, he left to return home, and the separation of mother and father was permanent. In 1888 Agustín wrote to Josefina:

When we were married I felt as if it were written that I should be united with you, yielding to the force of destiny [...]. Strange marriage, this of ours! So you say, and so it is in fact. I love you very much, and you too have cared for me, yet we do not live together³.

3. Life in Boston

When Santayana came to Boston, his English was not the best, and although he would turn nine years old in 1872, he attended Miss Welchman's Kindergarten on Chestnutt Street to

³ G. Santayana, *Persons and Places. Fragments of Autobiography*, eds. W.G. Holzberger and H.J. Saatkamp Jr., Cambridge, The MIT Press, 1986, p. 9.

improve his English. Later he attended the Boston Latin School (1874-1882) and Harvard College (1882-1886). In 1889 he completed his Ph.D. at Harvard College. He writes:

From the point of view of learning, my education at the Boston Latin School and at Harvard College was not solid or thorough; it would not have been solid or thorough in Spain; yet what scraps of learning or ideas I might have gathered there would have been vital, the wind of politics and of poetry would have swelled them, and allied them with notions of honour. But then I should have become a different man; so that my father's decision was all for my good, if I was to be the person that I am now⁴.

How true! Had he remained in Spain, he would have been a different person with a different outlook and future. Even so, he says his father's decision to bring him to the U.S. was good in the sense of shaping the person he became.

From 1889-1912 he became a vital member of Harvard's Department of Philosophy. William James, Josiah Royce and Santayana were internationally known colleagues during one of the most esteemed times for the department. Among his students were poets (Conrad Aiken, T.S. Eliot, Robert Frost, Wallace Stevens), journalists and writers (Walter Lippmann, Max Eastman, Van Wyck Brooks), professors (Samuel Eliot Morison, Harry Austryn Wolfson), a Supreme Court Justice (Felix Frankfurter), numerous diplomats (including his friend, Bronson Cutting), and a university president (James B. Conant).

Santayana was distinctly different from his Harvard colleagues, students, and the general population of protestant, puritanical and pragmatic Boston. Santayana's Spanish and Catholic background were unusual in that setting. He lived with his mother and siblings from another father. He spoke Spanish at home, and his dress and appearance were often different. His sense of being distinctive was prominent, but it did not keep him from fully engaging in undergraduate and graduate life. Some have portrayed Santayana almost as a recluse and isolated throughout his life, but that is simply false. He was a member of over twenty clubs and organizations, including the Harvard Lampoon, Hasty Pudding Club, the OK Club, the Harvard Monthly, and rarely is it noted that he was elected Pope! That is the position he was elected to when he helped form the Laodicean Club⁵. He traveled to Europe each summer following his freshman year, and clearly enjoyed the adventures and frivolity of an undergraduate young man as is attested to by his letters to family, particularly his father, and to friends. Two of his graduate years were spent abroad, primarily in Germany and England. Santayana's career at Harvard was productive, active, and remarkable in achievement. In his mid-thirties, after publishing books of poetry, he wrote *The Sense of Beauty* (1896)⁶ and *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion* (1900)⁷. *The Sense of Beauty* is based on his lectures from his Harvard aesthetics course. Rather than noting aesthetics as based on refined mental qualities, he places aesthetics in the natural sensibilities as a construct and response to human/animal activity. His distinct approach again is highlighted in *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion* where religion and poetry are portrayed as imaginative by-products that supervene on the natural order.

His Harvard mentors and colleagues were well-known for their views of muscular imagination that was essential to pragmatism and to idealism. Santayana's different philosophy and outlook were clear and to some offensive. These were the roots of his

⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁵ A reference to the Laodicean Church that was lukewarm and complacent as found in *Revelation* 3: 14-22.

⁶ Cfr. G. Santayana, *The Sense of Beauty. Being the Outlines of Aesthetic Theory*, New York, Scribner's, 1896.

⁷ Cfr. G. Santayana, *Interpretation of Poetry and Religion*, New York, Scribner's, 1900.

mature philosophy developed after he left Harvard when he views thought as meaningless in its consequence but eloquent in expression. Imagination and consciousness have no practical value as they are celebrational and festive reflections of one's physical (psyche) interaction with one's environment. This theme was largely shaped by his Spanish and Catholic heritage, and even in its rudimentary form, was not well received in a university known for shaping future generations to have a significant impact on the nation's governance and business based on their education and mental abilities. Santayana's future in the department was in question but that changed with the publication of the five-volume *The Life of Reason* (1905)⁸ which was well received partly because it was misunderstood. To many Santayana had finally crossed the American line since it appeared that he now maintained the practical impact of mental constructs and reason. And even though he expressed this in classical terms, it seemed to his American colleagues a welcome turn to an approach that had practical impacts and seemed more in the American tradition. The five volumes were advertised as works in the pragmatic tradition, and Santayana complained to Scribner's about this and asked that it be corrected⁹. Later he would write that the volumes satisfied Americans because «it moves in a moralistic, humanistic, atmosphere which they can appreciate. I think it is sensible, and contains some good passages and sayings as Erskine quotes. But neither as a writer nor a philosopher can I be judged by it»¹⁰. Regardless of his reception, favorable and unfavorable, his notice as a serious philosopher was well established by the turn of the century, and shortly after the publication of *The Life of Reason* he was promoted to full Professor. Had he been a typical professor, he could have looked at a lifetime of teaching and writing at one of the principal American universities. But he was not typical.

As early 1893 he began what he refers to as his *metanoia*, an awakening from somnambulism which led him to begin to set aside money and work towards an early retirement. He saw this as the end of youth and a move toward maturity that occurred over a long period of time punctuated by his early retirement in 1912 and followed by the development of his fully naturalistic philosophy and way of life ending only at his death in 1952. However, even though this change was slow he notes there were three events that brought about his initial change in perspective in 1893: (1) the death of a young student, (2) the death of his father, and (3) the marriage of Susanna¹¹. In contrast to his many activities and recognitions, the contingency of life was dramatically brought forward by the unexpected death from cholera of Warwick Potter, Harvard class of 1893, while sailing with his friend Edgar Scott¹².

Though he was a general favourite and a long procession of us walked behind the bier at his funeral, there was after all nothing extraordinary about him. The cause of my emotion was in myself. I was brimming over with the sense of parting, of being divided by fortune where at heart there was no division. I found myself, unwillingly and irreparably, separated from Spain, from England, from Europe, from my youth and from my religion. It was not good simple Warwick alone that inspired my verses about him. It was the thought of everything that was escaping me: the Good in all the modes of it that I might have caught a glimpse of and lost¹³.

⁸ G. Santayana, *The Life of Reason; or, The Phases of Human Progress*, New York, Scribner's, 1905.

⁹ Cfr. G. Santayana, *The Letters of George Santayana, Book One, 1868-1909*, eds. W.G. Holzberger and H.J. Saatkamp Jr., Cambridge, The MIT Press, 2001, pp. 361-362.

¹⁰ Ivi, p. 45.

¹¹ Cfr. G. Santayana, *Persons and Places*, cit., pp. 423-425.

¹² J. McCormick, *George Santayana. A Biography*, New York, Knopf, 1987, p. 104.

¹³ G. Santayana, *Persons and Places*, cit., p. 423.

The death of his father in the same year brought forward Santayana's sense of what life might be like after his energetic youth one that he saw as less than positive but leading over a long period to a more positive inward and isolated existence. He writes of his father:

He was seventy-nine years old, deaf, half-blind, and poor; he had desired his own death and had attempted to hasten it. The fact that he was my father, whose character and destiny were strikingly repeated, with variations, in my own, called up a lurid image of what my life in the world was likely to be: solitary, obscure, trivial, and wasted. I must not look ahead. Ahead, after youth was gone, everything would grow sadder and sadder. I must look within or above¹⁴.

The marriage of his half-sister, Susana, perhaps had an even deeper impact than the previous ones. She was his closest relationship in many ways, and he cherished their communication and care for each other, particularly given the distant relationship with their mother and his father living in Spain. In 1893 Susana married Celedonio Sastre who was widowed and a prominent person in Ávila. She was forty-one years old, and Celedonio already had six children. For Santayana this was a marriage of need and not of love. And her move to Spain and care for the children and the prominent role in the Ávila community meant the relationship with Santayana would be quite different and perhaps even difficult. Earlier in her life she had joined a convent only to leave it before being fully a nun. Santayana initially saw this move as seeking to be true to her religion and showing contempt for the world, but he admired her leaving the convent because she had tried too much too late.

Her leaving the convent then was no surprise; she had attempted too much and too late; but her marriage now proved more conclusively that she had no contempt of the world; that her religious enthusiasm itself had been something human and social, and that she, who had given the first impulse to my speculative life, had never had any speculative or mystical insight. She was a Sturgis; and her charm and her ascendancy over me had been founded only on her natural warmth, geniality and fun, themselves now less spontaneous and engaging than when she was younger. She still clung to the Church with an intense party spirit, which she developed also in politics; but she couldn't live her religion as I lived my philosophy. It was too unreal for her human nature¹⁵.

And from this point, he went on to live by his philosophy, regarding himself as a world citizen who visited many countries and regions, valuing the benefits of their cultures while knowing he viewed them from his own perspective¹⁶. However, this change of life was a slow process he describes as his «retirement from the world»¹⁷. Not until 1912 did he leave his Harvard position.

As he quietly planned for his early retirement, his sense grew that university life was unsuitable for his desire to be a full-time writer. He avoided faculty meetings and any administrative tasks. He found faculty meetings, committees, and governance structures and their discussions superficial consisting mostly of partisan heat over false issues. The general corporate and business-like adaptation of universities was not conducive to intellectual curiosity, development, and growth. His general description of the Harvard faculty was «an anonymous concourse of coral insects, each secreting one cell, and leaving that fossil legacy

¹⁴ Ivi, p. 424.

¹⁵ Ivi, p. 425.

¹⁶ Cfr. H.J. Saatkamp Jr., *A Life of Scholarship with Santayana*, eds Ch. Padrón and K.P. Skowroński, Leiden and Boston, Brill, 2021, pp. 100-125.

¹⁷ G. Santayana, *Persons and Places*, cit., p. 422.

to enlarge the earth»¹⁸. Surprisingly even with this awakening outlook, his successes as a professor are well documented, and, indeed, these successes made possible his early retirement. At the same time, the new expectations and restrictions accompanying his achievements convinced Santayana that the academic environment was not the proper place for a serious philosopher with the desire to be a full-time writer who did not want to be restricted by the American idea of practical outcomes and a view that America was the model for all other countries to follow. His sense was that America was a young country following outdated philosophies. But his writings and lectures led to many opportunities even in America. It is interesting that difference can both set one apart and also make one more interesting and more attractive. The latter was Santayana's fate; it was one of the portals that led to his being a cosmopolitan, and his last years at Harvard brought trips to major universities, receptions and parties in New York, and widespread recognitions and friendships. There is evidence he was being courted by Columbia, Williams, Wisconsin, and Berkeley. However, his resolve for early retirement is confirmed in letters to his sister in 1909¹⁹. When he announced his retirement in May 1911, President Lowell asked him to wait and agreed to provide Santayana with as much free time as he wanted. Santayana initially assented to teach only during the fall term with a full year's leave for 1912-13. However, in 1912 while he was on board ship to England, his mother died, leaving him and his siblings \$10,000 each. With his savings, steady income from his publications, and the inheritance, he could retire. His resolve to live his own life, to write, and to travel, overtook his sense of obligation to Harvard and, at the age of forty-eight, he left Harvard and the U.S. to spend the remaining forty years of his life in Europe never to return to the U.S. He asked his half-brother Robert Sturgis to manage his finances (something Robert had done for their mother) with the understanding that Robert or his descendants would inherit the full capital upon Santayana's death. Hence, in January 1912, at the age of forty-eight, Santayana was free to write, free to travel, free to choose his residence and country, and free from the constraints of university regimen and expectations. Santayana welcomed the release.

4. Europe

At first Santayana was not sure where he wanted his principal residence in Europe to be. He made many trips between Europe and England in 1912-1914. He appears to have settled on Paris, but he was in London when World War I broke out, and remained in England, mostly at Oxford, until 1919. He received offers of lifetime membership at both Corpus Christi and New College, but he chose a life of the traveling writer. He then was truly the vagabond scholar. Thereafter, his locales revolved around Paris, Madrid, the Riviera, Florence, Cortina d'Ampezzo, and finally by the mid-1920s his established patterns began to center more and more in Rome. There were efforts to have him return to the U.S., but he did not accept any of these. As early as 1917 Harvard asked Santayana to return, and as late as 1929 he was offered the Norton Chair in Poetry, one of Harvard's most respected chairs. In 1931 he turned down an invitation from Brown University, and Harvard later tempted him to accept for only a term the William James Lecturer in Philosophy, a newly established honorary post²⁰. Santayana never returned to Harvard, nor to America. He appeared on the

¹⁸ Ivi, p. 397.

¹⁹ G. Santayana, *The Letters of George Santayana, Book One, 1868–1909*, cit., p. 401.

²⁰ Cfr. J. McCormick, *George Santayana. A Biography*, cit., pp. 301-302.

front of *Time* magazine February 3, 1936, in conjunction with his best-selling novel, *The Last Puritan*. He also received a number of awards including the Royal Society of Literature Benson Medal (1925) and the Columbia University Butler Gold Medal (1945). Unsuccessful in his efforts to leave Rome before World War II, in 1941 he entered the Clinica della Piccola Compagna di Maria, a clinic administered by a Catholic order of nuns better known as the Blue Nuns for the color of their habit. His autobiography, *Persons and Places*, was smuggled out of Rome during the war and was a Book-of-the-Month Club selection in 1944-45. He died at the clinic on September 26, 1952, at the age of eighty-eight, having published 27 books and numerous articles during his lifetime.

5. Philosophical Aspects of His Being a Cosmopolitan

The critical edition of his autobiography restores many passages that were omitted from the original publication because of the difficulties of publishing during WWII and some censorship by the press and by Santayana himself who initially wanted his autobiography to be published after his death. Because of the cost and difficulties, Scribner's did not publish any of Santayana's 644 marginal comments that were intended to be a part of the autobiography. Santayana strongly expressed his hope that one day the text and the marginal comments would be restored, and that occurred in 1986 with the critical edition being published by MIT Press. This text provides the first true edition of Santayana's autobiography as he wrote it in his manuscript and corrected. Some of the omitted marginalia provide three insights as to the principal tenets of Santayana's philosophy and his cosmopolitan views. There are three principal portals through which Santayana views the world: (1) materialism, (2) moral relativism and (3) integrity and self-definition²¹.

6. Materialism²²

In Chapter XI of *Persons and Places*, «The Church of the Immaculate Conception», Santayana describes the development of his own thought from the idealisms of boyhood and from the intellectual materialism of a traveling student to the complete, materialistic outlook of the adult Santayana. Interestingly, he emphasizes the continuity throughout his life minimizing the different youthful perspectives in contrast to his mature materialism. He writes, «The more I change the more I am the same person»²³.

In a marginal heading he records that his boyhood idealisms were never his genuine beliefs²⁴.

But those ideal universes in my head did not produce any firm convictions or actual duties. They had nothing to do with the wretched poverty-stricken real world in which I was condemned to live. That the real was rotten and only the imaginary at all interesting seemed to me axiomatic. That was too sweeping; yet allowing for the rash generalisations of youth, it is still what I think. My philosophy has never changed²⁵.

²¹ These three steps are described in marginal comments (headings) in the holograph of *Persons and Places* (cit.). These comments were omitted from publications prior to the 1986 critical edition of the autobiography.

²² Santayana often uses «materialism» and «naturalism» as interchangeable.

²³ G. Santayana, *Persons and Places*, cit., p. 159, marginal heading [mh].

²⁴ Ivi, p. 166, mh.

²⁵ Ivi, p. 167.

Hence, he notes, in spite «of my religious and other day-dreams, I was at bottom a young realist; I knew I was dreaming, and so was awake. A sure proof of this was that I was never *anxious* about what those dreams would have involved if they had been true. I never had the least touch of superstition»²⁶.

From the boy dreaming awake in the church of the Immaculate Conception, to the travelling student seeing the world in Germany, England, and Spain there had been no great change in sentiment. I was still «at the church door». Yet in belief, in the clarification of my philosophy, I had taken an important step. I no longer wavered between alternate views of the world, to be put on or taken off like alternate plays at the theatre. I now saw that there was only one possible play, the actual history of nature and of mankind, although there might well be ghosts among the characters and soliloquies among the speeches. Religions, *all* religions, and idealistic philosophies, *all* idealistic philosophies, were the soliloquies and the ghosts. They might be eloquent and profound. Like Hamlet's soliloquy they might be excellent reflective criticisms of the play as a whole. Nevertheless they were only parts of it, and their value as criticisms lay entirely in their fidelity to the facts, and to the sentiments which those facts aroused in the critic²⁷.

The full statement and development of his materialism did not occur until later in his life. It was in place by the time of *Scepticism and Animal Faith* (1923)²⁸ and not fully so at the time of *The Life of Reason* (1905).

Within Santayana's fully cultivated materialism, the origins of all events in the world are arbitrary, temporal, and contingent. Matter (by whatever name it is called) is the principle of existence. It is «often untoward, and an occasion of imperfection or conflict in things». Hence, a «sour moralist» may consider it evil, but, according to Santayana, if one takes a wider view «matter would seem a good [...] because it is the principle of existence: it is all things in their potentiality and therefore the condition of all their excellence or possible perfection»²⁹. Matter is the non-discursive, natural foundation for all that is. In itself, it is neither good nor evil but may be perceived as such when viewed from the vested interest of animal life. Matter's nondiscernible, neutral face is converted to a smile or frown by latent animal interests. But «moral values cannot preside over nature»³⁰. Principled values are the products of natural forces: «The germination, definition, and prevalence of any good must be grounded in nature herself, not in human eloquence»³¹. From the point of view of origins, therefore, the realm of matter is the matrix and the source of everything: it is nature, the sphere of genesis, the universal mother. The truth cannot dictate to us the esteem in which we shall hold it: that is not a question of fact but of preference³².

Clearly the contingent events of his background, birth, and early childhood were major factors in his life and form a backdrop for his materialism. There are forces beyond one's reach, shaping one's destiny, and at the same time providing a chance for a good life. And from the perspective of a cosmopolitan, these forces shape what is possible in one's life.

²⁶ *Ibidem*.

²⁷ Ivi, p. 169.

²⁸ Cfr. G. Santayana, *Scepticism and Animal Faith. Introduction to a System of Philosophy*, New York, Scribner's, 1923.

²⁹ G. Santayana, *The Realm of Matter: Book Second*, New York, Scribner's, 1930, p. v.

³⁰ Ivi, p. 134.

³¹ Ivi, p. 131.

³² Ivi, p. XI.

7. Moral Relativism: The Forms of the Good are Diverse

The diversity of what is good in different material contexts led Santayana to a moral relativism that increased his sense of being a world citizen or a cosmopolitan. He writes, «the forms of the good are divergent». This enabled Santayana to overcome «moral and ideal provinciality, and to see that every form of life had its own perfection, which it was stupid and cruel to condemn for differing from some other form, by chance one's own»³³.

Santayana's moral relativism is consistent with his materialism. It is the neutral perspective of the naturalistic observer who, because he does not have the same commitments, can observe the behavior of others and value it for what it is, not because it coincides with his own interests. No doubt this insight was influenced by the diplomatic careers and lifestyles of his parents, their distant and respectful marriage, the experiences of the young Santayana in Miss Welchman's Kindergarten on Chestnut Street and in the Boston Latin School, the wanderings and deliberations of the traveling student, the personal and professional experiences of the young Harvard professor, and the success and travels of the mature, distinguished writer. It is clear that being Spanish, having a Catholic background, and perhaps being an «unconscious homosexual»³⁴ set him apart in Protestant America. He nevertheless participated in and valued the American experience though he could never fully identify with it. Later, he chose Hermes the Interpreter as his god³⁵, paralleling his mature insight as interpreter of views and values. Hermes is at home in the world of discourse – unraveling, decoding, and interpreting one perspective from another. Likewise, Santayana approaches philosophy as reflective discourse, understanding and interpreting many perspectives in his own dialect.

Materialism provides the naturalistic basis for morality while the unlimited realm of essence provides unlimited forms for imagination and interpretation. Santayana's naturalism projects a neutral, objective view towards the moralities, the vested interests, of animals³⁶. His realm of essence, likewise, is neutral to the realization or status of any possible form. «Any special system has alternatives, and must tremble for its frontiers; whereas the realm of essence, in its perfect catholicity, is placid and safe and the same whatever may happen in earth or heaven»³⁷.

Santayana's insight that the forms of the good are divergent reveals a boundless realm of possible goods not logically or morally ordered by animal interests or talents. However, a fully neutral perspective is not possible. Perspectives derive from some living being in a particular place and time with latent interests originating from their physiology and physical environment. Santayana's naturalism is balanced by a polarity between the neutral, objective understanding of behavior and activity on the one hand and the committed, vested interest of the living being on the other hand. One may recognize that every form of the good has its own perfection, and one may respect that perfection, but «the right of alien

³³ G. Santayana, *Persons and Places*, cit., p. 170.

³⁴ Daniel Cory relates that Santayana in 1929, after a discussion of A.E. Housman's poetry and homosexuality, remarked: «I think I must have been that way in my Harvard days – although I was unconscious of it at the time». D. Cory, *Santayana: The Later Years. A Portrait with Letters*, New York, Braziller, 1963, p. 40.

³⁵ G. Santayana, *Hermes the Interpreter*, in *Soliloquies in England*, Ann Arbor, The University of Michigan Press, 1967, p. 259.

³⁶ For more detailed information see H.J. Saatkamp Jr., *Naturalism*, in *Oxford Handbook on Santayana*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, forthcoming.

³⁷ G. Santayana, *Realms of Being*, One-volume edition, New York, Scribner's, 1942, p. 82.

natures to pursue their proper aims can never abolish our right to pursue ours»³⁸. Hence, Santayana's third tenet: each form of the good is definite and final.

8. Integrity: Each Form of the Good is Definite and Final

From the perspective of autobiography, Santayana's clear notion of self-knowledge, in the sense of the Greeks, is one of his most distinguishing marks. For Santayana, «integrity or self-definition is and remains first and fundamental in morals»³⁹. Decided elements of his self-definition are found in his retirement from Harvard and his life as a roving scholar. After Harvard, his daily activities and long-term achievements were matters of his own direction. Free to choose his own environment and habitual practices, his life was festive and fruitful. Santayana was true to his own form of life to the end. Two days before his death Cory asked him if he was suffering: «Yes, my friend. But my anguish is entirely physical; there are no moral difficulties whatsoever»⁴⁰.

Integrity was not only a central part of Santayana's life, his cosmopolitanism was based on respect for the multiplicity of human (and animal) interests suited not just for survival but for living well within one's environment and throughout one's lifetime. As Santayana notes: «Survival is something impossible: but it is possible to have lived and died well»⁴¹. Living and dying well are not abstract values that are the same for all, but rather they are rooted in one's heritable traits, physiological development, and culture. They are reflected in speech, literature, art and the whole of individual human lives. However presented, they are reflections of individual physiology rooted in diverse human and animal cultures. Santayana's philosophy rests on his materialism and on his humane and sympathetic appreciation for the excellence of each life. Like his naturalism and his realm of essence, this insight establishes his thought in a wide tradition, and it marks his career and his personal life with distinction.

A central part of the gravitas of Santayana's cosmopolitan outlook is his account of the relative values of all life, relative to one's heritable traits, one's physical development, and the physical structures of one's culture and the natural world. Respecting all forms of life and all forms of good does not remove the central integrity of one's own life and the natural drive to flourish and to live well in accord with one's natural psyche and physical culture.

9. Spiritual Life

For Santayana spiritual life was integral to living well. However spiritual life for Santayana is quite different from its usual account and is not something he recommends for everyone. The spirit or consciousness is an aftereffect of one's physical being (psyche) interacting with one's environment. It is temporary, fleeting, and not a way of living. It is not an influence that structures one's existence, but it is rather a reflection in consciousness of the quality of one's existence. If the spiritual life was considered a dominating or guiding influence in structuring one's life, then one would be forced to choose between the life of

³⁸ G. Santayana, *Persons and Places*, cit., p. 170.

³⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁰ D. Cory, *Santayana: The Later Years*, cit., p. 325.

⁴¹ G. Santayana, *Dominations and Powers. Reflections on Liberty, Society, and Government*, New York, Scribner's, 1951, pp. 209-210.

everyday existence and the life of the spirit as a monk or a nun much choose between the life of the world and that of the religious order. But for Santayana, no such conflict exists because spirituality is an awareness over an extended period of time. Spiritual life is a life of receptivity to all that comes in the moment while suspending animal interests. One may experience this spirituality for some extended time as when one is fully captivated by the beauty of a symphony, painting, poetry, or the delight of friendship or love. But if one suspends one's natural interests, such as eating or sleeping, for any extended period that would be both detrimental and tragic. Indeed, any effort to choose such a life would be short lived.

For Santayana, consciousness essentially is only an awareness of and a full focus on what is given. It is not an instrument in reshaping one's life or the world. Consciousness emerged late in the evolutionary pathway and is a flowering of happy circumstances that celebrates what is given, and when truly recognized, does only that. It is joyful, delighting in what is presented, and not troubled by where it leads or what it means. Religions that turn spiritual life into a science, social club or political movements are confused. Spirit, or consciousness, is momentary, fleeting, and depends on the physical forces of our bodies and environment in order to exist. Shaping one's life to enhance these spiritual, fleeting moments, extending them as long as is practical, is one of the delights of living for some people, but it is certainly not a goal for all, nor should it be.

10. Santayana and Contemporary Cosmopolitanism

Historically much has been written about cosmopolitanism, and one may find it worthwhile to explore various writers such as Diogenes of Sinope (c. 412 B.C.) who is thought of as the founder of cosmopolitanism. Historically, the cosmopolitan ethic echoes in forms of stoicism and in the Abrahamic religions: «there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus»⁴². One also finds it in the Enlightenment through the «Declaration of the Rights of Man» (1789) and in Kant's proposal for a league of nations. Immanuel Kant, Emmanuel Levinas, and Jacques Derrida all have written on cosmopolitanism and have made significant contributions. Of course, historical alternatives such as Hitler and Stalin attacked «rootless cosmopolitans», justifying their anti-Semitic views and positing them as clear threats to their regimes. And in today's world the rise of the right wing has increased antisemitic views, racism, and threats to immigrants not only in the U.S. but in other countries as well.

Perhaps the best-known contemporary cosmopolitan is Kwame Anthony Appiah. His international background enables him to honor his own heritage while maintaining that there are moral standards that may guide citizens of different countries and backgrounds. In some ways Santayana's views overlap with many of Appiah's. Both maintain concern for all humans living well and respect for legitimate differences. Unlike the rational principles in utilitarianism and other approaches, the values of concern and respect for all humans do not have the form of a consistent set of rational principles. Rather both recognize that moral agreements and disagreements are more often based on accepted views and values and not on rational principles. Even one's own accepted values may clash with one another rather than being consistent. As Appiah puts it:

⁴² *Galatians* 3: 28, King James Version (KJV).

As we'll see, there will be times when these two ideals – universal concern and respect for legitimate difference – clash. There's a sense in which cosmopolitanism is the name not of the solution but of the challenge⁴³.

The challenge of cosmopolitanism is how do we respect differences and find ways of living together even when there may be little or no agreements regarding important social issues. These issues may have wider implications for Appiah than for Santayana because of the remarkable interconnections in our modern world. Appiah maintains that the «very idea of morality» is that you have responsibilities for each person «you know and can affect». Obviously, the number of people we may affect in our contemporary world is much greater than it was in Santayana's lifetime. Our present interconnectedness makes us responsible for many more people than ever before. We have grown from living in local groups and now find ourselves in a «global tribe»⁴⁴.

Cosmopolitans largely maintain that the differences between cultures have been over emphasized and the differences highlighted depend on a commonality among peoples throughout the world.

So, naturally, the ethnographer didn't usually come back with a report whose one-sentence summary was: they are pretty much like us. And yet, of course, they had to be. They did, after all, mostly have gods, food, language, dance, music, carving, medicines, family lives, rituals, jokes, and children's tales. They smiled, slept, had sex and children, wept, and, in the end, died. And it was possible for this total stranger, the anthropologist, who was, nevertheless, a fellow human being, to make progress with their language and religion, their habits – things that every adult member of the society had had a couple of decades to work on – in a year or two. Without those similarities, how could cultural anthropology be possible?⁴⁵

This commonality is the basis of respect for others and living together even without a generally agreed on standard. Our shared traits and habits enable us to learn from and respect differences. Through communication, often through storytelling, we gain a better sense of each other and how we respond to the world and to each other, to problems and puzzles, is one way of aligning our responses to issues. And as Appiah notes: «And that alignment of responses is, in turn, one of the ways we maintain the social fabric, the texture of our relationships»⁴⁶. Other people, other cultures reveal themselves through fiction and nonfiction, music, painting, sculpture and dance. But what happens when there is a dramatically different response to the world?

Some responses may be shown as false while others are simply different ways of describing or organizing our way of living. Appiah notes that witchcraft can be shown to be false, and some of his kinsmen in Ghana maintain a belief in witchcraft. Even so, one can still live together when someone holds a view that is false, indeed, one can live together among many family and extended relations where there may be clearly false views. It is respect for the differences that makes the difference.

However, in his own heritage there is also a different way of understanding the organization of families which is simply a different way of structuring our lives and is an accurate account within that culture. This is the Akan idea of abusua which is different from the traditional western view. Abusua membership depends only on who your mother is. This

⁴³ K.A. Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers*, New York, Norton, 2006, p. XV.

⁴⁴ Ivi, p. XIII.

⁴⁵ Ivi, p. 14.

⁴⁶ Ivi, p. 29.

leads to a strikingly different structure of families, not one that is true or false, but only one that establishes different relationships and responsibilities than the western approach where family membership except for one's paternal name is often divided between maternal and paternal relations. For example, Appiah notes «So I am in the same abusua as my sister's children but not in the same one as my brother's children. And, since I am not related to my father through a woman, he is not a member of my abusua either»⁴⁷. Hence, this is considerably different from the western perspective, yet there are commonalities. Good parenting is considered a value in both the abusua arrangements and in western views, even while family arrangements are thickly enmeshed with the local culture, customs and expectations. Respecting such differences is central to modern cosmopolitanism. One may find examples in our literature. For example, Atticus Finch in Harper Lee's novel, *To Kill a Mocking Bird* (1960), tells his daughter Scout that «you never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view», and at the end of the novel Scout says she is grateful to her father for letting her know that «you never really know a man until you stand in his shoes and walk around in them»⁴⁸. Imagination and empathy are important ingredients in this account.

An important question is how we can get along without agreeing on why. If we exaggerate the role of reason, as is often the case in philosophy, we may not come to an agreement, but according to Appiah and Santayana, most conflicts do not arise from warring values⁴⁹.

One of Appiah's principal claims is that we can agree on living together without agreeing why. We may have differing judgments and reasons for living together without agreeing on the values that make it good to live together⁵⁰. Sociologists normally do not begin with an examination of reasons as to why people disagree, although philosophers often do. For the most part, Appiah claims we rarely make judgments based on carefully elucidated principles applied to particular circumstances and facts. Rather we should «recognize this simple fact: a large part of what we do we do because it is just what we do»⁵¹. «And a good deal of what we intuitively take to be right, we take to be right just because it is what we are used to»⁵².

The cosmopolitan universal value of living together, of getting along with each other, enables us to live together, even in harmony, without agreeing on the underlying principles of our values⁵³. Respecting each other and living together does not require agreeing on our rationality for behavior, but rather it requires an effort to understand and learn from each other. «Often enough, as Faust said, in the beginning is the deed: practices and not principles are what enable us to live together in peace»⁵⁴.

And I stress the role of the imagination here because the encounters, properly conducted, are valuable in themselves. Conversation doesn't have to lead to consensus about anything, especially not values; it's enough that it helps people get used to one another⁵⁵.

⁴⁷ Ivi, p. 48.

⁴⁸ H. Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, New York, Harper & Row, 1961, p. 33.

⁴⁹ Cfr. K.A. Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism*, cit., p. 67.

⁵⁰ Cfr. ivi, pp. 69-71.

⁵¹ Ivi, p. 73.

⁵² Ivi, p. 72.

⁵³ Ivi, p. 78.

⁵⁴ Ivi, p. 85.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*.

Our commonality enables us to understand and respect each other. Such commonality is found in our social structures as well as in our biology, in our memes as well as in our genes. Here Appiah and Santayana are taking similar paths. As Appiah says:

Finally, there's just a great deal of everyday life that is utterly, humanly familiar. People in Ghana, people everywhere, buy and sell, eat, read the papers, watch movies, sleep, go to church or mosque, laugh, marry, make love, commit adultery, go to funerals, die. Most of the time, once someone has translated the language you don't know, or explained some little unfamiliar symbol or custom, you'll have no more (and, of course, no less) trouble understanding why they do what they do than you do making sense of your neighbors back home⁵⁶.

Of course, some people cannot live well or even long with others. Socially, culturally, and biologically they focus on conflict, harm, and destruction. Psychopaths are unlikely prospects for having a sense of responsibility for others or for respecting differences. And there are many variations along the scale of responsibility and respect for others, and even sometimes significant variations in our talents and abilities. Musicians, geniuses, artists, scientists, business people, monks, nuns, and many more people represent the divergence in our human cultures. Even so there are models for how we can get along, understand each other, and live together that are based on the norms in human beings. One model used by Appiah is color language.

Most humans see colors: red, green, yellow, and blue. But some are born color blind or color deficient. There are also a few humans who are tetrachromats⁵⁷ and see far more colors than normal. Musicians and mathematicians appear to have abilities that are not common to most humans. Even so, most humans are kind and sympathize with one another, and most recognize a responsibility for others. There are statistical norms in human society as in our norm for seeing colors, and these norms provide a basis for commonality, communication, and living together⁵⁸.

The basis for these norms lies in our biology and cultures. It may not be clear that we would fully understand someone who came from a dramatically different culture and biological heritage. Appiah quotes Wittgenstein: «If a lion could speak, we couldn't understand him». But our shared nature allows us to communicate with each other and to share a sense of each other's perspective⁵⁹. However, Wittgenstein's approach may be too narrow. Some recent research on the phonetic alphabet of whales and other animals may broaden our boundaries of community and commonality⁶⁰. Most of us already live a cosmopolitan life with influences that are global: art, literature, politics, film and lifestyles from many parts of the world. And now our understanding of other animal cultures and communications may be at a dramatic turning point. If there ever was a monochrome

⁵⁶ Ivi, p. 94.

⁵⁷ Tetrachromacy is the condition of possessing four independent channels for conveying color information, or possessing four types of cone cell in the eye. Apes (including humans) normally have three types of cone cell and are therefore trichromats. However, human tetrachromacy is suspected to exist in a small percentage of the population.

⁵⁸ K.A. Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism*, cit., p. 96.

⁵⁹ Cfr. Ivi, p. 97.

⁶⁰ Cfr. S. Kuta, *Scientists Discover a 'Phonetic Alphabet' Used by Sperm Whales, Moving One Step Closer to Decoding Their Chatter*, in «Smithsonian Magazine», 8 May, 2024, online: <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/scientists-discover-a-phonetic-alphabet-used-by-sperm-whales-moving-one-step-closer-to-decoding-their-chatter-180984326/>

culture without other influences, that seems rare if not impossible today. As Appiah says, «Cultural purity is an oxymoron»⁶¹.

11. Conclusion

As engaging as Appiah and Santayana are, they leave us with challenges and unanswered questions. Some of the challenges will depend on further scientific research and the extent to which communication and respecting each other extends beyond human culture to other animal cultures. There are also distinctly different approaches that Santayana and Appiah take to understanding how we establish a community that works well together. Santayana focuses on individuals and the ability to live well based on one's chosen way of life while Appiah focuses on our communities fostering respect for differences that makes possible living well together. Both note that life is not based on rational principles but on patterns of behavior. Santayana's approach seems more naturalistic in terms of animal behavior while Appiah's approach seems more community oriented and how respect for differences propels society to a greater sense of working together regardless of differences. Put simply, one may ask how one makes a chorus out of individual voices and should the focus be on individuals or on the community, or on both. Of course, Appiah and Santayana's backgrounds and cultures are different, and one can only imagine what a conversation between the two would be like. Their respect for each other would be clear, but would they agree on the basic foundation of community? Appiah's more global perspective would conflict with Santayana's more European and Western views. And it might become clear that not only their personal heritage is quite different, but the world community of each is quite different. Santayana lived at a time when the western perspective was dominant in his writings and discussions, whereas Appiah lives in a time of global interconnectedness with all its possibilities and potential disasters. It is not clear that Santayana's individualism and his focus on spirituality will find roots in our modern society, but the best parts of it might be welcomed. His notion of consciousness as an impotent byproduct of one's physical interaction with the physical environment seems to be supported by contemporary research in neurosciences⁶².

The twin fears of private anarchy and public uniformity appear to be as real in American society and our global community today as they were when Santayana launched his criticisms, coupled with his early concern of American imperialism. But is a moral compass that points primarily to individual action and responsibilities sufficient in the face of global

⁶¹ K.A. Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism*, cit., p. 113.

⁶² For more information see: Ch.Q. Choi, *Brain Researchers Can Detect Who We Are Thinking About*, in «Scientific American», 14 March 2013, online: <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/brain-researchers-can-detect-who-we-are-thinking-about/>; J.L. Gallant, *Reconstructing Visual Experiences from Brain Activity Evoked by Natural Movies*, in «Current Biology», 11 October 2011, pp. 1641-46; O. Goldhill, *Neuroscientists Can Read Brain Activity to Predict Decisions 11 Seconds Before People Act*, in «Quartz», 9 March 2019, online: <https://qz.com/1569158/neuroscientists-read-unconscious-brain-activity-to-predict-decisions/>; N. Lanese, *Scientist Design Algorithm That 'Reads' People's Thoughts from Brain Scans*, in «LiveScience», 24 October 2022, online: <https://www.livescience.com/algorithm-mind-reading-from-fmri/>; K. Smith, *Brain Makes Decisions Before You Even Know It*, in «Nature», 11 April 2008, online: <https://www.nature.com/articles/news.2008.751>; D. Van Praet, *Our Brains Make Up Our Minds Before We Know It*, in «Psychology Today», 21 December 2020, online: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/unconscious-branding/202012/our-brains-make-our-minds-we-know-it?amp>; M. Velasquez-Manoff, *The Brain Implants That Could Change Humanity: Brains are talking to computers, and computers to brains. Are our daydreams safe?*, in «The New York Times», 28 August 2020, online: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/28/opinion/sunday/brain-machine-artificial-intelligence.html>; and R. Yuste, *The NeuroRights Foundation*, 2019: <https://neurorightsfoundation.org/>.

issues that cross individual and national boundaries? How can an individual help those who need it the most without the involvement of the larger community. Perhaps Appiah's concern for others bridges community and the individual, even as our communities grow dramatically in our interdependence. Santayana's focus on spirituality may find connections with Appiah's central view that art and literature are important bridges to living together. It is even possible that they would largely agree on Santayana's two criteria for judging any approach to understanding human nature and societies: (1) Does one, «like Spinoza, understand the natural basis of morality, or is he confused and superstitious on the subject»⁶³? In other words, is one a complete naturalist allowing science to determine the causes of all events including human actions or does one imagine non-natural explanations without material causality. And (2) «how humane and representative is his sense of the good, and how far, by his disposition or sympathetic intelligence, does he appreciate all the types of excellence toward which life may be directed? [...] The complete moralist must not only be sound in physics, but must be inwardly inspired by a normal human soul and an adequate human tradition; he must be a complete humanist in a complete naturalist»⁶⁴. And Appiah would most likely his own criteria of universal concern and respect for others.

When Santayana was buried in «Panteon de la Obra Pia española» in Rome's Campo Verano cemetery, Daniel Cory read lines from Santayana's *The Poet's Testament*, that confirmed his naturalistic outlook:

I give back to the earth what the earth gave,
All to the furrow, nothing to the grave.
The candle's out, the spirit's vigil spent;
Sight may not follow where the vision went⁶⁵.

Santayana's vision leaves us with enduring questions and remarkable insights into contemporary issues. This includes his account of consciousness as an aftereffect of our psyche's interaction with our physical environment, his moral relativism and the multiple senses of individual goods, as well as his respect for many cultures and their approaches to living well. Appiah's universal concern and the notion of respect for differing views moves some of Santayana's views and questions even further in our contemporary society.

⁶³ G. Santayana, *Persons and Places*, cit., p. 235.

⁶⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁵ G. Santayana, *The Complete Poems of George Santayana. A Critical Edition*, ed. by W.G. Holzberger, Lewisburg, Bucknell University Press, 1979, p. 268.

SANTAYANA'S PLURALISM OF CULTURES AS A MULTIPLE OF CULTURAL PERFECTIONS

Krzysztof Piotr Skowroński

Abstract: We live in a time of heated debates about culture wars, multiculturalism, cultural diversity, cultural pluralism, globalization, and cosmopolitanism in its many versions. My claim is that studying Santayana's works may help us contribute to such debates. In this text, I reconstruct and update Santayana's suggestions about the multitude, or plurality of cultural perfections, in order to see if they can apply to some of our contemporary contexts. Namely, one of the ways to approach culture pluralism is by appreciating a given culture via its achievements and sterling attributes. Most cultures, in all probability, apart from material masterpieces (e.g., architecture) and intellectual (e.g., arts, philosophy), have also developed their own models of a good life according to their own norms, worldviews, habits, customs, and interpretations of the roles of specific groups within their cultures. Wisdom lies, as we learn from the very last sentence of Santayana's *Dominations and Powers*, in understanding the good that they summon and the joy they may evoke.

Keywords: Santayana, Multiculturalism, Cosmopolitanism, Cultural pluralism, Perfection.

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1. Introduction: Multiculturalism, Cosmopolitanism, Diversity, and Cultural Pluralism in the Contemporary West

On many levels, contemporary Western states and institutions implement multicultural solutions, and public discourse is full of multicultural themes. Probably the most politicized one is the recently debated *diversity, equity, and inclusion* (DEI), promoted especially by universities and large corporations, but there have been many others: multiculturalist state policies of some countries that started in the 1970s in Canada, Sweden, and Australia; even earlier, the melting pot phenomenon especially in the US; the American pragmatist idea of cultural pluralism¹, discussed mainly in intellectual circles; and moral and political cosmopolitanism, an old Cynic and Stoic idea that was updated by Kant during the Enlightenment Era², and updated more recently again in the age of globalization³.

The cultural and the political emergence of these phenomena makes it hardly possible for us to distinguish these two. For example, the European Union, mainly a political body, appropriated the slogan «united in diversity» as its motto (in use since 2000), and the UNESCO *Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity* (announced in 2001)⁴, that seems to have primarily a cultural character, recommends its implementation by state institutions in various countries. Just to illustrate this: UNESCO's *Universal Declaration on Cultural*

¹ Cfr. H. Kallen, *Cultural Pluralism and the American Idea. An Essay in Social Philosophy*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1956; H. Kallen, *Culture and Democracy in the United States*, New Brunswick and London, Transactions Publishers, 1998 [1924].

² Cfr. M. Nussbaum, *Kant and Stoic Cosmopolitanism*, in «The Journal of Political Philosophy», V (1997), 1, pp. 1-25.

³ P. Kleingeld and E. Brown, *Cosmopolitanism*, in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2019; URL: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/cosmopolitanism/>

⁴ UNESCO's *Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity* (2001), URL: <https://en.unesco.org/about-us/legal-affairs/unesco-universal-declaration-cultural-diversity>.

Diversity provides descriptive and normative claims with a global political perspective (as well as legal, ethical, and cultural ones): «The defence of cultural diversity is an ethical imperative, inseparable from respect for human dignity» (Article 4). The justification for this claim is the following: «As a source of exchange, innovation and creativity, cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for the nature. In this sense, it is the common heritage of humanity and should be recognized and affirmed for the benefit of present and future generations» (Article 1). The *Declaration* assumes somehow, uncritically it seems to me, that cultural diversity is a factor of development, and that it «widens the range of options open to everyone» (Article 3). I say «uncritically» because it appears to ignore that some states, cultures, and traditions have homogenous identities which entails that any form of cultural diversity would be exceptionally difficult for them to take on. By «exceptionally», I mean, to those who harbor more pronounced traditions of intercultural exchanges, as colonizing powers in the past, or countries with long traditions of international trade. I cannot imagine, for example, traditional religious communities (e.g., the Amish, Jewish, the Orthodox Christians, or Muslim) or nation-oriented groups (as, for example, Ukrainians fighting for their national identity these days) would want to take on a multiculturalist approach in the hope to «widen the range of options»; instead, I would expect a justified fear in them that should diversity be forced upon them, it could chip away at their own specific traditions, eventually destroying their sense of identity. Perhaps for this reason, the *Declaration* admits (in Article 9) that particular states are free to define and implement cultural policies in their own ways. The declaration differentiates between cultural diversity and cultural pluralism (Article 2). The former is a descriptive claim that humanity signifies, among other things, a collection of diverse cultural traditions that can and should serve as rich and extensive sources for thriving and progress; the latter is a normative claim according to which some elements of cultural diversity should be implemented into the practice of life so as to enrich it.

2. Santayana's Cultural Pluralism

Santayana scholarship has already devoted much attention to cultural and multi-cultural issues, starting with the cosmopolitan background of his family and his own life⁵ and the famous William James's declaration that Santayana's philosophy shows a «perfection of rottenness» and represents «moribund Latinity»⁶. Since then, we have had texts about and references to Santayana's idea of cosmopolitanism⁷, cultural criticism⁸, multicultural aspects of his life and philosophy⁹, including his «Mediterranean aesthetics»¹⁰. Also, many authors

⁵ Cfr. J. McCormick, *George Santayana. A Biography*, New York, Knopf, 1987.

⁶ W. James, *The Letters of William James*, ed. by H. James, Boston, Atlantic Monthly Press, 1920, vol. II, p. 123.

⁷ Cfr. G. Gray, *Plato the Greek and Santayana the Cosmopolitan*, in «The American Scholar», XII (1943), 2, pp. 186-204; H. Saatkamp, *Santayana: Cosmopolitanism and the Spiritual Life*, in *George Santayana at 150. International Interpretations*, ed. by M.C. Flamm, G. Patella, and J.A. Rea, Lanham, Lexington, 2014, pp. 93-110; K.P. Skowroński, *El cosmopolitismo de Santayana*, in «Archipiélago. Cuadernos de crítica de la cultura», vol. 70, 2006, pp. 81-85.

⁸ Cfr. J. Seaton, *George Santayana: The Philosopher as a Cultural Critic*, in G. Santayana, *The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy and Character and Opinion in the United States*, ed. by J. Seaton, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2009, pp. xi-xxxviii; R. Rorty, *Genteel Synthesis, Professional Analyses, Transcendentalist Culture*, in «American Philosophical Quarterly», 1980, pp. 228-239.

⁹ Cfr. H. Saatkamp, *A Life of Scholarship with Santayana. Essays and Reflections*, ed. by Ch. Padrón and K.P. Skowroński, Leiden and Boston, Brill, 2021, pp. 93-98, 105-125, 321-332.

¹⁰ Cfr. G. Patella, *Belleza, Arte y Vida. La estética mediterránea de George Santayana*, Valencia, PUV, 2010.

have focused on Santayana's philosophy of travel as an inspirational example of his cosmopolitan and multicultural approach in theory and also in life¹¹. Additionally, apart from the voices arguing that Santayana should not be given any ethnic descriptive reference since he is «the philosopher» who deserves our attention independently of specific, designated cultural contexts¹², there is an abundant literature discussing the question of whether Santayana is, philosophically and culturally speaking, American at all¹³, or rather Spanish¹⁴ both¹⁵ or «southern European 'Continental'»¹⁶ or more universal¹⁷, and, indeed, unquestionably cosmopolitan as he has «produced a text for all ages and cultures by realizing an essential possibility of thought»¹⁸. There are even scholars who claim that Santayana's entire philosophy culminates in «a philosophy of civilization»¹⁹.

Even more so, Santayana, in numerous places within his written output, dedicated his attention to specific cultures: American, Spanish (Castilian), ancient Greek, Roman, Latin, Catholic, Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, the academic, and others. It is these cultures or forms of cultures that Santayana most frequently referred to with admiration or with criticism. For example, he wrote extensively about egotism in German philosophy, about the British character, German freedom, English liberty, and the American character. Some of their expressions – artistic, moral, poetic, and literary, for example – he saw equally natural and equally beautiful, as he admits in many places. All these activities and views embody a strong motivation to study even more his thought from the perspective of cultural pluralism and other, similar themes.

I employ the term “cultural pluralism”, one that was coined (in 1920s) by Santayana's former student and graduate assistant, Horace Kallen²⁰, as more suitable in the Santayanan context, more up-to-date for our contemporary debates and, more importantly, as less

¹¹ Cfr. J. Beltrán Llavador, *Celebrar el mundo. Introducción al pensar nómada de George Santayana*, Valencia, PUV, 2008; G. Fantini, *Shattered Picture of Places and Cities in George Santayana's Autobiography*, Valencia, PUV, 2009.

¹² Cfr. A. Lastra, *Hacia una lectura definitiva de George Santayana*, in A. Lastra, *Emerson como educador*, Madrid, Verbum, 2007, pp. 131-143; A. Lastra (ed.), *George Santayana. Una antología del espíritu*, Madrid, Fundación Santander, 2023.

¹³ Cfr. M. Fisch, ed., *Classic American Philosophers. Peirce, James, Royce, Santayana, Dewey, Whitehead*, New York, Appleton, 1951; J. Stuhr, ed., *Classical American Philosophy. Essential Readings and Interpretative Essays*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1987; R. Dawidoff, *The Genteel Tradition and the Sacred Rage. High Culture vs. Democracy in Adams, James, and Santayana*, Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 1992; H.S. Levinson, *Santayana, Pragmatism, and the Spiritual Life*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1992; K.P. Skowroński, *Santayana and America: Values, Liberties, Responsibility*, Newcastle, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007; M. Coleman, *Is George Santayana an American Philosopher?*, in «Cognitio. Revista de filosofía», X (2009), 1, pp. 29-41.

¹⁴ Cfr. J.M. Alonso Gamo, *Un español en el mundo: Santayana. Poesía y Poética*, Madrid, Ediciones Cultura Hispánica, 1966; Martín, *El sustrato abulense de Jorge Santayana*, Ávila, Gran Duque de Alba, 1989.

¹⁵ Cfr. H. Saatkamp, *Santayana: Hispanic-American Philosopher*, in «Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society. A Quarterly Journal in American Philosophy», XXXIV (1988), 1, pp. 51-68; K.P. Skowroński, *Santayana as a Hispanic-American Philosopher. The National, International, and Transnational Perspectives*, in «Inter-American Journal of Philosophy», II (2011), 2, pp. 37-49.

¹⁶ Cfr. D. Dilworth, *The Place of Santayana in Modern Philosophy*, in «Overheard in Seville: Bulletin of the Santayana Society», 1997, 15, pp. 1-10.

¹⁷ Cfr. J. Beltrán, M. Garrido, S. Sevilla, (eds.), *Santayana. Un pensador universal*, Valencia, PUV, 2011; Ch. Padrón and K.P. Skowroński, (eds.), *The Life of Reason in an Age of Terrorism*, Leiden and Boston, Brill, 2018.

¹⁸ D. Dilworth, *Philosophy in the World Perspective. A Comparative Hermeneutic of the Major Theories*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1989, p. 139.

¹⁹ B. Singer, *The Rational Society. A Critical Study of Santayana's Social Thought*, Cleveland, London, The Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1970, p. 3.

²⁰ H. Kallen, *Cultural Pluralism and the American Idea*, cit.; H. Kallen, *Culture and Democracy in the United States*, cit., p. 3.

politically tinted (at least I hope so) as “diversity” or “multiculturalism”. I cannot discuss here the divergent intellectual predilections of both these men, although we know that they, for many years, held interesting discussions about culture, religion, politics, nationalism, and similar themes in their correspondence²¹; and also Kallen’s text on Santayana is an important part of the exchange of views between them²².

Hence, to clarify, what I call a “multiple of cultural perfections” in Santayana could be a smaller set of issues within Santayana’s cultural pluralism. It would be a wider concept or a more extensive framework (although these two terms or phrases Santayana never used in his work). The latter cannot be reduced to the former; after all, Santayana recommended that «the full grown human soul should respect all traditions and understand all passions»²³, not just the perfect or most excellent achievements. By the way, respecting all traditions and understanding all passions could constitute the meaning of the term cultural pluralism in its normative aspect here, even though Santayana does not seem to claim that all cultures deserve the same degree of respect and understanding (I write about barbarian cultures below). Nevertheless, my main focus in this paper is the former (*a multiple or plurality or pluralism of cultural perfections*) rather than the latter (*cultural pluralism*).

Accordingly, I tackle such Santayanan claims as what follows below, and I attempt to determine if we can detect an interesting approach towards something that one could name a “multiple of cultural perfections”, as a possible contribution to our contemporary debates about multicultural issues:

But human virtues and human forms of society had various natural models, according to differences of nature or of circumstances. Virtue, like health, has different shades according to race, sex, age, and personal endowment. In each phase of life and art a different perfection may be approached²⁴.

I take notice of the anti-dogmatic and anti-absolutist on the one hand and, on the other hand, the non-subjectivist character of this view. It does not limit itself to “presentism” or “presentness” or thinking only about our present (Western) world, its cultures and its norms, as the only valid point of reference in our assessment of the past (and future), ignoring other historical circumstances, as if to disregard the cultures of past epochs and the conditions that shaped those cultures. This seems to be a substantial part of contemporary progressivist and revolutionary positions in their (critical) moral assessment of past cultures, in many institutional policies of Western countries. Instead, Santayana refers to the perennial wisdom of humankind in many of its versions and evokes the respect for a deep wisdom of the past that should not be limited exclusively to *our* wisdom that *we* have in *our* time, whatever “we” and “our” could mean. To be sure, for an unprejudiced person «there is no more reason for swearing by the letter of the Gospels than that of Homer or the Upanishads or the Koran. We may prefer the spirit in one or another, but the moral beauty in them all is equally natural, equally human»²⁵. Santayana seems to think that the very fact that some cultures (or forms of cultural life) have evolved into more moral and humane versions and,

²¹ Cfr. G. Santayana, *The Letters of George Santayana, Book Two, 1910-1920*, ed. W.G. Holzberger, Cambridge, The MIT Press, 2002, pp. 224-225, 322-323; Id., *The Letters of George Santayana, Book Four, 1928-1932*, ed. W.G. Holzberger, Cambridge, The MIT Press, 2003, pp. 296-297.

²² Cfr. H. Kallen, *America and the Life of Reason*, in «The Journal of Philosophy, Psychology, and Scientific Methods», XVIII (1921), 20, pp. 533-551.

²³ G. Santayana, *Persons and Places. Fragments of Autobiography*, Cambridge, The MIT Press, 1986, p. 464.

²⁴ G. Santayana, *Dominations and Powers. Reflections on Liberty, Society, and Government*, New Brunswick and London, Transaction Publishers, 1995, p. 337.

²⁵ G. Santayana, *The Idea of Christ in the Gospels or God in Man*, New York, Scribner’s, 1946, p. 5.

as such, passed the test of time – hundreds of years – already testifies to their “achievement”. This implies social functionality both in times of war and of peace, in prosperity and in crisis, in the young generations and in the elderly ones.

Rejection of “presentism” is one precondition to the idea of multiple cultural perfections and the rejection of looking at others (other cultures), and by means of our own cultural or individual lenses is another. Let me explain.

There may exist precious little understanding of other cultures, other than our own, for a variety of reasons. One of the most recurring seems to be the following: when we study or have contact with other cultures, other ways of thinking and living, or other worldviews, we do so by means of our own terms and experience (our culture), our own interests, and we employ ideas prevalent in our own culture to help us understand. As a result, other cultures are perceived through the lenses of our own culture, factually external to the culture being studied or experienced, which, in turn, deprives this other culture of “talking to us” by means of its own language and its own set of ideas from the very start. For example, if an adherent to a secular culture assesses religious cultures as a pipedream of myths, prejudices, and fables, he or she imposes a secular pattern of thinking from the get-go. This prejudiced approach is utterly alien to religious cultures (and vice-versa). Proportionately, the misunderstanding and misrecognitions burgeon. Paradoxically, even if contact between different cultures is more frequent now due to the growing communication networking of our age, understanding is not easily established. Santayana himself, at certain moments, warns us against a possible illusion which would lie in imposing upon alien places and cultures our own criteria of excellence. Exactly this imposition happened to himself as he admits in his autobiography: «I could never abandon *my* England, because that was a part of myself, just as *my* America and *my* Spain are part of myself: but these are not to be confused with the real, public, ever-changing England, Spain or America of geography and politics. My England was only the illusion with which the real England had inspired me»²⁶.

Santayana's reflections about various cultures – although personal and subjective in many places – often transcend the subjective view that projects individual interpretations on various cultures. In this way, this philosophy may be inspirational for our debates about cultural issues in our contemporary contexts also.

3. A Multiple of Cultural Perfections: Santayana's Possible Contribution to the Contemporary Debates on Multicultural Matters

I would like to evoke Santayana's idea about the role of cultural achievements (alternatively: perfections, excellences, and similar) as indicative of a given culture's uniqueness and importance. I would like to do it because of my conviction that one of the ways to approach culture pluralism is by appreciating a given culture via its excellences and sterling attributes. It is also my conviction, as it was Santayana's, that most cultures, in all probability, have developed their own models of excellence, according to their own standards. I suspect that there are many traditional cultures that have worked out, throughout the centuries, models and outlines for a good life according to their own norms, worldviews, habits, and interpretations of the roles of specific groups of people within their cultures (this also refers to contemporary cultures although an adequate recognition of what

²⁶ G. Santayana, *Persons and Places*, cit., p. 508.

tends to be considered perfect or aiming at perfection may be debatable, and I will come back to it below).

This view corresponds to his position that is even more applicable to cultures of given social groups when that culture is understood as an established way of living and thinking. I cannot refer to Santayana's original definition of *culture* (or *civilization*). Santayana does not define these terms though he seems to use them interchangeably in some places, e.g., «English and American civilisation»²⁷, «Anglosaxon civilisation»²⁸, yet sometimes *civilization* does seem to have a more normative meaning (about which I write below). Thus, let me define, briefly, the term *culture* that I have proposed elsewhere²⁹ and will employ here in the conviction that it corresponds to Santayana's understanding of this term in similar contexts. I understand *culture* in this sense as a more or less established way of living and thinking of a given group of people in a given geographical territory (Western, American, European, etc.) in a given historical time (ancient, medieval, contemporary, etc.). I find this definition compatible with Santayana's understanding of the term in reference to a geographical region or historical era as he expresses in claims like the following: «I see no reason to deny that different races, epochs, and climates might develop different regimes with equal success and without mutual recrimination»³⁰. My definition is more extensive, yet its substance does not differ that much from the definition used by one of Santayana's most eminent scholars and interpreters, John Lachs, who defines *culture* as «a collection of the tendencies and behaviors of actual people»³¹. I do not use Kallen's understanding of culture because its essential component seems to be a *cultural pluralism*-oriented one, rather than explaining the precise term *culture* as such. For example, we read that *culture* implies a positive and «sympathetic recognition and understanding of differences»³², something that Santayana totally lacks in his approach to barbarism, of which I write below.

For our purposes, however, such a general definition will be misleading unless we do not forget that we speak about *perfections* or *achievements* that given cultures have generated. We need to remember that when we speak, say, about Hindu culture in Santayana's texts, we need to refer, for example, to the *Upanishads* as an eminent articulation or achievement of Hindu culture rather than Hindu culture as a whole, as he once referred to Greek philosophy or the ideal of *kalokagathia* – «perhaps the finest flower of human nature»³³ – rather than to ancient Greek culture as such, and, similarly, he referred to *English liberty in the US* rather than American culture in a descriptive or sociological manner.

An important part of the philosophical justification for this idea is the following. Cultural perfections, apart from such intrinsic features as beauty (Santayana also uses the term *dignity* in similar contexts), express the ways in which a given culture has successfully coped with the conditions and circumstances of its age. They are the symptoms of the genius – individual (author) and collective (author's culture) – that can show us facet of a given culture's worldview, a vision about the role of humans in the world, moral strife, the

²⁷ Ivi, p. 200.

²⁸ Ivi, p. 201.

²⁹ K.P. Skowroński, *A Meaningful Life Amidst a Pluralism of Cultures and Values. John Lachs's Stoic Pragmatism as a Philosophical and Cultural Project*, Leiden-Boston, Brill, 2023, p. 34.

³⁰ Santayana in H.J. Dawson, *America and the West at Mid-Century. An Unpublished Santayana Essay on the Philosophy of Enrico Castelli*, in «Journal of the History of Philosophy», 1979, 17, p. 454.

³¹ K.P. Skowroński, ed., *John Lachs's Practical Philosophy. Critical Essays on His Thought with Replies and Bibliography*, Leiden-Boston, Brill, 2018, p. 250.

³² H. Kallen, *Culture and Democracy in the United States*, cit., p. 56.

³³ G. Santayana, *The Sense of Beauty. Being the Outline of Aesthetic Theory*, New York, Scribner's, 1896, p. 23.

dealing with suffering and fear, expressing hopes, and admirations for a more or less defined noble goal and attempts to realize it. These are good reasons for us to recognize them adequately and appreciate them accordingly. They share with religions and religious masterpieces – according to Santayana, the atheist – some important traits, first of all in being «the intellectual and ritual expression of a particular ethos, nationality, or civilization»³⁴. Our interest (whatever “our” means) in cultures that have coped with the predicament of life in their historical contexts, should be interesting for us since we share with others a common, human existential condition. Independently of cultural differences, we need to know how to deal with suffering, with death, with the problem of meaningful life, with an efficient arrangement of our societies, and how the world functions in general. Such questions do not stop with the unprecedented technological progress and the unmatched advancement of the sciences in our own day.

Santayana seems to appreciate some traditions not because he is a conservative thinker willing to defend conservative ideas, but rather because he views traditions as achievements, as forms of societal behaviour that have passed the test of time. At least in expressing the predicament and hopes against natural challenges of a given historical time. And such achievements should be appreciated not in the form of a cult of idolatries, but rather as an appreciation of the efforts of many generations and the results of those efforts that have been undertaken to organize social, political, and cultural manifestations. Many specific forms of cultural life, for example, Gothic cathedrals or American skyscrapers or democratic procedures, express the spiritual, cognitive, and intellectual aspirations of the time. And then there are those, like Dante's literary and philosophical masterpiece in which we are led to entertain a thought like the following: «Having become Socratic, the thinking part of mankind devoted all its energies henceforward to defining good and evil in all their grades, and in their ultimate essence; a task which Dante brings to a perfect conclusion»³⁵.

Let me mention here that this idea (a multiple of cultural perfections) may be seen as cultural cosmopolitanism in its perfectionist version. Aside from the idea that political cosmopolitanism, initiated by the Cynics and the Stoics, for example found in Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations*³⁶, contemporary moral cosmopolitanism³⁷ is not directed against boundaries that divide people living in different states, and does not need to be directed against patriotism or a loyalty to one's state, region, or native culture. Rather, it evokes a moral sympathy for our fellow human beings who happen to live elsewhere and to our fellow human beings' traditions and cultures, beginning, interestingly enough, with our own. Santayana writes about «a psychological sense in which an individual may transcend himself. His thoughts will embrace all his familiar surroundings; and his habits being necessarily social, his passions will be social too. The scope of his affections may eventually extend over the whole world»³⁸. The strength of our sympathies towards our fellow human beings may have various degrees – after all, it is impossible to love everybody with a similar intensity or empathy, as it is equally hard to appreciate the excellences of all cultures. In instances like these, Santayana resembles an old Stoic

³⁴ G. Santayana, *The Letters of George Santayana, Book Four*, cit., p. 296.

³⁵ G. Santayana, *Three Philosophical Poets: Lucretius, Dante, and Goethe*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1910, p. 77.

³⁶ M. Aurelius, *Meditations*, trans. by G. Hays, New York, The Modern Library, 2002, IV, 4.

³⁷ Cfr. P. Kleingeld and E. Brown, *Cosmopolitanism*, in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2019, URL: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/cosmopolitanism/>

³⁸ G. Santayana, *Physical Order and Moral Liberty. Previously Unpublished Essays of George Santayana*, ed. by J. and S. Lachs, Nashville, Vanderbilt University Press, 1969, p. 196.

cosmopolitan embodiment entertaining the idea of *oikeiosis*, or circles of concern, most pronouncedly expressed by Hierocles, according to which our sympathy towards others should go outwards, starting with ourselves, then our family, then our community, then our country, ending with the entire world. A cosmopolitan view may be impotent and verbal, or perhaps tragic, if there is no center out of which a given person, a member of such and such a culture, take his own or her own point of view. Such a person «must be somebody and come from somewhere, so that his definite character and moral traditions may supply an organ and a point of comparison for his observations. [...] Everywhere he should remain a stranger no matter how benevolent, and a critic no matter how appreciative»³⁹.

I move on now to a possible development of the debate over the difference between cosmopolitanism and other similar terms (cultural pluralism, multiculturalism, diversity, etc.), and turn now to the question that seems much more important for understanding Santayana's ideal of a multiple of cultural perfections. I mean the appreciation of excellences in the case when given dominant cultures stifle weaker cultures (and degrade their achievements) and, which is a similar problem, a newer and a more expansive stage of the same culture that obliterates and annihilates its own earlier stages along with its old achievements. It happens now, for example, when the secular West depreciates its religious heritage as patriarchal, unfair, unjust, and oppressive. Do we have any objective or unbiased platform to see if a given achievement is really an achievement?

A short answer to this question is the following: If we talk about the practical, real, down-to-earth, and political dimension of inter-cultural relations, we cannot escape from the natural growth and expansion of those that are stronger, hegemonic, and willing to dominate other cultures that have a lesser potential to resist domination. For example, during the 1898 Spanish-American War, while at Harvard, he seemed to complain about Spain being tragically weak, rather than accusing the US of being imperialist as did his colleague William James⁴⁰. Here, in actual real-life reality, cultural conflict, physical clashes, and domination are inescapable, and this is the politicians' domain, not the philosophers', to deal with the practical arrangements of sociopolitical life. If we, however, talk about a non-political (if this is possible at all), impartial (if possible), humanistic approach towards human thriving within the educational, ethical, and the liberal arts domains, as I am trying to do now, we would probably be able to appreciate prominent figures and prominent works of the present day, in the same way as those past ages.

A longer answer to the question might be: How do we know if something deserves the name "cultural perfection"? Could it be related to Santayana's understanding of relativism? Santayana, although a proponent of relativism in culture and ethics, does not follow the trajectory of radical relativism. If he did, he would have to excuse himself from our common understanding of such categories as «perfectionism», «achievement», and others that tell us the same story about various cultures' best moments and best things. Yet some form of relativism remains. For «progress is relative to an ideal which reflection creates»⁴¹. Here we have a suggestion that perfection, or an aiming at perfection must be relativized to the ideal this perfection articulates.

This brings us to the anthropological question of human development, personal self-fulfillment, life goals, and the best way a given individual can thrive in society, and

³⁹ G. Santayana, *Persons and Places*, cit., p. 449.

⁴⁰ Cfr. *ivi*, pp. 403-404.

⁴¹ G. Santayana, *The Life of Reason. Introduction and Reason in Common Sense*, Cambridge, The MIT Press, 2011, p. 1.

subsequently the best way a given society can develop and prosper. The question refers to the development of social groups, not only individuals, since an individual cannot thrive independently of social arrangements and public institutions. The recognition and celebration of these communal perfections, along with the standards and norms that make them perfections rather than something ordinary, is the principal argument for this idea (multiple of cultural perfections) that Santayana evokes throughout his writings. One of the best ways we can do it is by means of arts and institutions that cultures have produced as an articulation of the good life in practice, and in the conditions, circumstances, and levels of knowledge at their disposal.

This, in turn, takes us to the question of the progress, melioration, development, and the criteria according to which we may claim that something is progressing and going in a good direction or not. Here, Santayana's pluralism shows its profound character: «Progress could not, then, be universal or endless, but only episodic, divergent, and multifarious. Each development was good in its own eyes; but if they became rivals for the same matter, they became evils for one another»⁴².

The Western capitalist general formula measures the progress of human development, both in individual and communal dimensions, with a commercial increase of products and the accumulation of material goods. Commonly, the measure is rendered by GDP. A high GDP automatically means access by an individual to a plurality of goods and a high possibility of having a satisfactory life. But there are costs, and one of the most outstanding American Santayana scholars, Herman Saatkamp, betrays this. Thinking about his own native country, one with one of the highest GDPs in the world, through a Santayanan lens, he writes: «Lacking the time to live in the mind, Americans use quantity as a justification for lack of quality in their achievements»⁴³, and adds pessimistically: «To rush through life and die without the joy of living, that is the tragedy of American life»⁴⁴.

For the philosophical tradition of American pragmatism “meliorism”, or a belief in progress, is one of its basic traits (even though, it must be admitted, American pragmatists have always had reservations about a hyper-consumption lifestyle). It states that, in Peirce's formulation (*Century Dictionary*), that «the world is neither the worst nor the best possible, but that it is capable of improvement»⁴⁵. The same idea, in John Dewey's formulation (*Reconstruction in Philosophy*) claims: «The specific conditions which exist at one moment, be they comparatively bad or comparatively good, in any event may be bettered»⁴⁶. As regards to this, Santayana's own incorporation of pragmatism was very limited especially when, according to his own assessment, pragmatism and the American philosophical tradition were «too derivative and too tied to the advancement of business and capitalism»⁴⁷.

Santayana's understanding of progress was quite different. He suggests «perfections to be achieved»⁴⁸, the process of «improvement or approach to perfection in some specific direction»⁴⁹, and that «a progress must be directed to attaining some definite type of life»⁵⁰.

⁴² G. Santayana, *The Philosophy of George Santayana*, ed. by P.A. Schilpp, New York, Tudor, 1951, p. 559.

⁴³ H. Saatkamp, *George Santayana*, in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2018. URL: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/santayana>

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁵ M. Bergman, *Improving Our Habits. Peirce and Meliorism*, in C. de Waal, K.P. Skowroński (eds.), *The Normative Thought of Charles S. Peirce*, New York, Fordham University Press, 2012, p. 127.

⁴⁶ J. Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, in *The Middle Works, 1899-1924*, vol. XII, ed. by J.A. Boydston, Carbondale and Edwardsville, Southern Illinois University Press, 1991 [1920], pp. 181-182.

⁴⁷ H. Saatkamp, *George Santayana*, in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, cit.

⁴⁸ G. Santayana, *Dominations and Powers*, cit., 1995, p. 337.

⁴⁹ G. Santayana, *The Philosophy of George Santayana*, ed. by P.A. Schilpp, cit., p. 499.

Each involves some more or less definite ideal to be approached. This is a clear reference to the old Greek (pre-Socratics), Old-Roman (Lucretius), and Hellenistic models of the good life as aiming at a fuller, more satisfying, meaningful life. Taking all into account, progress takes place when a given human being is able to navigate the circumstances, be they technological, economic, cultural, or political, in order to participate in a more substantive life. Economic progress does not equal progress in human self-realization, although it materially may help, often to a great degree. What is the difference between “living well” and having a successful life, according to Western conventional standards? Santayana’s suggested way of life can be a strong response since he lived, by choice, a very modest life by economic standards, yet a hyperacute life in making it his own creation according to his own nature and contributing to the humanistic and philosophical culture of the West.

The normative dimension of the cultural, or the civilized way of thinking, lies in having a clear vision of a conceivably perfect life, or at least a decent one, along with the recognition of the ultimate justification for the machinery of life, understanding it with all its ideals, wisdom, and beauty. In contrast to this, barbarian means simply «undisciplined, rebellious against the nature of things»⁵¹. In this way, a civilized person – which may mean also a well-educated person, according to Santayana’s criteria – is able to see, appreciate, and cultivate the richness of life in an amplified perspective, whereas a barbarian is content to recognize some fragments and ignore the many excellences of life that lie outside the scope of his or her outlook. Keeping ideas alive and treating them as if they were eternal standards for making life better (fuller, ampler, wiser, and wider) is civilized, or cultural in the manner of aiming at some ideal; having fragments of life in front of us and remaining dedicated to accidental, contingent, and artificial objects of desire makes us barbarian.

4. It is not so Aristocratic and un-Democratic as it may seem at First Sight

Santayana’s ideas in general have received some criticism too, for, among other things, having shown very little concern for promoting democratic ideas of citizenship and participation in institutionalized life⁵². However, if we discuss what democracy means or rather what it should mean, we often, without using old-fashioned vocabulary, could accompany Santayana in thinking that a given ideal (say, democracy) is to be implemented into public life, and that some societies (e.g., ancient Greece, modern America, contemporary Scandinavia) have realized this ideal more or less successfully by approaching, a vision of what democracy should be. Perfect is the vision but the factual realization could approach the ideal to some degree. This is what Santayana meant. He recognized «perfect democracy» merely on an ideal plane, «where everything that is or might be has a right of citizenship»⁵³. It is not militantly imposed: «Democracy is very well when it is natural, not forced. But the natural virtue of each age, place, and person is what a good democracy would secure – not uniformity»⁵⁴. Santayana was against «commercial

⁵⁰ G. Santayana, *The Life of Reason. Introduction and Reason in Common Sense*, cit., p. 158.

⁵¹ G. Santayana, *The Letters of George Santayana, Book Four*, cit., p. 45.

⁵² H.S. Levinson, *Santayana, Pragmatism, and the Spiritual Life*, cit., p. 264.

⁵³ G. Santayana, *Scepticism and Animal Faith. Introduction to a System of Philosophy*, New York, Scribner’s, 1923, p. 80.

⁵⁴ G. Santayana, *The Letters of George Santayana, Book Eight, 1948-1952*, Cambridge, The MIT Press, 2008, p. 228.

imperialism»⁵⁵, and «industrial liberalism» that levels down «all civilisations to a single cheap and dreary pattern»⁵⁶, as he was also against German *Kultur* and against Americanization, hoping (in 1950) that despite a naturally American «zeal for converting people to your views», America would not «impose one political system over the whole world»⁵⁷. All such tendencies he viewed as militant and undemocratic.

Since this «militant» element in intercultural relationships is often discussed by Santayana, let me say a few words about it. Doing so, I would like to return to the quote from the first part that I have already introduced above and focus my attention on its important continuation. Namely, as Santayana writes: «I see no reason to deny that different races, epochs, and climates might develop different regimes with equal success and without mutual recrimination, if only they understood the place of their respected virtues in the universe, and did not attempt to legislate, on their particular principles, for all men and for all ages»⁵⁸. And here, in the second part of the quote, we encounter one of the major challenges that occurs when talking about multicultural issues in any form: uniformization caused by a cultural imperialism or forceful expansion or even an undemocratic hegemony that allows a more dominant culture to legislate and impose its own norms and criteria upon others.

Cherishing various cultures, past and present, as if independently of each other –which is Santayana's idea here – is one thing, but a very different matter is when they clash and/or need to coexist side-by-side in practice as, for example, the idea of multicultural policy. The consequences, even the price that is paid, for introducing selected norms and standards, even excellences into other cultures, requires an accompanying degree of serious reflection. In the quote that follows, attention is given to the moral and social costs of elevating a given form of culture, or a given model of a good life, to the level of perfection at the cost of degrading other perfections (and norms). The social cost seems to be one of the basic measures by which some cultures can be appreciated and others punished, and it refers to the effective functioning of a given culture: «If any community can become and wishes to become communistic or democratic or anarchical I wish it joy from the bottom of my heart. I have only two qualms in this case: whether such ideals are realisable, and whether those who pursue them fancy them to be exclusively and universally right: an illusion pregnant with injustice, oppression, and war»⁵⁹.

Cultural pluralism along with a multiple of cultural perfections in the interpretation proposed here are not ideas that necessarily must be religiously, ethnically, and ideologically diverse in the spaces where a given culture is traditionally monolithic, or majoritarian, in case of ethnicity and religion. For example, if an individual's cultural tradition is religious, Christian for example, this does not imply that one should renounce it, and expand one's worldview with Buddhist ingredients, or Islamic elements, or agnostic tenets. Rather, it suggests that the recognition that there are others for whom religions are important (and irreligious people too), and that peaceful, respectful coexistence is a challenge that needs to be explored. This coexistence is not an ousting of one religion by another (or by atheism) or in reducing the importance of one by elevating the influence of the other. What it does suggest is that we need to search for solutions, e.g., within education,

⁵⁵ G. Santayana, *Persons and Places*, cit., p. 508.

⁵⁶ G. Santayana, *Dominations and Powers*, cit., p. xxi.

⁵⁷ G. Santayana, *The Letters of George Santayana, Book Eight*, cit., p. 311.

⁵⁸ H.J. Dawson, *America and the West at Mid-Century*, cit., p. 454.

⁵⁹ G. Santayana, *Persons and Places*, cit., p. 227.

that allow us all to involve ourselves in diverse forms of cultural activity as smoothly, and with as much mutual respect, as possible.

Most probably, Santayana would accuse such attempts as the militant imposition of one form of culture on another one, although such imperialistic tendencies seem to be natural for those cultures that have established themselves enough to expand and create institutional tools and the military technology to do so. Santayana's naturalistic philosophy recognizes the natural forces behind well-established cultures (and political bodies) that become «militant», as he so frequently writes in his *Dominations and Powers*, which translates, as he put it elsewhere, that «every organic being prizes its own type of perfection and strives to preserve it and to reproduce it»⁶⁰. He protests against such impositions in practice, although he understands them as inevitable, and claims that the richness of cultural life should go against uniformizations and standardizations, warning us that «the more equal and similar all nations and all individuals become, the more vehemently will each of them stick up for his atomic individuality»⁶¹.

5. Any Cultural Policy for a Multiple of Cultural Perfections? Debating Cultural Barbarism and the «Radical Disease» of Contemporary Western Culture

I employ Richard Rorty's famous term, «cultural policy»⁶² in order to ask if Santayana's idea is implementable into any segment of social reality by means of tools that cultural policy (or cultural politics) could use. Rorty's term links both the cultural and the political. I do so because Rorty's idea is not that removed from the way we, as commentators on Santayana's legacy and thought, could use his philosophical message in our contemporary contexts. To be sure, Santayana's output is *not* political in the sense of proposing specific social reforms, of promoting or criticizing a given political party, or of putting forward a designed series of measures to be implemented by governmental institutions. Yet, it is political in the cultural sense of showing us various relations of power, and this includes the limitations to our freedoms, which necessarily structure all cultures, present or past, all societies, religious or secular, and all polities, democratic or not. This carries him, to a humanistic openness for individual people and their self-fulfilment: «Happiness is hidden from a free and casual will; it belongs rather to one chastened by a long education and unfolded in an atmosphere of sacred and perfected institutions»⁶³. Opposed to this, we have an approach often promoted in a variety of quarters, according to which the barbarian is elevated to a role-forming function in society and culture. To stress all of this, the barbarian would be «the man who regards his passions as their own excuse for being; who does not domesticate them either by understanding their cause or by conceiving their ideal goal». The barbarian «merely feels and acts, valuing in his life its force and its filling, but being careless of its purpose and its form»⁶⁴.

Does Santayana prefer any one specific policy? And, if so, would it be a past-oriented policy? Rorty, commenting on Santayana, claims that one does not have reasons to think

⁶⁰ G. Santayana, *The Birth of Reason and Other Essays*, ed. by D. Cory, New York, Columbia University Press, 1968, p. 109.

⁶¹ G. Santayana, *Dominations and Powers*, cit., p. 180.

⁶² Cfr. K.P. Skowroński, *Values, Valuations, and Axiological Norms in Richard Rorty's Neopragmatism. Studies, Polemics, Interpretations*, Lanham, Lexington, 2015.

⁶³ G. Santayana, *The Life of Reason* (One-volume edition), Amherst, Prometheus Books, 1998, p. 463.

⁶⁴ G. Santayana, *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion*, New York, Harper, 1957, pp. 176-177.

that, for example, «American democracy will find its final fulfilment in America, any more than Roman law reached its fulfilment in the Roman Empire or literary culture its fulfilment in Alexandria. Nor is there much reason to think that the highbrow culture of whatever empire does achieve that fulfilment will resemble our own»⁶⁵. In other words, we cannot tell if this or that achievement will be the form that we assess now, since what happens now develops into forms that we are not able to anticipate.

In order to respond to this question, first let me return to the *Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity*. It does not discuss that there is a serious problem with an effective arrangement of different cultures, except by suggesting that many of them (or all of them) can equally enrich us or that we can enrich them, whatever “ours” and “theirs” actually mean. In other words, according to which criteria should we assess various cultures in order that they enrich us? Enrich in what sense? Mere coexistence, side-by-side, is well-nigh impossible, as the experience of multiculturalist policies in many countries show us. Should we assume that all of them are equally effective in, say, making life meaningful for most of its members? What if a given culture cultivates, for example, a caste system for centuries, or views the idea of the equality of men and women as pathological? What if secularization is viewed as blasphemous? Is it not an absolutistic claim that «all cultures are equal», and is it not in itself a form of Western cultural imperialism to impose such egalitarian and democratic claims («all cultures are equal») upon cultures that have been essentially nondemocratic and inegalitarian for centuries, if not millennia? I can only speculate that Santayana would be against these types of tendencies when they (these tendencies) lead to “militantly” imposing this or that cultural pattern, by means of legislation as it happens in some countries. In other words, the penalization or criminalization of some cultural norms that do not fit these new tendencies.

Apart from imperfections and mistakes that are present in all human efforts, there is something more systemic and radical that opposes Santayana's idea of cultural pluralism. Pluralism does not and cannot mean “unlimited diversity”. Anarchical aberration, difficult to define, is a natural by-product of any cultural development, and becomes suicidal if institutionally accepted and promoted. Any given culture becomes “vicious” or self-destructive «when it forms habits destructive of its health and of its ability to prosper in its environment»⁶⁶. Such an approach is not directed against enrichment understood as a recognition of perfective achievements. After all, he recommended that we attempt «to overcome moral and ideal provinciality, and to see that every form of life had its own perfection, which it was stupid and cruel to condemn for differing from some other form, by chance one's own»⁶⁷. Philosophy and the liberal arts play a huge role in this process, because a measure of a cultural life that has a perfective aspiration is secured by internalizing lessons from the past, something that the barbarian – if we follow Santayana's terminology mentioned above – does not need or want. More precisely, what the barbarian encounters in history is, first and foremost, superstition and the idols that prevent the barbarian mentality of attaining a more enlightened understanding of the world. A «radical disease» of Western culture⁶⁸ would be to allow, or even promote, such militant and perfection-less scenarios by using rhetoric that would justify such barbaric impositions on other cultures and destroying the idea both of pluralism and of perfectionism:

⁶⁵ R. Rorty, *Genteel Synthesis, Professional Analyses, Transcendentalist Culture*, cit., p. 238.

⁶⁶ G. Santayana, *Persons and Places*, cit., p. 541.

⁶⁷ Ivi, p. 170.

⁶⁸ Ivi, p. 540.

logical arts are fatal if they are used to construct, by way of a moral fable, an anthropomorphic picture of the universe given out for scientific truth and imposed on mankind by propaganda, by threats, and by persecution. And this militant method of reforming mankind by misrepresenting their capacities and their place in the universe is no merely ancient or mediaeval delusion. It is the official and intolerant method of our most zealous contemporary prophets and reformers. Barbarism has adopted the weapons of flattery and prophecy. Merciless irrational ambition has borrowed the language of brotherly love⁶⁹.

6. Conclusion

I think that Santayana would expect from us, his contemporary readers, the following. Since we, living today, have many past generations behind us, we (should) have also the advantage of having many more and better, not fewer and poorer inspirations, in order to live life in a better fashion, and to avoid the mistakes and pitfalls of those who have lived before us. The predominant role of past traditions is to show us good and bad things, and this is possible when we do not forget the past, but rather want to approach it creatively and lucidly. Here we can evoke Santayana's most famous quote: «Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it»⁷⁰ (even a plaque with this quote was put up after WWII in the former Germany Nazi concentration camp of Auschwitz⁷¹). Such an insistence does not only preserve the material heritage, something that UNESCO and various museums want to do. Nor does it mean to come back, to regress, and imitate old-fashioned lifestyles. Instead, it must be something that enlivens us, makes our worldviews more open, and fortifies us morally, spiritually, and culturally in our future-oriented challenges. Philosophy, the liberal arts, and the humanities could be the tools to use in order to recognize and take on such ideas.

⁶⁹ Ivi, p. 546.

⁷⁰ G. Santayana, *The Life of Reason. Introduction and Reason in Common Sense*, cit., p. 172.

⁷¹ See Auschwitz.org, URL: <https://www.auschwitz.org/en/museum/news/words-in-the-service-of-hatred,1022.html>

DESDE LA PROXIMIDAD DE LA DISTANCIA: LA ESCATOLOGÍA ESPIRITUAL DE GEORGE SANTAYANA

Manuel Ruiz Zamora

Abstract: It can be said that every philosophy, more or less consciously, puts forward a certain idea of distance as the ideal way of being in the world. In fact, one could write a history of philosophy based on the exact degree of distance or closeness that, with respect to the world, is deduced from the work of each thinker. In this sense, there is perhaps no other in which the explicit thematization of distance, as a philosophical element, has reached such an exhaustive development and plays a more important role, from an epistemological and moral point of view, than in George Santayana. From the concept of distance, it is not only possible to gain an exhaustive understanding of the meaning of his philosophy, but also to appreciate the unusual coherence, absent in most of the thinkers of his time, between it and the way in which Santayana lived his life. This is the purpose of this essay.

Keywords: Detachment, Distance, Proximity, Santayana, Spirit.

* * *

Tal vez no haya fragmento más célebre en la obra de George Santayana, si descontamos el sobrebundantemente citado «los hombres que no son capaces de recordar la historia están condenados a repetirla», cuya autoría, por lo demás, a menudo se desconoce, que aquel de *Personas y lugares* en el que el filósofo da cuenta de su denominada *metanoia*, esa transformación o conversión radical a partir de cual vivirá la vida desde una dimensión de lejanía, por así decirlo, trascendental. Recordemos el pasaje, a cuya importancia biográfica y filosófica, se le añade su incuestionable belleza.

Hubo ahí, pues, – afirma el filósofo – cuatro pensamientos que unieron sus corrientes y me llevaron irresistiblemente hacia el mismo mar: la juventud se había acabado, la amistad había tenido su momento, el futuro no me ofrecía nada que me interesara y las utopías sociales no proponían nada que yo respetara. Fui empujado de lo temporal a lo eterno, no por ninguna crisis o conjunción de acontecimientos, sino por la propia naturaleza de la existencia, cuando la afronté con honradez y la acepté con franqueza¹.

Y más adelante precisa sus consecuencias:

Esta solución final del problema moral no conllevaba ningún cambio visible en mi modo de vida. Seguí dando clases y escribiendo, bebiendo y viajando y haciendo amistades; sólo que ahora, de antemano y explícitamente, estas ocupaciones estaban para mí marcadas con una cruz: señal, por un lado, de la muerte y, por otro, de la consagración. Por gradual e incruento que fuera el cambio, en él hubo dolor, travesía de la noche oscura².

La conclusión lleva implícita una suerte de liberación que, según veremos, tendrá su correlato de tematización teórica: «Esta transición se puede denominar *metanoia* filosófica.

¹ G. Santayana, *Personas y lugares*, Madrid, Trotta, 2002, p. 456.

² Ivi, p. 457.

Como la catarsis trágica, convierte el desastre en una especie de éxtasis, sin los falsos consuelos y engaños que rebajan a menudo la dignidad de la *metanoia* religiosa»³.

Tales consideraciones, en las que predomina un tono aparente, pero sólo aparente de renuncia, nos llevan a una pregunta que raramente se formula cuando nos ocupamos del trabajo de un filósofo: ¿fue Jorge Ruiz de Santayana un hombre feliz? Ciertamente, es ésta una cuestión que, para empezar, cabe reputar de problemática y, para algunos, sin duda, como enteramente irrelevante en términos filosóficos. ¿Qué tienen que ver finalmente la consistencia o la relevancia teórica de una determinada propuesta filosófica con la presunta disposición anímica del sujeto que la formula? En primer lugar, porque, según se considera, las ideas que un filósofo desarrolla en su obra, aunque ciertamente influidas, como en cualquier otra actividad, por los avatares de experiencia, tan sólo deberían ser valoradas en función de su condición de verdad o falsedad o, como mucho, de su contribución a la comprensión de una determinada realidad. Y, en segundo lugar, porque dicha pregunta, referida a la vida, no ya de un pensador, sino de cualquier otro ser humano, sólo puede ser contestada a modo de conjetura o presunción, toda vez que, por un lado, tenemos la propia indefinición general del objeto que se trata de identificar, esto es, qué sea la felicidad, y, por otro, el hecho de que la certeza incontrastable del sentimiento de la misma en cualquier persona nos estaría vedada por su propia condición de realidad, a la postre, puramente íntima y subjetiva sobre la que, además, ese mismo sujeto puede engañarse.

Ahora bien, a estas consideraciones cabe enfrentarles otras de signo opuesto. Con respecto a la imposibilidad de juzgar la presencia de un estado real de felicidad en una persona, y si bien, tal y como hemos señalado, entramos en un campo en el que, por la propia naturaleza del asunto, predomina la incertidumbre, hay varios testimonios sobre nuestro pensador que inciden en la presencia frecuente de la risa (uno de los textos más bellos que se han escrito sobre Santayana, el del crítico americano Lionel Thrilling, se titula precisamente «Aquella sonrisa de Parménides me dio que pensar»⁴). De hecho, se conserva una filmación de Santayana en Roma fechada en 1944 y que puede verse en *Youtube*, en la que el pensador, ya bastante anciano, aparece riendo con una encantadora espontaneidad. Y, sin embargo, ¿cabe determinar que la mera presencia de la risa constituye, por sí misma, una prueba irrefutable de felicidad? Hay risas que son apenas el resultado de una inercia, risas que esconden el dolor y la desesperación o risas que simplemente se desencadenan sin más significado que el instante puramente incidental del que se alimentan. Frente a ello, Santayana nos confiesa que hubo dolor y travesía en su noche oscura, pero también que, a

³ Ivi, p. 453. Este momento decisivo de extrañamiento del mundo no es infrecuente en los grandes espíritus. Rousseau, en sus *Ensoñaciones del pájaro solitario* apunta lo siguiente: «Cuanto me es exterior me es extraño de ahora en adelante. No tengo ya en este mundo ni prójimo, ni semejantes, ni hermanos. Estoy en la tierra como en un planeta extraño en el que habría caído desde aquel en el que habitaba». Y Giacomo Leopardi, en una de sus cartas, comparte el mismo sentimiento: «Mi vida, al principio por imposición de las circunstancias y en contra de mi voluntad, después por una inclinación originada en una costumbre convertida en consustancial a mi naturaleza y en indeleble, ha sido siempre, es y será perpetuamente solitaria, aun en medio de las conversaciones, en la que, por decirlo como los ingleses, yo estoy más *absent* de lo que estaría un ciego que fuera también sordo. Este vicio de la *absent* se ha hecho en mi incorregible y desesperado». Hay, sin embargo, dos circunstancias principales que diferencia la disposición de distanciamiento radical de Santayana de otras que se expresan en el mismo sentido en el mundo moderno: La suya, en primer lugar, brota de una decisión voluntaria, no es una afección o padecimiento *contra* la realidad. Podría decirse que, al contrario de los casos como los de Rousseau o los de Leopardi, Santayana desdeña el mundo como voluntad para salvarlo como representación. La segunda deferencia consiste en que no se queda en un mero momento de negación, sino que se elaborará, según veremos, en forma de cuerpo teórico o, si se quiere, de programa filosófico.

⁴ Cfr. L. Thrilling, *That Smile of Parmenides Made Me Think*, en «The Griffin», V, February 1956, 2; también publicado como *The Smile of Parmenides: George Santayana in his Letters*, en «Encounter», December 1956, pp. 30-37.

partir de ella, se ha producido una transformación o transfiguración determinante en su percepción y relación con el mundo, el cual queda reducido, por emplear la terminología de un filósofo que le influye, a nuda representación o, dicho más en su propio lenguaje, fantasmagoría de esencias con vocación de eternidad⁵. A partir de ello, así como de la rutina que podemos entresacar de su posterior condición de viajero y, en sus palabras, de sempiterno estudiante, así como de su asentamiento final en el Convento de las Monjas Azules de Roma, no parece demasiado aventurado conjeturar la posibilidad de una vida razonablemente feliz (o racionalmente) feliz, aplicándosele al término la insuperable definición aristotélica de «una actividad del alma de acuerdo con la virtud». La presunta felicidad de Santayana se derivaría, por lo demás, de su condición de libertad, que es el anhelo principal, según veremos, de la vida del espíritu.

Sea como fuere, el hecho de que el individuo Santayana nos ofrezca una impresión más o menos justificada de vida cumplida y feliz, cuanto menos desde que tiene lugar su metamorfosis espiritual, ¿alberga algún otro interés que no sea el puramente biográfico? O, dicho de otra forma: ¿afecta ello de algún modo al relieve o al valor de su obra filosófica? Con ello regresamos de nuevo a la cuestión primera, esto es, aquella que incidía en que la cuestión de si obra de un pensador sólo es digna de ser valorada en términos epistémicos, siendo indiferentes, a todos los respectos, cualesquiera otras consideraciones, a menos que puedan ofrecer algún otro tipo de información que se demuestre no del todo irrelevante a los mismos efectos. No obstante, al defender dicha opinión, ¿no se estaría incurriendo en una petición de principio? O, por expresarlo de una forma más contundente, ¿no estaríamos asumiendo el clásico prejuicio de la filosofía moderna, contra la que Santayana, por otra parte, reacciona, según el cual la filosofía es poco más que pura epistemología o teoría del conocimiento? Si la filosofía, a partir de Descartes, se convierte en una ciencia predominantemente de análisis del propio pensamiento y, a partir de él, por remitirnos a la célebre pregunta kantiana, sobre lo que podamos conocer, todo aquello que no afecte a la verdad o falsedad última de sus proposiciones habrá de ser descartado como irrelevante o circunstancial, lo cual determinaría, en definitiva, que carece de la menor importancia a efectos filosóficos el hecho de que un gran pensador pueda ser o haber sido un individuo excelso o un perfecto miserable. Casos ha habido en la historia de ambos extremos.

Ahora bien, y este es uno de los puntos que queremos defender en este texto, precisamente Jorge Ruiz de Santayana es un pensador que aspira a romper con todo esto; y ello por razones tanto filosóficas como por otras estrictamente biográficas, que, en su caso, según intentaremos poner de manifiesto, van intrínseca y necesariamente interconectadas con las primeras. De hecho, uno de los valores más destacables que podemos entresacar de la figura de este pensador es precisamente el de restituir a la filosofía aquella extensión de ejemplaridad moral que siempre tuvo en el mundo clásico, por más que en el caso de Santayana ésta sea, según veremos, perfectamente indiferente a la existencia o no de discípulos directos. De hecho, el propio carácter individualista de su pensamiento remitiría, por coherencia, a una pedagogía de y por distanciamiento. Sea como fuere, Santayana se diferencia de la mayor parte de la filosofía moderna, con la que, por otra parte, tantas

⁵ Por más que numerosos estudiosos hayan encontrado reminiscencias de la filosofía de Schopenhauer en la de Santayana, y que incluso él mismo haya reconocido dicha influencia, sus percepciones del mundo difieren sustancialmente: frente a la afirmación del primero de la existencia de un núcleo de realidad sustancial a partir del cual se origina el baile de los fenómenos, al segundo, que también afirma un reino de la sustancia, tan sólo se siente interpelado, a veces en grado de fascinación, por éstos últimos, que al ejemplificarse en su condición de esencias imaginativas alcanzan condición de eternidad.

preocupaciones temáticas comparte, en el hecho de haber recuperado esa dimensión fundamental de coherencia entre vida y obra en la actividad filosófica que había quedado relegada como una cuestión secundaria desde el mundo antiguo, en la que figura del pensador, más allá de su credo positivo, opera como ejemplo moral que se nutre, a su vez, del caudal de la experiencia. En el caso concreto de Santayana ello se va a traducir, como veremos, en una incomparable coherencia entre las tesis que sostiene en su trabajo y su forma de vivir, la cual puede ser interpretada sin demasiadas dificultades como una ejemplificación (término éste que juega un importante papel en sus reflexiones sobre las esencias) patente de sus ideas.

Pues bien, en nuestra opinión, no existe ningún concepto que nos permita analizar mejor dicha co-pertenencia fundamental entre la vida y la obra de este pensador que el de distancia, el cual, aunque no aparece desarrollado de forma expresa en sus textos, sí creemos que puede ser identificado sin demasiada dificultad tanto en sus planteamientos teóricos como morales. Para Santayana, la distancia o, en términos más concretos, la sabia gestión de la misma no es sólo un elemento epistemológico y, por supuesto, espiritual de primer rango, sino también una instancia que, bien manejada en el plano moral, permite una vida razonablemente feliz y sabia. Recordemos a tal respecto, las elocuentes consideraciones que Bertrand Russell nos ofrece sobre la personalidad del filósofo español en su libro *Portraits from memory and other essays*: «Whenever his Spanish patriotism was involved, his usual air of detachment disappeared»⁶. Hay otros muchos testimonios que inciden en ese presunto aire de cierta lejanía y frialdad, el cual puede ser achacado, ciertamente, a particularidades de su personalidad o su carácter (se ha llegado, incluso, a ver en ellos una manifestación de neurosis a consecuencia del abandono materno), pero que encuentran una prolija explicación al tiempo que una consistente justificación teórica, según intentaremos exponer, en el cuerpo de su obra. Esa dimensión bifronte entre vida y pensamiento también halla una lúcida expresión por parte del propio filósofo, en *Personas y lugares*, cuando afirma que «No es que se hubiera debilitado en mi interior la devoción a la filosofía. Seguía siendo mi único interés que todo lo englobaba, no como ciencia, desde luego, sólo como equilibrio de la mente y el temperamento»⁷.

Dicho ejemplo moral no encierra, sin embargo, pretensiones proselitistas, tal y como corresponde a un individualista radical (individualismo, por otra parte, en el que vuelven a encontrarse vida y pensamiento), aunque obviamente pueda operar como tal para algunos que se acercan a conocer el pensador. «Me sentí como Fedro con Sócrates», confiesa Gore Vidal en el capítulo que le dedica en sus memorias al «invitado de las Monjas azules». La combinación distancia e individualismo se resolverá inevitablemente en una búsqueda incesante de libertad, lo cual no es otra cosa que el reflejo de dicha aspiración en la vida del espíritu: «[El espíritu] ha elegido para todos los demás aquello que su naturaleza, en cada caso, pide; pero para sí mismo el espíritu ha elegido la renunciación, no ser predicado a otros que no pueden amarlo, sino ser practicado interiormente en su propia soledad. Lo primero a que el espíritu debe renunciar, si ha de comenzar a ser libre, es a toda pretensión de dominio. Su reino no es de este mundo»⁸.

⁶ B. Russell, *Portraits from Memory and other Essays*, New York, Simon and Schuster, 1956, pp. 92-93. Esta afirmación nos llevaría a admitir que la distancia no es, por tanto, una condición rígida e incondicional, sino un elemento que, como su propia acepción física indica, puede disminuir o aumentar, según el objeto o la realidad con que se trate. Así mismo, la expresión *air of detachment* nos indica, tal y como podremos comprobar, que hay algo de apariencia en dicha actitud, por más que su expresión sea obviamente real.

⁷ G. Santayana, *Personas y lugares*, cit., p. 292.

⁸ G. Santayana, *Los reinos del ser*, México, FCE, 2006, p. 535.

Cabría cuestionar, sin embargo, cómo es posible que, siendo Santayana, según él mismo proclama con insistencia, un pensador materialista, pueda integrar en su sistema, de forma, además, inequívocamente soteriológica, esa dimensión de separación imprescindible que significa el establecimiento de, por así decirlo, una distancia determinante frente a los lugares, las personas y las cosas. ¿No es la materia, acaso, en su condición de conformación indiferenciada una sustancia de la que formamos parte de manera inexorable? Obviamente ello es así, y el propio Santayana estaría de acuerdo en tal respecto, pero, según veremos, el materialismo de Santayana es una variante de esta corriente filosófica que no descarta incorporar aspectos más complejos y problemáticos. «Intelectualmente –nos dice– soy un materialista convencido; y la singularidad de mi libro es tal vez ésta: que averigua en las cosas espirituales sólo su cualidad espiritual, al tiempo que las planta, por lo que a su existencia se refiere, inequívocamente en el terreno natural, y muestra cómo es que brotan de él»⁹. Es, por tanto, desde el reino o instancia del espíritu, pero sin olvidar su pertenencia a la vida orgánica, desde donde será posible establecer una cierta lejanía casi siempre imaginativa y nunca verdaderamente sustancial frente al mundo. No hay que temer calificar dicha distancia como fenomenológica, al estar intrínsecamente relacionada con los resultados obtenidos en el reino de las esencias.

Nada, sin embargo, más alejado de esta forma de materialismo que reducir la distancia espiritual frente a la realidad a una cuestión meramente cognitiva o epistemológica, aunque, ciertamente, dicha dimensión se encuentre incluida en el concepto, aunque más a partir de las potencialidades de la intuición que de las capacidades del entendimiento. El espíritu alberga también una determinante cualidad moral, puesto que «Es un foco personal y moral de la vida en el que las perspectivas de la naturaleza se invierten como en un espejo y se atan a la suerte de una sola alma»¹⁰. Por eso, si bien *Personas y lugares* nos entrega, con un grado de excelencia raramente alcanzado en el género, la peripecia existencial del individuo Santayana, cabe leer el libro dedicado al espíritu con el que se cierran los *Reinos del ser* como una, no por velada, menos sincera autobiografía espiritual del pensador. De hecho, podría afirmarse que es en este libro, más que en ningún otro, en donde Santayana, cobijado tras la veladura de su peripecia teórica, nos ofrece el autorretrato más franco y acabado tanto de su personalidad como de su forma de estar en el mundo.

Comparemos, a tales efectos, el pasaje que hemos recogido anteriormente en torno al momento de su *metanoia* con este otro, tan breve como decisivo de *El reino del espíritu*, el cual versa justamente sobre la unión: «El espíritu nunca puede ser del todo espiritual, ni moralmente más que un capricho de la ciega Voluntad hasta que ha atravesado la *noche oscura*, descrita por San Juan de la Cruz, y adoptado su lema: *nada, nada, nada*»¹¹. Y veamos ahora otra reflexión, incluida en este caso en la sección dedicada a la liberación espiritual, estadio precedente al de la unión, y volvamos a confrontarlo con la descripción de la *metanoia*: «Este espíritu será cualitativamente el mismo que existe, o puede existir, en otras criaturas también; no en tanto en cuanto cada una acepta y persigue sus impulsos animales o políticos, sino sólo en tanto en cuanto, como espíritu en nosotros, se separa a sí misma de esos impulsos, los considera como accidentes patéticos y los iguala a nuestros impulsos contrastantes, y a los de todas las demás criaturas». Y concluye un poco más adelante: «nada será cambiado por este segundo discernimiento, pero moralmente todo el

⁹ Ivi, p. 461.

¹⁰ Ivi, p. 462.

¹¹ Ivi, p. 674.

mundo natural, junto con nuestras personas en él, *será puesto a una cierta distancia* (el subrayado es nuestro). Se habrá vuelto extranjero»¹².

Así pues, Santayana se instala a partir de cierto momento en esa condición de extranjería voluntaria que le procurará una suerte de atalaya o refugio desde el que resulta posible una contemplación comprehensiva de la realidad, sin participar, sin embargo, emocionalmente en la misma. Ahora bien, el espíritu, según afirma el propio pensador, no constituye ninguna entidad sustancial, sino que comprende una mera floración circunstancial de «esa luz interior de realidad o atención que inunda toda la vida cuando los hombres viven realmente en la Tierra». Pues bien, el origen o causa de esa opción vital, según nos confiesa el propio pensador, lo constituye, tanto en lo que se refiere a la vida como en su traducción al pensamiento filosófico, una decepción profunda con respecto al mundo. Así, «El auténtico desapego – nos dirá el pensador – presupone el apego. ¿Qué puede significar que alguien diga que renuncia a todo si todavía no ha sentido amor por nada?»¹³. También en personas y lugares manifestará su predilección por el mundo de la imaginación frente al mundo de la verdad, sin que ello, por supuesto, signifique ninguna desconsideración con respecto a la misma, que, según veremos, será recuperada en forma de eternidad: «Que lo real estaba podrido y sólo lo imaginario tenía interés me parecía axiomático. Eso era demasiado radical; pero, teniendo en cuenta las imprudentes generalizaciones de la juventud, es todavía lo que pienso. Mi filosofía nunca ha cambiado»¹⁴.

Es a partir de esta decepción originaria y radical desde donde se va a iniciar una suerte de *via crucis* espiritual de carácter, a nuestro entender, estrictamente escatológico, que va a quedar perfectamente reflejado en forma tanto de formulación filosófica como de subrepticia confesión autobiográfica en *El reino del espíritu*. Las estaciones de penitencia, por así decirlo, para alcanzar el primer estadio, que es el de la liberación, y, más tarde, según veremos, el de la unión, implican la obligación de sortear a los tres tradicionales enemigos del alma según la teología cristiana, el mundo, el demonio y la carne, si bien despojados por Santayana de su dimensión dogmática y reconvertidos, con esa destreza metafórica que muestra siempre en estos temas, en símbolos por antonomasia de la distracción espiritual y la caída en un estado de perturbación interior que aleja al espíritu de sus intereses esenciales.

Para Santayana el pecado moral más leve es el de la carne. El filósofo refleja una comprensión profunda y, por supuesto, nada puritana de las necesidades del cuerpo. «La carne – afirma – constituye la materia prima de la naturaleza humana y es imposible de descartar. Él mismo (el espíritu) ha sido perseguido y turbado desde su más tierna edad por impulsos carnales mal satisfechos que todavía se apoderan de su imaginación, no menos que de su cuerpo: por eso la charla obscena le hace reír. Sabe que, en alguna parte, de alguna manera, la carne tomará siempre su venganza»¹⁵. Es el pensador, pero también el hombre el que nos habla en esta confesión revestida de consideración filosófica. El tono de revelación personal del pasaje es de una evidencia incontestable y reflejan aspectos secretos de una vida, la del propio Santayana, caracterizada por una misteriosa ausencia de aventuras sentimentales, hasta el punto de que, ateniéndose a algunas expansiones de admiración demasiado expresas por la belleza de cuerpos casi siempre masculinos, algunos intérpretes han aventurado la posibilidad de una reprimida condición de homosexual en el filósofo. Sea

¹² Ivi, p. 611.

¹³ G. Santayana, *Personas y lugares*, cit., p. 452.

¹⁴ Ivi, p. 201.

¹⁵ Ivi, p. 572.

como fuere, la renuncia consciente a los placeres de la carne resulta, tanto en términos filosóficos como estrictamente existenciales, perfectamente coherente con esa independencia espiritual a ultranza a la que el pensador aspira. En consecuencia, el método que propone para eludir esta forma concreta de caída es la disciplina a través de la sublimación del deseo, porque «la pasión de amor, sublimada, no se vuelve exangüe, ni exenta de turbación corporal, como lo son la caridad y la filantropía. Es esencialmente la llama espiritual de un fuego carnal que ha tornado todo su combustible en luz»¹⁶.

Mucho más problemática es la forma de tentación que representa el mundo, en la medida en que, siendo éste, por definición, nuestra envoltura social, resulta virtualmente inextirpable de nuestra vida. De hecho, Santayana reconoce algunas virtualidades inequívocamente positivas y benéficas en este ámbito: el componente, por ejemplo, de arte en el trabajo, el de previsión paternal y filosofía moral en el gobierno o el espíritu de caballerosidad en la guerra, por más que finalmente representen un laberinto en el que el hombre «pierde la noción misma de libertad o de dominio en cualquier sentido»¹⁷. Por eso, y de la misma forma que le ocurre con la carne, tampoco va a exhibir Santayana aquí una profesión incondicional de rechazo por el mundo, ya que sabe muy bien que «el apego natural del espíritu al mundo se desprende de su apego a la carne y no es menos necesario en sus comienzos». Es más, «Al espíritu, que es la esencia misma de la vida, le gusta que se le excite, y sea lo que fuere lo que le excita, aparece en el primer momento *sub specie boni*, como algo interesante y maravilloso. El mundo es vivo, hermoso, alegre y tentador»¹⁸. La propia vida social, a la que el pensador, según los diversos recuerdos que recoge en sus memorias, no fue en absoluto reacio, contiene elementos que pueden revertir en elevación espiritual, haciendo posible, en algunos casos, «una trascendencia más constante del yo en la imaginación y un mundo más rico, variado y dramático que imaginar y superar».

Aquí la clave está en el verbo superar. Nuevamente la distancia espiritual es la que propicia un principio salvífico de libertad: «El espíritu en su propio plano no siente inercia, ni vínculos de hábitos: estos pertenecen sólo a su fundamento en la vida animal»¹⁹. Por eso, al contemplar desde este nuevo plano lo que antes nos sojuzgaba «tanto más ineludible será nuestra percepción de su carácter tragicómico, es decir, de su vanidad como experiencia y de su riqueza como verdad». Por consiguiente, parece decirnos el filósofo, el problema no son tanto las inercias inevitables que implica nuestra insoslayable condición material de huéspedes del mundo, sino la disposición a partir de la cual nos enfrentamos a éste. De ahí que al salvar el mundo desde la distancia espiritual nos salvamos también a nosotros mismos, con lo que encontramos en una curiosa coincidencia entre los puntos de vista de Santayana y su coetáneo Ortega, por más que la salvación de las circunstancias a las que se refiriera este último tenga poco o nada que ver con la vida del espíritu que dibuja el primero.

No obstante, el peligro por antonomasia para el espíritu lo constituye el demonio, toda vez que él mismo es una fuerza espiritual o una enfermedad, por así decirlo, del propio espíritu: «cuando cada pasión comienza a afirmar su derecho primordial a la vida y a la libertad el espíritu da – afirma Santayana – con un enemigo en la esfera espiritual. El demonio ha entrado en escena; por este personaje entiendo cualquier enemigo que sea interno del espíritu»²⁰. Digamos que el demonio es una fuerza anárquica que nos ataca

¹⁶ Ivi, p. 460.

¹⁷ G. Santayana, *Los reinos del ser*, cit., p. 575.

¹⁸ Ivi, p. 585.

¹⁹ Ivi, p. 576.

²⁰ Ivi, p. 594.

sembrado el caos dentro de nosotros. Por eso, más adelante, el filósofo precisa: «Es una rebelión del espíritu contra las fuentes del espíritu; un intento de ser inteligente sin docilidad, espiritual sin piedad, y victorioso sin entregarse a sí mismo». Pero, entonces, ¿cómo alejarse de aquello que, en cierta forma, es también nosotros? Las manifestaciones materiales de este espíritu escindido y perturbado van a ser de diverso tipo, desde la simple locura, la soberbia solipsista, la ilusión de omnipotencia y de omnisciencia y, finalmente y sobre todo, el egotismo, que, como sabemos, opera casi a modo de categoría moral, histórica y cultural en el pensamiento de Santayana, llegando a constituir un rasgo o seña determinante de identidad que va a definir a todo el pensamiento moderno y, muy particularmente, al pensamiento romántico alemán:

la espiritualidad se ha convertido en egotismo; y el ego, lleno de orgullo natural y de celos, comienza a afirmarse desafiadamente, alegando la libertad absoluta de algún impulso natural en el yo, no porque este impulso sea natural (como deben serlo todos los impulsos), ni porque sea racional (pues probablemente no lo es), sino porque este impulso es *mío*, porque *existe*, porque nada puede abolir su *derecho a ser como es*²¹.

La pregunta, por tanto, que se impone es la siguiente: ¿es posible liberar al espíritu de dichas cadenas? Y si es así, ¿cómo se consigue? Siendo el espíritu una floración súbita y circunstancial que ilumina el mundo cabe adelantar ya que la liberación no podrá ser nunca completa, ya que al ser también él una parte integral de la naturaleza está abocado a sufrir sus avatares. Está destinado, en tal sentido, a ser crucificado una y otra vez por toda la eternidad, pero también a resucitar reiteradamente como la luz del mundo. Teniendo en cuenta estos condicionantes naturales, Santayana, aunque no sólo no niega, sino que subraya la posibilidad de instantes e, incluso, de estados de dicha perfecta, si rechaza la viabilidad de una suerte de estado de felicidad invulnerable, aunque «a veces, más espiritualmente, el momento supremo nos libera por completo de las circunstancias, y sentimos que nos hemos retirado a una ciudadela interior de discernimiento profundo y exaltación»²².

Ahora bien, ¿cómo se libera entonces el espíritu de las distracciones que le alejan de sus propios intereses y de su inalienable vocación de libertad? ¿Cómo vencer las tentaciones del mundo, el demonio y la carne? Santayana, de forma implícita, aunque inequívoca, vuelve a remitirse a la experiencia fundamental de su *metanoia*, a ese proceso de transformación que supone un cambio de percepción radical de la realidad. Obsérvese de nuevo la incontestable semejanza de tono y contenido con el fragmento que al respecto incluye en su autobiografía: «La sinceridad nos obliga entonces [...] a considerar nuestras pasiones como locuras, a nuestras opiniones como ilusiones y a identificarnos, no con nosotros mismos, sino con el espíritu dentro de nosotros. [...] Física, existencial e históricamente, nada será cambiado por este segundo discernimiento; pero moralmente todo el mundo natural, junto con nuestras personas en él, será puesto a una cierta distancia, se habrá vuelto extranjero»²³. Así pues, la liberación del espíritu, como no podría ser de otra forma, sólo puede venir desde él mismo. Ya veremos las consecuencias finales que de ello van a derivarse. En cualquier caso, no es difícil identificar en esta forma de liberación espiritual que propugna Santayana ecos evidentes del tipo de beatitud ética que, a través del conocimiento, se alcanza también en los periplos finales de la filosofía de spinoziana: «Pero el espíritu, en la medida en que,

²¹ Ivi, p. 603.

²² Ivi, p. 608.

²³ Ivi, p. 611.

mediante el estudio y la simpatía atentos, haya podido comprender el mundo, será liberado de él, es decir, de la distracción por él»²⁴.

A tales efectos, Santayana aborda una tenaz metodología de desapego que no sólo no implica, tal y como se encarga de repetirnos en diversos lugares, una indiferencia despectiva por el mundo, lo cual sería virtualmente antitético a las disposiciones naturales del espíritu, sino que compondría, más bien, un estado de discernimiento intelectual que, si bien nos separa de cada cosa «con humildad y humor», nos une, sin embargo, al conjunto de ellas «con justicia, caridad y alegría pura». Los recursos para ello implican algunas disposiciones del ánimo bien precisas. Una de ellas es la constancia, que propicia la posibilidad de continuidad en lo que no es, en principio, sino una emanación puramente incidental. También la humildad y la piedad son actitudes, por así decirlo, necesarias, en la medida en que ambas son «mucho más que una virtud prudente, buena para los que desean prosperar en el mundo. Permiten al espíritu reconocer la verdad y ser interiormente constante, claro, valiente e irreprochable»²⁵.

No obstante, la liberación, tal y como ocurre con la libertad, es tan sólo una mera condición negativa que, por sí sola, no nos acarrearía beneficio efectivo alguno, sino tan más bien nos conduciría a «la paz de los muertos», de ahí que la ascesis espiritual del pensamiento santayaniano haya de resolverse en un estadio o estado ulterior: el de la unión. Ahora bien, cabría preguntarse, ¿unión con qué? Si fuera una unión con el Todo, con la realidad, con el mundo, estaríamos hablando de una resolución mística del conflicto que sería virtualmente contraria, por definición, a las perspectivas que sobre el misticismo desarrolla Santayana en diversos lugares de su obra, del misticismo; de ahí que pueda afirmar que «La idea de una unión final con algo específico, inclusiva la omnisciencia o el Ser puro, contradice por tanto la naturaleza misma del espíritu»²⁶. Al igual que Ortega aproximadamente por los mismos años, Santayana no reserva sino palabras de desestima intelectual. Si no de franco desprecio por el camino del misticismo, puesto que, para él, «el éxtasis vacío es una forma de embriaguez, no de sobriedad. En vez de limpiar la lámpara, apaga la luz»²⁷.

Entonces, ¿con que realidad se consuma esa unión que constituye la última instancia de la escatología espiritual que propone Santayana? Pues bien, inevitablemente platónico en su finalismo moral, parece previsible que esa unión última y trascendental se materialice precisamente con el Bien, el cual «como al final sabemos, es la armonía, que ha de establecerse, mediante la definición perfecta y el ajuste mutuo de todas las funciones naturales, tanto en el individuo como en el Estado». No obstante, en un claro reajuste del platonismo al mundo moderno, concluye que «He aquí al antiguo sabio griego, elegido para dar leyes a su ciudad en tiempos anteriores, pero condenado a legislar ahora sólo para sus propios pensamientos»²⁸. Por ello mismo, ese Bien no es ni puede ser una Idea hipostasiada, lo que constituiría una ilusión, sino «un nuevo albor en el interior: allí donde el cielo estaba nublado, se ha hecho un claro, a saber, en la mente»²⁹. Así pues, frente a una Idea de Bien que ilumina la realidad desde un orden trascendente, Santayana, moderno al fin y al cabo,

²⁴ Ivi, p. 616.

²⁵ Ivi, p. 625.

²⁶ Ivi, p. 669.

²⁷ Ivi, p. 623.

²⁸ Ivi, p. 633.

²⁹ Ivi, p. 664.

plantea una instancia interior al sujeto desde la que esa luz se proyecta en forma de armonía de la mente.

También en este estadio, al igual que en el anterior de liberación espiritual, existen una serie de actitudes o recursos imprescindibles. Aquí la virtud que se impone es la caridad, un estado de compasión o simpatía universal que sólo puede ser experimentado desde la distancia espiritual, es decir, desde la lejanía al inevitable tránsito con las cosas que corresponde a toda vida orgánica. Santayana vuelve a rechazar el presunto amor universal que representarían las ideas platónicas, para reivindicar en su lugar esa unión perfecta con el Bien que sólo es posible en la vida espiritual, pero que se apoya en el parentesco y el contagio con el mundo, y que «se torna espiritual en la medida en que se vuelve desinteresado [...] Cuando la simpatía por el mundo alcanza el nivel espiritual, recibe el nombre cristiano y se la llama caridad»³⁰.

El resultado de todo esto se traduce en la posibilidad de una armonía que, no obstante, no podrá olvidar nunca su condición natural de inestabilidad, toda vez que el espíritu, en virtud de los condicionantes que se han señalado, no puede alcanzar ni la unidad ni la perfección físicamente y, en consecuencia, «la llama viva debe danzar [...] Su felicidad habrá de ser siempre volátil, e ideal su unión con el Bien»³¹. Es sólo en este sentido en el que podemos imaginar a Santayana, huésped del mundo, como un hombre presuntamente feliz, y a su pensamiento, no como una mera propuesta teórica de búsqueda de la verdad, sino como una ejemplificación moral razonada que permitiría alcanzar ese estado, recordemos, siempre vulnerable, de beatitud, cuya condición de posibilidad implica la consecución de una distancia emocional con respecto a las personas y los lugares del mundo. De ahí, tal vez, las recurrentes atribuciones de lejanía y frialdad sentimental que por algunos de sus conocidos se han vertido sobre el filósofo, y que sólo lo serían en un sentido aparente y mundano, pero que esconderían, en realidad, una íntima afinidad y una comprensión mucho más profunda de la realidad, en tanto ésta es salvada en la imaginación y elevada a una imposible dimensión de eternidad.

Santayana pasó, en efecto, sus últimos años como huésped distinguido de las Madres Azules de Roma.

Nunca he disfrutado – confiesa en sus *Memorias* – tan plenamente de mi juventud como en mi vejez. Al escribir *Diálogos en el limbo*, *El último puritano* y ahora todas estas descripciones de los amigos de mi juventud y los jóvenes amigos de mi mediana edad, he bebido el placer de la vida más puro y más alegre de lo que fue jamás cuando se mezclaba con todas las ocultas ansiedades y pequeños fastidios de la vida real. Y el espíritu puede entrar en un ser humano mejor quizá en la tranquila vejez y morar allí con más paz que en el alboroto de la aventura. Pero debe ser en soledad³².

El correlato teórico de esta declaración en los *Reinos del Ser* es el siguiente: «Entonces, al espíritu que ha renunciado a todas las cosas, todas se le devuelven: habiendo renunciado a sí mismo también, no puede resistir ninguna inspiración ni pensar mal de ningún bien, sino que los abarca a todos en el objeto eterno de su culto, no como podían haber existido en el mundo de paso y en conjunto, sino como se encuentran idealmente reconciliados en el seno del Bien, en paz al fin consigo mismo y unos con otros»³³. Sí, podemos afirmar, en virtud de sus textos, que el hombre George/Jorge Santayana alcanzó cierta condición de beatitud en

³⁰ Ivi, pp. 663-664.

³¹ Ivi, p. 675.

³² G. Santayana, *Personas y lugares*, cit., p. 566.

³³ G. Santayana, *Los reinos del ser*, cit., pp. 675-676.

sus últimos años en este mundo, lo cual sería del todo irrelevante, si ese estado espiritual no fuera el resultado de una investigación o un camino filosófico en el que, al contrario que la mayor parte de las propuestas en tal sentido de la filosofía moderna, vida y obra alcanzan una insólita coherencia, que se resuelve en una callada y discreta referencia, como corresponde al caso, de admirable ejemplaridad moral.

PURITANISMO Y VIDA ESPIRITUAL O EL ERROR DE PLATÓN

Carmen González Marín

Abstract: In the last pages of *Platonism and the Spiritual Life*, Santayana writes: «Sometimes I ask myself: is not morality an enemy of the spirit worse than immorality». As a negative echo of the title of Santayana's aforementioned book, I will analyze the role played in *The Last Puritan* by what its protagonist, Oliver Alden, sees as Plato's mistake in his own constitution as a tragic character, who can only manage to live a sad life. Oliver Alden represents «the tragedy of the spirit when it is not content to understand but wishes to rule». I am interested in analyzing firstly the interpretation of love that underpins this story of a «sad life», as the representation of a thesis (Puritanism underpins the impossibility of articulating sensuality and love). Secondly, the question of the potential necessity of narrative as a supplement to argumentation; in other words, the necessity of fiction to show a truth that philosophy would not be able to tell.

Keywords: Love, Plato, Puritanism, Santayana, Spiritual Life.

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*Love makes us poets, and the approach of death
should make us philosophers.*

George Santayana, *The Sense of Beauty*

1. Amor(es) y tesis

El relato de *El último puritano* tiene como desencadenante el ensayo que el joven Oliver Alden entrega a su profesor y narrador de la novela para un curso sobre Platón en Harvard. Efectivamente, Oliver informa en la novela a su primo Vanny¹ de que ha tomado ese curso, y, como tarea, decide poner por escrito sus reflexiones en torno a lo que él considera un error de Platón. Una línea que orienta una lectura de *El último puritano* es, así, la diferencia entre amor y deseo, o lo que en realidad es una manera de conceptualizar la *philía* y sus modulaciones: *philía*/ *eros* / *agape*. En principio, quizá no afirmaríamos que es una novela sobre el amor y el deseo, pero no deja de ser significativo que la voz del narrador nos informe de que lo que Oliver se disponía a realizar como ensayo es *ahora* precisamente aquello que lleva a su profesor a escribir su novela.

El último puritano representa quizá la lucha entre razón y espíritu, o entre catolicismo y protestantismo, pero también en un nivel narratológico el combate fallido entre el deseo y el amor, y quizá con más fuerza esto último, precisamente porque se descubre como una lucha no productiva, abortada, frustrada, imposible, en suma.

¿Cómo entiende Oliver a Platón? Naturalmente, la respuesta a bote pronto es «como un puritano», o como alguien que lo es, pero se interpreta erróneamente, o como alguien que debería ser un puritano, o que parece serlo, pero no llega a constituirse como tal propiamente.

Es preciso tener antes de nada en cuenta que el personaje, en plena adolescencia, sufre un golpe que constituye de algún modo el giro definitivo en su corta biografía. Oliver tiene ante

¹ Vanny es el apelativo por el que se conoce a Mario Van der Weyer, primo de Oliver Alden.

sí dos caminos, el que señalara su padre, y el que marca su madre, y toma el segundo de algún modo por una interpretación peculiar del deber. Pero su padre ha muerto – se ha suicidado – después de que él tomara la decisión de regresar al College cerca de su madre, y la proverbial ausencia de percepción moral de ésta le lleva poco más o menos a acusarlo de la muerte de su padre en una situación de abandono². Pese a la injusticia de la acusación de Mrs. Alden, Oliver, poco propenso a los problemas de conciencia, no puede evitar que éstos asomen de alguna manera:

Cuando le dijo que había dejado perecer a su padre, este palo a ciegas vino a dar en el centro mismo de la conciencia de Oliver. El año anterior, venció una gran tentación, resistiendo el fabuloso señuelo del mar, del yatch, de Lord Jim, y aún se congratulaba a sí mismo por aquella decisión. Pero ahora que podía decirse que el mismo dilema se le había ofrecido de nuevo, y que persistiera en su resolución, el caso resultaba totalmente distinto, incluso opuesto; pues ahora no había habido ni tentación ni señuelo; tan solo una fría opción entre dos senderos ninguno de los cuales demasiado atractivo. La solución más ardua ahora habría sido el cambiar sus planes, desafiando a su madre; el sacudir su arnés provinciano, salir de su carril y sumergirse en el torbellino del mundo inmenso, puesto que estaba provisto de amplias facilidades para sobrenadar. Pero le había faltado el nervio necesario, y de aquí que ahora sus escrúpulos puritanos le llevaban a temer que al tomar el camino más fácil había tomado el que no era. De haber hecho él lo que correspondía ¿se habría suicidado su padre?

¿No habría por el contrario revivido? ¿No habrían acaso podido padre e hijo partir para Nápoles, Grecia o Egipto, alegres como dos niños [...]? Así, si había dejado morir a su padre no era en el sentido en que su madre le acusara, sino justamente por haber sido incapaz de sacudirse la influencia de ella y hacer caso omiso del mundo³.

Las cavilaciones de Oliver denotan una concepción según la cual nada que no nos sea arduo puede ser considerado realmente nuestro deber. De modo que tiene necesariamente que acatar la opción que no le agrada pero que, al mismo tiempo, no le expone a ningún tipo de riesgo. Es precisamente esa falta de riesgo lo que define su opción como deber de manera ambigua: arriesgarse hubiera sido más agradable, y quizá por ello no debido, pero al mismo tiempo arriesgarse elimina la inercia de la seguridad y en consecuencia exige un mayor esfuerzo que no hacerlo.

El padre y la madre de Oliver representan dos polos opuestos – la aventura y la seguridad, lo inesperado y lo previsto – y, como puritano, Oliver ha de quedarse con la segunda opción. Pero quizá no necesariamente. El deber no necesariamente está ligado a lo reconocido; sin embargo, él actúa como si así fuera. Le remuerde la conciencia por ello: quizá lo fácil no es exactamente lo que hay que hacer. Esto desvía la atención del puritanismo respecto de lo que es debido y adecuado a una concepción más contextual, acaso. Por eso duele la decisión. Este es un punto crucial en la vida de Oliver, y lo que descubriremos enseguida es que el tema del deber no parece ajeno ni externo al tema del amor, y esa es la razón de las tribulaciones del joven Alden con Platón.

Parece pues un buen tópico sobre el que reflexionar en diferentes niveles. Primero, la anécdota: Oliver, estudiante en Harvard, ocupará la misma habitación que ocupara en su día Emerson, en Divinity Hall, y allí se dispone a escribir un texto acerca de lo que considera un error en Platón. De hecho, Oliver acaba de llegar a Harvard donde le ha precedido Vanny, su primo, y tras su encuentro con Edith, también prima de ambos, que constituye el segundo intento de establecer una relación amorosa por parte de Oliver. Ese encuentro constituye un hito importante en la novela que sirve de contrapunto a otro hito sentimental – el beso de

² G. Santayana, *El último puritano*, trad. de R. Baeza, Buenos Aires, Editorial Sudamericana, 1940, pp. 165-166.

³ *Ivi*, p. 166.

Oliver a Rose la hermana de Jim Iffley, en pleno “despertar” adolescente.

A Oliver le había llevado inicialmente a Harvard un accidente deportivo, un partido de fútbol en el que sufre una lesión desafortunada que se convierte en la ocasión inesperada para ese encuentro con Edith. Es curiosa la escena en la que se narra dicho encuentro. Inicialmente la percepción de Vanny y Edith por parte de Oliver es la de una pareja compenetrada, con complicidades obvias, y ajenos por ello a ese chico de campo que representa él⁴. Sin embargo, la meditación de Oliver tras quedarse solo en su cama al marchar sus dos parientes le lleva a apreciar su verdadera relación con ellos y recíprocamente. Ambos lo quieren y él sabe que son su gente. Quizá lo son porque Oliver está descubriendo una forma peculiar de amor platónico, que no encuentra en Platón⁵.

En segundo lugar ¿por qué le interesa a Oliver el tema que se convierte en centro de su ensayo? Se diría quizá que él no conoce en ningún caso el amor y solo una vicaria forma de amistad. Oliver cree ser querido por sí mismo en algún momento, contra la visión de su madre, por Vanny, por ejemplo, quizá por Jim, antes de sentirse decepcionado por su forma de vida o su forma de ser demasiado mundana se diría. Y ha sido justamente en su encuentro extraño en el barco de vuelta a casa tras la muerte de su padre, inmediatamente antes de su ingreso en Harvard, cuando recuerda y entiende a la perfección las reflexiones de su progenitor en torno a la amistad: cuando se es joven, la amistad es como un ideal pagano, un sentimiento pueril de camaradería; pero el tiempo destruye esa posibilidad – los amigos pasan a ser aquellos que se puede utilizar o manejar –, de modo que el viejo en realidad no los tiene, aunque eso no significa que no pueda ser bondadoso y cordial. En realidad, Alden parece hacerse cargo de la vieja distinción entre tipos de amistad que aprendemos en Aristóteles, sin embargo, el modelo aristotélico de una amistad por interés parece desvanecerse justamente cuando se llega a la edad en que sería más necesaria. El padre de Oliver solo se aleja de la mistificación en torno a las bondades de la amistad quizá como un hombre deliberadamente sin amigos, pero que ha sustituido ese ideal por la posibilidad de otro que denomina caridad, como nombre de la ternura y la desilusión de la edad madura. En suma, la amistad no es lo que parece cuando joven – sino aturdimiento, bienestar y animación juvenil –, y no se puede dar realmente cuando viejo. Si aceptamos una proyección de la «teoría» paterna en la experiencia de Oliver, en realidad, éste es simplemente un viejo *avant la lettre*.

En tercer lugar, como un texto inspirado de manera netamente personal, cuenta el narrador que Oliver escribe acerca de la ignorancia de Platón con respecto al amor. Curiosa apreciación, por cierto, que nos hace recordar las palabras de Sócrates cuando en *Banquete* recuerda que es precisamente de esto, del amor, de lo que sabe algo. Si Oliver considera que Platón es ignorante en lo referente al amor es porque sostiene que cuando habla de ello solo habla del deseo. En otros términos, Platón habla de eros y no de amor. ¿A qué se refiere entonces Oliver cuando usa el término «amor»?

Oliver trata de definir el deseo frente al amor en relación con sus objetos respectivos. Probablemente, pensaríamos que, si cada uno de ellos posee un objeto propio, entonces es obvio que son diferentes, algo como la cocina y la química, que, aunque semejantes en muchos aspectos, no tienen el mismo objeto (un, o la meditación transcendental y la oración que presentan semejanzas, pero tienen definitivamente diferentes objetos – uno mismo en el primer caso, dios en el segundo). De manera que parece que amor y deseo se definen por su

⁴ Cfr. *ivi*, p. 259.

⁵ Cfr. *ivi*, pp. 260-261.

objeto. No obstante, Oliver no puede dejar de notar que en ocasiones pueden compartir objeto. Su contraejemplo, precisamente, nos aporta alguna luz acerca de la definición: el amor es desinteresado, no egoísta, ergo el deseo será precisamente lo contrario, aunque en ocasiones se den en la misma persona y con respecto al mismo objeto.

El hecho de que el deseo pueda darse sin amor y el amor sin deseo parece incontestable y suficiente justificación empírica para la diferenciación establecida desde el principio. Pero no carece de interés el modo en que el joven Alden se refiere a estos dos casos: cuando se trata de amor sin deseo, hablamos del que se siente por parientes, hijos o amigos, es decir *philia*; sin embargo, el deseo sin amor sería el efecto provocado por una «tempting woman». Naturalmente, la elección del género es solo la consecuencia natural del tipo de ejemplo propuesto: un hombre puede amar y desear a su mujer, pero también puede desear a alguna otra «tentadora». Lo que este modo de argumentar nos va a enseñar es que en el deseo al menos el objeto domina y se convierte en lo más relevante y determinante. Los ejemplos, bien presentados, sirven al joven estudiante para concluir, sin más, que el amor es enteramente diferente del deseo y, además que es *unselfish*. De ello se sigue que desde luego el deseo es básicamente *selfish*. Ahora bien, ¿cómo se identifica algo *selfish* y se diferencia de lo que no lo es? No es egoísta dar la vida por otros, y la motivación de tal acto no puede ser el deseo. Naturalmente, si entendemos el deseo como posesión – cosa que de momento no se ha definido de este modo en absoluto en este argumento – sería difícil al mismo tiempo considerar que es una forma de entrega de la vida. De manera que parece que la diferencia estriba en la pareja de opuestos posesión-entrega en efecto. El desinterés, el desprendimiento de lo propio, y lo más propio es la vida, o el tiempo de la vida, es el signo del amor. Oliver, no obstante, agrega algo más: la potencial invisibilidad de quien realmente ama como una fuente de contento también, de modo que la única satisfacción del que ama es la felicidad y la vida buena de los amados sin necesidad de reconocimiento.

Naturalmente, hay que ser muy inexperto para no caer en la cuenta de que esto mismo, esto que se añade como un complemento que adorna moralmente la definición del que ama frente al que desea, es absolutamente obvio en el deseo, en alguna de sus facetas al menos. Quizá Platón ignora lo que es amor, pero lo que es seguro es que Oliver ignora lo que es deseo. Si Oliver pensara, como podría hacerse, que el deseo puede ser perfectamente privado, podría asumir que el deseante es absolutamente invisible y no reconocido y que en esa privacidad puede haber contento y placer. Lo cierto es que Oliver podría haber replicado a esto último afirmando que en el fondo, aunque aparentemente hay algo en común entre esta actitud y la del que ama desinteresadamente – acaso es pleonástico decirlo así –, en realidad distan mucho de parecerse, porque en el deseo, aun cuando entendido privadamente y sin posibilidad alguna de consumación, lo que da valor al deseo siempre es la experiencia del sujeto que desea, su deseo como suyo, mientras que en el amor el valor se desplaza al objeto y si hay contento en quien ama no es por una experiencia privada, sino por lo bueno que suceda o pueda suceder a otros, esos que constituyen el objeto de amor.

De modo que, en último extremo, Oliver nos lleva a pensar, y se lleva a sí mismo a decir, que, aunque pareciera que el objeto era lo más interesante en el deseo, es sólo una ficción. Lo interesante es lo que hay en el propio sujeto, su impulso interior, y, además, independientemente de que se consume o no el movimiento que el deseo inaugura sigue siendo ese movimiento en sus orígenes, en lo recóndito del yo, lo que le confiere su particular modo de encantamiento.

Sin embargo, no acaba aquí el argumento de su trabajo. La cara negativa del amor y el deseo también se presenta como material de apoyo para confirmar la tesis de Oliver. En el

caso del amor la cara negativa, el dolor, podría ser la consecuencia de la empatía hacia los otros. Sin embargo, no es así exactamente, sino que se trata más bien de «moral distress». Y ese malestar moral se debe a dos causas que en realidad denotan alejamiento sentimental por parte de quien lo sufre. La causa de ese malestar en suma es la percepción de los otros: la visión de quien inmerecidamente sufre o la visión de quien se ha vuelto indigno o miserable. No es empatía que mueve o conmueve cuando el otro o los otros, los amados, sufren, sino que de nuevo el giro que da Oliver a su modo de reforzar su tesis nos da que pensar: el malestar moral es una frustración de las expectativas, algo de nuevo interno, y que nada tiene que ver con los otros, con los amados. El que ama y ve al otro sufriendo, y no solo convertido en un miserable, puede sufrir con él o puede sufrir porque el otro le ha defraudado en sus esperanzas, o, más interesante, porque el sufrimiento del otro exhibe la ineficiencia del que lo ama.

Aparentemente, en este punto se da por satisfecho en lo referente a la necesidad de justificar su tesis con ejemplos. Pasa por ello a otro punto de ataque contra Platón, que en este caso es el objeto del deseo. Platón cree que el deseo puede tener todo tipo de objetos elevados – «superior things» –, objetos que se sitúan entre los dos extremos de la belleza sensible y la Idea de Belleza, pero que obviamente tienen que ver con lo mismo en un cierto modo. Sin embargo, y este es el error de Platón, esos objetos superiores siguen siendo objeto de pasión erótica, de deseo que sólo puede satisfacerse mediante la posesión – de nuevo –, y aquí añade con asco, en una cierta forma de orgasmo. De modo que en realidad lo que molesta a Oliver no es una confusión categorial o de otra índole, sino más bien que en el concepto platónico de amor se presuma una unión carnal – ése es el verdadero error. Porque en el amor no se presupone, es más, al parecer, el amor se contradice con semejante tipo de unión.

Naturalmente, el colmo del despropósito es el que proporciona el ejemplo de la mística cristiana, que, platónicamente sigue pensando en la unión con la divinidad y, confundiendo en sus modos de expresarla, esa unión con algo carnal. Este es en el fondo pues el problema. En el deseo independientemente de cualquier otra consideración hay carne, carne que se presupone siempre, y la consecuencia de todo esto es que Platón permite que el deseo corrompa la noción de amistad.

Hemos llegado al punto central del problema que quiere resaltar Oliver. Si el amor se confunde con el deseo o se mezcla con él al menos, cualquier forma de amor en la que pensemos, particularmente la más elevada quizá que es la amistad, queda manchada, polucionada, corrompida por aquél. Los adjetivos que se aplican a amistad son «clara» y «fuerte», mientras que al deseo le corresponde «sensual». Lo temido es, pues, la sensualidad que puede inmiscuirse inopinadamente en cualquier situación en que potencialmente sería excluida o ahuyentada por la fortaleza y claridad de la amistad.

Si Platón no se equivoca en cambio cuando afirma que estar enamorado es una forma de locura, se sobreentiende que es porque estar enamorado tiene que ver con el deseo y no con el amor; y si también acierta, pese a todo, en lo que concierne a la magnitud, la grandeza o la dignidad de los objetos del deseo es porque reconoce que pueden no ser seres humanos, es decir, porque en ciertos casos esos objetos se dignifican al no ser carnales. Es justamente en este sentido en el que Oliver comienza a entender cómo Platón podría llegar a aunar amor y deseo, en tanto en cuanto el objeto puede ser intelectual y específicamente en el caso de la Idea de Belleza. Efectivamente, Oliver se sitúa en ese punto de *Banquete* en el cual se ha procedido a realizar toda la transición desde una criatura y su belleza particular hasta «el ancho mar de la belleza». Es pues filosóficamente como el amor se desliga del deseo,

aunque pudiera haber sido mucho más correcto por parte de Platón haber señalado que no sólo en filosofía puede darse tal interpretación o experiencia, sino también en la vida ordinaria.

Y bien: las historias de amor de Oliver ¿son el ejemplo que cuadra con su crítica a Platón? La verdad es que responder a esta pregunta nos llevaría lejos, pero al mismo tiempo creo que se puede responder a bote pronto que no lo son: en el caso de Edith, hay en Oliver un afán de posesión de la persona de su amiga que parece no casar bien con la idea de una relación *unselfish*; en el caso de Rose, el conato de relación es meramente erótica, y el segundo intento es el rescate de algo al parecer olvidado pero al mismo tiempo la única tabla de salvación de un personaje que se ha quedado solo – y no solo por su propia falta de tino, sino por circunstancias incontrolables. Rose no acepta su oferta – en el fondo prefiere a Vanny, que «sabía olvidarse completamente de sí mismo» por ella, ironías de la vida, mientras que Oliver parece pedirle algo, al menos que se acomode a su vida, como a Edith.

En resumen, ¿cuál es el modo puritano del amor? Y ¿cómo se opone al modo del deseo? El modo puritano de amor es simplemente eso, el amor, mientras que el modo del deseo es absolutamente anti-puritano, se halla en las antípodas, pero no solo por la carne, sino porque parece agarrarse, adherirse a lo concreto, al objeto que se trata de alcanzar, mientras que en el amor el objeto está fuera y simplemente se tiende a otorgarle todo tipo de bienes.

Walter Benjamin escribió que «el amor platónico es aquel que ama a la amada en su nombre mismo»⁶, como si hubiera un modo que no precisa de condiciones, que no responde necesariamente a descripciones, que puede condensarse en un mero nombre. Quizá un amor incondicionado debería ser un modelo opuesto al que molesta a Oliver en Platón, a saber, ese que parece no poder evadirse de lo concreto. Ese amor potencialmente incondicionado ¿sería un amor, tal como lo debería pensar un puritano, un amor sin determinaciones, sin la concreción material de sus objetos? Paradójicamente, por definición no, puesto que el amor debe estar atento a las condiciones de sus objetos, no como motivación erótica sino como acicate para la benevolencia. El deseo, en cambio, en la medida en que es potencialmente privado, puede abstraerse absolutamente de toda condición de su objeto, y en realidad pueda ser el mejor exponente del amor platónico. Si el carácter indeseable o egoísta radica en que el yo tiene demasiado peso en el deseo y ninguno en el amor, me temo que las historias de Oliver nos mostrarían lo contrario. Un motivo más para hacer de su vida una vida triste, sin duda.

2. Argumentos y suplementos

Nada más lejos de la vocación de quien piensa acerca de una novela que convertirla en un objeto transparente a través del cual alcanzar a percibir la vida o la personalidad de su autor, ni siquiera sus ideas filosóficas. Solo una cierta simpleza difícilmente tolerable tras Wimsatt⁷ y la narratología, nos permitiría aportar un mínimo valor a ese tipo de acercamiento. Pero, curiosamente, hay una gran tendencia a leer *El último puritano* como si se desconociese la eficacia del ataque contra la falacia intencional – y su tino, por cierto – así como los fundamentos metodológicos de ciertas formas de análisis textual, que radican

⁶ W. Benjamin, *Discursos interrumpidos*, Madrid, Taurus, 1972, p. 14.

⁷ W. Wimsatt, *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry*, Lexington, The University of Kentucky Press, 1954. Cfr. especialmente el capítulo «The Intentional Fallacy», pp. 3-19.

precisamente en la inutilidad de la figura del autor, al menos en lo que concierne a los elementos más interesantes a la hora de interpretar los textos. Lo cierto es que, independientemente de todo, en este caso hay que forzarse enormemente para no caer en esa falacia, puesto que el autor, con su nombre y algún elemento relevante de su biografía, está presente en la novela – tan es así que ésta se subtitula «una memoria en forma de novela».

El tono de la novela puede justificar una distancia suficiente como para interpretar la figura de Santayana y el texto como una modalidad de presencia a la Hitchcock. Su sentido del humor, especialmente, no parece permitir una lectura e interpretación no oblicua. Sería interesante un análisis pormenorizado del estilo indirecto libre, técnica constante en la narración, con la cual el narrador nos da cuenta de las interioridades peculiares de los personajes, de sus voces, desde una tonalidad muchas veces especialmente irónica. Sin duda, uno de esos personajes retratados de este modo es por antonomasia la madre de Oliver. Ello merecería un trabajo en sí mismo.

Si *El último puritano* nos inclinara fácilmente hacia una lectura aquejada del prejuicio autobiográfico, quizá es el momento de tratar de eliminarlo, y una manera de hacerlo, no accidental, es leer con cuidado el marco del relato que nos presenta la vida y muerte del joven Alden. Desde el Prólogo se anuncia que el conjunto de episodios que de alguna manera señalan el punto de partida material de la escritura de la novela, una serie de encuentros entre Santayana-personaje del ya ficticio prólogo, y Vanny, personaje de su novela, discurren en torno a recuerdos de ambos, pero que en realidad esa reiterada rememoración es más que otra cosa una *meditación en voz alta*.

Ese diálogo versa sobre algo tan ligero como es el hecho de que las clases sociales han desaparecido, una de esas clases al menos. En otras palabras, que las cosas tras la guerra – y ese no es un elemento inocente ni ligero – ya no son lo que eran. Sin embargo, lo que interesa recalcar es la degradación de la fantasía masculina en el vestir a favor de una indumentaria seria. ¿Es esta pérdida la de un tipo humano, la que preludia la pérdida de otro tipo humano, el puritano en este caso?

En general, hay un elemento que sorprende no poco y es el paso de lo intrascendente a la propuesta de escribir un relato acerca de la vida de Oliver Alden. Lo «intrascendente» sería la diferencia entre las modas en el vestir de antes de la guerra y las de después, es decir, la mediocridad del presente en asuntos de vestuario como un signo de los tiempos. Ese paso hace pensar si no se acabará por contagiarse de intrascendente lo que no lo era, o, al contrario, se hará trascendente lo que no debería ser interpretado así. Santayana-personaje opone no obstante a la propuesta de su joven amigo una serie de cuestiones no irrelevantes. La primera y principal es, sin duda, si realmente Oliver tuvo una vida que pueda narrarse.

Alguien que lucha contra la naturaleza, que se guarda para lo mejor, y que es conducido por su propia filosofía al fracaso de ésta en un sentido práctico, ¿tuvo realmente una vida? ¿Qué vida? ¿La vida de un fraile en potencia que lucha contra sí mismo? Se trata, quizá, de narrar el vacío, la falta de misterio de quien parece misterioso – como las mujeres. Se trataría de narrar lo que no es narrable sino argumentable – ¿una novela de tesis? –, algo para lo que no hay «materiales», o para lo que habría que inventarlos. Vanny confunde la novela con la transcripción de diarios, cartas, las memorias de Irma o del padre de Alden, de textos documentales, en suma. A la aprensión de Santayana respecto de lo que ignora, Vanny responde con la expresión de un prejuicio: que lo único interesante que no sabría tratar Santayana en realidad no es necesario tratarlo – el amor – porque la vida de Oliver es *una vida triste*.

La aprensión del potencial novelista se cifra en tres puntos en realidad: en primer lugar,

la carencia de materiales; en segundo lugar, la sensibilidad hacia las escenas amorosas; y, finalmente, el hecho de que habrían de aparecer personajes vivos⁸. Respecto de la manera en que se resuelven estas tres aprensiones, me interesa particularmente el caso de la segunda. No habría que preocuparse por las escenas de amor: no es interesante otra historia de amores y, además, subrayo, esta sería *la historia de una vida triste*. No olvidemos que esa historia de una vida triste nace de una reflexión acerca del amor precisamente. Y que esa historia de vida triste es en realidad la representación de una tesis: la vida llena de amores es una vida alegre. La vida de un puritano no es una vida llena de amores, aunque el puritanismo tiene que ver con el exceso de restricción y de libertad a la vez – con la imposibilidad de articular lo uno y lo otro, la sensualidad y el amor⁹.

Es necesaria una aclaración acerca de la potencial ligadura entre puritanismo y pureza: la argumentación de Santayana se convierte en una desviada apreciación sobre la vida sentimental o amorosa de Oliver en la boca de Vanny:

No creo que Oliver llegara a estar nunca realmente enamorado. Las mujeres eran para él más bien un estorbo. El creía que le gustaban naturalmente, y ellas por su parte creían que gustaban de él; pero siempre faltaba algo entre ellos. O consideraba a todas las mujeres como señoras, más o menos bonitas, atractivas e interesantes. Pero nunca llegó a descubrir que todas las señoras son mujeres¹⁰.

La deficiencia de Oliver, aunque bien definida por Vanny – *no se dio cuenta de que las señoras son mujeres* – en un juego de palabras de una recalcitrante misoginia, reinterpretada y recontextualizada por Santayana inmediatamente de un modo curioso. Resulta que Oliver participaba a ojos de Vanny del mismo malentendido del que eran víctimas las mujeres con las que se cruzó, puesto que las mujeres de principios del XX, estaban demasiado constreñidas por las convenciones, y, al tiempo, demasiado libres interiormente, o quizá a la inversa. Algo de la apreciación peculiar de Montaigne en su ensayo sobre la amistad resuena en este párrafo. Las mujeres pueden ser amigas de los varones quizá, pero ser amigas en este momento exige una renuncia que convierte la amistad en frustrante. Si esta es la interpretación correcta debería dar que pensar: acaso la amistad exige algún tipo de vida sentimental, quizá solo en el caso de las mujeres, porque las mujeres no pueden atarnos sino, *por una parte*, como consignó Montaigne¹¹.

En las mujeres ¿se acaba por confundir la amistad con la convención de una relación que necesariamente debe redefinirse en otro sentido inmediatamente? ¿Quizá es el varón quien interpreta que la relación con una mujer acabará por ser interpretada por ella como una relación convencional, que le exigirá una respuesta que, por ser el fruto de un malentendido, romperá la relación de amistad? El diagnóstico de Santayana es más bien que lo que sería una necesidad natural, parte de las alegrías de la vida, queda excluido en este tipo de personas – demasiado libres y constreñidas a la vez –, de modo que sus vidas se convierten en frustrantes dado que no son capaces de expresar su ternura:

El sexo para esta gente no es sino un estorbo y no consiguen relacionarlo, como un elemento de placer, con el sentimiento que experimentan por la gente que quieren. Así, la sensualidad continúa siendo para ellos una cosa repugnante, y la ternura permanece incompleta¹².

⁸ G. Santayana, *El último puritano*, cit., p. 24.

⁹ Cfr. *ivi.*, p. 22.

¹⁰ Cfr. *ivi.*, p. 21.

¹¹ M. de Montaigne, *De la amistad*, en *Id., Ensayos I*, Madrid, Cátedra, 1985, pp. 241-256.

¹² G. Santayana, *El último puritano*, cit., p. 22.

Aunque sea una novela en la que el amor parece anunciarse como ausente, es su ausencia parte del mensaje de la novela misma ¿Qué es pues *El último puritano*? Publicada a una edad ya proveya, y tras varios decenios de gestación, viene precedida por una cita de Alain, de lo más significativo: «Se suele decir que la experiencia habla por boca de los hombres de edad; pero la mejor experiencia que estos hombres pueden aportarnos es la de su juventud rescatada».

La cita nos hace pensar que la novela contendrá la condensación de una juventud mucho tiempo ha finiquitada, rescatada como único salvavidas para el viejo que ahora relata esas experiencias. Con no poca crueldad, se diría, la juventud como el tiempo de una experiencia valiosa debe conservarse, preservarse, hasta el punto de hacer morir al protagonista de esa experiencia. Pero hacerle morir supone evitar que pueda llegar a hablar como hombre de edad de esa misma experiencia, que ahora resulta ser vampirizada por otro viejo. La experiencia que se recoge no es propiamente, a juzgar por lo que se anuncia en el marco supuestamente verídico de la narración, la del autor, sino la de otros sujetos, especialmente Oliver, cuya vida desde luego no ha alcanzado el momento adecuado para hablar de la experiencia rescatada. Por tanto, la experiencia del protagonista parece ser desde este momento tan valiosa como irrelevante. Y ¿en qué sentido podría ser relevante la experiencia del narrador si no nos narra la suya propia? ¿Es su experiencia como observador lo suficientemente valiosa como para convertirse en ese objeto precioso que en edad avanzada se puede rescatar? Hay algo de sorprendente en este hecho: quizá lo que la voz del hombre de edad recupera es la experiencia de una vida sin experiencia demasiado narrable – cuánto más lo es la vida de Vanny, de Jim, o de Peter Alden. Pero en todo caso, la cita de Alain tomada en serio abre la puerta al relato autobiográfico. Sin embargo, las reglas de la pragmática de la lectura nos obligan a aceptar el marco que se nos propone. De modo que nos encontramos en las puertas de la aporía: se nos propone un relato que no puede construirse ni constituirse como debiera ser, es decir se nos da un relato deficiente al parecer. Pero ¿es que acaso hay algún tipo de relato no autobiográfico que no sea deficiente en este sentido? Si la respuesta es, como parece, afirmativa, entonces concluiremos como corolario que la novela es imposible.

El narrador nos coloca en una situación que mantiene esa sensación que provocara el texto de Alain: la novela es un recorrido que se va a situar entre dos escenas-tipo semejantes – el diálogo entre un viejo y un joven en torno a recuerdos de ambos, o recuerdos comunes de torno a una figura, la del joven amigo muerto trágicamente. Pero ese diálogo no lo es en puridad, sino que más bien entra en la categoría de la meditación – como una tonalidad afectiva más que un género literario. Es la distancia entre el diálogo y la meditación lo que media entre el texto y la vida.

¿Y el epílogo? El epílogo es la poética del autor-narrador, ya construida su obra, con la seguridad de haber «regresado a la cuadra sano y salvo» tras la excursión por lo ajeno – lo ajeno *como técnica* desde luego. Y los pilares de su poética son, creo, dos: el primero se relaciona con la oposición entre la verdad y la ficción, como no podría ser de otro modo; el segundo con el papel que la imaginación frente a la mimesis desempeña en la novela, cosa que, desde luego, es una manera paralela de tratar lo mismo. La manera en que se interpreta el papel de la ficción, como el de la imaginación, parte de la constatación de la imposibilidad del triunfo de la verdad en este mundo, y de la imposibilidad de un *objetivismo* real. De modo que, en el fondo, el hecho de que no podamos pensar en términos puramente objetivistas convierte a la ficción y a su suelo en el modo y la base por antonomasia de la referencia al mundo y a la experiencia humana.

Es curioso, en este sentido que al ser criticada la obra por su alejamiento del realismo – y esta crítica no deja de ser interesante – Vanny conceda, como un favor menor, la validez de la obra como ficción. En realidad, Vanny se ve excesivamente donjuanesco, y ésta es su primera apreciación; a continuación, ve a Oliver y a todos los demás como excesivamente inteligentes y filosofantes. El problema, en suma, es que su grado de realismo dista mucho de ser el deseable, y sin embargo es al parecer en esta deficiencia en la que reside no sólo el valor de la ficción, lo cual es una tautología, sino, lo que es más interesante, su valor como filosofía. Vanny, como tantas veces se ha puesto de manifiesto, señala que puede que en esta obra de ficción haya una mejor filosofía que en todos los demás libros de su autor. La respuesta a la perplejidad del autor, ante tal consideración, no tiene desperdicio: «porque en éste, no arguye usted, ni trata de demostrar ni de destruir nada, sino que se limita a pintar un cuadro». Y continúa con desparpajo: «Lo malo de ustedes, los filósofos, es que equivocan casi siempre su vocación. En vez de dedicarse a la poesía, como debían, se empeñan ustedes en formular las leyes del universo, físicas y morales, y se indignan unos con otros porque su inspiración no es idéntica»¹³.

De modo que la filosofía no es al arte de la argumentación, ni de la construcción de sistemas que hay que defender como fortalezas contra el enemigo, ni complementariamente el arte de hacer caer fortalezas ajenas abominables o mal guardadas. Antes bien, la filosofía es un arte pictórico. Se trataría de representar mundos, interpretaciones o construcciones sin ánimo de totalidad, mostrar más que decir.

Pero si tiramos del hilo, en realidad la demanda del comienzo estaba llamada al fracaso, o al éxito que supone su fracaso quizá. Si el autor lograra su propósito no respondería a lo exigido, y si respondiera a lo exigido no hubiera sido una novela. Por otra parte, si hubiera sido una historia fidedigna, no habría logrado transmitir la filosofía profunda que transmite, y, si lo hace, lo es contra la propia técnica filosófica. Sin quererlo, desde luego, Vanny nos conduce a la aristotélica conclusión de que la poesía es más filosófica que la historia. Cerramos el círculo con la autocita que resulta de la cita por parte de Vanny de un libro de Santayana:

Quando la vida ha tocado a su término y el mundo se ha desvanecido en humo ¿qué realidades podría el espíritu en nosotros seguir considerando como propias sin ilusión ni engaño, salvo las formas de aquellas mismas ilusiones que urdieron nuestra historia?¹⁴.

De manera que lo que realmente puede rememorar el viejo, como lo más valioso de la experiencia no es la vida misma sino «las formas de las ilusiones forjadas a lo largo de su historia».

Si parece impropio tratar de leer *El último puritano* con el tipo de expectativas que tachaba de impertinentes Wimsatt, seguramente no lo es menos interpretarla como un ejemplo de la filosofía de Santayana. ¿Para qué habría de escribir una novela un filósofo? Resulta, en cambio, extremadamente sencillo afirmar que el texto no es sino una dramatización de la batalla filosófica que se produce en el interior del autor entre el catolicismo y el naturalismo, o el espíritu y la razón, y tratar de ver plasmados en Oliver y su antagonista, Mario, dos extremos filosóficos y no sólo vitales.

Afirmaba Singer que en *El último puritano* Santayana ofrece no tanto un procedimiento de decisión para describir la verdadera naturaleza de uno mismo, sino *algo mejor*. Y si

¹³ Cfr. *ivi.*, p. 579.

¹⁴ Se trata de una cita del libro de 1927 *Platonismo y vida espiritual*, Madrid, Trotta, 2006.

ofrece algo mejor es precisamente porque ha pintado dos personajes, uno de ellos ineficiente y trágico, mientras que el otro es un ejemplo del tipo de sujeto capaz de salir adelante, cuya tragedia es «la tragedia del espíritu cuando no se conforma con comprender, sino que desea gobernar»¹⁵. Si es mejor lo que ofrece la novela que lo que podría ofrecer un texto argumentativo es, decía, precisamente, por su carácter representacional. Así, cree Singer, los retratos del protagonista y el antagonista permitirían plantear dos modelos del yo: aquél que posee un núcleo alrededor del cual las diferentes experiencias dibujan circunferencias concéntricas, y aquel otro sin núcleo, cuya representación más adecuada sería una espiral que indica la continuidad entre el yo y sus experiencias. Naturalmente, el primer modelo es el llamado al fracaso.

No me he propuesto tratar de la construcción del sujeto en este libro, sino más bien un par de cuestiones más modestas y obvias quizá. Mi propósito era realizar un camino doble: por una parte, el de las relaciones entre amor y deseo; por otro el de las relaciones entre narración y filosofía. Este doble camino, paralelo en principio, puede llevarnos a una interesante intersección en la medida en que Platón elabora una escenografía ficcional para generar las mediaciones necesarias que hagan plausible una teoría del conocimiento en la que eros es precisamente la metáfora. Maestro de la mejor retórica, en esencia el método que usa Platón es la expresión de la fuerza de lo ficcional para hacer fuerte un argumento.

Cuenta Giorgio Agamben que hay una manera de interpretar la parodia más antigua que aquella de la cual deriva nuestro uso moderno del término. Según ese modo antiguo de entender la parodia, ésta se refiere «a la esfera de la técnica musical»¹⁶: indica separación entre *melos* y *logos*. Si, contra lo que era la norma, la música no se adaptaba a las palabras, se dice que los rapsodas cantan *para ten oden* (contra el canto, o al lado del canto) de modo que la parodia no es sino la ruptura del nexo natural entre música y lenguaje. Se trata pues de un desajuste, de una ruptura de las expectativas, una modalidad desconcertante y desconcertada de lo indecoroso.

Una de las enseñanzas de *El último puritano* es que no conocemos la partitura de la vida, pero debemos ponerle letra. Y hacerlo nos obliga a perseguir un camino, deambulante, como el de la figura de ese sujeto del que hablaba al comienzo: una figura en espiral, no desde luego un conjunto de círculos concéntricos alrededor de un núcleo dado. Si nos empeñamos en poner la letra que hemos aprendido o escogitado previamente, no cabe duda de que el resultado será paródico. Deambular, no solo filosóficamente, sino vitalmente, parece la exigencia del canto de la vida – como el poema del joven Santayana nos dice, los días, son dulces, si deambulamos a través de ellos sin esperanza (me refiero al verso de uno de sus poemas «Sweet are the days we Wander with no hope»). Pero perder la esperanza quizá no le está permitido a quien quiere algo más que sobrevivir y trata de comprender la vida, darle un sentido, dirigirla.

El concepto de *suplemento* es utilizado por Jacques Derrida para referirse a aquello que suple y que de alguna manera excede lo suplido: ¿sería *El último puritano* un perfecto *suplemento* de la filosofía o de la novela? Vanny, suficientemente crítico con la primera, pretende descubrirnos que en el fondo esta *novela* redime de la hostilidad que expresa el discurso de los filósofos contra todos aquellos que no participan de mismo punto de vista o que simplemente no ven lo mismo. La razón es obvia: el modelo narrativo permite «dramatizar» posiciones diferentes y evitar el dogmatismo potencial de un discurso dirigido

¹⁵ I. Singer, *The World of George Santayana*, in «Hudson Review», 7(3), 1954, pp. 356-372.

¹⁶ G. Agamben, *Profanaciones*, traducción de F. Costa y E. Castro, Buenos Aires, Hidalgo, 2005, p. 50.

hacia el encuentro definitivo con la verdad. Ésta, la verdad, gusta de esconderse entre la proliferación de opiniones para dejarse ver cuando no se intenta desvelarla. Es una excelente razón para convertir a los filósofos en *poetas*, que finalmente quizá lograrán una vez más hacer de una vida que seguramente no merece ser recordada, por *triste*, la vida memorable de un sujeto singularizado como referente de una descripción definida. En realidad, una de las *enseñanzas* que como lectores podemos extraer de esta novela escrita por un filósofo es que las vidas, aun las vidas tristes, *se redimen* cuando son contadas, no como un ejercicio documental, sino como un ejercicio de la imaginación. Y que, por ello, si corresponde al filósofo comprender la vida humana está llamado a convertirnos en «criaturas de la imaginación».

VERSO UN'ECO-ONTOLOGIA: PER UNA RILETTURA CONTEMPORANEA DEI *REALMS OF BEING*

Mattia Manzoni

Abstract: George Santayana's philosophy is undergoing a gradual rediscovery by scholars. However, one aspect of his thought remains underexplored: his ontology, which reveals a naturalistic approach that focuses on the idea of an entity that is always ecologically situated. This could be defined as an eco-ontology. This article addresses this lack of attention by providing a clear articulation of this position, showing how it can be reinterpreted and integrated into contemporary philosophical contexts, such as environmentalism, speculative realism, and object-oriented ontology. The goal is to contribute to a better understanding of Santayana's thought and to demonstrate its relevance and applicability in contemporary philosophy.

Keywords: George Santayana, Ontology, Naturalism, Ecology, Object-Oriented Ontology.

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La natura globale entra nella storia: ecco qualcosa di veramente inedito in filosofia.
Michel Serres, *Il contratto naturale*

1. Introduzione: una questione di termini

Il presente articolo si ripropone di ovviare in parte a una lacuna presente negli studi su Santayana che, concentrandosi in prevalenza sulla sua produzione di carattere estetico, letterario e culturale, hanno finito per trascurare in larga misura gli aspetti epistemologici e ontologici della sua filosofia. Il presente lavoro punta a mostrare come il sistema ontologico esposto nei *Realms of Being* non solo sia estremamente attuale, trovando alcuni punti di contatto con alcune delle ontologie contemporanee più rilevanti, ma sia anche fertile di ulteriori possibilità speculative, a partire dal suo essere – *in nuce* – un sistema eco-ontologico. Come vedremo, l'esplorazione di tale sistema può aprire nuove prospettive per la riflessione filosofica sull'ambiente e sul ruolo dell'uomo nel mondo, contribuendo a una filosofia più attuale ed impegnata.

Prima di iniziare è però necessario chiarire cosa si intenda con il termine Eco-ontologia. Attualmente, sono infatti due i possibili sensi con cui si può far rientrare in tale categoria l'ontologia di Santayana. Il primo è il senso che gli viene attribuito dal coniatore del termine Eco-ontologia (*Eco-Ontology*), ossia T.M. Alexander, autore del testo *The Human Eros: Eco-ontology and the Aesthetics of Existence*¹. Nell'opera, Alexander concentra la sua analisi su due filosofi chiave: John Dewey e George Santayana, e introduce il termine in relazione al primo. Secondo l'autore, l'utilizzo del termine Eco-ontologia si rende necessario per evitare le implicazioni riduttive associate al termine naturalismo². Volendo

¹ T.M. Alexander, *The Human Eros: Eco-ontology and the Aesthetics of Existence*, New York, Fordham University Press, 2013.

² Ivi, pp. 16-17.

evitar ciò, preferisce impiegare il termine suddetto, definito come «the idea of an ontology of environed or ecologically situated being»³.

Ora, è possibile applicare tale definizione all'opera di Santayana, dato che Alexander conia e utilizza tale termine per definire la filosofia di Dewey? Nonostante le differenze tra i due sistemi, già discusse da Santayana nell'articolo *Dewey's Naturalistic Metaphysic*⁴ tale applicazione sembra appropriata. Non solo la filosofia di Santayana rappresenta un'originale reinterpretazione del Naturalismo, ma concepisce l'essere umano come parte integrante di un ecosistema. Questa peculiarità la si può derivare principalmente dall'ossatura epistemologica che struttura il suo pensiero. Per Santayana la conoscenza è infatti un concetto intrinsecamente relazionale e affonda le proprie radici in campo biologico. Come scrive in maniera efficace in *The Unknowable*, la conoscenza è «a relation of living bodies to their environment»⁵. Non solo, come emerge dalle sue opere, il soggetto è sempre racchiuso da un campo d'azione (*field of action*) che forma attorno ad esso un cosmo relativamente ordinato, ed è consapevole dell'esistenza di altri centri solo in virtù del fatto che essi sono dinamicamente connessi alla sua stessa esistenza⁶. È un centro particolare di esperienza, all'interno della quale si rivelano un circolo di essenze, ossia di universali, fortemente limitato, tanto che diversi osservatori sono destinati – secondo Santayana – a scorgere differenti regioni della stessa Natura⁷.

Questo per quanto concerne il primo senso. Il secondo, che non esclude il primo, deriva invece dal significato più comune del prefisso “Eco”, ovvero quello legato al pensiero ecologico e, di conseguenza, alle riflessioni riguardanti la questione ambientale *tout court*. Ora, è possibile collegare una riflessione teoretica, come è quella di Santayana, con un'istanza che si presenta come squisitamente etico-morale, se non politica? Secondo Michel Serres, infatti, la questione ambientale ci spinge a pensare a un possibile nuovo contratto, ossia rapporto, col mondo naturale⁸. Come può quindi una filosofia elaborata in un contesto totalmente altro rispetto a quello odierno, con le sue problematiche, ricadere in tale categoria? Ebbene, ciò può accadere perché, come spiega lo stesso Santayana in *A General Confession*, il suo sistema ontologico non ha un fine meramente teoretico o speculativo, ma ha piuttosto una finalità di tipo etico-morale, dato che punta a sostenere e a giustificare un'etica di tipo razionale⁹: un'etica che concerne, per quanto riguarda l'atteggiamento nei confronti del mondo naturale, o meglio della Materia, un atteggiamento di riverenza (*reverence*) come espresso nella prefazione di *The Realm of Matter*¹⁰. Un elemento, questo, presente nell'ontologia di Santayana, ma assente in quella di Dewey. Come sottolinea Jessica Wahn, la differenza principale tra i due sistemi risiede nel fatto che la centralità della prospettiva e della potenza umana nella filosofia di Dewey urta contro il senso di umiltà e persino di pietà nei confronti del mondo naturale che caratterizza Santayana¹¹. Un punto, questo, che sarà oggetto di analisi e approfondimento nel prosieguo dell'articolo. Tuttavia, già a questo punto si può notare come sia proprio in virtù di

³ Ivi, p. 29: «L'idea di un essere ecologicamente o ambientalmente situato».

⁴ G. Santayana, *Dewey's Naturalistic Metaphysic*, in «The Journal of Philosophy», XXII (1925), 25, pp. 673-688.

⁵ G. Santayana, *The Unknowable: The Herbert Spencer Lecture*, Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1923, p. 22: «Una relazione dei corpi viventi con il loro ambiente».

⁶ G. Santayana, *The Realm of Matter*, in *Realms of Being*, New York, Scribner's, 1942, pp. 202-203.

⁷ G. Santayana, *Il Regno dell'Essenza*, trad. it. di M. Manzoni, Roma, Aracne, 2023, p. 83.

⁸ M. Serres, *Il contratto naturale*, trad. it. di A. Sfera, Milano, Feltrinelli, 2019.

⁹ G. Santayana, *A General Confession*, in *The Philosophy of George Santayana*, Evanston and Chicago, Northwestern University Press, 1940, pp. 3-30.

¹⁰ G. Santayana, *The Realm of Matter*, in *Realms of Being*, cit., p. 191.

¹¹ J. Wahn, *Are Metaphysics and Naturalism contradictory?* in «Overheard in Seville», n. 40, 2022, pp. 66-71.

quest'enfasi sulla riverenza verso la natura che la filosofia di Santayana può essere considerata una solida base filosofica per un'eventuale filosofia ambientalista.

2. Un'ontologia (in)attuale: Santayana e l'OOO

Ora, stabilita l'inclusione della filosofia di Santayana nella categoria dell'Eco-ontologia, due questioni rimangono ancora aperte al dibattito. La prima riguarda l'attualità della sua ricerca ontologica, avvertita dai contemporanei come sì vasta e conclusiva, ma fin troppo varia ed eterogenea. La seconda, invece, verte sul suo potenziale di sviluppo, ossia se la sua posizione possa fornire nuove prospettive per affrontare le problematiche ambientali attuali. Il primo aspetto sarà approfondito nel presente sottocapitolo, mentre il secondo verrà sviluppato nel successivo.

È grazie all'avvento di nuovi approcci ontologici, infatti, che si può riconsiderare l'eco-ontologia di Santayana. Tra le ontologie oggi più influenti, un ruolo di primo piano spetta all'ontologia orientata agli oggetti (OOO), sviluppata originariamente da Graham Harman nel 1999 e successivamente elaborata da pensatori quali, Timothy Morton, Ian Bogost e Tristan Garcia. Nell'omonimo saggio del 2018 Harman delinea questa filosofia come una nuova, potenziale, teoria del tutto¹². Nella conclusione dell'opera, individua per riassumere otto capisaldi relativi alla sua posizione, che vanno dall'ontologia piatta (*flat ontology*) fino all'impossibilità di una conoscenza di tipo politico¹³. Enrico Schirò, invece, rileva quattro nuclei concettuali fondamentali, ossia l'ontologia piatta, l'anti-riduzionismo (*antimining*), il *withdrawal* e la causazione vicaria (*vicarious causation*)¹⁴. In questa sede, ci si concentrerà su alcuni dei concetti individuati da Schirò, che non solo trovano un riscontro nell'elenco offerto da Harman, ma che risultano anche rilevanti per il pensiero ontologico di Santayana.

Partiamo quindi dal robusto impegno dell'OOO nei confronti dell'anti-riduzionismo, che costituisce non a caso il discorso introduttivo con cui Harman ci presenta il suo sistema. La critica, in particolare, si articola in un attacco a diverse posizioni che, in un modo o nell'altro, finiscono per spiegare o assimilare gli oggetti riducendoli ad altre entità o processi. Bersaglio delle critiche di Harman sono così posizioni come il fisicalismo, che tende a ridurre i grandi oggetti alla somma totale dei loro componenti materiali, oppure il piccolismo (*smallism*), che crede che i componenti reali di un ente siano i componenti minimi in cui può essere scomposto. Harman critica, inoltre, approcci riduzionisti più sfumati come il *duomining*, termine con cui indica la tendenza filosofica a “minare” gli oggetti dal basso (*undermining*) o dall'alto (*overmining*). Con queste due espressioni, in particolare, ci si riferisce all'uso di ridurre gli oggetti ai loro elementi ultimi, considerati come soli esistenti a discapito dell'oggetto stesso e della sua “emergenza” (*undermining*)¹⁵ e all'abitudine della filosofia moderna di ridurre le cose all'impatto che esse esercitano nei confronti di un soggetto o di un altro oggetto, negando così qualunque altra cosa non rientri in questa rete di relazioni (*overmining*)¹⁶.

Harman contesta ognuna di queste posizioni con degli interessanti controesempi: entità fittizie come Sherlock Holmes, eventi storici come il terremoto di Lisbona e persino

¹² G. Harman, *Ontologia orientata agli oggetti. Una nuova teoria del tutto*, trad. it. di O. Ellero, Milano, Carbonio Editore, 2021.

¹³ Ivi, pp. 213-218.

¹⁴ E. Schirò, V. Cuomo (a cura di), *Decentrare l'umano*, Pompei (Na), Kaiak, 2021.

¹⁵ G. Harman, *Ontologia orientata*, cit., pp. 48-53.

¹⁶ Ivi, pp. 53-57.

costrutti sociali complessi come la Compagnia Olandese delle Indie Orientali. Ciascuno di questi oggetti sfida le facili categorizzazioni offerteci da tali sistemi, resistendo a ogni forma di comodo riduzionismo. Come nota Harman, tali oggetti non possono essere estromessi in maniera arbitraria dal dibattito ontologico, tanto più da teorie, come quelle fisiche o filosofiche, che puntano ad abbracciare la totalità dell'esistenza.

Questa posizione di Harman di ferma resistenza al riduzionismo trova un riscontro, o almeno un possibile punto di contatto, nell'ontologia Santayana. In diverse sue opere, questi dimostra infatti una posizione filosofica fortemente anti-riduzionistica. In particolare, è in *Alcuni significati della parola "è"* che approfondisce maggiormente la questione, in relazione ad uno dei possibili significati del verbo essere: quello di derivazione (*derivation*). Qui porta avanti un esplicito attacco alla consuetudine filosofica di ridurre ogni cosa ad altro tramite un uso distorto ed ambiguo del linguaggio. Come scrive nell'articolo:

Se questa licenza nell'utilizzo della parola "è" è permessa (e sarebbe da pedanti proibirla), posso ancora chiedere quale dei vari oggetti suggeriti è un particolare oggetto; e potrei trovarmi ad attraversare l'intero flusso della natura cercando l'essere del più semplice degli oggetti. Questa ricerca diventa più confusa, e allo stesso tempo più urgente, quando una parola psicologica è interposta, o finisce per sostituire il mondo della materia; una scuola filosofica sosterrà così che tutto ciò che è fisico è in realtà mentale, mentre un'altra che tutto ciò che è mentale è in realtà fisico. Un classico esempio di quest'abitudine si può ritrovare nell'espressione, cara a tanti filosofi critici, che qualcosa non è "nient'altro che" qualcos'altro. [...]. La frase "nient'altro che" rivendica l'adeguatezza dell'espressione che segue: ma una definizione può definire adeguatamente solo un'essenza, non può pretendere di esaurire un fatto¹⁷.

Un ragionamento che non si ferma a ciò ma che, tenendo conto dei progressi compiuti dalle scienze naturali, arriva comunque a sostenere che: «Anche se la derivazione da un qualsiasi fatto potesse esser assegnata in maniera adeguata, quel fatto non sarebbe identico con ciò che l'ha generato; e dire che gli oggetti sono ciò di cui sono fatti è usare il verbo "essere" in maniera confusa e confusionaria, sebbene la povertà del linguaggio possa renderlo inevitabile¹⁸». Una conclusione che riecheggia in parte Wittgenstein e la sua idea che la totalità delle difficoltà filosofiche siano legate ad ambiguità e fraintendimenti di ordine linguistico¹⁹.

Oltre a questa comune posizione anti-riduzionista, emerge però anche un affascinante parallelismo concettuale fra la definizione di "oggetto" data dall'OOO e quella di "essenza" fatta trapelare da Santayana in *Scetticismo e fede animale*. Mentre Harman definisce l'oggetto come «qualsiasi cosa che non può essere totalmente ridotta né ai componenti di cui è fatta, né agli effetti che ha sulle altre cose»²⁰, Santayana presenta la pietra angolare del proprio sistema come l'elemento irriducibile dell'esperienza: come il risultato di un processo estremo di scepsti in cui il dubbio raggiunge il fondo e trova conforto nell'«assolutamente indubitabile»²¹.

Ora, il risultato di questa ostilità al riduzionismo ha come suo principale risultato la creazione di quella che Harman definisce ontologia piatta (*flat ontology*) ossia, stando alle sue stesse parole: «l'idea per cui la filosofia debba partire allargando il più possibile il suo

¹⁷ G. Santayana, *Alcuni significati della parola "è"*, in G. Santayana, *Il Regno dell'Essenza*, cit., pp. 298-299.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*.

¹⁹ L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, trad. it di A. G. Conte, Torino, Einaudi, 1964, pp. 82-83.

²⁰ G. Harman, *Ontologia orientata*, cit., p. 49.

²¹ G. Santayana, *Scetticismo e fede animale*, trad. it. di N. Bosco, Milano, Mursia, 1973, p. 73.

raggio d'azione con l'ostinazione di parlare di tutto»²². Ora, proprio questa definizione pare riconfermare di primo acchito l'accordo di fondo tra il sistema di Santayana e quello di Harman. I *Regni dell'Essere* sono infatti il tentativo di Santayana di parlare di tutto, non escludendo dalla discussione alcun possibile concetto od ente, tanto da ipotizzare l'infinità delle essenze e le infinite possibilità della Materia.

Tuttavia, proprio questo atteggiamento tassonomico di Santayana nei confronti dell'Essere introduce le prime difficoltà nel conciliare i due sistemi. Harman sostiene infatti che «Il nemico principale dell'ontologia piatta è il pregiudizio tassonomico in base al quale si presuppone preventivamente che il mondo debba essere suddiviso in un numero ristretto di *tipologie* radicalmente differenti di entità»²³. È qui che risiede probabilmente il principale scoglio che separa l'ontologia di Santayana dall'OOO. La prima, infatti, riduce tutto l'Essere a quattro macrocategorie: l'Essenza, la Materia, la Verità e lo Spirito. Si presenta, insomma, come un'onto-tipologia, come potremmo definirla usando un termine di Lacoue-Labarthe, ossia un sistema che mira a immobilizzare l'Essere inserendolo in un'architettura rigida²⁴. Di contro, l'ontologia di Harman si configura come l'esatta antitesi di questo approccio, ossia come un modello che vuole evitare una qualsiasi forma prematura di classificazione o di distinzione di fondo. Un approccio che, come spiega l'autore, trova le sue radici in un passaggio di Ortega y Gasset, che recita: «La stessa differenza che esiste fra un dolore di cui mi si parla e un dolore che provo, esiste tra il rosso da me visto e l'essere rosso di questa scatola. [...] Tutto, guardato dall'interno di sé stesso, è un io»²⁵.

Eppure, proprio questa fonte peculiare dell'OOO fa sì che il sistema ontologico di Santayana, pur non arrestandosi davanti alla possibilità di ipotizzare delle macrocategorie dell'Essere, possa esser considerato anch'esso un esempio di ontologia piatta. Tanto il regno della materia quanto il regno dell'essenza possono essere infatti considerate sezioni dell'essere analizzate con un taglio da ontologia piatta, poiché l'analisi che ne vien fatta è un'indagine fatta da un punto di vista prospettico, che non potrebbe che inevitabilmente riecheggia l'affermazione di Ortega y Gasset, adottata da Harman: «Tutto, guardato dall'interno di sé stesso, è un io»²⁶. Lo sono le essenze, il cui principio logico è proprio l'identità, che le rende perfettamente individuali e idealmente autocentrate²⁷. Ma lo sono anche le sostanze, ossia le esistenze, che si strutturano in campi d'azione, ossia cosmi relativi, ognuno reciprocamente esterno all'altro²⁸. Lo è infine la verità, ossia la radiazione (*radiation*) di un fatto che «si ottiene assumendo questo fatto come centro, e guardando tutto il resto solo in relazione ad esso»²⁹. Lo sono, infine, i diversi regni dell'essere, la cui natura è refrattaria a ogni gerarchizzazione, tanto da essere paragonati, nella chiusa dell'opera, alla trinità cristiana³⁰. Ciascuno di questi cambia infatti il proprio ruolo in relazione alla regione altra da cui è scorto e studiato. Il fatto quindi che Santayana ipotizzi, nel suo sistema, delle coordinate ideali all'interno dell'Essere, non esaurisce, né mina il

²² G. Harman, *Ontologia orientata*, cit., p. 214.

²³ *Ibidem*.

²⁴ Ph. Lacoue-Labarthe, *Typographie*, in AA. VV., *Mimesis des articulations*, Paris, Flammarion, 1975, p. 269.

²⁵ J. Ortega y Gasset, *Saggio di estetica a mo' di prologo*, in J. Ortega y Gasset, *Meditazioni del Chisciotte*, trad. it. di B. Arpaia. Napoli, Guida, 2000, p. 287.

²⁶ *Ibidem*.

²⁷ G. Santayana, *Alcuni significati della parola "è"*, cit., pp. 285-286.

²⁸ G. Santayana, *The Realm of Matter*, cit., p. 191.

²⁹ G. Santayana, *Scetticismo e fede animale*, cit., p. 220.

³⁰ G. Santayana, *Realms of Being*, cit., pp. 845-850.

prospettivismo di fondo del suo sistema: prospettivismo che pone di fatto le basi epistemiche per ogni possibile ontologia piatta.

Se, giunti a questo punto, permangono ancora dubbi su un possibile accordo di fondo tra l'OOO e l'ontologia dei *Realms*, vi è tuttavia un altro elemento – che affonda le sue radici in una questione epistemologica – che può testimoniare una possibile convergenza. Harman, nel suo attacco al riduzionismo, finisce infatti per opporsi a una tendenza della filosofia moderna che indica con il termine letteralismo (*letteralism*). Scrive Harman: «Il letteralismo sostiene che una cosa possa essere sviscerata da una descrizione teoricamente perfetta di tale oggetto che sia in prosa o in una formalizzazione matematica. Questa prospettiva implica che una descrizione perfetta dell'oggetto sia isomorfa alla cosa in questione, nel senso che hanno la stessa forma»³¹. Piuttosto che puntare a una descrizione letterale «L'OOO sostiene che il linguaggio letterale sia *sempre* un'ipersemplificazione, perché descrive le cose nei termini di proprietà letterali definite, anche se *gli oggetti non sono mai semplicemente un insieme di proprietà letterali*»³². Più avanti, Harman sostiene ulteriormente la sua posizione anti-letteralista accostandosi ad Heidegger, poiché d'accordo con la sua linea di pensiero: «la realtà delle cose è sempre ritratta o velata, anziché direttamente accessibile, e di conseguenza qualsiasi tentativo di cogliere tale realtà attraverso un linguaggio diretto e letterale fallirà inevitabilmente»³³.

Ora, proprio la filosofia della conoscenza di Santayana, delineata nel suo saggio seminale *Literal and Symbolic Knowledge*, trova un sorprendente riscontro nella peculiare posizione dell'OOO appena esposta. Nell'articolo Santayana sferra una critica feroce alla nostra comprensione convenzionale della conoscenza, sfidando la nozione che sia una rappresentazione letterale della realtà. Assumiamo ingenuamente, sostiene, che la conoscenza rispecchi perfettamente gli oggetti che cerca di comprendere. Tuttavia, questo è fondamentalmente errato, come Santayana afferma eloquentemente: «The ideas we have of things are not fair portraits: they are political caricatures made in the human interest, but very often, in their partial way, masterpieces of characterization and insight»³⁴. La nostra conoscenza della realtà è costruita attraverso semplificazioni eccessive, filtrate attraverso il nostro linguaggio, i nostri sensi e il nostro intelletto. L'aspirazione della scienza a trascendere questa natura simbolica della conoscenza è, secondo Santayana, un'utopia, una ricerca inutile e vana. Come elabora ulteriormente:

The discouragement we may feel in science does not come from failure; it comes from a false conception of what would be success. Our worst difficulties arise from the assumption that knowledge of existences ought to be literal, whereas knowledge of existences has no need, no propensity, and no fitness to be literal. It is symbolic spontaneously, and its function (by which I mean its moral function of not leaving us in the dark about the world we live in) is perfectly fulfilled if it remains symbolical. What is more evident than that religion, language, all the passions, and science itself speak in symbols?³⁵

³¹ G. Harman, *Ontologia orientata*, cit., p. 86.

³² Ivi, p. 45.

³³ *Ibidem*.

³⁴ G. Santayana, *Literal and Symbolic Knowledge*, in «The Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods», XV (1918), 16, p. 436: «Le nostre idee sulle cose non sono ritratti fedeli: sono caricature politiche create a misura dell'uomo, ma spesso, proprio nella loro parzialità, capolavori di caratterizzazione e intuizione».

³⁵ Ivi, pp. 435-436: «Lo scoramento che potremmo provare in campo scientifico non deriva dal fallimento, ma da una concezione errata di ciò che costituirebbe il successo. Le nostre maggiori difficoltà sorgono dal presupposto che la conoscenza delle esistenze debba essere letterale, mentre la conoscenza delle esistenze non ha bisogno, né propensione, né idoneità ad esserlo. È spontaneamente simbolica e la sua funzione (intendo con ciò la sua funzione morale di non

Una posizione che va a braccetto con la ripresa della Metafisica di Aristotele con cui Harman chiude il discorso sull'anti-letteralismo: «le cose individuali non possono essere definite, dal momento che sono sempre concrete, mentre le definizioni sono costituite dagli universali»³⁶. Universali, idee o essenze: nomi diversi che alludono tutti a una medesima intuizione sullo statuto della nostra conoscenza della natura. Una conoscenza che non è mai diretta, ma sempre mediata da uno schermo di simboli.

Proprio questa ostilità verso il letteralismo giunge a lambire un altro punto cardine della OOO: il valore insolitamente elevato che questa attribuisce all'esperienza estetica. Scrive Harman: «L'esperienza estetica è fondamentale per la OOO come forma di accesso non letterale all'oggetto. Essa si realizza quando le qualità sensuali non appartengono più al loro solito oggetto sensuale, ma vengono trasferite invece a un oggetto reale, che si ritrae necessariamente da ogni forma di accesso»³⁷. L'Estetica assume così la funzione di filosofia prima rispetto a ogni altra disciplina, nonché di radice di ogni possibile indagine filosofica.

Quest'enfasi sull'estetico la ritroviamo anche in Santayana. Come sottolinea Giuseppe Patella, in un volume dedicato all'estetica del filosofo ibero-americano, vi è nel suo pensiero un vero e proprio primato dell'estetico, legato soprattutto alla priorità ontogenetica di questa nei confronti di ogni discorso e atto di stampo utilitaristico³⁸. Una posizione peculiare, che giunge a vedere l'atto poetico – e quindi estetico – anche alla base dell'atto gnoseologico. Come spiega nel già citato *Alcuni significati della parola "è"*: «La predicazione è una definizione supplementare, e siccome la definizione non è mai adeguata ai fatti, ulteriori definizioni sono sempre possibili. [...] La predicazione è un nominare elaborato, compiuto sotto la pressione dei sensi e dei cambi di idea: è poesia»³⁹.

3. Verso un'ontologia non antropocentrica

Seppur il precedente sottocapitolo abbia rilevato delle possibili convergenze tra Santayana e l'OOO, in particolare su questioni come l'ontologia piatta, l'anti-riduzionismo e l'estetica, restano ancora dei nodi da sciogliere. Che un'ontologia considerata ormai *demodé* possa avere alcuni punti di contatto, anche significativi, con una oggi particolarmente in voga non significa che possa portare un contributo rilevante al dibattito attuale, soprattutto in rapporto alla questione ecologica. Prima di tutto va provato se l'OOO abbia possibili ricadute in campo ecologico, secondariamente se la filosofia di Santayana possa essere foriera di ulteriori sviluppi su tale versante.

Riguardo al primo punto, è lo stesso Harman, nel suo volume, a rilevare come alcuni degli approcci più originali all'OOO giungano da Timothy Morton, che ha incanalato questo suo interesse proprio verso tematiche ambientali⁴⁰. Tra le idee più interessanti relativamente a questo autore si può citare il tentativo di sviluppare un'"ecologia senza natura", che si propone di pensare l'ambiente senza far uso di categorie concettuali rigide, che finiscono per reificare troppo l'oggetto dell'analisi perdendo di vista ogni possibile interconnessione

lasciarci al buio riguardo al mondo in cui viviamo) è perfettamente adempiuta se rimane simbolica. Cos'è più evidente del fatto che la religione, il linguaggio, tutte le passioni e la scienza stessa parlano per simboli?».

³⁶ G. Harman, *Ontologia orientata*, cit., p. 45.

³⁷ Ivi, p. 217.

³⁸ G. Patella, *Bellezza, arte e vita. L'estetica mediterranea di George Santayana*, Milano, Mimesis, 2001, pp. 20-24.

³⁹ G. Santayana, *Alcuni significati della parola "è"*, cit., p. 291.

⁴⁰ G. Harman, *Ontologia orientata*, cit., pp. 195-202.

che abbiamo con esso⁴¹. Questa prospettiva si avvicina, sotto alcuni suoi aspetti, all'idea di Santayana di approcciarsi al mondo naturale soprattutto attraverso i concetti di Materia, di Flusso o di Sostanza, più che a quello di Natura, che ritiene poetico e inadatto all'analisi ontologica. Santayana, infatti, ritiene che il termine "Natura", come altri, non riesca a descrivere il carattere anfibo (*amphibious*) dell'esistenza, a differenza di altri come Materia, Flusso, Sostanza, che ciononostante rimangono comunque semplificazioni inadeguate⁴². Come spiega anche in *The Unknowable*: «what exists is the substance at work, and this substance is never an idea hypostatized. It is prior to all ideas and descriptions of it»⁴³.

Quanto al secondo punto, sono le stesse affinità tra l'OOO e l'ontologia dei *Realms* a venirci incontro. La prima si presenta infatti, fin dall'inizio, come una filosofia non umanistica, nel senso più pieno del termine, quello esposto nella *Lettera sull'Umanismo* di Heidegger⁴⁴. Si vuole insomma configurare come un'indagine filosofica che non punta a porre l'essere umano al centro della propria riflessione, ma l'Essere *tout court* o, nel caso dell'OOO, l'Oggetto. Si presenta così come una filosofia non antropocentrica: basti pensare alla sua volontà di scalzare l'uomo dal cinquanta per cento dell'ontologia totale, superando dualismi quali quello cartesiano o suoi derivati, come quello tra Natura e Cultura.

Ora, proprio questo aspetto, lo sia ritrova già *in nuce* e parzialmente sviluppato nella filosofia di Santayana. Come nota Enrico Giannetto, nella sua prefazione al *Regno dell'Essenza*, l'ontologia dei *Realms* non si limita all'ambito dell'umano ma giunge a dischiudere anche la possibilità di esistenze totalmente altre — con annesse nuove, possibili, estetiche e filosofie. Se seguiamo Santayana, scrive Giannetto, arriviamo alla conclusione che:

Ogni animale legge la Natura nel suo linguaggio privato. La creazione in tutta la sua varietà di forme viventi sarebbe un errore, se contasse solo una verità assoluta, e ogni specie dovrebbe abbandonare i propri sensi specifici, i propri desideri, le proprie affezioni ed emozioni specifiche per raggiungere questa verità assoluta. [...]

La filosofia, allora, si potrebbe concludere, non solo non è specificatamente occidentale, o europea, ed è etno-filosofia, ma è ancora di più un fatto animale, una *specio-filosofia*: un'etica, un modo di vedere le cose da un particolare prospettiva animale, un modo di vivere nella fede del mondo, che però tenga conto e si arricchisca di tutti gli altri punti di vista animali⁴⁵.

È attraverso il suo approccio naturalista, nonché al prospettivismo dell'intero sistema, che noi possiamo arrivare a queste conclusioni teoreticamente dirompenti. Come spiega Santayana, se il mondo ci pare antropocentrico è perché, di fatto, noi viviamo immersi nel nostro campo d'azione (*field of action*), ossia nell'insieme di essenze accessibili ai nostri parametri e alle nostre facoltà. Bisogna però fare attenzione a non assolutizzare questo nostro orizzonte e a porlo come metro dell'universale. Una delle critiche che Santayana rivolge a Dewey — e che può essere ripresa anche per molti approcci contemporanei —

⁴¹ T. Morton, *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2007.

⁴² G. Santayana, *The Realm of Matter*, cit., pp. 183-184.

⁴³ G. Santayana, *The Unknowable*, cit., p. 26: «ciò che esiste è la sostanza all'opera, e questa non è mai un'idea ipostatizzata. È prima di ogni idea e di ogni sua descrizione».

⁴⁴ M. Heidegger, *Lettera sull'umanismo*, in M. Heidegger, *Segnavia*, trad. it. di F. Volpi, Milano, Adelphi, 1987, p. 283.

⁴⁵ E. Giannetto, *La grandezza della filosofia di George Santayana*, in G. Santayana, *Il Regno dell'Essenza*, cit., p. 13.

consiste nella cosiddetta predominanza del primo piano (*Predominance of Foreground*). Come spiega infatti Santayana: «In nature there is no foreground or background, no here, no now, no moral cathedra, no centre so really central as to reduce all other things to mere margins and mere perspectives»⁴⁶.

Il “primo piano”, come lo definisce Santayana, è sempre figurativo: è l'apparenza di una realtà scambiata per la realtà stessa. È la prospettiva di una vita, un accidente biologico che si tende ad elevare a principio metafisico. Una prassi che diviene norma ideale del mondo. Compito della filosofia, nonché di un genuino naturalismo, è decostruire questa illusione. Spingere l'individuo verso un uso pragmatico, distaccato ed ironico, delle essenze che gli si mostrano nell'immediato e che costituiscono una visione, assai parziale, della realtà che è costretto ad affrontare⁴⁷. In sintesi, ciò a cui punta Santayana è soprattutto lo sviluppo di un nuovo approccio al reale. Un fine che, come si vedrà nel paragrafo successivo, ha ricadute che vanno ben al di là dell'esistenza del singolo.

4. Conclusione: un'ontologia per una nuova etica?

Come si è potuto vedere, non solo l'ontologia di Santayana, a quasi un secolo di distanza, si rivela ancora al passo coi tempi, data la sua assonanza con l'attuale OOO, ma si rivela altresì un sistema ecologico – o meglio: eco-ontologico – il cui naturalismo può avere ancora uno spazio nel dibattito attuale. Non solo, si presenta anche caratterizzata da quella che potremmo definire un'epistemologia dell'immanenza, poiché ogni forma di sapere, da quello poetico a quello scientifico, si struttura non aprioristicamente rispetto all'esperienza del soggetto, ma a partire da essa.

Tuttavia, proprio partendo da questa singolare posizione epistemologica Santayana giunge a un contributo significativo, benché spesso trascurato, all'interno della sua teoria dell'essenza: il fatto che l'approccio che si adotta nei confronti della cosa cambia in maniera sostanziale la natura di ciò che viene trovato. Tramite un dato approccio si cambia, infatti, in maniera radicale il campo di Essenze che si va indagando. È questo un punto focale dell'ontologia di Santayana:

Diversi osservatori potrebbero indirizzarsi a differenti regioni della natura, od esser sensibili a diversi elementi nella stessa regione; così gli abitanti di diversi pianeti avranno geografie distinte, e la stessa battaglia nei cieli sarà conosciuta dal sordo solo come lampi e dal cieco solo come tuoni, rispondendo ognuno a una parte differente dell'evento totale, e non simultaneamente. Così un'eclissi – in sé un semplice aspetto di una costellazione di eventi nello spazio – potrà esser conosciuta in condizioni tra loro completamente diverse; attraverso il calcolo prima che avvenga, dai sensi quando si sta svolgendo, dalla memoria immediatamente dopo e dai resoconti per i posteri⁴⁸.

Per tale ragione tutti i discorsi del filosofo a proposito dell'approccio da avere nei confronti dell'Essere e della Materia non sono solamente discorsi di stampo moralistico, ma sono in realtà discorsi a proposito del metodo.

È proprio sotto questo aspetto che il pensiero di Santayana può essere intrecciato a posizioni come quelle di Michel Serres, che reputa che il nostro rapporto con la natura vada

⁴⁶ G. Santayana, *Dewey's Naturalistic Metaphysics*, cit., p. 678: «Nella natura non c'è primo piano o sfondo, non c'è un qui e ora, nessun pulpito morale, nessun centro così centrale da ridurre tutto il resto a semplici margini e prospettive».

⁴⁷ Ivi, p. 688.

⁴⁸ G. Santayana, *Il Regno dell'Essenza*, cit., p. 83.

rifondato con un nuovo contratto naturale, non più basato su rapporti di stampo utilitarista, ma da quelli simbiotici⁴⁹. In effetti, in *The Unknowable* del 1923 Santayana avanza l'idea che il nostro approccio alla natura non vada disgiunto da ciò che egli designa col termine pietà (*Piety*). Un concetto, questo, che si rifà all'antica *pietas* romana e si avvicina al concetto di devozione, oppure di rispetto empatico nei confronti della materia⁵⁰. È però in *The Realm of Spirit* che Santayana giunge a delineare in modo più netto questo corretto approccio, arrivando a definirlo con il nome di Carità (*Charity*), un punto di vista trascendentale ma razionale, che unisce e sublima l'empatia e la *pietas* nei confronti della natura⁵¹. Un punto, questo, non secondario nell'economia del pensiero di Santayana, soprattutto se si tiene conto, come rileva Jessica Wahman nel già citato articolo, che le critiche che Santayana avanza verso il sistema di Dewey – teoricamente molto simile a quello del filosofo ibero-americano – vertono proprio su questo aspetto: su un diverso approccio di tipo emotivo e morale all'esistenza⁵².

Un approccio che non si esaurisce in sé, ma ha necessariamente risvolti metodologici ed epistemologici. La carità, scrive Santayana, ha infatti una visione più profonda della natura di quella posseduta dalla coscienza normale o da quella mossa da interessi⁵³. È allo stesso tempo un punto di arrivo, ma anche un potenziale nuovo inizio, soprattutto per una possibile filosofia ecologica. Questo perché la carità, così come la saggezza, costituiscono il culmine della vita spirituale, caratterizzata da una disintossicazione (*Disintoxication*) da tutti i valori⁵⁴, condizione necessaria per la contemplazione, ossia l'intuizione delle essenze colte nel loro significato ultimo, non oggettivato, non preso nella rete dei fini e delle intenzioni umane. È la Natura, la Materia, l'Essenza, l'Essere colto nella sua nudità. Una posizione, questa, che finisce per fare eco a quella dell'ultimo Heidegger, laddove il pensatore tedesco conclude il suo percorso intellettuale con un invito ad un pensiero poetante che si interfacci all'Essere senza oggettivazioni, né contrapposizioni teoretiche. Come scrive nell'*Appendice a Fenomenologia e Teologia*: «La rosa sta in giardino e forse ondeggia al vento, mentre l'essere rosso della rosa non sta in giardino, né può ondeggiare al vento. Eppure, mentre lo nomino, lo penso e ne parlo. C'è dunque un pensare e un dire che in nessun modo oggettivano, né pongono di fronte»⁵⁵.

Nonostante ciò, rimangono comunque delle criticità latenti in merito ai rapporti tra l'ontologia di Santayana e le forme dell'ontologia e dell'ecologia contemporanee, a cui è giusto fare un riferimento. La principale, e forse più pressante, è lo sguardo fortemente individualistico di Santayana, e delle sue soluzioni, a fronte di un problema globale e quindi collettivo. Il contratto a cui pensa Serres è tra l'umanità, colta nella sua totalità, e la natura, non tra il singolo e questa.

Le possibili applicazioni di un'eco-ontologia ispirata a Santayana sono comunque molteplici. Essa potrebbe offrire nuove prospettive per la sostenibilità ambientale, promuovendo un diverso atteggiamento, che si strutturi a partire da un'etica di stampo razionalistico. Inoltre, la sua critica al letteralismo e la valorizzazione dell'esperienza estetica come forma di accesso all'oggetto potrebbero arricchire il dibattito sulle modalità di rappresentazione e comprensione dell'ambiente, favorendo un approccio più integrato e

⁴⁹ M. Serres, *Il contratto naturale*, cit., p. 156.

⁵⁰ G. Santayana, *The Unknowable*, cit., pp. 20-21.

⁵¹ G. Santayana, *The Realm of Spirit*, in G. Santayana, *Realms of Being*, cit., pp. 783-797.

⁵² J. Wahman, *Are Metaphysics and Naturalism contradictory?*, cit., pp. 72-73.

⁵³ G. Santayana, *The Realm of Spirit*, cit., p. 794.

⁵⁴ G. Santayana, *Platonism and the Spiritual Life*, New York, Scribner's, 1927, p. 30.

⁵⁵ M. Heidegger, *Fenomenologia e Teologia*, in M. Heidegger, *Segnavia*, cit., p. 29.

quindi, nel vero senso della parola, ecologico. L'invito è dunque quello di riscoprire il sistema di Santayana non solo in un'ottica archeologica, ma come pensiero capace di offrire, ancora oggi, preziosi strumenti teoretici.

MASKS AND MADNESS*

Martin A. Coleman

Abstract: «Masks», wrote philosopher George Santayana, «are glorious things» making it possible to understand an otherwise unintelligible world including ourselves (*Soliloquies in England and Other Soliloquies*, 1922). This seems to depart from the narrower, popular understanding of masks in superhero comics, in which they project a conventionally heroic or intimidating identity while hiding another identity. But the extraordinary superhero comic book series *Watchmen* (1986-87), by writer Alan Moore and artist Dave Gibbons, illustrates Santayana's ideas on masks, which in turn support a novel interpretation of *Watchmen*. The result is a better understanding of the nature of masks and an account of how this understanding contributes, first, to avoiding egotism that issues in irrationalities (dogmatism, nihilism, self-deception) and, second, to cultivating self-knowledge and sanity.

Keywords: Masks, Madness, Sanity, Santayana, *Watchmen*.

* * *

1. Introduction

«Masks are glorious things», wrote George Santayana in *Soliloquies in England and Other Soliloquies* (1922). They are basic to consciousness and make it possible to understand an otherwise unintelligible world including ourselves¹. Others might think the glory of masks depends on the deeds of the wearer. Indeed, the glory of masks often is associated with the adventures of comic book heroes, who come to be identified with the masks and costumes that mark the fantastical identities distinguished by their skills, strength, or superpowers.

Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons's comic book about a group of masked adventurers, *Watchmen* (1986-87), «deconstruct[s] [...] costumed super-hero values [...] as part of the deconstruction of the costumes themselves»². *Watchmen* demonstrates how masks that mark identity and symbolize power can threaten sanity by bringing confusion and diminishing human life – in direct opposition to the glory of understanding. Santayana's ideas bring out this aspect of *Watchmen* because guiding his reflections on masks is a vision of sane living. Santayana thought everyone depends on masks and faces the risks they bring. Superhero masks are a special case of the many and various masks in the world, but as dramatic exaggerations they are helpful starting points for inquiry into masks and madness. Superhero stories may be not only fantastical tales of extraordinary beings but also reflections on sanity and happiness relevant to all human beings.

Watchmen, set in 1985, is an alternate history of the United States in which superheroes are real. Foregoing supernaturalism and extraterrestrials, *Watchmen* is both realistic and unmistakably a superhero story as it challenges genre conventions by considering the psychology and social consequences of superheroes³. Other works have taken similar

* Thanks to Sam Adams and Jay Record.

¹ G. Santayana, *Soliloquies in England and Later Soliloquies*, New York, Scribner's, 1922, p. 132.

² R. Reynolds, *Super Heroes. A Modern Mythology*, London, B.T. Batsford, 1992, p. 30.

³ Cfr. W. Lee, *More on Moore: An Interview with Alan Moore*, in «Telegraph Wire», 23, 1985, pp. 11-15. <https://ia800404.us.archive.org/14/items/TelegraphWire221985/Telegraph%20Wire%202023%20%281985%29.pdf> (Accessed 22 August 2019); A. Moore, D. Gibbons, and N. Gaiman, *A Portal to Another Dimension: Alan Moore, Dave*

approaches, but *Watchmen* has been singularly influential in making «the comic book [...] an accepted medium» among English-language readers⁴. It has enjoyed high sales⁵ and generated decades of scholarly commentary; it is the only comic on «Time»'s unranked list of the top 100 novels published in English between 1923 and 2005⁶. But *Watchmen* was never meant to be «the ultimate statement on super-heroes», and the aim was not genre revision but artistic and philosophical exploration: structural experimentation and consideration of «way[s] of seeing the world» and how «the relationships of people and their various desires and demands and fears [go] together to make up the substance of the world»⁷.

Sixty-five years before *Watchmen*, Santayana's idiosyncratic *Soliloquies* appeared: ten years after Santayana retired, freeing his thinking and writing from the constraints of academia; and one year before *Scepticism and Animal Faith*, the important introductory volume to his mature philosophy. Like his later work, *Soliloquies* addresses self-knowledge and sanity, themes significant in *Watchmen*.

Though one work is a collection of reflections on philosophy, art, and culture and the other an illustrated story of vigilantes in a form often associated with children and semi-literates, they are notably similar. Moore and Gibbons created their work in installments determining the course of the story as they produced each issue of the series. Santayana's book was assembled from «rambling pieces»⁸ written in England amid the uncertainty of World War I (1914–1918) and in other locations (1918–1921) and published in periodicals with no plan for a compilation. Each work was guided by thematic vision, not a predetermined outline. The creators consciously experimented with how best to inquire into and express their ideas, demonstrating ideas expressed in both works: the importance of cultivating greater awareness of change and possibility and developing skillful responses to novel circumstances.

To consider Santayana's philosophy and *Watchmen* together puts Santayana's ideas in the «vital context» of a literary work, which can bring out issues that give point to the philosophical ideas⁹. The story helps clarify questions that motivate Santayana's ideas and demonstrate their relevance beyond the time and place of their articulation. These ideas provide a distinct interpretation of *Watchmen* as a reflection on living well.

Some read *Watchmen* in terms of knowledge and interpretation asserting the work's central concern is «what do we know and how do we know it? [...] How can we know what we think we know, when what we know is predicated on symbols that cannot be “known”?»¹⁰ or the «question of what history is»¹¹. Santayana's approach addresses similar questions but does not make them primary, giving up the quest for certainty that often

Gibbons, and Neil Gaiman, in «The Comics Journal», 116, 1987, pp. 80-88. <https://www.tcj.com/a-portal-to-another-dimension-alan-moore-dave-gibbons-and-neil-gaiman/> (Accessed 22 August 2019).

⁴ L. Parkin, *Alan Moore*, Chicago, Oldcastle Books, 2009, p. 15.

⁵ According to the Grand Comics Database, the single-volume collection of *Watchmen* has been reprinted at least 24 times since its original print run in 1987 (<https://www.comics.org/issue/43793/>). The work also has been published in a number of special editions: *Watchmen: Absolute Edition* (1994), *Watchmen: Collector's Edition Slipcase Set* (2016), *Watchmen: Deluxe Edition* (2013), *Watchmen: The Annotated Edition* (2017).

⁶ J. Kelly, *Time's 100 Best Novels*, in «Time», 166, 17, 6, 2005.

⁷ G. Groth, *Big Words I: Interview with Alan Moore*, in «The Comics Journal», 138, 1990, pp. 79-81.

⁸ G. Santayana, *The Letters of George Santayana, Book Two, 1910-1920*, ed. W.G. Holzberger, Cambridge, The MIT Press, 2002, p. 298.

⁹ I. Singer, *George Santayana. Literary Philosopher*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2000, p. 15.

¹⁰ B. Dietrich, *The Human Stain: Chaos and the Rage for Order in Watchmen*, in «Extrapolation», L (2009), 1, p. 131.

¹¹ S. Carney, *The Tides of History: Alan Moore's Historiographic Vision*, in «ImageText», II (2006), 2. <https://imagetextjournal.com/the-tides-of-history-alan-moores-historiographic-vision/> (Accessed May 29, 2024).

produces philosophical melodrama. For him masks make possible all understanding; acknowledging this enables us to get on with living that is neither bound by convention or unhinged by irrationalism – two poles that motivate concern with knowledge and can be exacerbated by tacit assumptions that knowledge should be certainty.

Other essays consider the work politically, taking the characters as «completely caught up in ideology»¹² or «as emblematic of political ideologies»¹³. Some use moral theory to understand particular characters: Nite Owl II exemplifying virtue ethics¹⁴, Dr. Manhattan as stoic sage¹⁵. Some take a broader approach to moral themes: reading the work as a criticism of authoritarianism and of superheroes' seemingly ethical justifications of their use of power and their corruption¹⁶; or taking the primary question of the work to be whether humans are humane and responsible enough to use science and regarding the characters as personifications of science¹⁷. Another uses Nietzsche's idea of the *Übermensch* to interpret characters¹⁸.

Santayana is uniquely helpful for understanding *Watchmen* because he related his ideas in terms of masks. Santayana regarded all ideologies and moralities as masks, which can be worn well or poorly, can serve or impede science, can justify lies or indicate new possibilities. This yields interpretations of greater depth and broader relevance than reading characters as examples of moral theories, personifications of science, or measured against the idea of the *Übermensch* (Nietzsche did comment on masks, but that is not considered in the referenced essay). Moore said that he and Gibbons wanted *Watchmen* characters to have depth and reality, and «cause the reader actually to sit down and make some moral decisions. We wanted to present the reader with a variety of worldviews and some hard choices»¹⁹. Santayana's ideas make the connection with a reader's moral life since he thought each of us wears masks; no special origin story of trauma or supernatural encounter compels us to wear masks; the risks of insanity assail each of us. A mask does not mark off a freak; it is a diagnostic tool for anyone concerned with mental and spiritual health.

2. Santayana & Masks

Superhero comics first appeared in the 1930s, a decade after the publication of Santayana's *Soliloquies* and several decades after Santayana had been a cartoonist for *The Harvard Lampoon*. Santayana took up the notion of masks in the context of theatre. In ancient Greek theatre a mask (*prosopon*, literally «face») of exaggerated expression indicated different

¹² J.A. Hughes, 'Who Watches the Watchmen?': Ideology and 'Real World' Superheroes, in «The Journal of Popular Culture», XXXIX (2006), 4, p. 548.

¹³ M. Wolf-Meyer, *The World Ozymandias Made. Utopias in the Superhero Comic, Subculture, and the Conservation of Difference*, in «The Journal of Popular Culture», XXXVI (2003), 3, p. 508.

¹⁴ M.D. White, *The Virtues of Nite Owl's Potbelly*, in *Watchmen and Philosophy. A Rorschach Test*, ed. by W. Irwin and M.D. White, Hoboken NJ, Wiley, 2009, pp. 79–90.

¹⁵ A. Terjesen, *I'm Just a Puppet Who Can See the Strings: Dr. Manhattan as a Stoic Sage*, in *Watchmen and Philosophy: A Rorschach Test*, cit., pp. 137–155.

¹⁶ J.R. Loftis, *Means, Ends, and the Critique of Pure Superheroes*, in *Watchmen and Philosophy: A Rorschach Test*, cit., p. 65.

¹⁷ B. Fishbaugh, *Moore and Gibbons's Watchmen: Exact Personifications of Science*, in «Extrapolation», XXXIX (1998), 3, p. 191.

¹⁸ J. Keeping, *Superheroes and Supermen: Finding Nietzsche's Übermensch*, in *Watchmen and Philosophy: A Rorschach Test*, cit., pp. 47–62.

¹⁹ Ch. Sharrett, *Alan Moore*, in E.L. Berlatsky (ed.), *Alan Moore. Conversations*, Jackson, University Press of Mississippi, 2011, p. 45.

types of tragic or comic characters. Theatre was important for Santayana's characterization of understanding: «Nature, like a theatre, offers a double object to the mind. There is in the first place the play presented, the overt spectacle, which is something specious and ideal; and then there is something material and profound lying behind and only symbolically revealed, namely, the stage, the actors, and the author»²⁰. The spectacle lies open to attention; «its sensuous and poetic essence» changes with the interests of different viewers; it «offers different beauties and different morals to every new critic»²¹. The material instrumentalities, lying behind the scenes, are «unfathomable. They are events, not ideas»; even the ideas of scientists and technicians «could never probe them to the bottom»²².

Masks are the observable aspect of natural processes, forms by which we might reflect on material existence. Masks, «like flowers, like sunsets, like melodies [...] cover for us appropriately the anatomical face of nature; and words and dogmas are other masks, behind which we, too, can venture upon the stage»²³. These appear in mind as the culmination of material processes conditioned by our constitutions and instincts and by contact with existences²⁴. Masks are a conceptual aspect of natural processes, while events of body and environment are a material aspect of those processes. Maintaining the distinction between mask and event is necessary for sanity and self-understanding.

Santayana analyzed self in terms of psyche and spirit. *Psyche* is a persisting order embodied in material substance: the self-sustaining pattern of biological functions that preserve an organism, adapting it to an environment, directing it to advantages, diverting it from dangers. Though conceived as a power, it is a poetic or mythic notion – a mask – that marks the self-preserving activities of an organism; power lies in the material of the organism. Psyche stands in contrast to another aspect of a conscious being, *spirit*, which is Santayana's term for «consciousness, attention, feeling, thought, or any word that marks the total *inner* difference between being awake or asleep, alive or dead»²⁵. Spirit arises in psyche's efforts to direct an organism through a changing environment of independent existences; it is a fruition of the interaction of a sensitive organism and its material environment²⁶. It notices the environment psyche must navigate, which may benefit psyche; but this is not spirit's natural function, and it suffers when exclusively directed or distracted by psyche's concerns. Spirit most fulfills its nature when, rising above instrumental meanings orienting psyche, it is liberated from regrets, anxieties, hopes, or fears. Still, spirit cannot be separated from psyche, on which it depends for its life and the perspective that makes it the particular spirit it is. Psyche and spirit are «realizations of the same fact»²⁷, but psyche is involved in the flux of matter, and spirit is impotent among material things. Spirit is a natural culmination of impulses in psyche. Its native function is to witness, which it does by intuiting masks.

Awareness of masks gives life the intellectual dignity of understanding and is the condition for memory, art, and happiness. This explains the glory of masks: they complete

²⁰ G. Santayana, *Soliloquies in England and Later Soliloquies*, cit., p. 126.

²¹ *Ibidem*.

²² *Ibidem*.

²³ Ivi, p. 128.

²⁴ This is, wrote Santayana, «no new doctrine, but is old as the hills» (G. Santayana, *Obiter Scripta. Lectures, Essays and Reviews*, ed. by J. Buchler and B. Schwartz, New York, Scribner's, 1936, p. 166).

²⁵ G. Santayana, *Realms of Being*, One-Volume edition, New York, Scribner's, 1942, p. 572.

²⁶ Ivi, p. 352; G. Santayana, *Soliloquies in England and Later Soliloquies*, cit., p. 225.

²⁷ G. Santayana, *Realms of Being*, cit., 564.

nature, which would be «blind and abortive» without them²⁸. Masks mark directions of change and give meaning to events. Masks are what Santayana called *essences*. Essences are real and infinitely various, non-material and non-existent; though they are forms, they have no power to determine that one particular form rather than another is embodied in matter. Whether an existence has one essence or another is determined by the dynamic flux of matter. So, it is deceptive to cling to masks declaring them the truth of existence, and futile to discard them to reveal a truth behind them.

Awareness of the distinction between essence and existence or mask and event is immensely important, because confusing mask and the event it stands for is the beginning of madness. This is not a distinction between the real and the unreal, but between realities to which different responses are appropriate. Masks do not distort reality; they are reality: the non-existent, perceptible aspect of an immeasurably vast reality, another aspect of which is material events independent of perception. Confusing mask and event ensures inappropriate responses to these aspects of reality. *Appreciation* is appropriate to masks; cultivating it «liberates our senses» from material concerns and celebrates consciousness²⁹. *Belief* is appropriate to events; it guides action, providing the possibility of reason in the midst of change. A careful and experienced observer who understands the nature of the double object, thought Santayana, «should see more and believe less»³⁰: be more attentive to masks (images and ideas) and more cautious in believing in the things they might stand for. Caution here means care in interpreting masks.

Interpreting masks means regarding them «as messengers, as signs for existences of which they furnish but an imperfect description, for which I am perhaps hopeful of substituting a better view»³¹. «A better view» is a refinement of initial appearances by «correcting, combining, and discounting» them, resulting in something no «less symbolic but more accurate and minute»³². Science is a refinement accomplished by using symbols to direct action in public and controlled situations, and systematically attending to results to modify symbols. The «better view» remains a mask, but one from which scientific inquiry has removed idiosyncrasy, sensuous excess, dramatic flourish from initial intuitions, yielding a more accurate symbol of dynamic relations among existences³³.

Interpreting self requires interpreting the «arrested expressions and [...] echoes of feeling» of psyche's masks³⁴, which symbolize natural processes of psyche. Santayana called interpretation of these masks «auscultation of the psyche»³⁵, indicating both the need for careful, attentive, and open awareness, and the physicality of its object. Spirit's intuition of masks remarks psyche's interactions among material existences; methods of self-interpretation are continuous with those of natural science in their concern with material existences. This means self-interpretation cannot be introspection directed at an

²⁸ G. Santayana, *Soliloquies in England and Later Soliloquies*, cit., p. 132.

²⁹ Ivi, p. 127.

³⁰ *Ibidem*.

³¹ G. Santayana, *Scepticism and Animal Faith. Introduction to a System of Philosophy*, New York, Scribner's, 1923, p. 155.

³² Ivi, p. 90.

³³ Ivi, p. 179. For more on the accuracy of science (and its relation to aesthetic life), see G. Santayana, *Some Turns of Thought in Modern Philosophy. Five Essays*, New York, Scribner's, 1933, p.12, pp. 22-23.

³⁴ G. Santayana, *Soliloquies in England and Later Soliloquies*, cit., p. 131.

³⁵ G. Santayana, *Realms of Being*, cit., p. 335.

independently existing spirit; as Krempleska observed, a study of character requires study of the material world³⁶.

Santayana noted that if interpretation of psyche lacks precision compared to other physical inquiries, it makes up for it with breadth and variety of material: Psyche's masks include «our books, our words, and our social actions», revealing the nature of psyche otherwise hidden from consciousness³⁷. *Whatever* knowledge we gain of the world reveals something of psyche

for the critic who studies [this knowledge] in order to distinguish whatever may be arbitrary in it, based on human accidents, and without any but a psychic ground. All the errors ever made about other things, if we understand their cause, enlighten us about ourselves; for the psyche is at once the spring of curiosity and the ground of refraction, selection, and distortion in our ideas³⁸.

Better inquiry into the world isolates and removes characteristic effects of psyche, and this bracketed result of interpretation of nature's masks reveals something of the nature of ourselves.

Interpreting psyche's masks does not always yield self-understanding. «One may fall under the spell of [...] self-knowledge»³⁹, risking madness. Interpreting masks that appear in a rush of natural changes, we become aware of distinctions and limits, opening a realm of ideas. This puts us in a different relation to our experience. We can express and understand it, refining it in new masks of words and concepts. To apprehend and articulate changes enables an intellectual mastery of experience, «like», wrote Santayana, «a god stilling a tempest»⁴⁰. We become aware of our limits including the limit of mortality; this awareness prompts justifications, commitments, and philosophies as means to defining an unchanging character. We fashion masks of identity, ideology, or culture. And «so long as we continue under the spell of this self-knowledge, we do not merely live but act», and act according to the roles we define and the loyalties and duties we declare⁴¹. This is the assumption of the tragic mask, the arrested expression, «half horror, half sublimity»⁴², that comes with the awareness of death.

This «spell of self-knowledge» and constraints of the tragic mask threaten understanding when we presume our ideas have tamed passions, impulses, and behaviors in ideas, transcending bodily or material life altogether. Not content to be *like* gods and understand things through ideas; we want to *be* gods, identical with unlimited and unchanging ideas. Satisfactions of material life and the glory of masks and dignity of understanding are different but there is no glory or dignity without the living body. This is a tension between psyche and spirit, which are distinct in idea but inseparable in actual living; psyche must act, risk, and live experimentally to satisfy its needs; spirit intuitively ideas without risk and with immediate satisfaction. The tension is rooted in the fact that the seemingly divine ability to master experience through ideas includes awareness of the inevitable change from life to death. When we deny the tension by imposing masks on events or rejecting masks

³⁶ K. Krempleska, *Life as Insinuation. George Santayana's Hermeneutics of Finite Life and Human Self*, New York, State University of New York Press, 2019, p. 55.

³⁷ G. Santayana, *Realms of Being*, cit., p. 335.

³⁸ Ivi, pp. 336-337.

³⁹ G. Santayana, *Soliloquies in England and Later Soliloquies*, cit., p. 133.

⁴⁰ G. Santayana, *The Life of Reason or The Phases of Human Progress. Critical Edition. Reason in Art*, ed. by M.S. Wokeck and M.A. Coleman, Cambridge, The MIT Press, 2015, p. 40.

⁴¹ G. Santayana, *Soliloquies in England and Later Soliloquies*, cit., p. 133.

⁴² *Ibidem*.

altogether, the result is divided consciousness, conflicted impulses and passions, and confused behaviors. To avoid this requires consciously preserving the tension; this is the activity of reasoning.

Reason, which Santayana conceived as a principle of harmony, does not preserve any particular passions, impulses, or behaviors; rather, it is expressed in modifying them to achieve more unified living. Reasoning itself is a passion for harmony, not denying other passions but seeking consistency and order among them. It has no absolute moral superiority over other passions, and it becomes something ridiculous and unreasonable when its ends are privileged above all others⁴³. Reasoning would cease without non-rational impulses and spontaneous reactions of the material organism: Conflicts of established and novel channels of impulsive energy give point to reason as a principle of harmony.

Rational response to inevitable change seeks new harmonies among old and new; so rational life necessarily is experimental and more precarious than spontaneous animal life. Animal life responds to change with instinctive regularity; under the spell of self-knowledge, we respond to change by denying it. Neither increases understanding or meaning. Reasoning transforms the novel and the established into new ideas and vital art⁴⁴; it adapts and conserves, making understanding possible.

Understanding remedies the madness of confusing mask and event, essence and existence. Self-understanding brings «assurance and peace in being what one is, and in becoming what one must become»⁴⁵; but it does not establish a settled definition and is not a matter of literal knowledge. It's an ongoing interpretation of masks symbolic of psychic processes and an experimental activity harmonizing impulses and habits. Sanity comes with understanding that «the infinite substance of things [is] instinct with a perpetual motion and rhythmic order which [is] its life, and that the spirit of [humans is] a spark from that universal fire»⁴⁶; in other words, understanding that consciousness is dependent on the flux of matter, we not fixed persons, and finding assurance and peace in this.

3. *Watchmen* & Masks

Masks in *Watchmen* appear to function as in other superhero comics. A mask is *synecdochic*, representing a public identity of the entire character (in *Watchmen* this extends to the class of superheroes, who often are called «masks»). A mask is *protective*, concealing an identity and enabling one to elude enemies. These carry a risk of madness through confusing mask and human being, obstructing self-understanding. The *synecdochic* mask may take over the self as the identity represented by the mask dominates the living person and denies change. The *protective* mask may isolate the self, sustaining a delusion of secure independence and limiting growth. Each *Watchmen* character displays a different understanding of masks and a different way of denying or dealing with inevitable change.

⁴³ G. Santayana, *Soliloquies in England and Later Soliloquies*, cit., p. 138.

⁴⁴ See also G. Santayana, *The Life of Reason or The Phases of Human Progress. Critical Edition. Introduction and Reason in Common Sense*, ed. by M.S Wokeck and M.A. Coleman, Cambridge, The MIT Press, 2011, pp. 2-4, pp. 28-29; Id., *The Life of Reason or The Phases of Human Progress. Critical Edition. Reason in Religion*, ed. by M.S Wokeck and M.A. Coleman, Cambridge, The MIT Press, 2014, p. 6; *The Life of Reason or The Phases of Human Progress. Critical Edition. Reason in Science*, ed. by M.S Wokeck and M.A. Coleman, Cambridge, The MIT Press, 2016, p. 35; Id., *Soliloquies in England and Later Soliloquies*, cit., pp. 136-7; Id., *The Philosophy of George Santayana*, La Salle, Open Court, 1951, p. 14.

⁴⁵ G. Santayana, *Dialogues in Limbo*, New York, Scribner's, 1948, p. 40.

⁴⁶ G. Santayana, *Soliloquies in England and Later Soliloquies*, cit., p. 212.

In *Watchmen*, the first masked vigilante appeared in 1938 followed by several more who united the next year to form the Minutemen. After their initial popularity declined, and members retired or died, the group disbanded by the end of the 1940s. Yet new masks appeared; their attempt to form a group in 1966 failed, and they worked individually or in small, informal teams. By the next decade they mostly were feared and reviled and then outlawed in 1977 except for two employed by the U.S. government.

The six main characters of *Watchmen* with one exception, are of this second-generation. Each corresponds to an aspect of Santayana's ideas about masks, demonstrating not Santayana's influence but the reasonableness of the shared interpretation of human experience and the self. Listed in order of first costumed appearance: *Rorschach* exemplifies what Santayana called the tragic mask; *The Comedian* exemplifies the comic mask; *Dr. Manhattan* and *Ozymandias* exemplify different ways of denying or rejecting masks; and *Nite Owl II* and *Silk Spectre II* exemplify different ways of living sanely with masks. Only Manhattan has superpowers; the others have extraordinary strength and agility, training in combat or weapons, and high intelligence.

The story begins in 1985 with the defenestration of the Comedian. Rorschach, suspecting a «mask killer», tries to warn the others. Ozymandias, Nite Owl II, and Silk Spectre II are skeptical. Dr. Manhattan, after a journalist interrogates him on TV, leaves earth for Mars. Rorschach is framed for murder and imprisoned. Nite Owl II and Silk Spectre II free him. Manhattan takes Silk Spectre II, his former intimate partner, to Mars, tells her he knows she left him for Nite Owl II, and declares his indifference to humanity. Nite Owl II and Rorschach figure out Ozymandias is behind the Comedian's death, Manhattan's disappearance, and Rorschach's capture; and they head to Ozymandias's Antarctic headquarters. Manhattan regains some concern for humanity, figures out the plot, and transports Silk Spectre II and himself to Ozymandias's headquarters. Ozymandias stages what appears to be an inter-dimensional alien attack that kills millions of people, revealing this to the others after it happens. Rorschach leaves to expose the plot. Manhattan kills him. The surviving masks agree not to reveal Ozymandias's deception, which has brought peace as rival superpowers now work together against a perceived common enemy; the truth would revive hostilities and even more people would die.

4. The Tragic Mask

Born in 1940, Walter Joseph Kovacs grew up poor and abused, his single mother hitting him and calling him ugly. After injuring two older boys who threatened him, he entered a juvenile institution at 11, where he excelled in academics, boxing, and gymnastics. He did not lament his mother's murder five years later. As a young adult, he worked in a garment factory. When a woman rejected a custom dress as ugly, Kovacs saved the fabric made of viscous fluids between latex that produced shifting black-and-white patterns in response to temperature and pressure. «Black and white not mixing [...] no gray. Very, very beautiful» (VI, 10)⁴⁷. Two years later, the woman – Kitty Genovese – was murdered, reportedly as neighbors looked on and ignored her cries. Kovacs concluded that people essentially are selfish and cruel, denying it even to themselves. Then he took the «unwanted dress and made a face that I could bear to look at in the mirror» (VI, 10). He wore the Rorschach

⁴⁷ A. Moore, D. Gibbons, *Watchmen*, New York, DC Comics, 1987. Cited as [book number as Roman numeral], [page number as Arabic numeral].

mask with a hat and overcoat, fighting street gangs and organized crime; he joined Nite Owl II the next year. Later he realized allowing criminals to live made him too soft, only «a man in a costume» pretending to be Rorschach (VI, 15). His realization came in 1975 when he discovered a kidnapper had murdered a six-year-old girl and fed her to his dogs. After he killed the dogs, bound the kidnapper, and set fire to the house, he felt cleansed of illusion, convinced there was no god and no order to existence except what humans impose on it. He became Rorschach.

The shifting mask expresses the instability of Rorschach's childhood; it imposes black-and-white clarity on uncertainty baffling to a child; and it symbolically subdues – by containing within its shape – the volatile emotions resulting from the cruelty and betrayal he suffered. This tragic mask defines Rorschach's role as strong, independent, and righteous: it stands for the limits of what he allows, the certainty of the life he will live – without compromise – and the death he will deal to enemies. With this he is under the spell of self-knowledge that compels him to reject weakness and inconsistency, to live unbowed before anyone, and to impose moral law on a corrupt world. One author wrote, «Rorschach acts out of a completely introverted vision of Law (seeing little but himself, his own definitions, and acting on them)»⁴⁸.

But actually, Rorschach sees little of himself: only the fixed traits the mask symbolizes. He acknowledges no tension between mask and life, instead arresting his life with a mask. When he put on his costume, he «abandoned my disguise and become myself, free from fear or weakness or lust. My coat, my shoes, my spotless gloves. My face» (V, 18). «This face all that's necessary [...] all I need» (X, 9). Dreiberg comments on Rorschach: «That mask's eaten his brains» (VII, 9), and indeed he is incapable of self-understanding, missing other things besides. The account of the murder of Kitty Genovese that prompted the creation of his mask was almost immediately found to be rife with inconsistencies, and the most sensational claims of indifference to the murder and disregard for the dying victim lacked evidence. He also is the only one of the main characters ignorant of the Comedian's identity. More problematic is his disregard for his dynamic mask: its fabric registers material changes, which Santayana thought superior to introspection for indicating functioning of psyche. Instead of interpreting psyche, Rorschach holds to an abstract meaning of the mask, ignoring the meaning of the events crossing his face. This is the spell of self-knowledge.

The potential value of Rorschach's mask for self-understanding is all the more striking when compared to his habituation expressionlessness. Unmasked Kovacs is described as «very withdrawn, with no expression in either face or voice. Getting a response is often difficult» (VI, 1). Two times he expresses himself freely. First, when he is captured and demasked by cops, he has lost control of the situation and is violently assaulted and mocked. The frame shows a wild-eyed, snarling, bloodied face rendered in burning red, orange, and yellow; he screams, «No! My FACE! Give it BACK! » (V, 28). Second, when Manhattan blocks him from revealing Ozymandias's plot, Rorschach takes off his mask and with angry tears streaming down his contorted face screams, «DO IT!» forcing his death (XII, 24).

Unable to change, harmonize conflicting impulses, or reason, Rorschach cannot continue to live with himself when the mask and the traits it stands for fail to manage the situation. This divided consciousness and internal conflict destroys Rorschach. Either his mask

⁴⁸ B. Dietrich, *The Human Stain: Chaos and the Rage for Order in Watchmen*, cit., p. 122.

dominates life, or Rorschach – invested in his mask as his «true person»⁴⁹ – is overwhelmed by the material flux and dies.

The tragic is not the only mask we might remark. Santayana acknowledged that it is no less human or legitimate to look in directions other than that of our inevitable death and assume masks other than the tragic mask; and he considered, in particular, the comic mask, «the irresponsible, complete, extreme expression of each moment»⁵⁰.

5. The Comic Mask

The Comedian was first noticed in 1939: «a particularly vicious and brutal young man in a gaudy yellow boiler suit» (II, 29-30) who was the youngest of the first generation of masks (II, 3), an original member of the Minutemen at 15⁵¹. He was kicked out of the Minutemen in 1940 for sexually assaulting Silk Spectre. He then fought for the United States in World War II (II, 32) and made «good government connections» (III, 29). He fought in Vietnam and in a rage murdered a woman (II, 13-15; IV, 19). In the 1970s he worked with other masks to subdue public protests (II, 16-18). When masked adventurers were outlawed in 1977, he continued working legally as a government agent (IV, 23).

The Comedian's costume changed more dramatically than that of any other character. After suffering a serious knife wound, he discarded his jester-like yellow and purple suit with the mask of comedy for a belt buckle (II, 5). The new costume was heavy black leather with a red and white striped short sleeve on the right shoulder and blue shoulder pad with a white star on the left (II, 32). He wore a small eye mask until replacing it in the late 1970s (II, 16) with what Gibbons called a «rapist's mask», giving the character an «ominous» and uncomedic appearance⁵². Gibbons thought the costume «looked very serious, so I drew a tiny little yellow smiley faced badge, almost as a throwaway»⁵³.

The *comedic* aspect of a ruthless opportunist, rapist, and murderer wearing the smiley face might be called ironic: he was a crimefighter but committed crimes; he laughed at defenders of justice and joined them to brutalize criminals. But irony is thin cover for the cruelty of «a psychopath»⁵⁴, and irony, cruelty, and psychopathy don't account for the character's comic aspect.

Santayana regarded the comic mask as the mark of «the primitive comedian», who acts impulsively on whim or personal inclination instead of considered reason⁵⁵. The Comedian trading a clown suit for bondage gear recalls Santayana's observation that the primitive comedian will pretend to be one thing one moment but present a different appearance in the next moment. But this change is illusory; the Comedian plays a fixed role of irresponsible and detached individual. He clings to a comic mask even when the costume lacks a mask: the Comedian wearing no mask in a bar in Vietnam is attacked with a broken bottle by a woman pregnant with his child. In a scene similar to the demasking of Rorschach, he screams «My face [...] ghuhuhh. What did you do, you bitch, you hurt my face, you

⁴⁹ G. Santayana, *Soliloquies in England and Later Soliloquies*, cit., p. 133.

⁵⁰ Ivi, p. 137.

⁵¹ Rorschach says the Comedian was 16 when he was in the Minutemen (I, 12); he was born in 1924 (I, 28), and the Minutemen formed in 1939; so, he joined when he was 14 or 15.

⁵² M. Salisbury, *Artists on Comic Art*, London, Titan, 2000, p. 80.

⁵³ N. Serrao, *Watchmen: Behind the Smiley Face*, in «EW.com», 16 June, 2017, p. 63.

⁵⁴ A. Moore, D. Gibbons, N. Gaiman, *A Portal to Another Dimension*, cit.

⁵⁵ G. Santayana, *Soliloquies in England and Later Soliloquies*, cit., p. 135.

whore, you [...] filthy, stinking, worthless [...] lousy piece of [...]», and he murders her with a handgun (II, 14-15). By naming him father of her child and attacking his face, the woman threatened his role as primitive comedian, who is unconnected to others and without responsibilities. When told, «You gunned her down»; he repeats the charge with the responsibility elided: «Yeah, yeah, that's right. Pregnant woman. Gunned her down» (II, 15).

With no origin story, the Comedian appears as if emerging from the wilderness to exercise his strength. His identity as Edward Blake has no story of its own. When invited to join a community, he betrays it for his immediate pleasure through domination. But he also took on social roles, reflecting the development of Santayana's primitive comedian who moves beyond acting on whim to responding to people and things by imitating them. Impulsive behavior becomes mimicry, performing stereotyped roles or imitating responses to human situations. But really this is mockery because the primitive comedian assumes superiority over those imitated. The primitive comedian, who plays many different roles and reverts to an assumed natural self, believes this nimbleness elevates imitator over imitated, who are assumed to be stuck with one perspective only and have no self apart from the appearance imitated⁵⁶. The Comedian in *Watchmen* performs the roles of crimefighter, war hero, and government agent all while mocking ideals of justice, community, sacrifice, and public service as ineffective responses to actual conditions in a brutal and meaningless universe.

The Comedian made this clear in the failed organizational meeting in 1966, deriding the other masks for taking seriously criminal gangs and drug dealers when nuclear war will destroy everything within 30 years. He took nothing seriously, of course, but he thought this the only sensible approach: «once you figure out what a joke everything is, being the Comedian's the only thing makes sense [...] I never said it was a good joke! I'm just playin' along with the gag» (II, 13). He thought he was immune to the insanity he observed in others, like Rorschach after the murder of the six-year-old girl: «I keep things in proportion an' try to see the funny side [...] I kinda like when things get weird, y'know? I like it when all the cards are on the table» (II, 18).

This funny side that the Comedian saw is only surface. He had no insight into the conditions or meaning of what he sees⁵⁷. Like the primitive comedian, he had the shallow understanding of a child but, unlike the child, was not playful, engaging instead in merciless satire. The clowning satirist – regardless of how meticulous the observation and how accurate the imitation of fellow humans – achieves no moral sympathy or wisdom. There is only mocking response, reinforcing the primitive comedian's sense of superiority. The absurdity of the human predicament merely stimulates the primitive comedian to reproduce it, not understand it.

And yet the Comedian had gained a reputation for understanding: Manhattan thought he understood human suffering without caring (IV, 19); Rorschach thought he understood the human «capacity for horrors» and would not look away or quit the fight (VI, 15); and Ozymandias thought he understood that Ozymandias's plot would eliminate the brutality he thrived on and was jealous of Ozymandias's epic joke on humankind (XI, 24-25).

But each is incorrect: When the Comedian discovered Ozymandias's plot – when things got *really* weird and all the cards were on the table for him to see – he demonstrated no

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*.

great understanding of himself or the human condition and had no resources for preserving sanity. He admitted his inability to grasp his situation: «I thought I knew how it was, how the world was. But then I found out about this gag, this joke [...] I can't believe anybody would do that» (II, 22-3). He got drunk and cried, confessed to a former rival the «bad things» he did, and repeatedly begged forgiveness of the Virgin Mary. He asked, «What's funny? [...] I don't get it. [...] somebody explain it to me» (II, 23).

Manhattan is wrong about the Comedian because there is no understanding human suffering without caring about human beings; this is lost on Manhattan who barely finds life significant. Rorschach is wrong because it was precisely Ozymandias's capacity for horrors that overwhelmed the Comedian. Rorschach mistakes the Comedian's tenacity for understanding, when it was only mindless clinging to the comic mask just as Rorschach clings to the tragic mask. Ozymandias is wrong because the Comedian did not despair of losing a competition but of understanding such an unfathomably «bad thing» (II, 23); the Comedian was not resentful, but terrified. Ozymandias acknowledges the terror but is wrong that the Comedian understood. The change in the Comedian was not due to understanding but to the imposition of superior force. The Comedian only drops his mask after Ozymandias throws him from a window, which is fully consistent with Ozymandias's approach to human problems.

The Comedian's disregard of convention and lack of restraint has potential benefits: Just as the clown's leaping and shouting are raw material for dance and drama, so impulsiveness and mimicry provide starting points for criticism. The raw materials are meaningless until harmonized by reflection on past experience. Mindless impulse discharges unnoticed, but actually remarking novel masks is an opportunity for new harmonies; satire becomes criticism and whim becomes inspiration. This introduces reasoning; and primitive comedy, enlightened by understanding and sympathy, becomes humane comedy⁵⁸. Humane comedy is rational in the sense that «the irresponsible, complete, extreme expression of each moment»⁵⁹ is harmonized with a tragic understanding of the human condition. The tension of mask and life is preserved in reasoning. Without this sort of reasoning, the individual's life is especially unstable as the Comedian's turned out to be.

6. Rejecting Masks

In *Watchmen*, the two most powerful characters regard themselves as self-made, have reputations for great intelligence, and are confident they know the truth about the world. Yet they both end up at least as deluded or cruel as Rorschach and the Comedian, causing greater destruction and cultivating greater inhumanity.

Before becoming the only character with superpowers, Dr. Manhattan was physics Ph.D. Jon Osterman, who lost his intrinsic field in a laboratory accident, rendering his body into separate particles. He is presumed dead, but within a month an «electromagnetic pattern resembling consciousness» (IV, 30) assembled a material body: a self-created blue human figure resembling Jon Osterman (with his memories and answering to his name)⁶⁰ with power to rearrange or disintegrate any material object and unaffected by traditional weapons. He synthesizes materials enabling new energy technologies, altering the world

⁵⁸ Ivi, p. 136.

⁵⁹ Ivi, p. 137.

⁶⁰ He also distinguishes himself from Osterman: see XII, 18.

economy (IV, 15). He observes all moments as simultaneous; for him there is no past or future, and to others he seems to perceive the future in the present (IV, 15-16; IX, 5-6, 17; XII, 7-8).

This new being is recruited by the United States government, ensuring military supremacy (securing the invasion of Viet Nam and establishing superiority over the Soviet Union). His employers named him Dr. Manhattan, and dressed him in a dark purple body suit with blue belt and helmet with the atomic whirl on it. He rejected the helmet and the symbol; but officials insisted on a marketable image, so he drew on his forehead a symbol he could respect, that of the hydrogen atom (IV, 12). After five years, he reduced his costume to a sleeveless black leotard, and contrasted himself with masked heroes «wearing disguises» (IV, 17). In another five years, he wore only a black bikini; twelve years after that he wore nothing (although he would dress in a suit and tie for a funeral or television appearance).

Dr. Manhattan, aided by his superpowers – «he can see neutrinos» (VII, 10) – continues Osterman's scientific research. He finds no quantifiable or structural difference between life and death (I, 21) and refuses to «see existence in human terms» obscured by emotion (IX, 23). Regarding scientific knowledge as free of human taint is for Santayana a rejection of masks in favor of being «straightforward»⁶¹, corresponding to the illustrated stripping away of Manhattan's costume. Manhattan rejects human stories about experience and insists he knows the literal truth of existence. Though this is yet another story – another mask – more precise and less idiosyncratic. The denial of masks results in a mania for reason – reason pursued unreasonably becoming a madness for exactness and literalness.

For Santayana, matter is of interest not because it is an accessible literal truth behind masks, but because it produces minds and presents masks, including masks of science – hydrogen atom, theory, chaos labeled as such – that can direct human activity in ways more congenial than non-scientific conceptions to continued human experience. But «did we have nothing but electrical physics to think of, the nightmare would soon become intolerable»⁶². There is value in touring Mars with Manhattan and observing the limits of human perspectives, the non-human scale of the landscape, and its inorganic history. Our perspective need not mislead us, limiting reality to our own scale and taking masks for material existences, which is a mistake Manhattan makes again and again. Masks «[remain] our natural companions [...]». It is fortunate that the material world, whatever may be its intrinsic structure or substance, falls to our apprehension into such charming units»⁶³.

Santayana's words describe Manhattan: «the masks of life, are odious to him; yet he is quite happy to be deceived and to be masked by a thick atmosphere of convention»⁶⁴. Osterman's life before and after the accident bears this out. He remarked «[o]ther people seem to make all my moves for me» (IV, 5): his father determined his career; his colleagues inadvertently removed his intrinsic field; and, then, after gaining superpowers, he was subject to government control, media influence, and Ozymandias's manipulation. Egotistically, he makes this lifelong experience of impotence into a universal truth, believing «everything is preordained [...] [he] is just a puppet who can see the strings» (IX, 5). He claims the universe is the masks he finds it wearing; a confusion invisible when

⁶¹ G. Santayana, *Soliloquies in England and Later Soliloquies*, cit., p. 130.

⁶² Ivi, p. 124.

⁶³ Ivi, p. 125.

⁶⁴ Ivi, p. 131.

masks are denied. Santayana thought the choice is «between a mask and a fig-leaf»⁶⁵, meaning we acknowledge masks and interpret or enjoy them as appropriate or else we deny there is nothing else behind the fig-leaf we insist on wearing: «Art and discipline render seemly what would be unseemly without them, but hypocrisy hides it ostentatiously under something irrelevant, and the fig-leaf is only a more ignominious mask»⁶⁶. Manhattan may go naked, but he covers the reality of human feelings and perceptions with science, leading him into hypocrisy and contradiction.

Manhattan's ignorance of masks results in ignorance of himself, apparent in his contradictory words and actions. He criticizes Laurie Juspecky for being blinded by her emotions (IX, 23) after he has consciously lied to his first partner (IV, 11) about his desire for the younger Juspecky who becomes his partner (IV, 17-18), teleported an entire audience after becoming angry with a journalist's questions (III, 13-16); and retreated to Mars to sulk, having lost all concern with humanity when Juspecky left him. He denigrates the human perspective but quite comfortably anthropomorphizes inorganic processes (a planet *choosing* not to support life) and praises in poetic and value terms (IX, 14, 19) the «breathtaking» and «excellent» Martian landscape in comparison to human existence (IX, 18).

The apparent contradiction in Manhattan's character would not matter if he really were a god. Honesty, courage, and friendship would be meaningless for a god, unmatched power obviating need and capacity for virtue. How could one be an excellent human being when one is no longer a human being? Manhattan's character is interesting because of the tension between his (sporadic) humanity and his new way of being. Manhattan acquired god-like powers through an extreme trauma. Perhaps extreme symptoms of post-traumatic stress resemble traits of a god. Traumatic experiences resist narrative ordering in memory and remain a present disrupting experience. They are not past experiences but powerful and detailed present sensations of the trauma. Osterman's extreme trauma may have inhibited experiences of temporal distinction or what Santayana called «sentimental time»: representations in human terms (masks) of changes in material existence⁶⁷. Manhattan's altered experience of time recalls Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* in which Billy Pilgrim comes unstuck in time. Both characters survive violence that threatens all bodily integrity and live with stories lacking reliable patterns and a sense of utter loss of control. Manhattan exclaims: «It's all getting out of my hands» (IV, 12) and sees «the whole continuum, life's pattern or lack of one» (IX, 23).

Ozymandias's plan to fake an alien invasion is, in the words of *Watchmen* illustrator Dave Gibbons, a «macguffin [...] the plot itself is of no great consequence»⁶⁸. Fittingly, Ozymandias is the least interesting character of the comic book; driven by ambition and lust for control, he's an authoritarian mass murderer of no great insight. Born Adrian Veidt, the exceptionally bright child of immigrants, he believed his intelligence self-willed, a result of his decision to be intelligent. Orphaned at 17, he gave up an inheritance and life of ease because he «burned with the paradoxical urge to do everything» (XI, 8) and wanted «to prove that I could accomplish anything [...] starting from absolutely nothing» (XI,30).

He took as the measure of success the Macedonian king Alexander the Great (356-323 BCE), whom he idolized for the empire he established. But he realized Alexander's empire

⁶⁵ Ivi, p. 139.

⁶⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁷ G. Santayana, *Realms of Being*, cit., p. 256.

⁶⁸ M. Salisbury, *Artists on Comic Art*, London, Titan, 2000, p. 82.

had been unstable, fragmenting after his death. He took new inspiration from the pharaohs of Egypt, who established a culture both intellectually rich and stable. Honoring both inspirations he took the Greek name of Pharaoh Rameses the Second, Ozymandias, and attempted to apply the wisdom of antiquity to contemporary problems (XI, 8-11). He claims to have become a superhero by believing in himself and his potential, asserting anyone could do the same: «physical exercise, meditation and study aren't terribly esoteric» (XI, 30). After cultivating extraordinary strength and intelligence, he was slow to figure out that fighting street crime would not ensure global stability. The Comedian's sarcasm alerted him to his «sham crusade» fighting symptoms rather than causes. He quit masked crime fighting in 1975, two years before it was outlawed, retaining public sympathy when other masks were feared and ridiculed (V, 17; II, 16). He built a business empire, gaining wealth and power to carry out his plan: Frightening «governments into co-operation, I would convince them that earth faced imminent attack by beings from another world» (XI, 21, 22, 24, 30). He appears to accomplish this, simulating an alien invasion that halts all terrestrial hostilities and kills three million people in New York City, with all others who knew of the plot either murdered or committed to keeping the secret.

In addition to murdering the Comedian, Ozymandias is what Santayana called an enemy of comedy⁶⁹. He craves control and hates unpredictability and variety in human experience. He claims «there is no ordinary person» and «anyone can be a hero», but this is no pluralism: one becomes «extraordinary» and a «hero» following his «step by step guide» (XI, 31; X, 32). He disciplines himself, believing power is simply a choice; if others seem to have chosen not to control themselves, he must do it for them.

His unacknowledged mask of self-control ensures hypocrisy and loss of expressiveness. His order and righteousness are a pose. Illustrations of Ozymandias show stereotypes of a performer (masculine hero, reflective sage, righteous victor). His words are platitudes: «You get to be a superhero by believing in the hero within you and summoning him or her forth by an act of will» (XI, 30); cynical calculations of how to direct human longings into fantasies profitable for his business (X, 31); polished interview answers of unconvincing humility, unshakeable confidence, and unfunny jokes (XI, 29-32). Santayana thought that comedy, when suppressed, «goes on silently behind the scenes, until perhaps it gets the upper hand and becomes positive madness»⁷⁰, a striking example being when Ozymandias soliloquizes to loyal assistants he has just poisoned to ensure they never reveal his plans (XI, 7-11).

7. Living with Masks

As their names suggest, Nite Owl II and Silk Spectre II are the least original characters, but they are the most successful in their struggles to live sanely with masks. They acknowledge the danger of the masks they wear: Dreiberg tells of trying out an exo-skeleton prototype that resulted in a broken arm; Juspeczyk responds, «That sounds like the sort of costume that could really mess you up», and Dreiberg asks, «Is there any other sort?» (VII, 8). They don't deny masks or use them to hide. Masks are vital to their learning how to cultivate stronger human relationships. (Their witty exchanges are humane comedy – critical, not mocking; demonstrating tendencies to reasoning and humanity).

⁶⁹ G. Santayana, *Soliloquies in England and Later Soliloquies*, cit., p. 138.

⁷⁰ *Ibidem*.

Dan Dreiberg's interests in birds, airplanes, and mythology and university studies in zoology and aeronautics disappointed his father, who wanted his son to become a banker like him. Instead, Dreiberg, bored and rich after inheriting his father's wealth, took up the crime-fighting identity of his hero Hollis Mason, the retired Nite Owl (VII, 8). Nite Owl II is distinguished by his use of technology: night vision goggles, respirator, pocket laser; radar-invisible aircraft with various defenses and weapons; auxiliary costumes for different conditions (underwater, radioactive contamination); and his procedural use of computers to find patterns among data (VII, 6, 9; VIII, 4; X, 9).

Laurie Juspezyk was raised to fulfill her mother's fantasies (VII.5; IX.14) and become «a big tough super-lady, like [her] mom», Silk Spectre (IX, 11). This meant physical training overseen by her mother (IX, 12) and wearing «a stupid costume because my stupid mother wanted me to» (I, 25; IV, 23; VIII, 8). Already a mask at 16 years old, she began a relationship with Manhattan in 1966, leaving him 19 years later and starting a relationship with Dreiberg. Shortly after this, she realized that the Comedian, known to her as the man who nine years before her birth sexually assaulted her mother, was her father (making it especially appropriate that she should be a practitioner of humane comedy).

Both retired when masked adventurers were outlawed in 1977, and both struggled to find a meaningful life after that. Juspezyk was «a kept woman for the military's secret weapon», living with Manhattan at a government military research center (I, 25). She was secure but bored, lonely, and with «no real human contact» but also no privacy (VII, 7, 10). She wanted contact but didn't «know any body except goddamned [...] superheroes» (III, 8). Dreiberg sees his adventuring past as an adolescent fantasy, but he can't quite move on, keeping his old costumes and equipment (VII, 7). Neither Dreiberg nor Juspezyk respond to changing conditions by clinging to a particular mask or rejecting masks outright, but finding the right response was difficult. Their story is about finding more vital masks after connecting with each other.

One reader characterized Dreiberg and Juspezyk as «rather broken individuals [...] making few if any real human connections»⁷¹. Though plausible, this is highly misleading. The pair are broken in the ways each of us is broken off from others by limited perspectives, conflicting impulses, and mortality; they are exemplary in learning how to establish connections under extreme conditions. Their responses to imposed masks are improvised, increasingly self-aware, and salutary for relating to others as human beings.

When Dreiberg and Juspezyk become intimate, he is unable to have sex though he wants to. Discouraged, he wakes in the middle of night, puts on his costume, and takes his aircraft out on patrol. Juspezyk comes along, surprising him by wearing her costume, and together they rescue people from a burning building. Afterward, they have sex. She asks, «Did the costumes make it good?» (VII, 28). He says, yes, remarking how strange it feels to admit it. The restored identities bring self-confidence and honesty, enabling an intimate relationship that grows beyond the old masks.

Among their peers, they are the only ones with long-standing and close human relationships: Dreiberg rejected his father's mask and chose the mask of his hero who becomes a mentor and friend he visits weekly (I, 9). Dreiberg is the only person Rorschach explicitly acknowledged as a friend (X, 10), and Dreiberg proves this by illegally donning his mask to break Rorschach out of prison. Juspezyk, as the offspring of two masks and the intimate partner of another, struggled not to be completely subsumed – by maternal

⁷¹ B. Dietrich, *The Human Stain: Chaos and the Rage for Order in Watchmen*, cit., p. 128.

domination, grief and anger at her father, or the inhumane chill of superpowers; yet she does maintain a relationship with her mother, unlike Manhattan who let his father think his son had died in a lab accident (IV, 19). Juspeczyk also grieves the millions of Ozymandias's dead victims calling them «people» (XII, 7-8), again unlike Manhattan, who denies any structural difference between life and death or special value of humanity (I, 21; IX, 8-9, 13).

Juspeczyk's refusal to be dominated and Dreiberg's awareness of adolescent motivations of his career keep them from getting stuck in the past. But Juspeczyk's resistance is similar to the uncompromising and independent Rorschach or unrestrained Comedian, and Dreiberg's judgment is similar to the cynical Comedian or reinvented Adrian Veidt. What makes the difference is their desire for connection, their regard for human life, and reasoning. Dreiberg does not forsake humanity in his devotion to science. Unlike Manhattan who is oblivious to his own poetic tendencies, Dreiberg knows that «scientific understanding [...] does not impede a poetic appreciation of [...] phenomenon. Rather the two enhance each other» (VII, 32). Similarly, Dreiberg's recognition of the need for the technological aide of auxiliary costumes demonstrates flexibility in the use of masks; which is repeated in his careful planning as when he «set up emergency identities years ago» (VIII, 21) enabling him and Juspeczyk to ditch their old identities, elude authorities, and start new lives (though they reveal themselves to Juspeczyk's mother and honor Hollis by taking his name as their new surname) (XII, 28). They acknowledge the need for masks and use them with growing wisdom to understand themselves and live well.

Near the end of the story, Manhattan notes that «exposing [Ozymandias's] plot, we destroy any chance of peace, dooming earth to worse destruction» (XII, 20). Dreiberg gives a classical example of wisdom, acknowledging his limits: «How can humans make decisions like this? We're damned if we stay quiet, earth's damned if we don't. We [...] okay. Okay, count me in. We say nothing [...]. This is too big to be hard-assed about!» (XII, 20). A few pages later Juspeczyk and Dreiberg have cut and dyed their hair, Dreiberg wears a mustache and no glasses. They do not rule out adventuring but already they consider different names and masks.

8. Conclusion

Risks of masks are reduced when we «see more and believe less»⁷² – when you attend to the changing variety of masks and are cautious in committing to the existence of what they might stand for. Life has more dignity, harmony, and is saner when this attention aids reasoning, which increasing understanding. Comic books are helpful for practicing seeing more and believing less since they invite you to attend to a narrative in novel ways: the eyes move in unaccustomed directions as you inspect images, their arrangements, their details; the physical placement of text can suggest enlightening parallels or interesting ambiguities when considered with juxtaposed images. More questions and interpretations arise.

In *Watchmen*, images reveal changes in the masks and costumes – especially the variety of otherwise unremarked patterns of Rorschach's mask. You can see the subtle expressions of shock, sadness, or fear in the Comedian and of delight, annoyance, or anger in Manhattan – two characters who deny such emotions; the collection of stereotyped poses and postures of Ozymandias; and the changes in bearing and general appearance in Dreiberg and Juspeczyk as they come out of depression or fall in love or start new lives. This can be

⁷² G. Santayana, *Soliloquies in England and Later Soliloquies*, cit., p. 127.

conveyed in words, as I'm not claiming absolute superiority of one over the other. But reading text in a conventional format (Santayana's texts) and reading comics (*Watchmen*) are different experiences. The assumption here is that experience is more than information, and the different experiences draw attention to that in an immediate way and in the context of considering the importance of attention to masks.

Scott McCloud explained that often times images in comics amplify through simplification; it is not «just a way of drawing, it's a way of seeing»⁷³ with a focus and intensity – practice for seeing more and believing less. Comics are an excellent way to bring out the double aspect of what nature presents to mind⁷⁴. They present a spectacle that engages in a way sensuously distinct from reading text. They also present shockingly obvious (though sometimes forgotten) evidence they deal in unrealities – the flat, abstract images are not the things they portray – this is not a superhero, this is not an alien life form, this is not a way to live sanely. Comics can help us engage with masks as masks not the things they stand for, and with essences as essences and not existences. Obviously, this is true of texts too, and in particular Santayana's texts. But read together, they offer experiences of attending, distinguishing, and reasoning that are not present with one of the media alone. Reading in this way may free spirit to appreciate a variety of masks, limbering up psyche for responding beneficially to changing material conditions. Seeing more increases awareness of possibilities and enriches reasoning; this enables stronger harmonies and, when necessary, refines beliefs that aid understanding apply more widely to nature.

The extraordinary skills and talents of superheroes may tempt them to forego practices of attention and reasoning. Their great strengths, symbolized by masks, can make subtler methods seem unnecessary; they cling to their strengths and identify with their masks. The ignorance, gullibility, and dogmatism of Rorschach and the instability of the Comedian result from their tenacious clinging to their masks; the arrogance and isolation of Ozymandias and Manhattan result from their denial of masks; Drieberg and Juspeczyk, who have much different relationships to their masks than their colleagues and than each other, are able to acknowledge and make use of changing masks to live sanely. If Santayana is right, these characters are exaggerated images of risks each of us faces and, if Moore and Gibbons have been successful, these characters raise important questions for us about how we might live sanely.

⁷³ S. McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, [New York?], Paradox Press, 1999, p. 31.

⁷⁴ G. Santayana, *Soliloquies in England and Later Soliloquies*, cit., p. 126.

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

Leonarda Vaiana

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.

* * *

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. James¹.

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 nature³. 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 Will⁵.

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.

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 inconsistency 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 verses¹⁰, «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 tintured 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 spirit¹³. 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 years¹⁴. 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 Santayana*, 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 triumph¹⁸.

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 reward¹⁹.

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 haben 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 things²⁴.

In addition, in spite of distancing himself from Nietzsche many a time²⁵, 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 recurrent²⁶. 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 system²⁸. However, contrary to expectations²⁹, 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 sensitivity³⁰. 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 beliefs³¹, and in *Winds of Doctrine* he had stigmatized B. Russell's faith in the «absolute necessity» of mathematics as it were a religion³². 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 Dionysius³⁵, 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 reason³⁸.

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 sanity³⁹ 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. He 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 born⁴⁰.

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, Scribner'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 follower⁴¹ «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 reasons. 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 leaders⁴⁵, *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 warmth⁴⁶. Still what emerges from his letters and autobiography, reveals an uncommon richness and intensity of social relationships⁴⁷. 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 age⁴⁸.

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 joy⁴⁹. 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.

A BRIDGE BETWEEN TRADITIONS:
THE SENSE OF BEAUTY IN THE AESTHETIC THEORIES
OF FRANCIS HUTCHESON AND GEORGE SANTAYANA

Laura Elizia Haubert

Abstract: Although a fair amount of secondary literature on George Santayana's aesthetics has been produced, almost none of these works – to the best of our knowledge – is concerned with linking his production to the context of the formation of American aesthetics. This is precisely the main purpose of this article. The hypothesis supported here is that by critically comparing the concepts of «sense of beauty» proposed by George Santayana and inspired by Francis Hutcheson's work, it is possible to highlight the influence of classical British aesthetic theory on the emerging aesthetic tradition in the United States at the end of the 19th century.

Keywords: Santayana, Hutcheson, Sense of Beauty, Aesthetics.

* * *

1. Introduction: recovering the connections between British and American aesthetics

The historiography of the American aesthetic tradition is still under development. This phenomenon was briefly analyzed in a recently published book¹. In this work it was argued that the existence of such a legacy was debated until very recently in the academic domain, and that while on the one hand it was quickly admitted by historians that there exists a properly American criticism of art and even an American fine arts tradition, the same was not so clear regarding the field of philosophical aesthetics², particularly when we consider the beginnings of this tradition.

Seeking to expand the scope of this line of investigation to include the history of American aesthetics, Laura Haubert, Fabio Campeoto, and Claudio M. Viale³ argued that it was not that such an aesthetic tradition did not exist, but rather that it had been presented in a different way at the beginning⁴. It did not originate at universities. Its source was not academics, but literary societies and free meetings, and its authors were not experts, but artists, freethinkers, politicians, and a general literate public who were interested in the subjects of aesthetics and philosophy of art. Even at the beginning, when American aesthetics was still a fragmentary tradition being developed there was already something distinctive that could be considered a tradition of its own, and many of the debates about it took on a nationalistic character, with artists and freethinkers insisting on the need to build a theoretical aesthetic tradition of their own.

¹ W.B. Gulick, G. Slater (eds.), *American Aesthetics: Theory and Practice*, Albany, Suny Press, 2020.

² Ivi, p. 8.

³ L.E. Haubert, F. Campeoto, C.M. Viale, *La génesis de la estética estadounidense: pioneros, espíritu colonial y la resignificación de la experiencia estética en el siglo XIX*, en «Metafísica y persona», 28, 2022, pp. 11-39.

⁴ The major argument developed by Haubert, Campeoto, and Viale (*ibidem*) is based on previous work done by: M.I. Baym, *A History of Literary Aesthetic in America*, New York, Frederick Unger Publishing, 1988. M.J. Neil, *Toward a National Taste: America's Quest for Aesthetic Independence*, Honolulu, The University Press of Hawaii, 1975. M. Banta, *One True Theory & the Quest for an American Aesthetics*, New York and London, Yale University Press, 2007. E. Cahill, *Liberty of the Imagination: Aesthetic Theory, Literary Form, and Politics in the Early United States*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012.

However, this almost unknown legacy flourished and developed and became established. What can be accurately spotted is the moment when this tradition ceased to be fragmentary and entered the realm of universities, becoming a discipline that, though not very respectable at the time, at least began to gain ground. This key moment was epitomized by George Santayana's contribution/work. It is important to note that «George Santayana (1863-1952) inaugurated aesthetics as a major part of Academic philosophy in the United States at the end of the nineteenth century» and actually «remained the most prominent writer on aesthetics [...] until the appearance in 1934 of *Art as Experience* by his close contemporary John Dewey»⁵. A similar position is defended by Santayana's biographer, who claimed that *The Sense of Beauty* «was the first American treatise on [aesthetics], and among the first in Britain or on the continent»⁶.

This initial period of aesthetics inaugurated by Santayana's work is of particular interest here, since until now there have been no major studies on this transition from a non-academic to an academic American aesthetics and therefore the influence of foreign traditions such as the European ones has not been properly investigated yet. Existing research is either dedicated to a broader analysis not specifically focused on aesthetics purposely⁷, or, on the contrary, they focus on aesthetics, but from a single thinker's perspective, as in the case of studies on the reception of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and Friedrich Schiller in John Dewey's aesthetics⁸ and of Friedrich Schiller in Charles Sanders Peirce's⁹.

Even though research dedicated to the beginning of the American aesthetic theory is still rare, it does exist and most of it is focused on the Germanic tradition, i.e. on the reception of Kant, the Romantics and even of Hegel. This may be explained by the fact that, there had been an intense flow of Germanic ideas into the educational sphere of the United States since at least 1830¹⁰. There were many forms of contact, such as receiving immigrants, sending students abroad to Germany, and even translating classical German works. It cannot be denied that this nexus existed and was important or that a more detailed work on this in the field of aesthetics has yet to be written.

However, the present investigation seeks to draw attention to the fact that there was also a British tradition which had a profound impact on the beginnings of American aesthetics before the Germanic influence during the 19th century. Unfortunately, practically nothing has been written yet about this common bridge between the two traditions, with rare exceptions such as Paul Guyer historical inquiry¹¹.

The British tradition of philosophy and aesthetics was the first theoretical source for American thinkers¹². This scenario began to change only after the Anglo-American War of 1812, when a process of searching for other intellectual references began. Until then, almost

⁵ P. Guyer, *A History of Modern Aesthetics. Volume 3: The Twentieth Century*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2014, p. 238.

⁶ J. McCormick, *George Santayana: A Biography*, New York, Knopf, 1987, p. 127.

⁷ W. H. Goetzmann, *The American Hegelians. An Intellectual Episode in the History of Western America*, New York, Knopf, 1973.

⁸ D.J. Morse, *Faith in Life: John Dewey's Early Philosophy*, New York, Fordham University Press, 2011. R. Dreon, *Dewey after the End of Art. Evaluating the "Hegelian Permanent Deposit" in Dewey's Aesthetics*, in «Contemporary Pragmatism», 17, 2020, pp. 146-169.

⁹ J. Barnouw, *Aesthetic for Schiller and Peirce: A Neglected Origin of Pragmatism*, in «Journal of the History of Ideas», XLIX (1988), 4, pp. 607-632.

¹⁰ B. Kuklic, *A History of Philosophy in America 1720-2000*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2001.

¹¹ P. Guyer, *A History of Modern Aesthetics*, cit.

¹² M.I. Baym, *A History of Literary Aesthetic in America*, cit.

all the aesthetic ideas circulating in the United States were based on English and Scottish periodicals and books. In fact, there was a mutual exchange between the United States and England, which can be seen in the fact that it was common for British writers to contribute to American periodicals and vice-versa¹³.

This heritage is recognized, for example Thomas Munro in an article about the beginnings of aesthetics in the United States wrote: «We are direct heirs of the long British tradition in the philosophy and psychology of art»¹⁴. For Munro, this legacy is such that even when the Germans become the great referent as was already said, they do so through British intermediaries. For example, the works of Coleridge, Bosanquet and Carritt are essential to draw public attention to what was happening in Europe.

By approaching Santayana and Hutcheson we attempt to demonstrate that the connection between the aesthetic traditions of the United States and England may have weakened at a certain specific point in the late nineteenth century, but it has never disappeared completely. Whether in the early days of this academic tradition, as we want to show here, or later¹⁵, when relations were more openly established, as Guyer pointed out, when was common that philosophers worked in both countries.

Perhaps what these two Anglophone traditions have in common is that they have received little attention from philosophical historians until very recently. For example, although the British aesthetic tradition can be considered older than the Germanic¹⁶ one, it was only very recently that a broader secondary literature on it emerged¹⁷. The American case is not different, with the first substantial scholarships going back to the 70s¹⁸.

This investigation follows the trends of revival of and deliberation on these two traditions, the British and the American. It aims to provide a further piece for this puzzle, by trying to show how, even at a time when there was supposedly less British influence, it was not completely ignored, presenting itself through important writers such as Santayana. As this connection is so important, the following section is dedicated to understand the context in which this reappropriation took place.

¹³ W. Knight, *The Philosophy of the Beautiful, Being Outlines of History of Aesthetics. Volume I: Its History*, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1905.

¹⁴ T. Munro, *Aesthetics as Science: Its Development in America*, in «The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism», IX (1951), 3, p. 163.

¹⁵ «While in the first part of the twentieth century there was not much interaction between British and American aesthetics, in the second part there was, and some of the leading figures even divided their careers between the two countries» (P. Guyer, *A History of Modern Aesthetics*, cit., p. 2).

¹⁶ Although a large part of current philosophical historiography places the birth of aesthetics in Germany, with the publication of Alexander Baumgarten's works that would name the discipline, some historians in the last decade have drawn attention to the importance of production on British soil that anticipated many of the characteristics and themes that would later reappear in this well-known and prestigious German tradition. In this respect, it is worth quoting the words of that: «the intellectual roots of modern aesthetics are buried deep in British soil» (T.M. Costelloe, *The British Aesthetic Tradition. From Shaftesbury to Wittgenstein*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2013, p. 1) and also, the work of Guyer (*A History of Modern Aesthetics*, cit., p. 98): «Although it would not receive its name until ten years later in Germany, and that name would not be adopted in Britain for another century, the history of what we now call aesthetics as a specialty within academic philosophy began in Britain with the *Treatise Concerning Beauty, Order, Harmony, Design* by Francis Hutcheson (1694-1746), the first part of his *Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* of 1725».

¹⁷ C.W. Korsmeyer, *Relativism and Hutcheson's Aesthetic Theory*, in «Journal of the History of Ideas», 36 (2), 1975, 319, pp. 319-330. G. Dickie, *The Century of Taste: The Philosophical Odyssey of Taste in the Eighteenth Century*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1995. P. Kivy, *The Seventh Sense. Francis Hutcheson and Eighteenth-Century British Aesthetics*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2003. T.M. Costelloe, *The British Aesthetic Tradition. From Shaftesbury to Wittgenstein*, cit.

¹⁸ M. I. Baym, *A History of Literary Aesthetic in America*, cit.; M.J. Neil, *Toward a National Taste: America's Quest for Aesthetic Independence*, cit.; W.B. Gulick, G. Slater (eds.), *American Aesthetics: Theory and Practice*, cit.

2. The context of the connection: the writing of «The Sense of Beauty»

The hypothesis proposed here is that the meeting point between the two traditions occurs in George Santayana's essay *The sense of Beauty* (1896). According to Paul Guyer, one of the merits of that essay is to recover the idea of 18th century British theories that appreciation of beauty is a spontaneous and immediate experience. The difference is that the Spanish contemporary philosopher tries to update the psychological background with the discoveries of 19th century.

As Danto wrote in his critical introduction¹⁹, the importance of this work is twofold. On the one hand, it represented a turning point in Santayana's personal history since it was this book which gave him a reputation as a philosopher (he had published other work before, but in the field of poetry). On the other hand, the work also lays the foundations, as it has been said, for the canon of the American tradition, and today not only does it have this historical value, but it also remains a fruitful reading for those interested in the topic of beauty.

Santayana's work took several years to be created. Although it was written relatively quickly, it was based on the lectures that the thinker used in the Aesthetics courses that he taught at Harvard between 1892 and 1895, and which had not been published until then. Later, Santayana would refer to this book and these courses in a very negative way, calling them «sham», and even going so far as to state that: «Although I didn't have, and haven't now, a clear notion of what 'aesthetics' may be, I undertook to give a course in that subject»²⁰.

Curiously enough, one of the most important books in the American tradition was born out of the external pressure its author was under to keep his work. As K.P. Skowroński²¹ describes the president of Harvard at the time, Charles Eliot, was on the verge of firing Santayana because he did not meet what was expected since he was looking for a specialist in each area of philosophy for the department, not a freethinker in the manner of the Greeks, as Santayana would have liked to be²². Regarding this pressure, we have highlighted below an excerpt from one of his biographers who encountered the philosopher.

At one point I said something about *The Sense of Beauty*. Santayana answered that he wrote the book only because he was coming up for tenure at Harvard and his friends had warned him that in order to keep his job he would have to publish a scholarly work. «But what can I write about?» he had asked them. «There's that course of lectures you've been giving on aesthetics», someone suggested. «Why not that?» Santayana laughed as he added that he followed this advice just to stay on at Harvard²³.

Now, the negative tone used by Santayana years later to refer to one of his most important works has captured the interest of different interpreters until the present date²⁴. Such a negative interpretation of the philosopher should not, however, overshadow the

¹⁹ A.C. Danto, *Santayana's The Sense of Beauty: an introduction*, in G. Santayana, *The Sense of Beauty. Being the Outlines of Aesthetic Theory*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, The MIT Press, 1988, pp. xv–xxviii.

²⁰ G. Santayana, *Persons and Places: Fragments of Autobiography*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, The MIT Press, 1986, p. 393.

²¹ K.P. Skowroński, *Santayana and America. Values, Liberties, Responsibility*, Newcastle (UK), Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007.

²² About Santayana's conception of philosophy as a search for wisdom and as a way of life, we recommend the work of D. Moreno, *Santayana filósofo. La filosofía como forma de vida*, Madrid, Trotta, 2007.

²³ I. Singer, *George Santayana, Literary Philosopher*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2000, p. 10.

²⁴ G. Tiller, *Santayana in 1896: The Sense of Beauty and Studies in England*, in «Overheard in Seville: Bulletin of the Santayana Society», 39, 2021, pp. 7-15. W.E. Arnett, *Santayana and the Sense of Beauty*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1957.

oeuvre, since as the latter critic noted, it seems to be contaminated by Santayana's negative retrospective view of his years in the United States, and more specifically, at Harvard.

Although Santayana's is not a very fond recollection, this early period at Harvard, and particularly the years between 1889 and 1896, when he taught aesthetics and organized his manuscript to be published, are essential to the point made here. Thus, although it is difficult to find direct references to Hutcheson – and even to other authors from this tradition – in the work itself, it is known from context that these classic thinkers of British aesthetics were not unknown to the Spanish philosopher. One look at the public archives of Harvard University can show that Santayana taught many seminars on English philosophy in those early years. For example, in his first semester as a professor, in the fall of 1889-1890, he taught a course on English philosophy. Then, in the next semester (1890-1891), he offered a seminar on «English Philosophy from Hobbes to Hume – Lectures and theses», which possibly included Hutcheson's work at some point. These seminars were repeated in the semesters of 1892-1893, 1894-1895, and 1897-1898. Turning specifically to aesthetics, in the 1893-1894 semester he taught «Aesthetics. – The Psychology of Taste and the History of Aesthetic Theories», which probably reviewed all the great names in classical British aesthetics including Hutcheson²⁵.

It is worth remembering here that as Santayana's most famous biographer pointed out, the Spanish thinker always had affection for English society and institutions, and although he was a critic of British empiricist tradition, he was also an admirer, to the point that the historian wrote about him: «in the intellectual exchange, however, his manners were British rather than American»²⁶.

Thus, although Hutcheson is not explicitly mentioned in Santayana's 1896 work, his presence can be inferred. Moreover, it seems highly probable that the Spanish philosopher had a good knowledge of him, either because he was interested in British culture and manners, or because he spent years teaching about this tradition at Harvard, including the time when it came to the more specific field of aesthetics.

The theoretical proximity between Hutcheson and Santayana has not gone entirely unnoticed in the secondary literature on both authors. On Santayana's part, Arthur Danto already indicates this closeness in his introduction to the critical version of the work, while on Hutcheson's part, both Costelloe and Korsmeyer signal this heritage. For example, the latter even states more openly that: «Santayana's theory of beauty is also reminiscent of Hutcheson's»²⁷.

What Santayana takes from Hutcheson is an ontological model of thinking about beauty, where beauty is in simple terms «not a property of an object distinct from our response to it, but rather the pleasurable “idea rais'd in us” by an object»²⁸. The difference is that Santayana, as it will be seen below, does not share some of the presuppositions endorsed by Hutcheson and the tradition that would succeed him. In broad terms, Santayana adopts a wider version of the sense of beauty, where there are not so many rules, but everything that causes pleasure and stimulates the play between our faculties making it seem as if it were part of the object, is beautiful. Let us now look in more detail at what «sense of beauty» meant in each philosophical theory.

²⁵ Harvard University, Faculty of Arts and Sciences (2009). *Courses of Instruction 1879-2009*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Archives. <https://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.ARCH:40128815>

²⁶ J. McCormick, *George Santayana: A Biography*, cit., p. 205.

²⁷ C.W. Korsmeyer, *Relativism and Hutcheson's Aesthetic Theory*, cit., p. 322.

²⁸ P. Guyer, *A History of Modern Aesthetics*, cit., p. 257.

3. Francis Hutcheson and «the sense of beauty»

The concept of «sense of beauty» appeared in Francis Hutcheson's *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (1725). Although this book remained unnoticed for many years among secondary philosophical literature, since the beginning of 1970s it has been gaining more attention from commentators and it has come to be considered by many specialists²⁹ as the first treatise on aesthetics in the modern sense of the English word.

Hutcheson's purpose in this book was twofold. On the one hand, he sought to explain, using philosophical language, how the mind is naturally capable of perceiving and enjoying beauty. On the other hand, he tried to clarify what properties objects must have in order to generate such a response in the observer contemplating them. In this sense, it can be said that his theory tried to contemplate both the internal subjective sense of perception and the external properties of the object.

One point in Hutcheson's main argument that deserves a brief mention here is that for the philosopher, as it can be seen from the excerpt highlighted below, there is a «sense of beauty» that is natural and innate in all human beings. This «sense» is a natural predisposition that helps to understand how men weave an agreement in relation to formal questions of taste that seem so disparate.

In the first Treatise, the Author perhaps in some Instances has gone too far, in supposing a greater Agree-[xvii]ment of Mankind in their Sense of Beauty, than Experience will confirm; but all he is solicitous about is to shew, «That there is some Sense of Beauty natural to Men; that we find as great an Agreement of Men in their Relishes of Forms, as in their external Senses which all agree to be natural; and that Pleasure or Pain, Delight or Aversion, are naturally join'd to their Perceptions». If the Reader be convinc'd of such Determinations of the Mind to be pleas'd with Forms, Proportions, Resemblances, Theorems, it will be no difficult matter to apprehend another superior Sense, natural also to Men, determining them to be pleas'd with Actions, Characters, Affections. This is the moral Sense, which makes the Subject of the second Treatise.³⁰

The starting point of Hutcheson's argument is quite simple: there are objects that generally please most individuals immediately when they are perceived while others do not have the same effect³¹. In some cases, the opposite can happen, i.e. the perception of a certain object may result in dislike. Now, this premise, which helps to support the edifice of his argument, is not open to debate since it functions more like the observation of an empirical fact. In a sense, what is claimed here is that there is a certain structure of the human mind that translates experiences in terms of dislike or pleasure.

According to George Dickie³², Hutcheson starts from the previous observation to build his argument in four major steps. The first, which includes the preface and the first section of the book, is where the thinker seeks to demonstrate the existence of such an internal

²⁹ P. Guyer, *A History of Modern Aesthetic. Volume 1: The Eighteenth Century*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2014, p. 98. P. Kivy, *The Seventh Sense. Francis Hutcheson and Eighteenth-Century British Aesthetics*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2003.

³⁰ F. Hutcheson, *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*, Indianapolis, Liberty Fund, 2004, p. 10.

³¹ «In reflecting upon our external Senses, we plainly see, that our Perceptions of Pleasure, or Pain, do not depend directly on our Will. Objects do not please us, according as we incline they should. The presence of some Objects necessarily pleases us, and the presence of others as necessarily displeases us. Nor can we by our Will, any otherwise procure Pleasure, or avoid Pain, than by procuring the former kind of Objects, and avoiding the latter. By the very Frame of our Nature the one is made the occasion of Delight, and the other of Dissatisfaction» (Ivi, p. 8).

³² G. Dickie, *The Century of Taste: The Philosophical Odyssey of Taste in the Eighteenth Century*, cit.

sense of beauty, which in other words would be that mental faculty which deals with perceptions, and which is responsible for responding to this with pleasure – when there is beauty. In the next, between sections two and four, the philosopher indicates what characterizes a beautiful object, emphasizing a classic characteristic of unity in variety. In the third step, sixth section, Hutcheson argues that the sense of beauty (i.e. this mental faculty) is universal, i.e. it is present in all human beings. Finally, he arranges the final segments by developing his thesis on pleasure and displeasure in relation to diverse experiences of beauty.

We do not intend to delve into the steps of Hutcheson's argument here. It suffices to focus on his concept of an internal sense of beauty. According to Hutcheson, there is an external as well as an internal sense of beauty. The former is the source of experiences, i.e. inputs that then pass to the internal senses. The first internal sense would be precisely that of beauty, harmony, and regularity; the second internal sense is that of morality, which looks at actions, at an individuals' character and virtue. This division between morality and aesthetics as meeting points in a single theory recurs in Santayana's work.

When focusing on the first internal sense, Hutcheson argues that this is dedicated to perceive beauty and that it is a type of distinctly human mental faculty that precedes social customs, education and even examples. This mental faculty is made up of a perceptive capacity that is activated when the external sense is stimulated. The following elucidates this connection between the mental faculty and beauty.

For Beauty, like other Names of sensible Ideas, properly denotes the Perception of some Mind; so Cold, Hot, Sweet, Bitter, denote the Sensations in our Minds, to which perhaps there is no resemblance in the Objects, which excite these Ideas in us, however we generally imagine that there is something in the Object just like our Perception. The Ideas of Beauty and Harmony being excited upon our Perception of some primary Quality, and having relation to Figure and Time, may indeed have a nearer resemblance to Objects, than these Sensations, which seem not so much any Pictures of Objects, as Modifications of the perceiving Mind; and yet were there no Mind with a Sense of beauty to contemplate objects, I see not how they could be call'd beautiful³³.

To Hutcheson's understanding, this inner sense should not be taken as an axiom, but rather as a characteristic that is part of the human being's natural structure. Thus, it can be said that the internal sense that deals with beauty is nothing but the ability to passively receive such ideas of beauty that are projected from certain objects that possess certain characteristics, such as unity in variety. This mental faculty seems to be intended to receive specific ideas when a type of particle organization penetrates it, this is the case with beauty, but it could also be the case with sound through the vibration that propagates in the air.

To some extent, Hutcheson's argument seems to try to combine the two most common answers to the nature of beauty. Namely, whether it is objective or subjective. The thinker's solution is that both spheres are necessary. On the one hand, objects need to have certain characteristics and organizations to be able to arouse the inner mental faculty. On the other hand, this internal mental faculty cannot be ignored; its existence is necessary for the experience to be completed and the subject to feel pleasure or not. So, in short, while the internal sense is subjective, it depends on something external and objective to be activated.

Now, we can see in Hutcheson's theory of the sense of beauty an example of how his empiricism, so marked at the beginning of the book, slowly makes way for a kind of

³³ F. Hutcheson, *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*, cit., p. 27.

Platonism, where objects are at the same time part of a more universal class, even if they are accessible³⁴. Although there is an internal sense of beauty, universal, a priori in everyone, it is only accessible when it encounters certain objects, and although they have many forms, and beauty presents itself in many ways, to be beautiful is have some level of unity in variety.

4. George Santayana and the «sense of beauty» revisited

Santayana's «Sense of Beauty» is his most famous philosophical work, and despite the author's prolific work, it has remained his best-seller³⁵. There are many reasons for this, one is that Santayana was one of few authors who turned to the theme of beauty, amid a growing obsession among 19th century theorists to discuss art, its nature, and its value³⁶. He thus offered an aesthetic in the midst of a rising wave of works on the philosophy of art.

As mentioned earlier, it is known that Santayana was very familiar with the British philosophical tradition. Thus, the title for his book cannot have been a random choice, but a deliberate one. In this regard, Costelloe wrote that «The title of the work [...] clearly (and deliberately, one assumes) recalls the tradition of Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, and Reid»³⁷. This connection can be inferred when we look at the argument behind this concept that «human beings are endowed with an inner sense for beauty comparable or analogous to the external ones that perceive their objects in the form of sight, hearing, and touch»³⁸.

Again, as Costelloe noticed, the proximity between the two thinkers is remarkable, since «despite a gap of two centuries, only the idiom really separates the work from its eighteenth-century predecessors»³⁹. Let us now see what similarities and differences there are in the concept of the «sense of beauty» proposed by Santayana. We begin by emphasizing an excerpt to understand what Santayana specifically means by the word «sense».

There is notoriously no great agreement upon aesthetic matters; and such agreement as there is, is based upon similarity of origin, nature, and circumstance among men, a similarity which, where it exists, tends to bring about identity in all judgments and feelings. It is unmeaning to say that what is beautiful to one man ought to be beautiful to another. If their senses are the same, their associations and dispositions similar, then the same thing will certainly be beautiful to both. If their natures are different, the form which to one will be entrancing will be to another even invisible, because his classifications and discriminations in perception will be different, and he may see a hideous detached fragment or a shapeless aggregate of things, in what to another is a perfect whole - so entirely are the unities of objects unities of function and use. It is absurd to say that what is invisible to a given being ought to seem beautiful to him. Evidently this obligation of recognizing the same qualities is

³⁴ G.L. Hagberg, *Francis Hutcheson*, in A. Giovannelli, *Aesthetics: the Key Thinkers*, New York, Bloomsbury Academic, 2021², pp. 59-73.

³⁵ «I see that my first book *The Sense of Beauty* remains my “best seller”: I had a shock on reading that *The Last Puritan*, had not sold any copies at all; but at the foot of the page I found that *The Last Puritan* for \$ 5.00, had sold several hundred copies. I do not understand these mysteries of the trade, but decretely bow to them» (G. Santayana, *The Letters of George Santayana, Book Eight (1948-1952). The Works of George Santayana, Volume V*, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, The MIT Press, 2008, p. 190).

³⁶ C. Sartwell, *Six Names of Beauty*, New York and London, Routledge, 2004.

³⁷ T.M. Costelloe, *The British Aesthetic Tradition. From Shaftesbury to Wittgenstein*, cit., p. 255.

³⁸ *Ibidem*.

³⁹ *Ivi*, p. 257.

conditioned by the possession of the same faculties. But no two men have exactly the same faculties, nor can things have for any two exactly the same values⁴⁰.

As it is evident from this excerpt, Santayana's concept of «sense of beauty» is similar to the one presented by Francis Hutcheson. Both consider it as a mental faculty. Or one could say that in Santayana the «sense» is the human perceptual apparatus. For example, in Singer's interpretation, the title of the Spanish thinker's work could be translated also as: «the organic and other conditions under which beauty appears»⁴¹ or «the human faculty of being susceptible to beauty », or simply «the aesthetic experience»⁴².

In another significant passage later in the book, Santayana explains that the senses «are indispensable working instruments developed by the needs of life [...] their perfect development produces a harmony between the internal structure and instinct of the organ and the external opportunities for its use»⁴³. This apparatus produces an effect of harmony, which ends up resulting in the objectified pleasure that we later know and call «beauty».

Now, it should be noticed that there are also significant differences between the two philosophers. For example, Santayana's concept of the «sense of beauty» is somehow deceitful, since it is actually a condition that makes one perceive something that is not, in the sense that the perceptual apparatus transforms a perceptual sensation into a quality, thus objectifying what has been experienced⁴⁴. Beauty, in fact, is not something that exists in itself, but exists as an element that constitutes the process of experience. It is a quality, but it does not have an independent existence as it might initially seem, this is exemplified in the excerpt below.

If we say that other men should see the beauties we see, it is because we think those beauties are in the object, like its color, proportion, or size. Our judgment appears to us merely the perception and discovery of an external existence, of the real excellence that is without. But this notion is radically absurd and contradictory. Beauty, as we have seen, is a value; it cannot be conceived as an independent existence which affects our senses and which we consequently perceive. It exists in perception, and cannot exist otherwise. A beauty not perceived is a pleasure not felt, and a contradiction⁴⁵.

One substantial difference with Hutcheson, which can be observed in the first Santayana's highlighted quote, is that although he works with the existence of such mental faculty, the use of this term seems to be somewhat «satirical» as remarked by Danto since his argument is that «if there is a sense of beauty, it does not, for all the features it may share with the standard senses, function like them at all»⁴⁶.

A further difference observed by different interpreters⁴⁷ is that in Santayana's theory beauty is not being approached from a determination of characteristics that it must have. His book is more a reflection on how the human apparatus works in response to an impulse presented to it and ends up objectifying it. Santayana does not define any single or

⁴⁰ G. Santayana, *The Sense of Beauty. Being the Outlines of Aesthetic Theory*, cit., pp. 28-29.

⁴¹ I. Singer, *Santayana's Aesthetics: A Critical Introduction*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1957, p. 35.

⁴² *Ibidem*.

⁴³ G. Santayana, *The Sense of Beauty. Being the Outlines of Aesthetic Theory*, cit., p. 52.

⁴⁴ I. Singer, *Santayana's Aesthetics*, cit.

⁴⁵ G. Santayana, *The Sense of Beauty*, cit., pp. 30-31.

⁴⁶ A.C. Danto, *Santayana's The Sense of Beauty: an Introduction*, cit., p. xxi.

⁴⁷ G. Patella, *George Santayana: de la estética a lo estético*, in «Limbo», 28, 2008, pp. 91-97. P. Guyer, *A History of Modern Aesthetics. Volume 3: The Twentieth Century*, cit.

necessary characteristic for such objectification. In Hutcheson's view, unity in variety must be present and cannot be suppressed, but here, in Santayana's view, there is simply no such unifying characteristic, there is only a kind of phenomenological test carried out by the subject in each situation.

A third distinction is that Santayana does not agree with most modernists' idea that qualities such as universality and disinterestedness are necessary components of the aesthetic experience (or the beauty experience)⁴⁸. All our functions work together to process and form the experience of beauty. The pleasure of beauty is nothing but the pleasure in which the process of association between the aroused response and the object that aroused us reaches a peak, becoming a fundamental and central experience point. Therefore, more than universality or interest, pleasure is what matters to configure an experience as aesthetic. In Santayana's words «aesthetic merit may then very plausibly be regarded as the pleasure objectified»⁴⁹.

Finally, Santayana also discusses the relationship between ethical and aesthetic «sense» in his book as also did Hutcheson. For the Spanish thinker, beauty is not restricted to the arts, but it is an essential component of life as a whole and cannot be separated, since it is part of the human beings' perception apparatus⁵⁰. Therefore, a life without beauty is not merely ugly or worrying because it lacks an aesthetic sense, but it is degrading for those who live it.

5. Conclusion

Unfortunately, Santayana did not explicitly mention Hutcheson's name not even once in the course of his 1896 work. This, however, is not particularly unexpected, as the Spanish thinker quotes few authors by name in this book, leaving the reader familiar with the tradition to detect each of the philosophers behind the ideas quoted.

Despite this, due to biographical facts that have been addressed, such as Santayana's knowledge of the British philosophical tradition, his knowledge of the aesthetics developed by such thinkers during the 18th century, and his personal preference for the British over the American culture where he was raised, are elements that allow to infer Hutcheson's presence in his work.

This particular inference functions here as a bridge between traditions, in an attempt to show how this British tradition, which has received little attention from interpreters, influenced the development of American aesthetics in its early years as an academic discipline. Although Santayana separates himself from Hutcheson by adapting Hutcheson to the contemporary language of the late 19th century, this does not diminish the value of the fact that he chose this terrain to base his theory on.

Last but not least, this research is the result of a humble attempt to give life to an aesthetic tradition and to understand its history, since so far few efforts have been made in this direction. Far from being a closed question, this is also an invitation for more researchers to reflect on this period of American philosophical history and all the connections that still need to be established.

⁴⁸ C.W. Korsmeyer, *Relativism and Hutcheson's Aesthetic Theory*, cit.

⁴⁹ G. Santayana, *The Sense of Beauty*, cit., p. xxvii.

⁵⁰ R. Lida, *Belleza, Arte y Poesía en la Estética de Santayana*, Tucumán, Editorial Universidad Nacional de Tucumán, 1943.

SANTAYANA AND PARIS: AN UNCONSUMMATED AFFAIR

Charles Padrón

Abstract: In this paper I develop a narrative of Santayana's relationship with Paris, from his initial visit (1883) to the last time (1936) he was in the city. Apart from Rome, where unofficially his home was from 1928 onwards, and where he spent the last eleven years of (1941-52, «Old Age in Italy», as he described it in *My Host the World*, the third volume of his autobiographical *Persons and Places*), and apart from Ávila, the medieval-walled city of his childhood, Paris exerted a central, geographical focus on his life. I do not include Cambridge/Boston (USA) and Cambridge/Oxford (UK) as having any comparable emotional momentousness. Rome, in the end, turned out to be Santayana's most endearing geographical *space*, but Paris throughout a fifty-four years span was a highly influential city in Santayana's life.

Keywords: Santayana, Paris, Travel, Biographical.

* * *

1. As Santayana did not step foot in Paris on his initial trip to the United States with his father Agustín in July 1872 at the age of eight, traveling from Ávila to Boston, his first encounter with France, and specifically Paris, took place in 1883, on his first return trip to Ávila to visit his father after a lapse of eleven years. Santayana had just finished his freshman year at Harvard, and was nineteen years of age. With the ocean steamer *Waesland* arriving in Antwerp from New York, Santayana just had enough time in Antwerp «to see the marketplace with the Cathedral spire»¹. With Paris it was even more brief and uneventful: «In Paris I saw nothing, merely driving from one station to other»². That would have been from the Gare du Nord to the Gare d'Orléans (currently Gare d'Austerlitz). That's it. That would have been a horse-drawn omnibus ride or a horse-and-carriage trot with accompanying baggage from north, just crossing the Seine, to eastern Paris. Frankly speaking, not the most memorable *first time*. Santayana goes on to write quite matter-of-factly: «During the next ten years [1883-1893] I repeated this journey many times; the expense was about the same if I went first class without stopping, or second class with two or three stops on the way: a method that avoided long nights in the train, and enabled me, by varying my voyage and landing at Cherbourg or England, or even Gibraltar, to see the principal sights in all France and Spain»³. He also added that «it was only Italy that remained to be explored and lived in when I became relatively independent»⁴. The lure of Italy as a travel destination and place to live would be a constant in Santayana's adult life, and play off against Santayana's possibilities of making Paris (and France) his home.

In those eleven years from 1883 to 1893 we can be certain that Santayana was in Paris during six of those years (1883, 1886, 1887, 1888, 1891, and 1893). We can be certain that he was *not* there during four years (1884, 1885, 1889, and 1892). That leaves one year slightly in doubt. And although he arrived at Liverpool from New York aboard the *Majestic* in June 1890, it cannot be confirmed that he passed through, or stayed for any length of time

¹ G. Santayana, *Persons and Places: Fragments of Autobiography*, Cambridge, The MIT Press, 1986, p. 197.

² *Ibidem*.

³ *Ivi*, p. 198.

⁴ *Ibidem*.

in Paris en route to Ávila where he visited his father Agustín and extended family. There is reason to believe that he did though. Susana, his half-sister in Ávila, had written him in an unpublished letter on 16 June 1890:

Do you intend stopping at Paris? If so would you kindly bring me the skirt of a dress. I mean if you have room in your trunk and if it is not too much trouble: by taking a carriage (wh. you will charge to me) and directing the driver either to the *Magasins du Louvre* or better still, to the *Magasins du Bon Marché* and giving the salesman the enclosed slip I think you will be quits in ten minutes⁵.

If we infer (and we *do* know that he passed through London on the way to Ávila) that he followed the same route as in 1891, then in all probability he did transit Paris in 1890, at the same time fulfilling his sister's personal request. We know about his presence in Paris in 1891 with certainty thanks to another unpublished letter in Columbia University's Butler Library written from Agustín to his son once he had left Ávila to return to the States on 10 September 1891: «...And once in London you got better, and I do not doubt that on board you will recover completely, that is on board the *Cephalonia*, because in the Channel no one can enjoy it. And, why did you obtain provisions for the trip on the way from Paris to Calais?»⁶.

Santayana had inadvertently avoided the Exposition Universelle in Paris of 1889, a world fair during which the Eiffel Tower was showcased and for which it was built in a period of twenty-six months. At this exposition France assumed world leadership not only in architectural construction, but also in electricity and machinery. In short, it had become the international scientific and cultural centerpiece of the then *modern world*. In 1892, having anticipated being able to be in Europe in the summer, Santayana had to forgo going for personal reasons, and sent a letter to one Isabella Stewart Gardner that «I am not going to Venice at all, not even to Paris or Avila, but only to Mr. Davidson's school of philosophy in the Adirondacks. Where else I may go, I hardly care, I am so disappointed at missing the many pleasures of being in Venice with you»⁷. Even at this early stage, Santayana being twenty-eight, one can read in his words that somehow, and for some as yet undisclosed reason, *Italy* (and Rome) were more alluring than *France* (and Paris) – more intellectually and culturally *personal* and attractive.

What was Santayana's experience of Paris during these years, and what has he left us as impressions of and thoughts about, *la Ville Lumière* (the City of Light)? We have precious little content to interpret and aid us. John McCormick in his biography has written that in the summer of 1886 Santayana had, after landing in Cherbourg in July, made a «tour of French and Spanish cathedral towns», and this is confirmed by Santayana's own words earlier quoted. In a letter Santayana writes that «I arrived at Cherbourg alive and in sufficiently good spirits to wander slowly down France and Spain [...]. I stopped at Caen, Le Mans (charming place, by the way, as Fullerton would say) Tours, Bordeaux, and Valladolid»⁸. Each of these cities had a beautiful cathedral or abbey, but all of them were on the same train route. This probably was the real reason for his stopping in each. He rejected Paris as a city in which to study in July 1888 before returning earlier than expected to

⁵ Letter in Special Collections, Butler Library, Columbia University.

⁶ Letter in Special Collections, Butler Library, Columbia University, translation mine.

⁷ G. Santayana, *The Letters of George Santayana, Book One, 1868-1909*, ed. by W.G. Holzberger, Cambridge, The MIT Press, 2001, p. 123.

⁸ D. Pinkas (ed.), *Recently Discovered Letters of George Santayana*, Valencia, Biblioteca Javier Coy d'estudis nord-americans, 2021, p. 59.

Harvard and Cambridge on his fellowship, as evidenced in his words to William James that «I had thought of Paris as a possible resting place, but on the whole it seems to offer few advantages for me»⁹.

Paris, let us be honest, was *the* city acting as a magnet and focal point of European civilization during these years, championing *modernity* in all its facets, filled with over 20,000 electric street lamps, and electricity within buildings, and had become «full of the new wonders of the world»¹⁰. Paris even boasted of a *Poste pneumatique*, an underground network of tubing that allowed one to send a message that arrived at its destination in an hour or less within the city of Paris¹¹. Yet none of this, or any academic or cultural competence, seems to have impressed Santayana that much, and he preferred to settle back in Cambridge and Harvard to finish his Ph.D. dissertation, returning in July 1888. Afterwards in 1893 (the year of his father's death), after not being in Paris in 1889 and 1892, Santayana passed through Paris in early August en route to Liverpool to sail back to New York from Southampton. In 1894 he remained stateside, and did not travel to Europe.

2. The year 1895 was, in many ways, a remarkable year for Santayana. As an Instructor of Philosophy at Harvard and with a book of poems (*Sonnets and Other Verses*) published in 1894, and the manuscript of *The Sense of Beauty* completed, he travelled aboard the *Werra* leaving New York City and landed at Gibraltar in June. He made his way up to Ávila where his sister Susana, with her husband Celedonio Sastre, were. There, after roughly a month, he wrote a letter to his Harvard classmate Charles A. Loeser on 13 July that he was «free to go a little more afield from my usual path»¹². Loeser was in Stuttgart. What then unfolded for Santayana was that he suggested to Loeser in a letter of 20 July that they could meet in Milan, with Santayana reminding him that he has «never been in Italy, and this is all virgin ground to me»¹³. He let Loeser know that he had to be «in Paris by the 22nd or 23rd»¹⁴. He added in another letter four days later that «I shall turn up, then at the Hotel Manin on August 3rd when I expect to have the real pleasure of seeing you»¹⁵. Santayana did not make it back to Paris until 31 August, a week later than planned. They must have travelled together some, for Santayana wrote to Charles Augustus Strong later on 10 November that «afterwards with Loeser in Italy and Switzerland»¹⁶. However, no mention is made of Rome, either in Santayana's communications with Loeser or anyone else. Yet, many years

⁹ G. Santayana, *The Letters of George Santayana, Book One, 1868-1909*, cit., p. 95.

¹⁰ A. Horne, *Seven Ages of Paris*, London, MacMillan, 2002, p. 326.

¹¹ In an enlightening passage, the literary historian Joan DeJean captures this Parisian quality of *modernity* by extending it even further back in time, and counterposes it with Rome, which is even more relevant to the case of Santayana: «What makes a city great? Prior to the seventeenth century, the most celebrated European city was one famous for its past. Visitors made pilgrimages to Rome to tour its ancient monuments or its historic churches; they were seeking artistic inspiration and indulgences rather than novelty and excitement. Then, in the seventeenth century, a new model for urban space and urban life was invented, a blueprint for all great cities to come [...]. The modern city was oriented to the future rather than the past: speed and movement were its hallmarks. And, as many Europeans quickly recognized, only one city was truly modern: Paris» (J. DeJean, *How Paris Became Paris: The Invention of the Modern City*, New York, Bloomsbury, 2014, p. 1).

¹² D. Pinkas (ed.), *Recently Discovered Letters of George Santayana*, cit., p. 114.

¹³ Ivi, p. 116.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

¹⁵ Ivi, p. 118. The hotel still exists today, even though heavily rebuilt in 1948 after being destroyed in August 1943 in a British air raid. It was purchased in 1904 by the Colombo family, and is now a four-star hotel with a picturesque garden.

¹⁶ G. Santayana, *The Letters of George Santayana, Book One, 1868-1909*, cit., p. 147.

later he would write in *The Middle Span*, vol. II of *Persons and Places*: «In 1897 we arranged to make a trip to Italy together; and Mrs. Potter secretly took Italian lessons, so as to be able to rescue us helpless men in all our linguistic difficulties. I had been in Italy two years earlier; and this second journey with the Potters, partly over the same ground, showed me how important the human element is in our supposedly abstract interests»¹⁷.

What is deeply confusing is the following sentence: «I saw Venice and Rome, and the pictures everywhere, in a new light»¹⁸. Santayana does not state that he *experienced* Rome and Venice again, but rather than saw them «in a new light» of his understanding, with that alteration having occurred prior to being there. We have no airtight written fragment by Santayana clarifying that he definitely was in Rome in 1895, but we can state in all confidence that he was in Italy¹⁹. Even Loeser's personal diaries in Villa I Tatti, the Harvard University Center of Italian Renaissance Studies, are of no help, for they are for the years 1909-1913, 1922, and 1923. But we have one last piece of evidence (a vestige of written testimony, or lack of, if you like) that nudges us to believe that he was *not* in Rome in 1895. On a Stanford's «New Map of the Greater Part of Europe» gifted to William Holzberger by the Sastre family (Santayana's sister Susana married one Celedonio Sastre), detailing his transatlantic voyages and European travels, Santayana had written in his own hand on the «Italy» part next to Rome «1897; 1904». Interestingly enough, next to Venice is written «Aug., 1895; May 1897». One would think that one would recall with precision, given Rome's historical weightiness and cultural significance, the first time one's eyes took in the Eternal City. This Stanford map is convincing, ocular proof.

In the seventeen-year stretch from 1895 to 1911 Santayana made the roundtrip voyage from the US to Europe a total of thirteen times, crossing the Atlantic on twenty-six separate occasions, either going or coming. During this period he was in Paris on thirteen occasions, and quite possibly on a fourteenth: 1895, 1896, 1897, 1898, 1899, 1900, 1904, 1905, 1906, 1907, 1908, 1910, and 1911, all years in which we can locate him there with certainty. In 1901, a year during which we know in fact that he was not in Paris, it was most definitely on his mind during July and August when he was in Oxford, where he did not even travel to Ávila, writing to Susana that «I may go in August to Paris, and in that case I should like very much to run on to see you»²⁰. Three weeks later on 13 August he wrote again to her that «I have given up all idea of going even to Paris this year»²¹. In 1902, about which it is difficult to be precise, he arrived on the *Grosser Kurfurst* at Southampton in June and by 3 July he was in Ávila – he might have passed through Paris on his way there. In 1903, like in 1901, he remained in Oxford throughout July and August, probably very occupied (and preoccupied) with *The Life of Reason*.

The years 1904-1906 are singular in Santayana's relationship to Paris in that this is the first instance that Santayana had a full-time Parisian address: at the Hôtel Foyot, rue de Tournon, just north of the Jardin du Luxembourg, from September 1905 to June 1906. The hotel would later be demolished in 1937. This was his lodgings and base as an official

¹⁷ G. Santayana, *Persons and Places*, cit., p. 380.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*.

¹⁹ See my *Santayana's Relationship to Rome*, in M. Flamm, G. Patella, and J.A. Rea, eds., *George Santayana at 150: International Interpretations*, Lanham, Lexington, 2014, pp. 249-68, for an in-depth discussion of Santayana and Rome.

²⁰ G. Santayana, *The Letters of George Santayana, Book One, 1868-1909*, cit., p. 232.

²¹ *Ivi*, p. 235.

representative of Harvard serving as the Hyde Lecturer in Paris²². He officially was on sabbatical during the academic year 1904-05, later officially becoming Hyde Lecturer from November 1905 to June 1906. In late November and December 1904 he had met up with Loeser in Rome, and it is at this very moment in his life that he genuinely opens up to Rome and *discovers* it in a way that only through the facilitation of a native Roman, or a knowledgeable, discerning guide (Loeser), could help bring about. It is here when, towards the closing of the year in 1904 that Santayana, as I understand it, both intellectually and emotionally, fell in love with Rome, with its history and culture and rhythms; in short, with its way of life. In a letter of 3 December 1904 he wrote:

I am enjoying myself hugely and reading a good deal more than usual. Friends of mine turn up at regular intervals, and the sun shines, and humanity smiles about me almost without hypocrisy. I feel at home²³.

All of this by way of counterpoising the contrast that though he was both personally and professionally immersed in Paris (and France) during these years, he had, contemporaneously experienced an *emplacement* where he sensed himself *a part of*, while in unison *apart* from, his immediate surroundings. In other words, where he could *be* himself without losing his *self* in the material mass and circumscribing community of others. It appears that this was *Rome*. Obviously, Paris at this time was not the topographical *place*, nor would it be in the future for Santayana, in which to give up one's very being to.

Perhaps it was a combination of formal commitment, of being held to an imposed schedule not of his own creation, and the privation of a relative liberty to move about at will. For after five inspiring weeks in Rome with Loeser, Santayana had sailed for Egypt via Naples and Sicily, visited the Levant, then came back to Europe via the Danube, and by September in Paris he immediately found his physical movements and intellectual attentions curtailed. Slipping away from Paris to visit loved ones in Ávila, he was soon having books sent to his Paris Hôtel Foyot address in his absence. Paris had become his geographical *home*, even though that was coupled beginning in late March throughout June traveling throughout France giving lectures at regional universities in Nancy, Caen, Lille, Lyons, Grenoble, Montpellier, Toulouse, and Bordeaux. He became very intimate with both Paris and France on the whole during these eight months. In Paris, after his responsibilities tied to being the Hyde Lecturer were carried out and finished, and before returning to the US and Harvard after an absence of twenty-seven months, he shared some private preferences with Albert W. von Westenholz, like Loeser an undergraduate ex-classmate, who was back in his native Germany. On the question of whether an English university would consider hiring him as a professor, he affirms some private preferences and gives us a glimpse of what course his life would take in the future (and it did play out very much as he wrote, except his eventual choice of where to die!), and this writing in 1906, at the age of forty-two:

²² Santayana describes it best with the following from *Persons and Places* (cit., pp. 411-12): «My academic career also had an unexpected extension to Paris. At Harvard, during my last years, there was a rich and isolated student named Caleb Hyde, interested in French literature. On graduating he founded an exchange professorship between Harvard and the Sorbonne, lectures to be in English in Paris, and in French at Cambridge. Barrett Wendall was the first appointed at Paris; and when I was in the East, during 1905, I received an invitation to be his successor [...]. Yet, after Wendell, I was a sad disappointment to Hyde, and, I suspect, to all the officials concerned. For I avoided seeing anyone [...] and lived in my hotel just as quietly as if I had no academic duties [...]. In spite of my avoidance of contacts, I came involuntarily on various little manifestations of the sham and corruption that prevailed in the official world».

²³ G. Santayana, *The Letters of George Santayana, Book One, 1868-1909*, cit., p. 282.

English academic people are no longer very congenial to me. Without being so common or aggressive as the American sort, they are less amiable and generally less admirable. Their minds are dry, narrow, and set: their ways are graceless and punctilious. I should live among them quite as much alone as I live in Boston, or as I live here. In fact, it makes very little difference to me, emotionally, where I am, if food, weather, and independence allow me to retire into my own thoughts. Books are a sufficient stimulus, without people, and nice people a sufficient pleasure, without talk of books [...]. My requirements in the way of clothes, food, bags, hats, gloves, and yellow raincoats will grow less with the years, and at Avila I have a whole house of my own where I can live for nothing. The solution is clear. While my mother lives I shall remain at Harvard; afterwards, I will simply retire from teaching altogether, and if I am still hale and vigorous enough, go about enjoying the right places at the right reasons, composing my *Dialogues in Limbo*, and having my «home» to return to at Avila, which is a place I like, and habitable at all seasons²⁴.

During the next five years, from 1907-1911, Santayana was in Paris for four of them. The exception was 1909. On 3 August 1910 he could write to Strong from Ávila that «I am looking forward with pleasure to being again in Paris, and enjoying the luxury of your apartment»²⁵. Anyone who has stood before the apartment building of 9, Avenue de l'Observatoire in Paris knows that it is a *privileged* place, not only for Paris, but comparably, to anywhere in the world, as an apartment providing an exquisite existence in a large city. From inside the apartment, «nothing but sky and a wall of trees visible from the windows»²⁶, as Santayana described it. Exiting the front door, within a minute one is in the Jardin du Luxembourg, and the surrounding trees and privacy embody a measured steadiness and concord. Yet even an arrangement like this was not enough to win him over to make his permanent residence in Paris in the long haul. On 22 August 1911, anticipating his final departure from the US, in the *forever* sense of leaving (a final good-bye, a departure that allows for no return) writing to Strong from California that he might want to move all his books – again to Paris. But he held out the possibility also of soon making either Ávila or Madrid his legal residence:

If I feel I can establish myself permanently with my friend Mercedes, I can unpack and arrange my books in my rooms at her house, and make that my legal residence. If I don't like Madrid, my books and useless baggage can remain at my sister's in Avila, until I have decided where I shall live. Possibly – wouldn't this be amusing? – I might take an apartment of my own in Paris, and it might very well be a large one – a sort of studio in some remote place – where if you liked you might deposit your books, and come and stay when you passed through Paris, if you were living ordinarily somewhere else²⁷.

This last quote was written five months before Santayana boarded the *Olympic* on 24 January and sailed from Boston to Plymouth (England) never to return to the US. It gives evidence as to a certain uncertainty, both of his concrete plans and his tendencies. Things were undecided, especially as to where he was going to live once he severed, emotionally and physically, his ties with the United States. This was helped along with the death of his mother, Josefina Borrás y Carbonell, on 5 January in Boston, about which he received a telegram in England, notifying him of her death. What remained in the US for him to go back to?

²⁴ D. Pinkas (ed.), *Recently Discovered Letters of George Santayana*, cit., pp. 198-199.

²⁵ G. Santayana, *The Letters of George Santayana, Book Two, 1910-1920*, ed. W.G. Holzberger, Cambridge, The MIT Press, 2002, p. 18.

²⁶ G. Santayana, *Persons and Places*, cit., p. 377.

²⁷ G. Santayana, *The Letters of George Santayana, Book Two, 1910-1920*, cit., p. 48.

3. From 1912 to 1936, the latter being the last year Santayana was in Paris, twenty-five years elapsed. Santayana was in Paris in fourteen (1912, 1913, 1914, 1919, 1920, 1921, 1922, 1923, 1925, 1927, 1928, 1930, 1932, 1936) of these years for various periods of time. For example, in 1919 he resided in Paris from July to the end of November, for five months. The Paris Peace Conference²⁸, or anything concerning the restoration of a non-warring state of affairs in the world, was never mentioned in his correspondence of 1919-1920 – but he was able to express on 9 October 1920 to Westenholz that as «to politics and the aftermath of the war, I entirely agree with you that the trouble has not been due to selfishness (which is not a bad thing, if long-sighted) but to moral materialism, to an absurd esteem for the size, number, elaboration and momentum of our possessions and affairs [...] its best side was its human and humane, its Dickensian side; but all its boasts of electricity and pomps of democracy were cheap and distressing; and mankind can easily do better»²⁹.

One month earlier, it was «concerts in the Tuileries gardens, to which I have been going almost every evening on my way back from dinner, end today, and I expect to get back earlier in future and to do a little pleasant reading before going to bed»³⁰. Eleven days later on 18 September he wrote to his friend and poet Robert Bridges, back in Oxford: «Your letters make me a little homesick for Oxford, although I am having a very nice time (in my own way) here among all my books and papers, and under the stimulous (*sic*) of such delightful scenes as meet one wherever one goes in this place – more normal, more Roman and human, than what is man-made at Oxford, – because the fields and trees and skies, and that mesh of little streams, are another matter»³¹. Even Paris made him think of Rome and a *classical* pace of life, after nearly five years of historically imposed confinement in Oxford and England, and allowed him to *sense* himself a good European, and even, as Giuseppe Patella has written, to help him eventually chose to live out a *Mediterranean aesthetics*, «a good part of his existence on the shores of that sea, in the midst of many lands, of that *Mare Nostrum*, cradle of an old civilization, and where he was to die in the city of which it was a symbol»³².

In 1921 Santayana spent seven months in Paris, and in 1922 roughly six months. In 1924, a year without being in Paris, we find him writing from Rome on 16 January: «Here in Rome, for instance, the world is pleasing; it seems always to have cared for things worth having; it is congenitally beautiful, born to enjoy itself humanly [...] I walk about, knowing no one and speaking to nobody, and I feel that everybody understands me»³³. And even though he wrote once again to Robert Graves in August that 9, Avenue de l'Observatoire was still, along with his sister's home in Ávila, «his other permanent address»³⁴, it was

²⁸ Margaret MacMillan, in her authoritative *Paris 1919*, writes: «For six months in 1919, Paris was the capital of the world. The Peace Conference was the world's most important business, the peacemakers its most powerful people. They met day after day. They argued, debated, quarreled and made it up again. They created new countries and new organizations [...]. Officially, the Peace Conference lasted into 1920, but those first six months are the ones that count, when the key decisions were taken and the crucial chains of events set in moment. The world has never seen anything quite like it and never will again». (M. MacMillan, *Paris 1919: Six Months that Changed the World*, New York, Random House, 2001, p. xxv).

²⁹ D. Pinkas, ed., *Recently Discovered Letters of George Santayana*, cit., p. 292.

³⁰ G. Santayana, *The Letters of George Santayana, Book Two, 1910-1920*, cit., p. 362.

³¹ Ivi, p. 364.

³² G. Patella, *Belleza, Arte y Vida: La estética mediterránea de George Santayana*, Valencia, PUV, 2010, p. 31, translation mine.

³³ G. Santayana, *The Letters of George Santayana, Book Three, 1921-1927*, ed. by W.G. Holzberger, Cambridge, The MIT Press, 2002, p. 179.

³⁴ Ivi, p. 212.

becoming clearer that Rome was luring Santayana away from anywhere further north (Paris, Oxford), and most definitely from across the Atlantic. By 1925 it seems that the final emotional decision was made by Santayana in February when he wrote to his nephew George Sturgis that life in Rome proceeds «so agreeably that I am seriously inclined to make some permanent arrangement by which I should have a little establishment of my own in this hotel or some other like it»³⁵, while in the same letter mentioning that trips to Paris were becoming more challenging with the years, i.e., the back and forth between Paris and Rome. Things were made easier for Santayana when in 1928 Strong sold the 9, Avenue de l'Observatoire Paris apartment, despite Santayana's persistent avoidance of calling it for what it was.

Another happening that forced Santayana's leave-taking of Paris once and for all took place on his very last visit ever to *la Ville Lumière*, in 1936. Santayana was seventy-two years of age. On 3 May 1936 the *Front populaire* (Popular Front), a composite coalition of leftist political parties won the general election, and constant strikes and work sit-ins plagued Paris and greater France. Santayana arrived in Paris in early June and had witnessed the shift to Socialist policies and novel economic and social implementations. By 12 August he was comfortably ensconced at the stately, elegant Victoria Hotel in Glion sur Montreux, Switzerland, half of a kilometer from the waters of Lake Geneva, after «having decided to leave Paris for various little reasons and also on account of a certain political strain that made one feel insecure. Here, on neutral ground, I hope to be safe from revolutions, strikes, brandished fists, hammers and sickles, and being tapped on the head by a youth on a bicycle (not very hard) because I had on a Panama hat, which I suppose marked me for a capitalist»³⁶. Santayana was never ever in Paris again.

4. As a contemporary Spanish writer, Antonio Muñoz Molina, writing about another city (Córdoba) in particular, but also in a general sense, has written: «We begin to know a city when we live it as a habit, not out of tediousness, but of out passion»³⁷. (Muñoz Molina, 2006, 16, translation mine). The essential drawback with Paris for Santayana, as I understand it, was that it never seized him as a *passion*, intellectual *or* emotional, but often was the embodiment of that very tediousness that Muñoz Molina mentions. Paris, from the initial encounters that Santayana as a young man, had maintained an element of the scuttle and scurry in the social tensions of human life, from the necessity of securing transportation to move in the city on time (1883), to having to deal with the French university system's bureaucracy (1905-06), to mention just two. Moreover, there were other factors, more philosophical and cultural, which also influenced the dynamic of Santayana and Paris. Rome, on the contrary, began as an indiscriminate fondness and continued on in that manner up till 1924, when he realized how complete and whole he sensed himself when he was there, and amidst which, he was entirely at home.

In the chapter «Old Age in Italy», in the third volume of *Persons and Places, My Host the World*³⁸, Santayana tells us:

³⁵ Ivi, p. 236.

³⁶ G. Santayana, *The Letters of George Santayana, Book Five, 1933-1936*, ed. by W.G. Holzberger, Cambridge, The MIT Press, 2003, p. 363.

³⁷ A. Muñoz Molina, *Córdoba de los omeyas*, Barcelona, Seix Barral, 2006, p. 16, translation mine.

³⁸ This third volume was published for the first time in 1953, in the year following Santayana's death. But the manuscript had been completed by June 1945, at which time he was eighty-one. Santayana wanted the title of the third

My nominal headquarters, as well as my books, remained for some time at Strong's in the Avenue de l'Observatoire, and my passport was periodically renewed by the Spanish Consulate in Paris [...]. There was evidently no finality, no sense of home, in such a *pied-à-terre*. Nor was Paris a place where, even if I had been younger and richer, I should have cared to live. It did very well for an occasional season of cosmopolitan pleasures, but even its intellectual and artistic movements, though they greatly attracted and rewarded attention, were episodes, fashions, and extravagances with which no one would wish to be identified [...]. I have never had a French friend. In the most charming of them I felt something false, as if an evil spell bound them to some secret and sinister cause, and they were feigning all their amiability for an ulterior reason. They could never be disinterested, never detached. They had in their hearts a sort of covert intensity and stubborn nearsightedness that I could not endure³⁹.

Is Santayana being fair, and even more to the point, *honest*? That is a question that demands more time than I can dedicate here, but suffice it to say that all other things being equal, Santayana spent many years of his life in Paris and enjoyed it, benefited from it, and at least legally, it was the *place* where he lived. Yet Paris, as he writes above, was never *home*. Rome was, even from 1904 when he claimed it himself in a letter. And after 1928, it became his physical, emotional, and intellectual grounding of this life on earth. One beautiful, historical city had been replaced by another, more ancient beautiful city. Paris, the European center of science and the avant-garde and *modern* revolution, with all its electricity and light, gave way to the ancient, more spiritual, more *urbs ruri*, where once the secular Roman Empire tolerated in many periods all religions and sects, and Rome was, despite its Catholic *dogma* and intolerance, blended into some kind of convivial whole, where «the City exists in her citizens, wandering as strangers through the world of time [...]. The City is a spiritual goal, to be attained in eternity, but also an ideal to be striven after day by day»⁴⁰. As Ramón J. Sender has written, «Santayana liked Catholicism for its pagan background»⁴¹. And in that Rome, let us be clear, Santayana was not a *citizen*, but a stranger, a stranger in that ancient sense of a *foreigner*, without property, unmarried, childless, and at liberty to the extent that he broke no laws. And it is here, in this city, which he never left after 1941, that he died on 26 September 1952, 1105 kilometers from Paris.

volume of *Persons and Places* to be *Seeking Places for a Chosen Life*, but John Hall Wheelock at Scribner's insisted on *My Host the World*. This betrays the fact that Santayana's choices as to where he lived, were deliberate.

³⁹ G. Santayana, *Persons and Places*, cit., pp. 525-526.

⁴⁰ L. Storoni Mazzolani, *The Idea of the City in Roman Thought: From Walled City to Spiritual Commonwealth*, London, Hollis & Carter, 1970, p. 276.

⁴¹ J. Ramón Sender, *Unamuno, Valle Inclán, Baroja y Santayana*, México, Ediciones de Andrea, 1955, p. 150, translation mine.

BIBLIOGRAFÍA RECIENTE DE Y SOBRE SANTAYANA. ÚLTIMOS CINCO AÑOS

Daniel Moreno Moreno

Abstract: The article provides brief introductions to the books published by and on George Santayana. The period covered is the last five years and it is important to highlight the languages that appear in this bibliographic repertoire: English, Spanish, Italian, Polish, Chinese, Turkish and German. The two journals dedicated to Santayana are also presented, one from the United States, «Overheard in Seville. Bulletin of the Santayana Society», and the other one from Spain: «Limbo. Boletín internacional de estudios sobre Santayana». There is also news regarding works by and on Santayana that will be published in the near future.

Keywords: George Santayana, Philosophy, Bibliographic Repertoires, Santayanism.

* * *

Restringiré el contenido de este Anexo a libros de Santayana o sobre Santayana, porque recoger los capítulos de libros y los artículos y reseñas publicados en revistas excedería con mucho lo recomendable. No obstante, sí que informaré de los dos boletines dedicados a Santayana donde se recogen, en lo posible, esos datos. Y publicados, por cierto, uno en Estados Unidos y otro en España, constituyendo un auténtico puente de comunicación entre las dos orillas del Atlántico, con Santayana como protagonista absoluto, seguramente muy a su pesar, dada su proverbial modestia filosófica.

Me refiero a «Overheard in Seville. Bulletin of the Santayana Society» (OiS) y a «Limbo. Boletín internacional de estudios sobre Santayana». OiS publicó su primer número en 1983 y estuvo dirigido durante muchos años por Angus Kerr-Lawson (1932-2011); desde 2017, bajo la dirección de Richard M. Rubin, ha aumentado de páginas y de empaque; en 2024 se espera el número correspondiente a 2023 y 2024. «Limbo», por su parte, fue fundado por el profesor Manuel Garrido (1925-2015) como suplemento de la revista «Teorema», también fundada por él; en su primera etapa aparecía tres veces al año, dentro de «Teorema», con la excepción del año 2002, cuando fue «Teorema» la que dedicó un número anual a Santayana bajo el título «Presencia de Santayana en el cincuentenario de su muerte»; a partir de 2006, el profesor Garrido decidió que «Limbo» iniciara una segunda navegación convirtiéndose en un suplemento anual exento que acompañara el número de otoño de «Teorema». En los últimos cinco años ha estado dedicado a: *Simposio sobre la Historia de la Filosofía de Santayana* (2020); número misceláneo (2021); número misceláneo (2022); *Simposio sobre el centenario de Escepticismo y fe animal* (2023) y *Santayana y la fotografía* (2024).

Y, hablando de revistas, resulta que, bajo el título *Especial: George Santayana*, «Quimera. Revista de literatura», dedicó su número de marzo de 2020 a Santayana. El Dossier incluyó artículos de: Joan Cuscó Clarasó, *George Santayana. Filosofía y vida*; José Beltrán Llavador, *El filósofo como narrador*; Daniel Moreno, *Los poetas filosóficos de Santayana*; Andreu Navarra, *George Santayana, ese extraño escritor ateo*; Vicente Cervera Salinas, *Santayana, un poeta en el limbo*; Antonio Lastra, *Soliloquios en Inglaterra*, y Bernat Torres, *Platonismo y espiritualidad en George Santayana*. El editor presentó a

Santayana como: «filósofo, novelista y profesor de Harvard que fue portada de la revista “Time” y nominado al premio Pulitzer (que no pudo ganar por conservar la nacionalidad española, aunque escribió su obra en inglés). Considerado junto con Ralph Waldo Emerson uno de los mejores estilistas de la tradición clásica estadounidense, su obra filosófica se enmarca entre el pragmatismo y el naturalismo, y su obra literaria pone en relación la literatura con el pensamiento, la religión y el arte».

Mención especial merecen las traducciones de Santayana al chino, que aquí recojo, aunque se salgan del límite temporal de este Anexo. De hecho, en «Limbo» 42 (2022), Xie Mimmin dio cuenta de la presencia de Santayana en China en su informe *Historical Overview of George Santayana in China*. Tal como me informa por correo electrónico del 5 de marzo de 2024, los datos exactos de las traducciones al chino son:

《美感》(*The Sense of Beauty*, 1982, China Social Sciences Press);

《三位哲学诗人》(*Three Philosophical Poets*, 2001, Guangxi Normal University Press);

《英伦独语》(*Soliloquies in England and Later Soliloquies*, 2003, SDX Joint Publishing Company);

《常识中的理性》(*Reason in Common Sense*, 2008, Peking University Press);

《社会中的理性》(*Reason in Society*, 2008, Peking University Press);

《宗教中的理性》(*Reason in Religion*, 2008, Peking University Press);

《怀疑主义与动物信仰》(*Scepticism and Animal Faith*, 2008, Peking University Press);

《美国的民族性格与信念》(*Character and Opinion in the United States*, 2008, Peking University Press);

《艺术中的理性》(*Reason in Art*, 2014, Peking University Press);

《人性与价值》(*Little Essays Drawn from the Writings of George Santayana*, 2016, The Commercial Press).

En cuanto a las publicaciones que siguen, me permito destacar las traducciones al polaco y al turco. Para más información sobre la presencia de Santayana en Polonia y en Turquía, pueden consultarse los respectivos informes de Adam Grzeliński y de Volkan Hacıoğlu: *Polish Edition of Santayana's Works* («Limbo» 42) y *The Survey on Translation Studies of Santayana in Turkish Literature* («Limbo» 44).

2020

1. *El carácter y la opinión en Estados Unidos*, traducción de Fernando Lida, introducción de José Beltrán y Daniel Moreno, Oviedo, KrK, 2020.

Cuando se cumplían 100 años de la primera edición de *The Character and Opinion in the United States*, se recuperó el libro que recoge las impresiones de Santayana sobre su época; su descripción de la transformación que Harvard pasó de ser un *college* a ser universidad; el penetrante retrato de su profesor, William James; la inclemente y humorística crítica al idealista Josiah Royce; la caracterización de la renovada tradición gentil norteamericana, el

neorrealismo; la pre-hollywoodiense descripción que hace del talante norteamericano y, finalmente, cuando disecciona los usos democráticos estadounidenses, procedentes de la equilibrada libertad inglesa, nunca de la libertad revolucionaria.

2. *Ensayos de historia de la filosofía*, edición de Daniel Moreno, Colección “Los esenciales de la filosofía”, Madrid, Tecnos, 2020.

El libro incluye los siguientes ensayos, traducidos por vez primera al español: *Buscando al Platón verdadero*; *La doctrina ética de Spinoza*; *‘Introducción’ a Baruch Spinoza Ethics and ‘De Intellectus Emendatione’*; *Locke y los límites del sentido común*; *El obispo Berkeley*; *La filosofía de la historia sofística*; *Por qué no soy marxista*; *Algunos desarrollos del materialismo*; *Lo incognoscible*; *Modernismo y cristianismo*; *La filosofía de M. Henri Bergson*; *La filosofía de Mr. Bertrand Russell*; *La filosofía que viene*; *Herejía filosófica*; *Tres pruebas del realismo*; *La metafísica naturalista de Dewey*; *Americanismo*. Se recuperaba así una faceta de Santayana no del todo conocida, su tarea como historiador de la filosofía.

3. *Il senso della bellezza*, traducción y presentación de Giuseppe Patella, Milán, Aesthetica Edizioni, 2020.

Nueva edición de la primera traducción al italiano de *The Sense of Beauty*, siguiendo la edición crítica de 1988 e incorporando, para las citas de Santayana en otros idiomas, las más acreditadas traducciones respectivas al italiano. En su presentación, el profesor Patella destaca que el planteamiento de Santayana desborda el tradicional corsé de la estética como disciplina para integrar la belleza y el arte en el conjunto de la actividad humana.

4. *Rozum w religii [Reason in Religion]*, traducido por Adam Grzeźliński y Krzysztof Wawrzonkowski, Toruń, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, 2020.

No era, en realidad, la primera traducción de Santayana al polaco, sino que venía precedida de *Poczucie piękna [The Sense of Beauty]*, traducido por Adam Grzeźliński y Krzysztof Wawrzonkowski, Toruń, 2014; y de *Rozum w sztuce [Reason in Art]*, traducido por Adam Grzeźliński con la ayuda de sus alumnos, Toruń, 2015. En la contracubierta se presenta a Santayana «como uno de los filósofos americanos más importantes del siglo XX» y que el libro presenta la religión como un componente irreductible e independiente del ser humano.

5. Como muestra de la importante labor que el profesor John Lachs (1934-2024) dedicó durante décadas en su Vanderbilt University en Nashville, Estados Unidos, desde donde irradió el lento pero irrefrenable resurgimiento del santayyanismo, en 2020 se reeditaron dos importantes libros. Uno de Santayana: *Physical Order and Moral Liberty Previously Unpublished Essays of George Santayana by George Santayana*, editado en 1969 por John Lachs y Shirley Lachs. Y otro sobre Santayana: *Thinking in the Ruins: Wittgenstein and Santayana on Contingency*, publicado por John Lachs y Michael Hodges el año 2000.

2021

1. *Recently Discovered Letters of George Santayana/Cartas recién descubiertas de George Santayana*, edición de Daniel Pinkas, presentación de José Beltrán, traducción y notas de Daniel Moreno, València, Publicacions de la Universitat de València, Biblioteca Javier Coy d'estudis nord-americans nº 180, 2021.

Fruto de los esfuerzos de tres reconocidos estudiosos de Jorge/George Santayana, el libro recoge la transcripción de las cartas de Santayana a dos de sus mejores amigos, Charles A. Loeser y Albert von Westenholz. Las cartas han sido descubiertas solo recientemente y se dieron a conocer aquí por vez primera. En ellas encontramos la correspondencia epistolar que Santayana mantiene con sus amigos durante cinco décadas, que atraviesan el siglo XIX y el siglo XX. Estos escritos son una suerte de sorprendente mosaico, un microcosmos de piezas de vida con sus latidos en cada mensaje, en cada palabra, con ecos muy sugerentes que resuenan en el resto de la obra del filósofo madrileño.

2. *Poesías*, traducción de Emma Guzmán Cabrera, prólogo de Oswaldo Guerra Sánchez, Madrid, Mercurio, 2021.

Edición bilingüe de *De un libro de filosofía escolástica, En la muerte de un metafísico, De un tapiz, A W.P., Cabo Cod, Brindis, Premonición, Solipsismo, Eros, Espíritu, Dedicatoria a La vida de la razón, A Urani», El testamento del poeta y Epitafio*. Para el profesor Guerra Sánchez, la poesía de Santayana «breve, pero intensa, ocupa un lugar privilegiado en el conjunto de su obra».

3. *Ensayos filosóficos* edición de Daniel Moreno, Oviedo, Krk, 2021.

El libro incluye los siguientes ensayos y reseñas de Santayana: *Algunos significados de la palabra es* (1915), *Conocimiento literal y conocimiento simbólico* (1918), *Algunos significados de la palabra 'es'* (1924), *Revoluciones en la ciencia* (1928), *Religión última* (1933), *Sobre la proyección metafísica* (1957), *Símbolos humanos para la materia* (1957), *Los dos idealismos: un diálogo en el limbo* (1902), *La Psicología de James* (1891), *¿Es deseable la inmortalidad?* (1909), *La filosofía y la política alemanas* (1915), *Un largo rodeo hacia el Nirvana; o mucho alboroto sobre la muerte* (1923), *Cincuenta años de idealismo británico* (1928), *Spengler* (1929). En conjunto, recogen el armazón técnico del sistema filosófico de madurez de Santayana, y muestran dos de sus aplicaciones más directas: una historia de la filosofía diferente y un modo de leer a sus contemporáneos nada liviano. El hilo conductor de estos ensayos lo constituye el paso de la teoría del conocimiento a la ontología.

4. *Rozum w zdrowym rozsądku [Reason in Common Sense]*, traducción de Adam Grzeliński y Krzysztof Wawrzonkowski, Toruń, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, 2021.

En esta ocasión, los editores destacan que Santayana intenta evitar los extremos metafísicos del materialismo y del idealismo y que considera la racionalidad humana como

el resultado del desarrollo gradual de la vida y de la reflexión que aparece en cierto momento.

5. Herman J. Saatkamp Jr., *A Life of Scholarship with Santayana*, editado por Charles Padrón y Krzysztof Skowroński, Leiden, Brill/Rodopi, 2021.

En la cuidada edición de Padrón y Skowroński, el libro recoge la intensa actividad de Herman Saatkamp en torno a Santayana durante casi cinco décadas. Es de destacar que cada apartado lleva una presentación de los artículos, lo que dota al conjunto de una indiscutible relevancia y actualidad. Toda una invitación a seguir profundizando en la figura de Santayana en la medida en que puede ayudar a entender nuestra época. El libro informa sobre la gestación de los distintos proyectos en torno a Santayana, la edición crítica de *The Works of George Santayana* entre ellos, y personifica una vida llena de reflexión, cultivando el sentido de la apreciación y de la afirmación de la vida y del aprendizaje.

6. Guido K. Tamponi, *George Santayana: Eine materialistische Philosophie der Vita contemplativa*, Würzburg, Königshausen & Neumann, 2021.

Primera monografía en alemán dedicada al sistema filosófico de Santayana, presentado como un eminente filósofo estadounidense cuyo pensamiento fue, en muchos aspectos, antiestadounidense. Al mismo tiempo, deja claro que Santayana fue una figura única en la filosofía del siglo XX: un materialista consistente que fue «religiosamente musical» y estuvo abierto a la belleza; un realista crítico que no sólo conoce lo ineludiblemente simbólico y poético, sino que lo celebra. Una filosofía con mucho que decir respecto a la epistemología, la ontología, la religiosidad, la crítica cultural y los estilos de vida individuales.

7. Forrest Adam Sopuck, *The Aesthetics of Horror Films. A Santayanan Perspective*, Berlin, Springer, 2021.

El autor analiza la naturaleza y las funciones de las películas de terror a la luz de la presentación de la belleza a cargo de Santayana. Estudia también cómo las películas de terror explican quién y cómo debe morir. El libro considera que el público obtiene placer de las películas confrontando los escenarios duros que comunican y racionalizando la negación de su aplicabilidad personal; defiende además el horror como una fuente de autoempoderamiento y belleza, pero también da fe de los daños potenciales del género.

8. José Aguilera, *Santayana: el sabio que abandonó Harvard para ser feliz*, publicación independiente, 2021.

El libro se presenta como “Biografía intelectual del primer filósofo español que logró escalar la élite académica de EE.UU. para dejarla poco después con un portazo”. El autor destaca cuatro ejes de su tesis: un enfoque global sobre Santayana, exhaustivo estudio de su Teoría de las Esencias, su decisiva aportación al pluralismo cultural americano, el extrañamiento y orientación disidente de Santayana.

2022

1. *Tre poeti filosofi: Lucrezio, Dante e Goethe*, edición de Giuseppe Buttà, Milán, Giuffrè, 2022.

Se destaca que la comparación entre estos tres grandes poetas no es para decidir cuál es el mejor sino para evaluar el tipo de imaginación y filosofía que cada poeta encarna. Lucrecio como poeta de la materia y la naturaleza. Dante es el poeta de la salvación dado que contempla la experiencia desde arriba y en su totalidad. Goethe es el poeta de la vida, en lo que esta tiene de inmediato, variedad y aparente inocuidad. El libro se había planteado para honrar el setecientos aniversario de la muerte de Dante.

2. *El nacimiento de la razón y otros ensayos*, edición de Daniel Cory (1968), traducción de Nuria Parés (1971), presentación de Vicente Cervera, Oviedo, KRK, 2022.

Daniel Cory, secretario y albacea literario de Santayana, publicó estos veintidós ensayos y un soneto, advirtiendo que «en esta colección no hay nada que no esté perfectamente logrado». El libro es, efectivamente, muy rico en contenidos, está conformado por piezas breves de una prosa envidiable y de una perspicacia sorprendente. Los ensayos van de lo técnico a lo liviano, pero todos revelan la onda introspección y el profundo estado poético de la obra de Santayana. Vicente Cervera, al presentar esta nueva edición, reitera, como Cory, que «en esta colección no hay nada que no esté perfectamente logrado».

3. *El intelecto no está de moda*, edición y traducción de Santiago Sanz y de Misael Ruiz, Barcelona, El animal sospechoso, 2022.

Presentación del Santayana ensayista y poeta. El título del libro procede del pequeño ensayo número 64 de los *Pequeños ensayos* que L. P. Smith extrajo de la obra de Santayana anterior a 1920. Los editores publican los ensayos 45-86, que tratan sobre *Arte y poesía* y sobre *Poetas y filósofos*. En cuanto a la poesía, se incluyen, en versión bilingüe, catorce sonetos y los poemas *Cape Cod* y *El testamento el poeta*.

4. *Platonculuk ve Ruhsal Hayat (Platonism and Spiritual Life)*, traducción de Ali Fahri Doğan, Ankara/Istanbul, Divan Kitap, 2022.

Los editores destacan que es la primera vez que se traduce este libro del filósofo hispanoamericano al turco. En él se aborda la afinidad entre platonismo y vida espiritual y la gran afinidad entre pensamiento y vida religiosa que se ha dado desde la antigüedad hasta nuestros días tanto en Oriente como en Occidente.

5. *Güzellik Duyusu (The Sense of Beauty)*, traducción de Selim Baran, Istanbul, Albaraka Yayinlari, 2022.

Los editores consideran que *The Sense of Beauty* fue el libro más abarcador en su campo cuando fue publicado y que todavía es una importante obra de referencia para la estética puesto que responde con honestidad a por qué, cómo y dónde surge la belleza.

6. *Aklın Yaşamı. Kisa Denemeler (The Life of Reason*, selección), traducción de Oya Özağaç, Istanbul, Fol Kitap , 2022.

Santayana es presentado como filósofo español cuyos temas abarcan desde la poesía a la teología, de la metafísica al materialismo, de la percepción estética al idealismo. Para él la mente humana es el resultado de un largo proceso, en el que ha de haber una armonía entre las pasiones del alma y las fuerzas de la naturaleza. Por ello que sigue su desarrollo en: religión, arte, filosofía, moral y ciencia.

7. *Rozum w społeczeństwie, (Reason in Society)*, traducción de Adam Grzeliński y Katarzyna Krempleska, Toruń, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, 2022.

Santayana es presentado como uno de los más importantes filósofos americanos. En este libro aborda la sociedad natural, la sociedad libre y la sociedad ideal, en la que las relaciones humanas contingentes pierden su importancia a favor de una vida tan cercana a los ideales como sea posible.

8. Katarzyna Krempleska, *George Santayana's Political Hermeneutics*, Leiden, Brill, 2022.

La autora aborda las ideas políticas de Santayana recogidas en *Dominaciones y potestades* y en el resto de su obra. Se convierte así en el primer estudio global sobre la filosofía política santayana, en conexión con su sistema filosófico y con su faceta de crítico cultural. Las nuevas categorías interpretativas son: cómo arreglárselas con la necesidad y cómo armonizar la diversidad, antropología negativa, individualismo apolíneo, humanismo naturalista, entre otros. Se muestra de este modo el carácter ambiguo, irónico y meditativo de Santayana, así como su intemporalidad. La autora había publicado en 2019 *Life as Insinuation: George Santayana's Hermeneutics of Finite Life and Human Self*.

2023

1. *Winds of Doctrine. Studies in Contemporary Opinion*, edición crítica, vol. IX de *The Works of George Santayana*, editado por David E. Spiech, Martin A. Coleman y Faedra L. Weiss, con Introducción de Paul Foster, Cambridge, MA, The MIT Press, 2023.

Paul Foster afirma en su Introducción que, aunque las modas filosóficas analizadas por Santayana ya no están tan presentes como en su época, sí lo están las grandes cuestiones de fondo: «realismo, idealismo, pragmatismo; hechos y valores; razón y fe; ciencia y arte», por eso «*Winds of Doctrine* contiene grandes intuiciones, no solo importantes para el pensamiento de su época, sino también para el nuestro». El vol. VIII de la Edición Crítica apareció en 2019 y estuvo dedicado a *Three Philosophical Poets*.

2. *Il regno dell'essenza. Primo libro dei regni dell'essere*, traducción de Mattia Manzoni, introducción de Enrico Gianneto, Roma, Aracne, 2023.

Es la primera traducción al italiano de *The Realm Essence*. Los editores lo presentan como el primer libro de un sistema ontológico original y provocador donde confluyen numerosas corrientes filosóficas de la época, como el pragmatismo de William James o la novedosa filosofía analítica de Bertrand Russell. En él Santayana aporta un análisis riguroso e innovador de conceptos como: Esencia, Existencia, Materia, Conocimiento. En definitiva, un clásico de la filosofía.

3. *Una antología del espíritu*, edición y traducción de Antonio Lastra, Madrid, Fundación Banco Santander, Colección Obra Fundamental, 2023.

La interesante selección y traducción de los textos de Santayana sobre el espíritu incluye, entre otros, fragmentos de: *Personas y lugares*, *Interpretaciones de poesía y religión*, *Diálogos en el limbo*, *La vida de la razón*, *El reino de espíritu*, *Platonismo y vida espiritual* y *Dominaciones y potestades*. De Santayana se dice que «supo combinar el respeto riguroso por la materia con la aspiración irrenunciable al espíritu, la tradición con la autotranscendencia, alejándose en todo momento de la angustia y de la desesperación que marcaban el pensamiento de sus contemporáneos».

4. *Introducción y La razón en el sentido común*, vol. I de *La vida de la razón*, traducción de Daniel Moreno, presentación de José Beltrán y Daniel Moreno, Oviedo, Krk, 2023.

Tras más de cien años de su publicación original, ve por fin la luz en español el primer volumen de la pentalogía *La vida de la razón*, en su versión íntegra. Ahí Santayana da cuenta del surgimiento de la razón desde un punto de vista naturalista y de su papel en la sociedad, en la religión, en el arte y en la ciencia. Partiendo del trascendentalismo más estricto, del flujo continuo de la experiencia, Santayana muestra su necesario fundamento en un naturalismo materialista con acentos pragmatistas.

5. *Güzelliğin Felsefesi. Güzellik Duyusu (The Sense of Beauty)*, traducción de Yeşim İpekçi, Istanbul, Fol kitap, 2023.

El libro se presenta como un instructivo viaje al extraordinario mundo de la estética y a la esencia de la belleza, que trasciende el tiempo y las culturas. El estudio aúna filosofía y psicología para descubrir el poder transformador de la belleza, que enriquece nuestras vidas y muestra la esencia de nuestra humanidad.

6. *Sonsuzun İtibarı (Some Turns of Thoughts in Modern Philosophy: Five Essays)*, traducción de Zeynep Begüm Güne, Istanbul, Büyüyenay Yayinlari, 2023.

El título en turco en realidad es el del último de los ensayos aquí recogidos: «The Prestige of the Infinite». Los editores destacan así ese ensayo de Santayana, del que citan en la contracubierta su párrafo final sobre el modo en que la vida espiritual aporta paz al trajín diario.

7. *Şiirin Öğeleri ve İşlevi (The Elements and Function of Poetry)*, traducción y presentación de Volkan Hacıoğlu, Ve Yayınevi, 2023.

Se presenta a Santayana muy encomiásticamente y se dice que este artículo es un texto clásico para rechazar la falsa comprensión que del arte se ofrece en la cultura de masas. Tema sobre el que también reflexionó Harold Bloom. El artículo lleva como presentación un artículo del traductor titulado «Un católico ateo: George Santayana». La primera edición es de 2013, siendo esta la primera traducción de Santayana al turco, y la que dio origen a las demás.

8. *Dominazioni e poteri. Riflessioni sulla libertà, sulla società e sul governo*, traducción de Giuseppe Buttà, Roma, tab edizioni, 2023.

Con la ayuda del Secretariado Europeo para las Publicaciones Científicas, se publica en italiano *Dominations and Powers*, que recoge, no una teoría política o una ideología, como se advierte en la contraportada, sino un resumen de la filosofía naturalista de Santayana donde se rastrean las instituciones y principios políticos con vistas a los frutos espirituales que pueden producir. G. Buttà, en su *Presentación*, destaca que, aunque Santayana no fue activo políticamente, comprendió profundamente los mecanismos de la política.

2024

1. *La razón en la sociedad*, vol. II de *La vida de la razón*, traducción de Daniel Moreno, presentación de José Beltrán y Daniel Moreno, Oviedo, Krk, 2024.

En este volumen Santayana aborda, con su característica visión caleidoscópica, cuestiones tan complejas como: la sociedad natural – amor, familia, industria, gobierno, guerra, aristocracia, democracia –, la sociedad libre – fama, amistad, patriotismo – y la sociedad ideal, esto es, la compañía de las ideas, los símbolos y los ideales. Una vez descubierto el origen de esas realidades, se pregunta qué tienen de racionales y qué de barbarie.

2. *The Palgrave Companion to George Santayana's Scepticism and Animal Faith*, editado por Martin A. Coleman y Glenn Tiller, London, Palgrave Macmillan Cham, 2024, pp. Xviii-400.

El contenido del libro es: *Introduction*, Martin A. Coleman, Glenn Tiller; *Santayana: Philosopher for the Twenty-First Century*, Herman J. Saatkamp Jr.; *The Last Sceptic: Santayana, Descartes, and the External World*, Douglas McDermid; *Laying Siege to the Truth: Santayana's Discourse on Method*, Diana B. Heney; *Scepticism, Anti-scepticism, and Santayana's Singularity*, Daniel Pinkas; *Knowledge as a Leap of Faith*, Jessica Wahman; *Animal Faith and Its Object*, John J. Stuhr; *Natural Knowledge and Transcendental Criticism in Scepticism and Animal Faith*, Paul Forster; *Santayana's Naturalism at the Junction of Epistemology and Ontology*, Ángel M. Faerna; *Reconstruction from Ultimate Scepticism*, Angus Kerr-Lawson; *The Centrality of the Imagination in Scepticism and Animal Faith*, Richard Marc Rubin; *Spiritual Exercises and Animal Faith*, Martin A. Coleman; *The Cries of Spirit: Santayana in Dialogue with Andrey Platonov*, Matthew Caleb Flamm; *Fumbling Toward the Animal in 'Animal Faith'*, Charles Padrón; *A Tension at the Center of Santayana's Philosophy*, Michael Hodges; *Truth and Ontology*, Glenn Tiller; *On*

Gnats and Barnacles, or Some Similarities Between Santayana's Idea of Change and Ancient Greek Thought, Andrés Tutor de Ureta; *The Ideal of a Philosophic Redemption: Baruch Spinoza's Place in Western Philosophy and in Santayana's Thought*, Lydia Amir; *G. Santayana (Scepticism and Animal Faith, 1923) and E. Husserl (Cartesianische Meditationen, 1929)*, Readers of R. Descartes, Daniel Moreno; *Hermes as an Interpreter and the Guide to Hades: Re-reading 'The Lord Chandos Letter' with Reference to Santayana's Scepticism and Animal Faith*, Katarzyna Krempleska; *The Conservative Disposition in Santayana's Philosophy*, Michael Brodrick.

En cuanto a los proyectos inmediatos, se anuncia el vol. X de la Edición Crítica dedicado a *Scepticism and Animal Faith*, con Introducción de John Lachs y Herman Saatkamp Jr.; la traducción de *Scepticism and Animal Faith* al polaco a cargo de Adam Grzeliński y Katarzyna Krempleska; la traducción de Mattia Manzoni de *Platonism and the Spiritual Life*; Ricardo Miguel Alfonso está coordinando para Oxford University Press uno de sus famosos Handbooks dedicado a Santayana en el que está prevista que colaboren numerosos santayanistas y cuyo título sería *Oxford Handbook of George Santayana*; Cayetano Estébanez prepara un libro sobre la vida, obra y huella de Agustín Santayana en su hijo Jorge, tal como anunció en «Limbo» 42; Daniel Pinkas prepara la publicación de una novela de autobiografía de ficción sobre Santayana titulada *Un Hôte de Passage*, de la que aparece un avance en «Overheard in Seville. Bulletin of the Santayana Society», nº 40 (2022), pp. 54-65.

Solo falta desear larga vida al santayanismo mundial.

II

NOTE CRITICHE E RECENSIONI

EL DISCURSO DEL MÉTODO Y LOS ENSAYOS. UNA EDICIÓN PARA ABORDAR UN CLÁSICO*

Guillermo Patiño Diaz-Alejo

* * *

Corren los clásicos el riesgo de ser «más nombrados que leídos» y, con ello, que al leerlos de verdad, resulten «tanto más nuevos, inesperados, inéditos»¹ de lo que uno podía imaginarse al principio. Ambas afirmaciones se cumplen de sobremanera en la ópera prima de Descartes: *Discurso del método. Dióptrica, Meteoros y Geometría, ensayos de este método*, pues, primeramente, al lector en castellano no le resultaba sencillo acceder a una edición completa del texto en cuestión, pero sobre todo porque la historiografía cartesiana dominante ha dado la espalda a dichos Ensayos. Todo esto como si el proyecto se agotara en el primer punto y seguido del título de la obra. Es, por ello, motivo de celebración que la editorial KRK dé a luz una edición del *Discurso del método* y sus Ensayos: la *Dióptrica*, los *Meteoros* y la *Geometría*, al cuidado del profesor Guillermo Quintás Alonso, quien corre al cargo de introducción, traducción y notas del volumen y cuya rúbrica no es sino un signo de garantía de quien atesora toda una vida dedicada al estudio y traducción del filósofo francés, como dan debida cuenta, sin pretender ser exhaustivo, las ediciones de *El tratado del hombre*, *Observaciones sobre la explicación de la mente humana* y *Los principios de la filosofía*, así como múltiples introducciones y estudios sobre nuestro autor y otros textos afines a los círculos cartesianos de la época: *La lógica o el arte del pensar*, de Arnauld y Nicole, así como *El discurso físico de la palabra* de G. De Cordemoy. De hecho, esta edición se articula sobre las traducciones previas que presentó el profesor Guillermo Quintás allá por el año 1981, de la mano de Ediciones Alfaguara.

Ahora bien, los cambios introducidos en esta nueva edición son importantes, tanto si consideramos la orientación dada al aparato crítico como a la traducción: el lector encontrará una traducción pulida durante cuarenta años y unas notas e introducción de gran ayuda y que muestran un profundo conocimiento de los lugares problemáticos del texto. La edición consta de una introducción a cargo del traductor, precedida por las portadas de la edición francesa y latina, para, a continuación, recoger el texto: *El Discurso del método*, la *Dióptrica*, los *Meteoros* y la *Geometría*, seguidos de los índices de los Ensayos. Un total de quinientas diecinueve páginas de texto, de las que setenta y nueve pertenecen al *Discurso* y cuatrocientas seis a los Ensayos. Elementos muy diversos, pero que constituyen una unidad incontestable.

Ahora bien, con esta edición no solo se enmienda una ausencia, sino que se hacen buenas las palabras de Calvino con las que abrimos, pues el profesor Quintás hace emerger de los textos una lectura de Descartes que no se ajusta a la vertida en los manuales al uso: inesperado por su articulación de la teoría y la experimentación («poca fe debe concederse a las observaciones que no están acompañadas de la verdadera razón»), por el papel asociado a la «ocupación más digna» y por la defensa y aprecio de la libertad. Un pensador de

* Acerca de R. Descartes, *Discurso del método. Dióptrica, Meteoros y Geometría, ensayos de este método*, edición de Guillermo Quintás Alonso, Oviedo, KRK Ediciones, 2023.

¹ I. Calvino, *Por qué leer los clásicos*, Madrid, Siruela, 2012, pp. 13 y ss.

insultante modernidad que cierra su alegato en favor de «la filosofía práctica» haciendo explícito el principio que debe regular el desarrollo de la ciencia: «alejarse de toda clase de proyectos que solamente serían útiles para unos y perjudiciales para otros». Esta edición es la culminación de una dedicación al texto de Descartes, que inició a principios de los setenta y que apuntaló en su tesis doctoral: *Razón y experiencia según Descartes*, que en el año 1973 defendió de la mano del profesor Fernando Montero y donde se rompía con “el cartesianismo oficial” que, como dijo el Profesor Lledó, es “el cartesianismo inexistente”. Ya desde dicho trabajo podemos rastrear las líneas de fuerza que guían esta edición: Descartes no fue el creador de una física apriorista y dogmática (deducida de la metafísica) que hubiera pretendido reducir toda la realidad a ideas claras y distintas, sino que fue el defensor de unas hipótesis explicativas de diversos fenómenos, cuyos primeros principios poseen un valor conjetural y cuya validez pende de la articulación con otras hipótesis, seleccionadas obedeciendo a la simplicidad de supuestos, verificabilidad y claridad de los mismos. Una concepción de la ciencia y la verdad que podemos rastrear en textos posteriores, como en las *Segundas objeciones* de las *Meditaciones metafísicas*.

El profesor Quintás aporta abundantes citas y reflexiones de gran relevancia, todas ellas bien escogidas e iluminadoras, como es el caso de la importante correspondencia que Descartes mantuvo previamente a la publicación del libro y en la que se recogen pasajes tan importantes como: «los tratados son ensayos de este método, porque pretendo que lo que contienen no hubiera podido ser indagado careciendo de este método y que mediante estos ensayos se puede conocer el valor que este método tiene» (*Discurso*, p. XV o cuando afirma que su deseo «no ha sido enseñar mi método en el *Discurso del método* en el que lo propongo, sino que solamente he pretendido decir lo suficiente para permitir juzgar que las opiniones que se darán a conocer en *La Dióptrica* y en *Los Meteoros* no han sido concebidas a la ligera y que merece la pena que esas opiniones sean examinadas» (*Discurso*, p.11), o bien cuando al ser consultado sobre su método, el propio Descartes los remitiera al *Discurso Octavo de los Meteoros*, *Sobre el arcoíris*, al que señaló como ejemplar, y sobre el cual el trabajo del editor ha sido concienzudo, por ser paradigmático y por lo que tiene de orientador.

Esta puesta en valor de los Ensayos debe venir acompañada por la recuperación de la Quinta y Sexta parte del *Discurso del método*, capítulos que los planes de estudios, tanto de las enseñanzas medias como superiores, han solventado con el cliché del “hombre-máquina” en el caso de la primera o con el mero olvido, en el caso de la segunda. Para enmendar dicha situación hermenéutica, el editor aporta interesantes perspectivas a lo largo de las distintas notas: por una lado, apunta tanto al carácter programático de la Sexta parte como a su preeminencia metodológica (p. 60), amén de señalar algo fundamental: en un primer momento, fue pensada como presentación de *La Dióptrica* y *Los Meteoros*, algo que se colige de su perfecta unidad en cuanto prólogo o introducción, y como guía del lector respecto a un asunto que Descartes considera de vital importancia: el lector ha de percatarse y valorar cuán diferentes son los principios de la filosofía que se enseña en las escuelas y los principios de la filosofía práctica que postula en su itinerario filosófico. No plantea otra tarea Descartes al lector, pero sobre esta insiste. El peso de este capítulo para el editor es evidente, como dan buena cuenta los ciegos datos: cuarenta y cuatro notas a pie de página en la Quinta parte, a la par que la Sexta parte, pero casi el doble que la Cuarta. Ahora bien, si el trabajo en la edición es abundante, valioso y preciso a lo largo del texto, en la Sexta parte alcanza unas cotas de minuciosidad admirables. Simplemente, hasta donde yo sé, no hay un trabajo equiparable en lengua castellana. Dicho enfoque apunta a la incorrección que

supone dar la espalda a las más de cuatrocientas páginas, de sus casi quinientas, en las que se habla constantemente de experimentos, hipótesis y supuestos. ¿Cómo desdeñar semejante dedicación por parte de Descartes?

A la luz de esta orientación, el profesor Guillermo Quintás abre nuevas sendas en los pasajes más transitados y conocidos por el lector interesado en el pensador francés. Así, en la Segunda parte, tras una valiosa introducción donde el traductor reflexiona en torno a la metáfora del viaje y de la biografía cartesiana, nos obliga a revisar ciertos cánones, como que la verdad, en sentido formal, es propia de los juicios o que la ausencia de duda se ejemplifica en los Ensayos con afirmaciones como que «tanto el análisis de las hipótesis como la revisión de las observaciones contribuyen a anular las dudas que obligarían a dudar de la verdad de un juicio» (p. 18). Algo semejante ocurre con el paradigma de la evidencia, que el profesor Quintás vincula con la proporción y que «se percibe con toda claridad en la Geometría» (p. 20). O con los conceptos de «orden» y «cadenas», sobre los que, de nuevo, realiza valiosos apuntes a partir de pasajes de los Ensayos y que ilustra con una cita de Descartes: «Aquellos que se satisfacen afirmando que no creen lo que he escrito, pues ha sido explicado a partir de ciertas suposiciones que no habrían sido probadas, no saben lo que piden ni lo que deberían pedir» (p. 22, cita A-T, II, 143-144).

Respecto a la Cuarta parte, aquella donde se desarrolla la metafísica cartesiana, la edición recoge un buen surtido de aclaraciones regidas por ciertas líneas maestras: la metafísica cartesiana no estaba debidamente desarrollada, pero sus tesis fundamentales están presentes en el *Discurso*. Su exposición fue fruto de una necesidad perentoria, a saber, evitar la posibilidad de exponer una filosofía mutilada y unos principios, que el lector podría juzgar, poco sólidos. Además, la cuestión metafísica se debe enmarcar en su justo sentido, a saber, el retorno a una teología simple con la que se podrá evitar esa dominación que ejercía junto al aristotelismo sobre el saber y, gracias a ello, establecer unos nuevos asientos sólidos para el conocimiento sobre los que construir toda la ciencia, como el de ese Dios filosófico cartesiano que limita, pero no compromete nuestra racionalidad (p. 35).

El solitario capítulo de metafísica da paso a una Quinta parte donde el editor nos advierte en la nota inicial de que Descartes «abandona las cuestiones metafísicas y pasa al terreno de la física» (p. 43), ciencia para la que diseña un plan que dé cuenta de los fenómenos y que pasa por «la necesidad de precisar los nuevos principios generales» (p. 41). En el caso de las investigaciones en torno al cuerpo, señala el traductor que Descartes propone la eliminación de la cuestión de la sustancia pensante y su actividad. Esta estrategia, como ya se advirtió anteriormente, pretende dejar fuera a Aristóteles y, en cambio, selecciona Harvey como propuesta teórica rival. Simplemente, la posición escolástica, ni se contempla. En cualquier caso, el resultado es que el modelo del ser natural necesario para la nueva medicina debería fundarse en otros principios o leyes generales de la naturaleza, en otros modelos o analogías (hombre máquina) e hipótesis asociadas a su desarrollo, que marcarán el desarrollo de este campo de conocimiento, tan priorizado por Descartes.

Con este preparatorio que Descartes diseñó debería el lector afrontar los Ensayos. Ardua tarea si no contáramos con la ayuda del traductor. Pongamos la mirada, por ejemplo, siguiendo la invitación Descartes en el *Discurso octavo* de los *Meteoros: Sobre el arcoíris*. Muy probablemente, el lector actual, con una formación filosófica totalmente diferente al pensador del siglo XVII, se encontrará fuera de esa zona de confort que ha gozado en las primeras partes del *Discurso del método*. Por ello, las notas que se incorporan son fundamentales para afrontar la tarea, pues no es sencillo seguir la cadena de experimentos, hipótesis y fases del proceso de investigación de los fenómenos que nos plantea Descartes.

Además, evitaremos pasar por alto detalles de suma importancia: como, por ejemplo, que, a la hora de explicar el orden de las franjas de color del arcoíris, Descartes admitirá hipótesis explicativas en función de criterios como la simplicidad, la verificabilidad (p. 333) o incluso la claridad y la coherencia con el resto del sistema (p. 331). Al auxilio del lector también acuden las imágenes que elaboró Franz von Schooten, el Joven, y que la edición castellana ha incorporado y perfilado con sumo gusto. La lectura hace emerger un entendimiento de Descartes, donde lo que se pretende es que al «desarrollar un campo teórico (tal como ha venido exponiendo), las experiencias adquieren un significado en razón de esa teoría o hipótesis, pues las observaciones se diseñan y efectúan si y solo si esperamos que la teoría expuesta les confiera un significado» (p. 431).

Para finalizar este breve repaso al trabajo del profesor Guillermo Quintás, hemos reservado la Tercera parte. En ella, el traductor presenta una de sus propuestas más meditada, justificada y, seguramente, controvertida, pues defiende que la moral de esta parte no es una «moral destinada a ser suplida, corregida o abandonada» o que estemos ante moral cuyas «reglas propuestas tengan fecha de caducidad» (p. 22). Frente a ello, el profesor Quintás viene defendiendo desde hace décadas lo erróneo de esta posición. Buena prueba de esto ha sido la traducción de «morale par provision» como «moral como provisión», en lugar de la habitual «moral provisional», con lo que se deja atrás una larga tradición historiográfica. Las líneas básicas de su tesis se construyen a partir de las distintas notas que recorren el texto. El punto de partida transita desde Trento y el problema de la libertad en el siglo XVII hasta la situación política de Holanda para llegar al planteamiento más concreto: las reglas de la moral no aparecen como imperativos dogmáticos, sino como una parte más de la pregunta general: «¿Cómo no analizar todo según la propia razón cuando he llegado al convencimiento de que somos víctimas de las costumbres, del ejemplo dado por otros y de los prejuicios generados en el pasado?» (p. XXVI). Una posición que enraíza con el proyecto cartesiano más básico y cuyas «normas mantienen una clara conexión con tesis fundamentales de la metafísica cartesiana en aspectos fundamentales» (p. 22), así como con esos aspectos prácticos que Descartes siempre defendió como fundamentales: la salud o la libertad, entendida esta última no solo en sentido metafísico, sino también fáctico, como «una libertad tan completa y de vivir en un lugar donde se pueda conciliar el sueño con menor inquietud» (p. 31, n. 39). Valga decir que en este asunto el traductor se ha permitido salpicar el texto con cuestiones historiográficas, mientras que en el resto del texto el compromiso con la evasión de largas menciones bibliográficas o historiográficas ha sido ejemplar y se ha proporcionado al lector un horizonte claro donde degustar ese artificio técnico que siempre es la traducción. Entre las escasas notas bibliográficas podemos entrever un tributo a autores como Harry Frankfurt, Élie Denisoff, Jean-Paul Weber o Constantino Lascaris. Todos ellos, buenos compañeros del periplo intelectual del profesor Guillermo Quintás en sus lecturas cartesianas.

Sobre la traducción hay mucho que decir; por lo pronto que, sin duda, estamos ante una de las traducciones más trabajadas y pensadas del *Discurso* en lengua española, pues se empezó a gestar a finales de los años setenta y ha ido afinándose a lo largo de los años. Se nota que hay toda una vida de reflexión en cada palabra y un sinfín de lecturas de cada silencio. Buena muestra de ello es el exhaustivo uso que se hacen de diccionarios “de la época”, como la primera edición del *Dictionnaire de L’Academie Française* (1695), el *Diccionario castellano con voces y ciencias y artes de Terreros y Pando* (1788) o el siempre citado *Dictionnaire universel* de Antoine Furetière, publicado en 1701. Esta minuciosidad ha llevado a revisar incluso términos aparentemente inocentes, algo

imprescindible para una buena traducción, pues se evitan ciertos peligros: “False Friends”, los calcos sintácticos y los tentadores galicismos, a los que el profesor Guillermo Quintás ha ido expulsando de sus ediciones paulatinamente. Buena muestra de todo ello son las molestias que el traductor se ha tomado en señalar al lector acerca del uso cartesiano de ciertos términos. Y así, siguiendo las indicaciones del propio filósofo francés, nos advierte que “demostrar”, “probar”, “deducir”, etc., no se usan con el sentido habitual de los lógicos escolásticos, sino siguiendo el uso común. Ahora bien, ¿cuál es el uso común de esos términos en el siglo XVII? El profesor Quintás, por ejemplo, aclara que es el de «narración, enumeración detallada: hacer una detallada narración de sus razones» (p. 40, n. 2). Un matiz de gran valor para el lector. En el mismo orden de cosas, el traductor reconoce que ha «respetado al máximo las expresiones y giros de Descartes, aunque ello haya impuesto el evitar términos y expresiones que, por otra parte, son fácilmente incorporables por el lector de hoy». Al hilo de esta idea, acredita expresiones como «espejos que queman». Una decisión como esta la justifica en función de dos premisas que operan en el texto cartesiano, por un lado, escapar del lenguaje de la escuela, aun a costa de acabar empleando expresiones poco precisas (que tuvo que inventar) y, por otro lado, escapar de los tecnicismos y cumplir con ese propósito de «hacerme entender por todos» (p. 83). No es baladí que la obra se publicara inicialmente en francés. En resumen, un gran trabajo, especialmente cuando uno asume las dificultades propias de la distancia diacrónica del lenguaje, pero mantener la misma raíz románica, un asunto al que ya apuntó Ortega, quien ya nos avisaba de que el francés es, de «todas las lenguas europeas, la que menos facilita la faena de traducir»².

Para tal empresa, el traductor ha asumido también dos fuentes fundamentales: la edición francesa y la latina, esta última traducida por Courcelles (salvo la Geometría), pero que el propio Descartes revisó y sobre la que realizó alguna corrección interesante. Aunar ambas fuentes se ha solventado, a nuestro entender, de la mejor manera posible: las variaciones entre las fuentes básicas están apuntadas y, cuando se ha requerido, comentadas. Más complejo es traducir los silencios de un autor que voló todos los puentes para sus biógrafos, limitándose a incorporar «los aspectos que son significativos para comprender las distintas decisiones y opciones que tomó al dar forma a la “filosofía práctica”» (p. XVII) en un contexto donde primaba la ausencia de apoyo de las instituciones a la nueva filosofía. A estas ausencias dedica el profesor Quintás unas ilustrativas páginas de su introducción.

En último lugar, pero no menos importante, quisiera decir algunas palabras sobre la edición que presenta la editorial KRK. El trabajo de quien ha estado al cuidado de la edición, Benito García Noriega, es imponente. Uno entiende que la editorial haya sido recibido el Premio Nacional al libro mejor editado en alguna ocasión. No solo por los buenos cuidados de la edición, sino por haber hecho coincidir la paginación de la obra con la de Adam-Tannery. Así, cuando el lector acuda a la página treinta, el texto se corresponderá con el de la edición canónica. Un auténtico trabajo de orfebrería. Otro logro editorial reseñable es el trabajo con las imágenes que incorporó Descartes en los Ensayos, obra de Franz von Schooten, el Joven. Tengo ante mí, en mi mesa, la última edición de las obras de Descartes publicadas por Vrin y la que está publicando Gallimard, comparo la ilustración de A-T, 335 con la de KRK y, sin duda, la legibilidad de la última es mucho mejor. Lo dicho, un gran trabajo.

² J. Ortega y Gasset, *Miseria y esplendor de la traducción*, en Id., *Obras completas*, Madrid, Taurus, 2006, vol. V, p. 724.

Por todo esto, podemos concluir que el resultado final nos parece de alta estima y valor para los estudios filosóficos en nuestra lengua. No únicamente por recoger *La Dióptrica*, *Los Meteoros* y *La Geometría*, sino por la ajustada y correcta traducción que ofrece, por la guía del profesor Guillermo Quintás, que no enreda con erudición y por señalar cómo Descartes abrió nuevos caminos a la razón y atisbó el horizonte desde su tiempo con una agudeza digna de mención. A él rinde tributo esta edición del *Discurso del método* que acaba de publicar KRK.

ISSN 2531-6451

RIVISTA DI FILOSOFIA IBERICA, IBEROAMERICANA E INTERCULTURALE