

**limbo**

Núm. 30, 2010, pp. 31-52

ISSN: 0210-1602

## George Santayana and John Dewey Meet

RICHARD M. RUBIN

### ABSTRACT

Santayana's divergence from pragmatism became increasingly clear in the years surrounding his departure from the United States in 1912. The seeds of this divergence can be seen after his encounter with Dewey at Columbia University in February 1910, when he gave a series of lectures that later became the book *Three Philosophical Poets*. Dewey arranged for Santayana to come to Columbia. The extant correspondence and an article by Santayana make it clear they discussed philosophic issues. Afterwards, Dewey remained puzzled as to what Santayana meant by the term 'essence' and why Santayana thought empirical philosophy was solipsistic. When Santayana published a series of essays, one of which described a "realm of essence" and another, entitled "Critique of Pragmatism", which mentioned Dewey explicitly, Dewey wrote for clarification. Santayana responded with questions that puzzled him further. Dewey's review of *Scepticism and Animal Faith* in 1923 showed that, even then, he believed Santayana needed to develop his ideas more. Dewey regarded the word 'essence' as signifying the gist of something, and he regarded the existence of the natural world as a given but not the focus of philosophic inquiry. When they met in 1910, Santayana had already sketched out a draft of the system that he would later elaborate in the *Realms of Being*. In this system, Santayana used 'essence' to mean a term of discourse, which could either be the contents of a moment of experience or an idea which might or might not be exemplified in the actual world, i.e., in the realms of matter and spirit. The source of

the confusion between the two men now becomes clear. Santayana was developing a complex notion of essence that was at odds with Dewey's own philosophical instincts, and for each the purpose of philosophy was radically different

*Keywords:* Santayana, Dewey, Pragmatism, Columbia University, Essence.

#### RESUMEN

La divergencia de Santayana respecto al pragmatismo se hizo cada vez más clara conforme se acercaba el año en que abandonó Estados Unidos, 1912. Las semillas de tal divergencia se pueden ver en su encuentro con Dewey en la Universidad de Columbia en febrero de 1910, cuando dio la serie de conferencias que dieron lugar al libro *Interpretaciones de poesía y religión*. Dewey ayudó a que Santayana acudiera a Columbia. La correspondencia conservada muestra con claridad que discutieron sobre filosofía. Tras lo cual Dewey siguió preguntándose qué quería decir Santayana exactamente con el término 'esencia'. Tal incertidumbre se mantuvo durante algún tiempo, tal como se refleja en los comentarios posteriores de Dewey sobre Santayana, en especial en su reseña de *Escepticismo y fe animal* de 1923. Dewey consideraba que la palabra 'esencia' significaba la clave de algo. Cuando se encontraron en 1910, Santayana ya tenía el boceto del sistema que acabaría elaborando en *Reinos del ser*. En ese sistema, Santayana utilizaba 'esencia' para significar un término del discurso mental, que bien podía ser el contenido de un momento de experiencia o bien una idea que podría, o no, estar ejemplificada en el mundo real, léase en los reinos de la materia o del espíritu. La raíz de la confusión entre ambos pensadores se aclara ahora. Santayana estaba en pleno proceso de desarrollo de una noción compleja de esencia que chocaba con los instintos filosóficos de Dewey, y cada cual entendía el objetivo de la filosofía de modo totalmente distinto.

*Palabras clave:* Santayana, Dewey, pragmatismo, Universidad de Columbia, esencia.

The publication of *The Life of Reason* in 1905 and 1906 solidified Santayana's reputation as one of the preeminent philosophers writing in America. Soon after the last volume (*Reason in Science*) appeared, his position was such that when the Harvard University Philosophy Department, early in 1907, considered going outside the University to find a senior philosopher to replace William James, Santayana threatened to leave if the choice were made without consulting him and before his own promotion to full professor. The University backed off and immediately promoted him<sup>1</sup>.

John Dewey's two reviews of the *Life of Reason* made Dewey something of a champion of Santayana's work. After Dewey's first review, Santayana wrote his publisher, Charles Scribner's Sons, from Europe:

I have not read many reviews, as I find little profit in doing so as a rule; but two sent me by their authors Mr. Bliss Carman's in the Saturday literary supplement to the N.Y. Tribune and Professor's Dewey's in "Science" are very flattering indeed, and could furnish excellent sentences to quote in an advertising sheet [Santayana (2001), p. 340].

Note that Dewey sent Santayana the review. Santayana's letter to Scribner's is the first of the very few records we have of any correspondence between them.

By this time Dewey had also established himself as a scholar at least equal in prominence to Santayana. He had published numerous essays and books on psychology, education, and pragmatism. In 1905 he moved from the University of Chicago to Columbia University, where he became a professor of both philosophy and psychology. (The following year Santayana was offered a one-year position at Columbia, which he turned down, having been away from Harvard for two years and not able to get his workload at Harvard reduced enough to enable him to travel to New York to teach there part of the week<sup>2</sup>) The same year that Dewey moved to New York (1905), he became President of the American Philosophical Association,

which met jointly with the American Psychological Association in December at Harvard (while Santayana was in Europe<sup>3</sup>).

#### I. THE SETTING: THE CONVERSATIONS AND LETTERS

By the summer of 1909, Dewey had become chairman of the Philosophy Department at Columbia University. [Dewey Chronology, 1909.07.] In that position he was instrumental in arranging for Santayana to give a series of lectures at Columbia in February of 1910. Santayana repeated these lectures in April of the same year at the University of Wisconsin and published them in the fall as *Three Philosophical Poets*. [Santayana Chronology, 1910]<sup>4</sup>. Although it is remotely possible that that the two men had met earlier, their meeting during Santayana's lectures at Columbia was a significant moment in their evolving relationship.

Most likely at the time of lectures at Columbia, Dewey's wife, Alice Chipman Dewey, heard Santayana talk and then met him socially. Mrs. Dewey issued what may be the definitive put-down of Santayana. She told her husband that Santayana "lived in the drawing room and had never seen the kitchen."<sup>5</sup> How do we know they met? A year later, in February of 1911, Santayana began to publish a series of articles on Bertrand Russell's *Philosophic Essays* in the *Journal of Philosophy, Psychology, and Scientific Methods*. The first (in the issue of February 3) is entitled "The Study of Essence" and the second (in the issue of March 2) is called "The Critique of Pragmatism." In "The Critique of Pragmatism," Santayana wrote: "I remember Professor Dewey saying in conversation..." [Santayana (1911), p. 116].

One week after the article's publication, on March 9, 1911, Dewey wrote a letter to Santayana in which he said:

I do not recall the context of the conversation to which you refer.... As nearly as I can recall, I was thinking of the problem of the nature of philosophy [Dewey Letters, 1911.03.09 (03608): JD to George Santayana].<sup>6</sup>

We are lucky to have any letters between them, because neither habitually saved correspondence. The only evidence we have of Dewey writing to Santayana before this is Santayana's letter to Scribner's in 1906. It is unlikely they had corresponded since then, because Dewey greeted him rather formally with:

My dear Professor Santayana

just as Santayana had referred to him as "Professor Dewey" in his article. Dewey's difficulty in recalling the context helps date their conversation to the previous year during the course of Santayana's lectures in New York.

Four days after the first letter, Dewey sent another that begins:

My dear Mr Santayana;

Just a line to thank you for your response [Dewey Letters, 1911.03.13 (03609): JD to George Santayana],

Santayana's quick response to the first letter has not turned up. No other letters between them have survived.

It is likely that Dewey and Santayana had another conversation soon after their exchange of letters, for Santayana wrote to Charles Augustus Strong several weeks later at the end of April:

I was in New York for a week at Easter, and saw some old friends, and also the philosophers at Columbia.... [Santayana (2002), p. 35].

Not only was Dewey the chairman of the Philosophy Department at Columbia, but the likelihood that he was there when Santayana was is enhanced by the conclusion of the sentence just quoted from Santayana's letter. In his first letter, Dewey wrote:

While I do not recall the context of the conversation to which you refer, I think its meaning to your mind and to mine is another

illustration of how easy it is in philosophy to suppose that two persons are discussing the same subject, when they are talking, as a matter of fact, in different universes of discourse [Dewey Letters, 1911.03.09 (03608): JD to George Santayana].

Santayana, in his letter to Strong, after noting that he had met the philosophers at Columbia, added: “but without making much progress in mutual understanding — As Dewey said, we are all facing different problems when we seem to be discussing the same point”.

Different universes, different problems — the theme is the same: similar terms used with different meanings because of differing concerns. This theme was prevalent enough in their exchanges that Dewey may have repeated some version of it in discussion with Santayana during his Easter visit to New York. In any event, it is clear that Dewey and Santayana were becoming increasingly aware of how different their philosophic endeavors were.

In his letter of March 13, 1911 (the second one), Dewey showed his recognition that he and Santayana were heading down different paths. The entire text of the letter is as follows:

My dear Mr. Santayana;

Just a line to thank you for your response. I am not going to try to answer any of the questions you raise, because, while very simple and direct, they do not spring up readily in the sort of question that more habitually preoccupies me, and I want to assimilate them.

I am enclosing some unrevised copy of a lecture I gave in the fall at the University of Pennsylvania. It does not answer your questions; in fact, I fear you will find parts of it horribly subjectivistic in tone. But for good or for evil, it may suggest the kind of questions that seem to me to give import to philosophic reflection.

Sincerely yours, John Dewey

[Dewey Letters, 1911.03.13 (03609): JD to George Santayana].

## II. THE CONTEXT: THE ARTICLES AND ISSUES

The two conversations and three letters establish that both Dewey and Santayana had begun to acknowledge their approaches to philosophy were fundamentally different. Dewey's prediction that Santayana would find his paper "subjectivistic" anticipates the most famous objection that Santayana had to Dewey's metaphysics: Dewey's emphasis on the "foreground of human experience." (1925)

In his first letter, which I examine in this section, Dewey raised two specific topics: the relation of existence to essence and Santayana's characterization of empirical philosophy as solipsistic. Regarding existence and essence, he called for clarification of Santayana's views. Regarding the empirical philosophy, Dewey sought to clarify his own views. He concluded by saying that the two issues are bound together because both pertain to the nature and purpose of philosophy. In light of this, Dewey asked Santayana to elaborate on his conception of what philosophy ought to be.

### *Santayana's idea of essence*

Dewey's first letter to Santayana begins:

My dear Professor Santayana:

I need hardly say that I have been intensely interested in your Journal articles; so much so that I venture to write to express the hope that you are going sometime to write something more definitive on the problem of "essences" and their relation to existences. I say this partly because I am perplexed in getting at just what your own theory is; and partly because the problem is not only difficult, but is shirked quite generally by philosophic writers. (I cannot see that pragmatists or empiricists are sinners above others in this regard). Consequently a constructive exposition of a theory on this matter from one in whose philosophy the conception of essence plays so large a part as it evidently does in yours, could but be of great assistance.

Santayana's article "The Study of Essence" (February 1911) must have led Dewey to ask for further exposition. This article may contain Santayana's first reference in print to his idea of essence as a "realm." Essence is one the four realms of being that constitute the architecture of his later philosophy. The others are matter, truth, and spirit. It is no surprise that Dewey should have found Santayana's concept of essence puzzling. Santayana adopted a non-standard usage of the term – one that never became widespread. For Santayana, 'essence' refers to the full range of ideas, images, sounds, flavors, and impressions that might possibly appear in experience or imagination and which may also be exemplified at some moment in some part of the physical world. In "The Study of Essence" he wrote:

The realm of essence contains the infinite multitude of Leibnitz's possible worlds, many of these worlds being very small and simple, and consisting merely of what might be presented in some isolated moment of feeling. If any such feeling, however, or its object, never in fact occurs, the essence that it would have presented if it had occurred remains possible merely; so that nothing can ever exist in nature or for consciousness which has not a prior and independent locus in the realm of essence. When a man lights upon a thought or is interested in tracing a relation, he does not introduce those objects into the realm of essence, but merely selects them from the plenitude of what lies there eternally [Santayana (1913), p. 119].

And also:

The realm of essence is merely the system or chaos of ... fundamental possibilities, the catalogue of all exemplifiable natures; so that any experience whatsoever must tap the realm of essence, and throw the light of attention on one of its constituent forms [Santayana (1913), p. 122].

Unlike Plato's forms, which are general concepts, Santayana's realm of essence includes not only the abstract idea of a human



being, for example, but also the idea of a particular person. Essence also includes the abstract notion that a person has different conditions at different times, and it also includes anything that might represent someone's actual or imagined condition or state of mind in all its particularity. It includes the impressions that flies and fish have, as well as those of a symphony conductor, a molecular biologist, a cinematographer, or a professional comedian. Several commentators have observed that Santayana's realm of essence might equally be called 'the realm of meaning.' The terms 'idea' and 'image' are more commonly used. Today some writers, following Richard Dawkins, use the term 'meme' to refer to a meaningful unit of experience. A meme is basically what Santayana meant by 'essence', although as customarily used, 'meme' might be characterized in Santayana's vocabulary as those essences that get tossed about among various psyches so that over the course of history some remain actively attended to while others fall aside.

The more common use of 'essence' as meaning the heart of the matter or the gist of something can get lost if you begin to meditate on the sea of limitless possibilities and points of view in the realm of essence. Yet, Santayana often used the term 'essence' with its ordinary meaning and this ordinary meaning is certainly the one Dewey had in mind when he tried to understand Santayana's concept. Furthermore, both notions of essence are related to the idea of definition. Dewey was writing and thinking in the shadow of Aristotle, for whom the process of defining something is an investigation to find a phrase that describes the thing's essence (see, for example, Aristotle, *Topics* 101b). Dewey was Aristotle's pupil in that he regarded definition as a process of inquiry. The essence of something is its fundamental attributes. Santayana instead regarded an essence as something unchanging and permanent, not the end result of an investigative process. For Santayana, essence is something given or found or, by chance, illustrated for a moment by the changing world of matter.

Although the notion that essence constitutes a realm of being may have been introduced in “The Study of Essence,” it was not the first time Santayana used ‘essence’ to refer to non-existent ideas. In his first letter Dewey calls attention to this earlier use. After asking for “a constructive exposition of a theory” of essence, Dewey added:

I had the same desire for further enlightenment as to your view, after reading the parts of *The Life of Reason* that touch upon the interrelations of physics and dialectic. I have in mind especially the conception that they touch both at the beginning and the end of their careers no matter how divergent between [Dewey Letters, 1911.03.09 (03608): JD to George Santayana].

Dewey is referring to *Reason in Science*, where Santayana distinguished between two types of science: one, dialectic, deals with relations among ideas; and the other, physics, deals with relations among things – that is, relations in existence (which Santayana distinguished from ideas). The two sciences are interrelated. One way they are connected, as Santayana put it, is that physical science “is itself discourse” and that before existing things can be discovered and

groups of co-existent qualities can be identified those qualities themselves must be arrested by the mind, noted, and identified in their recurrences. But these terms, bandied about in scientific discourse, are so many essences and pure ideas [Santayana (1906), pp. 29-30].

In “The Study of Essence,” Santayana introduced his notion of the realm of essence to take Russell to task for venerating mathematical study in a way that is much like religious devotion. He quoted Russell as saying, for example, that mathematics is “one of those elements in human life which merit a place in heaven.” Santayana then commented that the objects of mathematical study are merely dialectical relationships among essences that have no value or beauty in themselves. He put it this way:

The affinity which the human mind may develop to certain provinces of essence is adventitious to those essences, and hardly to be mentioned in their presence. It is something the mind has acquired, and may lose. It is an incident in the life of reason, and no inherent characteristic of eternal necessity [Santayana (1913), p. 119].

Dewey's hope for further exposition about essence did not come from failure to read Santayana carefully. Santayana's system was still in development. After his death, Santayana's assistant, Daniel Cory, published a series of lectures Cory found among his papers. These lectures were given in a course Santayana taught at Harvard in the fall of 1909. They show he had already distinguished three of his four realms of being. The course was given just before Santayana met Dewey at Columbia. In May of the year that Dewey wrote to him (1911), Santayana wrote his sister, Susan Sturgis de Sastre:

I am writing a brand new system of philosophy to be called "Three realms of Being"—not the mineral vegetable and animal, but something far more metaphysical, namely Essence, Matter, and Consciousness. It will not be a long book, but very technical [Santayana (2002), p. 37].

Santayana had not yet identified the fourth realm, truth, which is a province of the realm of essence, and he had not settled on the term 'spirit' for the realm of conscious life. Dewey's hope for more exposition about essence was not in vain. Santayana did elaborate further, but it took 12 more years before he published *Scepticism and Animal Faith* (in 1923), in which he discussed his notion of essence at length. For Dewey, however, the puzzlement he expressed in his letter grew into discontent. When Dewey reviewed *Scepticism and Animal Faith*, he wrote that Santayana's philosophy amounted to a "radical separation of existence and essence" [Dewey (1923), p. 295]. The elaboration he had urged in his 1911 letter remained incomplete. A sequel, he wrote in 1923, "is badly needed" [*Idem*]. Four years later, Santayana published the sequel as the first volume of *Realms*

*of Being: The Realm of Essence* (1927). By this time, Santayana had published his ironic and damning review of Dewey's *Experience and Nature* in which he accused Dewey of being a "half-hearted naturalist" for placing unwarranted emphasis on the "foreground" of human experience. Dewey had become less hopeful that Santayana would see how much they were alike. The sequel Dewey asked for had been published, but when he reviewed it he found *The Realm of Essence* to be "philosophy as fine art": pleasurable to read as poetry, even though it was the product of what to Dewey was an unacceptable philosophic dualism.

*Empirical solipsism and the realm of truth*

Santayana's as yet undelineated realm of truth underlay his characterization of empiricism as solipsistic. Santayana had already hinted at the realm of truth in *The Life of Reason*, where he wrote:

Truth is not self-generating (...) Its eternity, and the infinite propositions it contains, remain potential and unapproachable until their incidence is found in existence. Form cannot of itself decide which of all possible forms shall be real [Santayana (1906), pp. 31-32].

That was in 1906. Four or five years later, when writing the "Critique of Pragmatism" (1911) (and during his brief correspondence with Dewey), Santayana had in the back of his mind that truth is what existence carves out of essence, even if it had not yet entered his mind to include truth formally in the realms of being. In his essay on pragmatism, Santayana used Russell's criticism of pragmatism as a jumping off point to expound his own.

Santayana was quite skeptical of the pragmatic conception of truth, which he took to be psychological. So he wrote:

The bed-rock of facts that the pragmatist builds upon is avowedly drifting sand. Hence the odd expressions, new to literature and even

to grammar, which bubble up continually in pragmatist writings. “For illustration take the former fact that the earth is flat,” says one, quite innocently [Santayana (1911), p. 115].

That one was John Dewey, in his *Studies in Logical Theory* (1903). Santayana caricatured the pragmatists as having a fluctuating notion of truth, because they, like the idealists, have the habit of staring at their own ideas — a form of solipsism. Santayana wondered whether this practice were simply a preference rather than an ultimate position:

The habit of studying ideas rather than their objects might be simply a matter of emphasis or predilection. It might merely indicate a special interest in the life of reason, and be an effort, legitimate under any system of philosophy, to recount the stages by which human thought, developing in the bosom of nature, may have reached its present degree of articulation. I myself, for instance, like to look at things from this angle [Santayana (1911), p. 116].

Santayana was aware some pragmatists did not deny the existence of an external world. He wrote:

I remember Professor Dewey saying in conversation that he had no doubt that the mind of a friend of ours, M., existed independently of our ideas of M’s mind; but it was not for philosophy to discuss that independent being; the business of philosophy was merely to fix the logic and system of our own knowledge [*idem*].

So Dewey was not so much denying the facts as not focusing on them. Surely, it is this passage that prodded Dewey to write. But Santayana went further:

The original reason for deliberately ignoring, in this way, the realistic way of thinking, even while admitting (like Professor Dewey) that it represents the real state of affairs, would have been, I suppose, that what

could be verified was always some further effect of the real objects, and never those real objects themselves; so that for interpreting and predicting our personal experience only the hypothesis of objects was pertinent, while the objects themselves, except as so represented, were useless and unattainable.... Pragmatism, approached from this side, would then seem to express an acute critical conscience, a sort of will not to believe; not to believe, I mean, more than is absolutely necessary for solipsistic practice [Santayana, (1911) pp. 116-117].<sup>7</sup>

The notion that empirical philosophy is inherently solipsistic is what Martin Coleman has called a “trademark view of Santayana” [Coleman (2004), p. 109]. In his letter, Dewey raised this issue as one he was interested in “from a personal standpoint.” He then replied directly to Santayana’s characterization of him in his article. He and Santayana were, as quoted previously, in “different universes of discourse” because

You were evidently thinking of the solipsistic problem; as nearly as I can recall I was thinking of the problem of the nature of philosophy [Dewey Letters, 1911.03.09 (03608): JD to George Santayana].

The divide then is this: Santayana was focusing on a technical problem: Do pragmatists deny that a world independent of our conceptions exists? Whereas, Dewey was raising the ante and asking: What is philosophy about and how does one go about doing it? Dewey clarified that he and Santayana had no disagreement about the facts:

What you say about your attitude to the question of the external world, expresses not only my attitude toward that but also to that of “other minds”. It always seems to me that in both these cases that the “problem” is rather a *reductio ad absurdum* of the premisses, than a genuine problem. I mention this because it indicates the context of my reply as you quote it. Not only have I (according to my conceptions) exactly the same sort

of evidence of the existence of consciousness in other persons that I have of its existence in connection with my own person, but so far as I can see both the existence and the subject-matter of my consciousness are absolutely bound up with physical heredity and social intercourse [Dewey Letters, 1911.03.09 (03608): JD to George Santayana].

Here Dewey introduced one of his own trademark notions: that consciousness does not emerge independently, but has a natural basis and develops in a physical and social setting. This is about as far from solipsism as you can get. He continued, explaining what he thought philosophy is and arguing that, while not denying the external world and the possibility of making discoveries about it, philosophy itself is an imaginative construction:

My agnosticism is about the possibility of any philosophy except in terms of the Life of Reason, but that does not mean that I would deny that the adventures of thought result in the discovery of things and persons independent of the history of the discovery--but only that any philosophy that any one can construct is really, (no matter how *sub specie eternitatis* one may conceive it,) fundamentally nothing but a contribution to the imaginative life of humanity [Dewey Letters, 1911.03.09 (03608): JD to George Santayana].

Dewey's plea then was for Santayana to understand him better, especially as his own vision of what philosophy might be had been articulated so well by Santayana himself in *The Life of Reason*.

In his second letter, Dewey continued his efforts to explain himself but with a growing awareness that the resolution of their differences might not come quickly. The questions Santayana sent him were not "the sort of question that more habitually preoccupies me." Dewey then sent him a copy of a lecture that he hoped would "suggest the kind of questions that seem to me to give import to philosophic reflection" [Dewey Letters, 1911.03.13 (03609): JD to George Santayana].

That lecture was published as “The Problem of Truth.” I do not consider it at length here, except to note that it contains much about the social and moral character of truth. Dewey wrote, for example: “When we hear not that the assassination of Caesar by Brutus was an historic event, but that it is an historic truth, we may safely prepare for the enforcement of a moral, not for the noting of an incident [Dewey (1911), p. 13]. He then observed that philosophers over-epistemologize truth and ignore its common meaning: “We forget — I mean philosophers forget — that truth ... is first of all truthfulness, a social virtue.... When mere matters of fact and mere happenings are promoted from the status of fact and event to the category of truth it is because some social consequence is seen to depend on their mode of presentation [Dewey (1911), pp. 14-15].

Mere matters of fact! No wonder Santayana and Dewey had trouble understanding each other. Santayana’s realm of truth is precisely the set of essences exemplified by the facts. As Santayana’s theory of truth developed in subsequent years, it became clear that the facts include not just physical happenings in the realm of matter, but also thoughts, feelings, and experiences — the essences that present themselves to consciousness and which constitute Santayana’s realm of spirit. In his later work *The Realm of Truth* (1938), Santayana did acknowledge the honorific use of the word ‘truth’ that Dewey spoke of in his lecture on “The Problem of Truth,” but this usage is hardly the centerpiece of Santayana’s theory.

By 1911 the divide between Santayana and Dewey was distinct and growing. Santayana had chastised the Pragmatists for “ignoring the realistic way of thinking”. In conversations, letters, and the lecture he mailed, Dewey had laid down a direction for philosophy that had almost no interest for Santayana.

### III. SIDEBAR: DISCOVERING THE CONVERSATION

My own biography is irrelevant to the circumstances of the meeting of Santayana and Dewey at Columbia University in 1910, but



I believe the story of how I came upon the passage where Santayana referred to a conversation with Dewey is worth telling because it illustrates the ups and down of doing research on historical figures. Finding the sentence in which Santayana wrote that he remembered “Professor Dewey saying in conversation” was the culmination of a search that began more than 30 years ago. As a graduate student in the mid-seventies, I wondered if Dewey and Santayana had ever met. I posed the question by mail to Herbert Schneider, then in his nineties, who had known them both. Schneider responded that it would have been splendid for them to have gotten together as they were both “great conversationalists,” but, alas, it never happened.

Schneider’s report was made long before the wide availability of electronically searchable documents, and when the assemblage of the correspondence and other material relating to both Dewey and Santayana had just begun. In my dissertation of 2000, I asserted that they had never met or corresponded (with a footnote to Schneider’s letter). Somewhat later I repeated the assertion they had not met or corresponded as a minor part of my introduction to a presentation I had prepared for delivery at SIU Carbondale. Martin Coleman, in his first review of the Dewey Letters, accurately recounts the next part of the story as follows:

Early in 2002, Rubin visited the Center for Dewey Studies at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, and Larry Hickman showed him the letters from Dewey to Santayana, which were located for Hickman by Harriet Simon, an editor of *The Correspondence of John Dewey*. Within a few days Rubin contacted Kris Frost, Assistant Director of the Santayana Edition at Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis, who passed along the 1911 letter from Santayana that mentioned his Easter visit to New York [Coleman (2004), p. 110].

Coleman’s article discusses the significance of Dewey’s letters to Santayana. I am indebted to him for first bringing the letters into the context of the Santayana-Dewey controversy.

Dewey's two letters made it obvious that correspondence between them had occurred. Moreover, it was not one-way correspondence, because Dewey's second letter responded to an intervening letter from Santayana. But the most striking refutation of Schneider's report is that Dewey's first letter made note of Santayana's reference to a conversation, apparently one they had had with each other.

At the time, I did not pursue further where Santayana might have referred to a conversation. It wasn't until I began writing the accompanying article that I looked more carefully at the annotations made by an editor at the Dewey Center (who, I later learned, was Harriet Simon) and realized that Dewey's first letter was a response to articles that Santayana had begun to publish with Bertrand Russell as the ostensible subject.

I knew that the "Critique of Pragmatism," which was part of that series and which I had planned to use in the article, came out in *Winds of Doctrine* not too long after Santayana left the United States for the last time in 1912. What I had not realized was that its first publication in a journal occurred shortly before Dewey's first letter.

The footnotes in the copy of the letter I had picked up in Carbondale in 2002 clearly showed the timing of Dewey's letter was related to Santayana's articles. There was even a reference to a page in the original journal version of the "Critique of Pragmatism." I did not bother to look up the journal article as I had my own copy of *Winds of Doctrine*. Furthermore, Project Gutenberg had an HTML version of *Winds of Doctrine*. A scan of the electronic version turned up no reference to a conversation with Dewey. So I thought vaguely that perhaps Santayana had already written to Dewey in another lost letter. But that did not sit right and, as I was preparing to send a version of this article as a paper for the Santayana conference in Valencia, I realized that several things in Dewey's letter still didn't make sense. I thought perhaps there was a reason that the editor at the Dewey Center explicitly referred to a page in the journal version of the essay. Not having access to JSTOR from my home computer (JSTOR – an extensive digital archive of scholarly journals

– is something Schneider’s generation probably never even dreamed of), I made a late night trip to the Washington University library and discovered that several sections of a key paragraph (references to three then-living philosophers, including Dewey) had been eliminated from the *Winds of Doctrine* version. The cut section was where Santayana commented on a point “Professor Dewey” had made to him “in conversation.” Suddenly Dewey’s letter came to life.

I was excited at first, but then I realized that the footnote had been there all along, waiting for me to follow it. Moreover, when I got home the next day, I looked at the electronic version of Dewey’s first letter, which the Dewey Center had sent me via email in late August of 2009 and found something had been added since I picked up my paper copy of the letter in 2002. The footnote now includes not just the page reference, but the quotation in which Santayana said, “I remember Professor Dewey saying in conversation.” I felt like a caver, excited to be crawling down what he takes to be a previously unexplored passage, only to discover, halfway through, the marks of someone who’d been there before and then, upon leaving the passage, to see that it was the previous explorer’s guide marks that had led him to the passage in the first place.

*2135A Alfred Avenue  
St Louis, Missouri 63110 USA  
E-mail: rmrubin@acm.org*

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See Santayana Letters, GS to Eliot, February 16, 1907 [Santayana (2001), pp. 360-361] and February 19, 1907 [Santayana (2001), p. 362].

<sup>2</sup> See Santayana Letters, GS to Münsterberg, May 10 1906 [Santayana (2001), pp. 347-348] and GS to Eliot, August 7, 1906 [Santayana (2001), p. 353].

<sup>3</sup> Dewey Chronology, 1904.05.09, 1904.05.24, 1905.02.01, 1905.12.27, 1905.12.27-29, 1905.12.28, 1905-1906.

<sup>4</sup> See also: Dewey Letters: 1909.10.15 (02343): JD to Nicholas Murray Butler; 1909.10.19 (02344): Nicholas Murray Butler to JD; 1910.02.25 (02345):

Frederick P. Keppel to JD; 1910.03.22 (02358): JD to Frederick P. Keppel; 1910.03.24 (02359): Frederick P. Keppel to JD.

<sup>5</sup> See Dewey Letters, 1944.05.21 (10002): JD to WR Houston. There are only two times Mrs Dewey is likely to have met Santayana: either during his February 1910 lectures or his Easter 1911 visit to New York. There is no definitive evidence. Alice Dewey is known to have attended lectures without her husband, but the best guess is that she attended one or more of Santayana's lectures in 1910, probably with her husband, and afterwards talked to Santayana at dinner or some other social event.

<sup>6</sup> The full text of Dewey's letter follows:

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK

DEPARTMENTS OF PHILOSOPHY AND PSYCHOLOGY /March 9 '11.

My dear Professor Santayana:

I need hardly say that I have been intensely interested in your Journal articles; so much so that I venture to write to express the hope that you are going sometime to write something more definitive on the problem of "essences" and their relation to existences. I say this partly because I am perplexed in getting at just what your own theory is; and partly because the problem is not only difficult, but is shirked quite generally by philosophic writers. (I cannot see that pragmatists or empiricists are sinners above others in this regard). Consequently a constructive exposition of a theory on this matter from one in whose philosophy the conception of essence plays so large a part as it evidently does in yours, could but be of great assistance. I had the same desire for further enlightenment as to your view, after reading the parts of *The Life of Reason* that touch upon the interrelations of physics and dialectic. I have in mind especially the conception that they touch both at the beginning and the end of their careers no matter how divergent between — I am not quoting of course, but speaking from the impression left on my mind.

From a personal standpoint, I was naturally interested in your conception of the solipsistic character of empirical philosophy. While I do not recall the context of the conversation to which you refer, I think its meaning to your mind and to mine is an other illustration of how easy it is in philosophy to suppose that two persons are discussing the same subject, when they are talking, as a matter of fact, in different universes of discourse. You were evidently thinking of the solipsistic problem; as nearly as I can recall I was thinking of the problem of the nature of philosophy. What you say about your attitude to the question of the external world, expresses not only my attitude toward that but also to that of "other minds." It always seems to me in both these cases that the "problem" is rather a *reductio ad absurdum* of the premisses, than a genuine problem. I mention this because it indicates the context of my reply as you quote it. Not

only have I (according to my conceptions) exactly the same sort of evidence of the existence of consciousness in other persons that I have of its existence in connection with my own person, but so far as I can see both the existence and the subject-matter of my consciousness are absolutely bound up with physical heredity and social intercourse. Hence when I said what you quote about philosophy and the logic and system of our knowledge (or even our experience) if I had used that word I meant the sum total of available human knowledge, including the material of physical and social science. My agnosticism is about the possibility of any philosophy except in terms of the Life of Reason, but that does not mean that I would deny that the adventures of thought result in the discovery of things and persons independent of the history of the discovery—but only that any philosophy that any one can construct is really (no matter how sub specie eternatis one may conceive it) fundamentally nothing but a contribution to the imaginative life of humanity. With many persons such a statement would run the risk of great misconception, but with your conception of the life of reason, I do not think it will. Another way of saying what I have in mind is that it seems to me the business of the sciences [ink underline] to discuss the “independent beings”; but the business of philosophy to discuss the relation of science itself to the good of life., so that in some sense all philosophy is ultimately morals, or love of wisdom. My pragmatism, such as it is, derives from Plato more than from any one else; I mean of course from that strain in Plato according to which “the science of the whole” is the science of politics.

I should hardly have ventured to thrust so much biography upon you were it not that this matter is connected, in my own mind, with the first problem I brought up. I mean that I hope you will make a more definitive and positive statement of your conception of the real nature, the real problems and the real methods of philosophy. I think I know pretty well what you think philosophy isn't, but I have a very hazy idea of what you think it should be or might be, apart, that is, from an account of the life of reason, as it has been & may profitably become.

Again expressing my appreciation of your articles, I am,

Sincerely yours,

John Dewey

<sup>7</sup> Also Santayana (1913), pp. 129-130, without the reference to Dewey.

## REFERENCES

- COLEMAN, M. (2004), “Another Kind of E-Mail.” *Documentary Editing* 26(2-Summer 2004), pp. 93-120.

- “Dewey Chronology”, in Levine, Barbara, editor. *Chronology of John Dewey’s Life and Work*. Carbondale IL: The Center for Dewey Studies. PDF retrieved 7 September 2009 from <http://www.siuc.edu/~deweyctr/pdf/CHRONO.pdf>.
- “Dewey Letters”, in Dewey, John. *The Correspondence of John Dewey*. Edited by Larry A. Hickman. IntelLex, 1992.
- DEWEY, J. (1911) “The Problem of Truth”, in *The Middle Works of John Dewey, 1899-1924*. Volume 6 of 15 Volumes). Part 2 of *The Collected Works of John Dewey*. Edited by Jo Ann Boydston. Carbondale IL: SIU Press, 1969-1991.
- (1923), Review of *Scepticism and Animal Faith*. “George Santayana.” *The New Republic*, August 8, 1923.
- “Santayana Chronology”, in William G. Holzberger, editor. “Chronology” in Santayana Letters.
- Santayana Letters. Santayana, George. *The Letters of George Santayana*. In Eight Volumes. Edited by William G. Holzberger and Herman J. Saatkamp Jr. Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2008.
- SANTAYANA, G. (1911), “The Critique of Pragmatism.” *Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods* 8 (March 2, 1911):113-124.
- (1906) *Reason in Science*. Volume 5 of *The Life of Reason*. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons.
- (1913), *Winds of Doctrine*. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons. Reprinted Gloucester MA: Peter Smith, 1971. Also available in an HTML version with original page numbers at Project Gutenberg (<http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/17771>), 16 Feb 2006 (retrieved 27 Aug 2009).
- (2001), *The Letters of George Santayana. Book One [1868]-1909*, (William G. Holzberber, ed.), Cambridge, Londres, MIT Press.
- (2002), *The Letters of George Santayana. Book Two (1910-1920)*, (William G. Holzberber, ed.), Cambridge, Londres, MIT Press.