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Santayana's Critique of Moralism

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ABSTRACT

George Santayana was a trenchant critic of moralism, the vice of taking morality too seriously or too far, by some standard. We foreground a reading of Santayana's novel, *The Last Puritan*, finding that it contains a thorough-going critique of moralism. Another theme of critique of moralism is Santayana's repudiation of the genteel tradition. And his autobiography, *Persons and Places*, blends his materialist morality with a critique of moralism. The upshot is a strangely moral materialism, an attempt to be moral but not moralistic. It may be thought that Santayana failed to maintain his anti-moralism in every respect, and occasionally fell into moralism himself, especially with respect to anti-liberalism and anti-semitism, but on the whole he made a valiant attempt to avoid the pitfalls of moralism.

Key words: Santayana, moralism, genteel tradition, anti-liberalism, anti-semitism, escepticismo

RESUMEN

La crítica de Santayana del moralismo. George Santayana fue un crítico mordaz del moralismo, de ese vicio de tomar la moralidad demasiado en serio o demasiado lejos, de acuerdo a alguna norma. En una lectura directa y sin mediaciones de la novela de Santayana, *El último puritano*, nosotros hemos encontrado que contiene una crítica profunda del recorrido del moralismo. Otro aspecto de la crítica del moralismo con el que hemos

topado es el repudio de la tradición gentil de Santayana; y en su autobiografía, *Personas y lugares*, combina originalmente una moral materialista, con una crítica de moralismo muy recurrente e insistente. El resultado de ese singular materialismo es una extraña moral, un intento de ser moral, pero no moralista. Puede pensarse que Santayana no pudo mantener su posición anti-moralismo en todos los aspectos, y de vez en cuando cayó en el mismo moralismo, especialmente con respecto al antiliberalismo y el antisemitismo, pero en general hizo un valiente intento de evitar las sádicas o capciosas trampas de moralismo.

Palabras Clave: Santayana, moralismo, tradición gentil, anti-liberalismo, anti-semitismo, escepticismo

It is commonly said that the work of George Santayana --materialist, idealist, naturalist, epicurean, and much else-- was developed at the margins of traditional and systematic philosophy. A skeptic in philosophy and religion, a pessimist in politics, a naturalist of cold desperation in regard to moral ideas, he is not easy to classify [Laursen and Román 2015]. A *bon mot* has it that “Santayana thinks that there is no God and that the virgin is the mother of God” [Beltrán 2009, p. 13]. This attitude, very Spanish, was recognized in the death notice dedicated to him in *Time Magazine* when he died, which called him one of the three most eminent thinkers of the West, together with Benedetto Croce and Bertrand Russell [Anonymous 1952, p. 56]. To understand his philosophy, we need to understand his life. One of the most controversial aspects of his system is his attitude toward morality. Was he a moral thinker? Very much so. But was he also a critic of moralism? Yes, indeed.

We are going to show here that Santayana was a trenchant critic of moralism. Let us start with the difference between a moral person and a moralistic person. There are rather few admitted philosophical immoralists or amorlists: almost everyone wants to be moral. But almost everyone also recognizes that sometimes people carry their morality too far. That is sometimes described as “moral-

ism", being "moralistic", or "moralizing".¹ A whole popular vocabulary has been developed for describing this: fanatics, the self-righteous, moral extremists. Robert Fullinwider characterizes moralizers as "swollen up with self-importance", "pompous", "busybodies and meddlers", and "sanctimonious, holier-than-thou prigs" [Fullinwider 2005, p. 106]. It has been defined as "the vice of overdoing morality" [Coady 2005, p. 101]. British philosopher Michael Oakeshott was one of the great critics of moralism: he wrote that "every moral ideal is potentially an obsession; the pursuit of moral ideals is an idolatry..." and "too often the excessive pursuit of one ideal leads to the exclusion of others, perhaps all others; in our eagerness to realize justice we come to forget charity, and a passion for righteousness has made many a man hard and merciless" [Oakeshott 1991, p. 476].² Santayana shared this critique of moralism, but as always he gave it his own personal touch.

Other scholars have touched on Santayana's anti-moralism from various perspectives. Wilfred McClay explained that "the American habit of compulsory moralizing seemed to him to burden the life of the entire faculty [at Harvard]" [McClay 2009, p. 135]. McClay also observed that Santayana's anti-moralism led him to some regrettable political positions. When William James criticized the American annexation of the Philippines, Santayana accused him of "lapsing into the genteel tradition, imposing universalistic Protestant morals on the amoral workings of history" [McClay 2009, p. 139]. And Santayana "also had surprisingly benign feelings about the Mussolini regime in Italy... as opposed to the 'moral anarchy' and centrifugal impotence of liberal" societies [McClay 2009, p. 139].

Other scholars have also delved into the implications of Santayana's anti-moralism. James Seaton remarked that "he urged Irving Babbitt and Paul Elmer More to stop their worried moralizing and, like Santayana, 'frankly rejoice' in a modern world that includes 'at least (besides football)... Einstein and Freud, Proust and Paul Valéry, Lenin and Mussolini'" [Seaton 2009, p. 172]. "It was enough, apparently", he observes, "that Lenin and Mussolini, like the writ-

ers and thinkers listed first, provided food for thought and speculation" [Seaton 2009, p. 172]. This is yet another example of what we have called Santayana's emotional distance in philosophy and politics [Laursen and Román 2015]. Roger Kimball remarks that Santayana's critique of liberalism includes a critique of moralism: "The homogenizing imperative of liberalism has a psychological correlative in abstract moralism" [Kimball 2009, p. 186]. The example he gives is that of Santayana's mother's cruel method of teaching a hungry boy to be generous and share, as he told the story in his autobiography [Kimball 2009, p. 186; see PP, p. 248].

Santayana's biographer, John McCormick, has a chapter on Santayana's "moral dogmatism", dedicated to Santayana's anti-semitism and indefensible political positions [McCormick 1987, pp. 352-367]. McCormick's epigraph from Santayana, about fanaticism [McCormick 1987, p. 352], quotes Santayana against Santayana, we think, implying that Santayana was a fanatic in his own terms concerning politics and the Jews. His politics is a dogmatic position, not subjected to revision: "he chose his political position early, and stated it repeatedly" [McCormick 1987, p. 352]. He "remained absolutely loyal to his basic naturalism, conservative and absolutely opposed to liberalism" [McCormick 1987, p. 353]. His anti-liberalism was a moralism, leading to positions such as blaming the anarchists for the Spanish civil war [McCormick 1987, p. 354]. McCormick characterizes him as "a selfish man immersed in his own work and refusing to be bothered by any public cause, good or bad" [McCormick 1987, p. 356]. This surely fits some of the definitions of moralism, carrying moral isolationism too far.

McCormick knows that Santayana believes that all moralities are rooted in nature and biology, including his own, and from his own experiences Santayana concludes dogmatically that industrialization is a radical evil [McCormick 1987, p. 357]. When he sympathizes with the Soviets and Fascists and Catholics against the liberals [McCormick 1987, p. 358], this is the "redoubling his effort" of the epigraph. McCormick says his anti-semitism is "scarcely com-

prehensible" given his other ideas [McCormick 1987, p. 359], although one can trace it to his upbringing in Spain and Boston and later period in Oxford [McCormick 1987, p. 360]. His moralism includes his commitment to order [McCormick 1987, p. 363]. McCormick refers to part of his letter to Sturgis of 1936 as "awful sentences, flippant in tone", and a "conscious and final turn to an ascetic, detached Epicureanism" [McCormick 1987, 364], which is a moralism if taken too far. He describes Santayana's efforts to distance himself from "his long-held and rigid views", but concludes that "his plea for 'moral imagination' in *The Realm of Truth* went unheard by its author": his "anti-semitism reveals an astonishing failure of imagination, and either wilful disregard of fact or wilful ignorance" [McCormick 1987, p. 367], which certainly sounds like the redoubling of effort when one has forgotten one's aim of the epigraph. The last paragraph in McCormick's chapter cites a letter of 1951 in which Santayana justifies the expulsion of the Jews and Moors from fifteenth-century Spain (McCormick 1987, p. 367). McCormick is describing Santayana as a moral fanatic and moral dogmatist on some issues, and he is right. But we will show that Santayana's own moral theory should have inoculated him against it. His anti-moralistic theory of morals should be distinguished from his dogmatic and moralistic personal morals.

Santayana's theory of morals holds that they should be flexible, tolerant (maybe even to a fault), and open to flux and change. It is anything but dogmatic, and it is anti-moralistic. Matthew Caleb Flamm writes that the term "moralism" is a synonym for "politicization" for Santayana, which would seem to imply that Santayana's critiques of education, courtesy, urbanity, and other elements of moralism do not have profound ontological and moral consequences that go far beyond what is ordinarily understood as the political [Flamm 2009, p. 52].³ We are going to use the term in a much wider sense here, bringing out Santayana's critique of moralism in a wide variety of its manifestations. We critically evaluate the observations of a few more scholars in our text below. In summary, we are

going to show that anti-moralism was a much more pervasive and important aspect of Santayana's philosophy than previous scholars have recognized.

We foreground Santayana's novel and his autobiography, which is appropriate for a philosopher who believed that a philosopher should live his philosophy, and one who claimed that he did in fact live his philosophy. He wrote on literature and poetry and in the form of soliloquies and dialogues much more than what others might consider technical philosophy. Not surprisingly, his critique of moralism emerges everywhere in this lived philosophy. We shall see that even his novel was an implicit therapy for the excesses of the stringent moralism that he saw around him that promoted narrow social, religious, and political dogmas.

Already in Santayana's second book, *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion* (1900), he defended the position that poetry, religion, and ethics are products of the imagination derived from the natural order, products or inventions of our minds that we then impose upon the world. The relativity of morals is evident, and all of existence is intrinsically in flux. In later notes he observed that "it consists in a passage of recognizable characters that arise and lapse by accident, in an accidental field. By 'accident' and 'accidental' I mean without relevance or justification found in the nature of that which arises to its arising there and then, or to its lapsing" [POML, p. 201]. Morality is something natural that rises up and varies according to the nature of each creature. "Morality is something relative: not that its precepts in any case are optional or arbitrary; for each man they are defined by his innate character and possible forms of happiness and action" [POML, p. 234]. Philosophy should guarantee and celebrate the tendency of thought to create a multitude of ideas, and all should be respected; this was what a moral world would mean. As one scholar puts it, "According to this line of thinking, the point of philosophy is to celebrate and defend the 'commonwealth' of human interests by providing a 'comprehensive synthesis' of them all" [Levinson 1992, p. 86]. The reigning pragmatist philosophy found it offensive

that there would be no practical value in philosophy, only a celebration of the spirit. So Santayana's challenge was not well received in a department and a university that were dedicated to forming and structuring the minds of the rising generations to prepare them for governing and managing the great enterprises of the nation.

From Santayana's perspective, to be a philosopher is to seek the truth or truths for their own sake, remain above good and evil (since they cannot be known), live in eternity, understand all interests and impulses without succumbing to any, live disillusionment as a special grace for living. The philosopher is a vagabond with an aesthetic sense which binds figure and intellect. From this perspective what we call a good life might be good, and what we call a bad life might be bad, but life and death of themselves are neither good nor bad in themselves, nor the same for everyone. Rather, one must take life as an opportunity or occasion for both good and bad [DL, pp. 36-57, esp. 47-51]. As Lachs puts it, "If the most important question of ethics is 'What ought to exist for its own sake?' Santayana's answer is simply 'Nothing'" [Lachs 1964, p. 53]. All moral ideas are hybrids and in constant transformation [RB, p. 473].

It has been observed that Santayana uses the term "moralism" in two ways. "The first, 'moralism proper', according to Santayana, is a species of Kantianism, where 'the categorical imperative of an absolute reason or duty determining right judgment'... is asserted" [Flamm 2009, p. 40]. The criticism is that this imperative is too rigid and inflexible. And the other moralism is 'a principle of cosmology and religion [asserting] the actual dominance of reason or goodness over the universe at large'; this is what he claims to find in Dewey" [Flamm 2009, p. 40]. This wider, living sense of moralism referred to the religion, social customs, education, manners, and moral principles of a gentleman. He called this latter, as practiced in New England, "the genteel tradition", by which a gentleman is obliged to follow such principles even if he does not believe in them, and a critique of this form of moralism is found in his 1911 address on *The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy* and his 1920

book, *Character and Opinion in the United States* [GT-COUS]. Similarly, “moralist” sometimes merely means someone who is thinking or theorizing about morals and sometimes means someone who takes morality too seriously. We will try to distinguish the meanings where appropriate.

The genteel tradition, as Santayana describes it in the address of that name, is a “survival of the beliefs and standards of the fathers”, which Bernard Shaw had found to be “in all the higher things of the kind –in religion, in literature, in the moral emotions- ...a hundred years behind the times” [GT-COUS, p. 4]. It came from Calvinism, and “it is on this that the current academic philosophy has been grafted” [GT-COUS, p. 4]. It included transcendentalism, systematic subjectivism, and Kantianism, and most people could not get out of it [GT-COUS, pp. 7-8]. It was an attitude so anchored in our identities as to be almost inevitable, like the smell that objects give off without trying to, just like our principles. Much of what we display is a product of civilization, education, sophistication, and even deliberately misleading, but our generation of smells and of principles is primitive, in Santayana’s world. Nietzsche wrote that “no philosopher has ever mentioned the nose with admiration and gratitude, even though it is the most delicate instrument we have at our disposal”, and despite some scandalous failures he had a fine nose for the philosophical fragrance of ideas, wafting up behind the cheap or expensive perfume of their proponents [Nietzsche 2005, p. 168]. And others have said that about Santayana’s work: “His philosophy has an aroma. It can be distinctly smelled, as he once said of another philosophy, where it cannot always be clearly seen” [Pepper 1940, p. 219]. The first dialogue of Santayana’s *Dialogues in Limbo* is titled “The Scent of Philosophies”, and his Democritus expands on the smells of each [DL, pp. 1-20]. Fernando Savater affirms that true and authentic philosophers smell (and sometimes smell bad), and in Santayana there are many odors: of literature, aesthetics, doubt, dilettantish creation, and it sometimes seems that they cancel each other out [Savater 2006, pp. 23-28].

A central part of the focus of Santayana is his exposition of the values of every life, of a wide variety of inherited characteristics, of diverse physical developments, of structures of culture, and of the natural world around us. For Stephen Pepper his analysis is clearly along moral lines, especially as theory of value: "his whole philosophy is a theory of value, or rather an attitude distributing values among things" [Pepper 1940, p. 219]. But it is not a theory of value from any one particular point of view. Only a person who is a native and a stranger at the same time can fully understand this, Santayana says. "My accidental foreignness favoured my spiritual freedom", and a bit later on the same page he adds that "I admit no absolute standards" [PP, p. 539]. He respects all of the forms of life of people and every person's natural orientation to prosperity and to live well in accordance with their natural psychological factors and physical abilities.

But respecting does not mean approving. The problem with the genteel tradition that he explored is that it is given to moralizing. It is everywhere and influences everything: even "persons with no very distinctive Christian belief, like... Professor Royce, may be nevertheless, philosophically, perfect Calvinists" [GT-COUS, p. 5]. But this means closing off opportunities. So, for example, "when a genteel tradition forbids people to confess that they are unhappy, serious poetry and profound religion are closed to them" [GT-COUS, p. 11]. That tradition had often been "simply a way of white-washing and adoring things as they are", moralistic without critical thought [GT-COUS, p. 17]. It is important to observe that the genteel tradition he is criticizing is not only American: what he calls the "European genteel tradition [which] has been handed down since Socrates" is "egotistical..., anthropocentric, and inspired by the conceited notion that man, or human reason, or the human distinction between good and evil, is the center and pivot of the universe" [GT-COUS, p. 19]. In *Character and Opinion in the United States* Santayana follows up on these points. "Good and evil, like light and shade, are ethereal; all things, events, or persons, and conventional virtues

are in themselves utterly valueless" [GT-COUS, p. 73]. This means that "moralism itself is a superstition. In its abstract form it is moral, too moral; it adores the conventional conscience, or perhaps a morbid one. In its romantic form, moralism becomes barbarous and actually immoral" [GT-COUS, p. 73].

THE LAST PURITAN AS A CRITIQUE OF MORALISM

Santayana's great novel, *The Last Puritan*, can be read as a full-blown, thorough-going critique of moralism. Oliver Alden is the last puritan, but there are several of them to explore the type. Most of the members of his family can be accused of excessive moralizing. His grandfather is murdered by a desperate tenant for relentless insistence on payment of rent. His uncle, Nathaniel, knows that that grandfather "had always been a hard landlord and a miser", but Nathaniel himself had to evict tenants on moral grounds as well: "he couldn't abandon his trust and his responsibilities" [LP, p. 23]. Nevertheless, "in fulfilling as he must the evident duties of his station, he" could "never be at ease in his conscience" [LP, p. 23]. His self-control was stifling: he never went to the theater because it generates artificial emotions [LP, p. 25]. Among other unpleasant characteristics, he found "the investigation of wickedness... deeply satisfying" [LP, p. 32]. When his half-brother, Peter, seems to have been reformed, Nathaniel instinctively hopes not: he had predicted Peter's perdition, and only perdition could vindicate the moral law [LP, p. 48]. Only the failure of others could reinforce the "sense of superiority which was necessary to [Nathaniel's] moral being" [LP, p. 49]. His view of life, as with most moralists, was narrow: he thought that "one's property... formed the chief and fundamental part of one's moral personality" [LP, p. 40]. So he neglects justice and equality in his focus on property and social class. He is astonished when his brother, Oliver's father, plays baseball with a bus driver and his school lets him play on the Boston Common with common people [LP, p. 31]. Nathaniel's reply reveals that dif-

ficult balance between democracy and moralism, between justice and bourgeois hypocrisy: "I don't approve of your intimacy with persons of inferior education and a lower station in life. Of course, we all believe in democracy, and wish all classes to enjoy the greatest possible advantages: but we shall never help the less fortunate to rise to our own level, if we sink away from it ourselves" [LP, pp. 33-34]. He was quick –and very pleased with himself– to interfere in his brother's life. "It is also clear –he said– that my young brother must not continue at the Boston Latin School. I see now what an error it was to have sent him there at all. In the fifteen years since my own time its character, I am sorry to say, seems to have profoundly altered. Our democracy has ceased to be ours: it has become more than half alien. Only a private education can preserve for us the noble traditions which were once those of our whole community" [LP, pp. 40-41; see Beltrán 2009].

Oliver's mother, Harriet, is also a moralist. That emerges in many ways, one of which is her argumentation style. If she thinks she might lose an argument, she changes, "as she often did, the ground of her arguments" [LP, p. 82; see also p. 332]. She is grateful that "in America the immigrant working classes lived apart in their own districts and tenements", so she does not have to interact with them [LP, p. 93]. She could see a foreign governess in her household, who handled kitchen duties and took care of her son, as a "vast relief... her reward for thinking so unselfishly only of what would be best for Oliver" [LP, p. 93]. The irony here is thick. Harriet liked to think she had a "strong, upright, determined, unselfish character" [LP, p. 312], and she is quick to recognize the selfishness in others [LP, pp. 320-321]. Santayana is signaling that people who are overly conscious of how unselfish they are may not in fact be so unselfish. And Harriet also freely improvised in her assessments of others: "being a woman of independent and intuitive mind, [she] unhesitatingly invented the thoughts and actions to be attributed to others" [LP, p. 100]. When she was wrong about something, she "turned from physical to moral considerations; a great resource when the facts contradict one's con-

victions" [LP, p. 107]. Bad things about her son could be attributed to an inheritance from her husband [LP, p. 133]. Her husband had to admire "the conviction with which his wife could turn into virtuous invectives that secret jealousy which she felt towards people more fashionable than herself" [LP, p. 125]. And she thought of herself as really quite modest, because "all really superior people *are* modest" [LP, p. 95]. Unfortunately, her moralism was harmful to Oliver. Her distance and unavailability taught Oliver that "the persons he ought to love best, like his mother and God, would always be impossible to hug and it would always be wrong to hug the others" [LP, p. 99].

And her moralism comes back to harm her when Oliver learns from her. That "very habit of superior judgment and disapproval which his mother's example had always encouraged was now turned against herself. He had passed over to the enemy taking with him his arsenal of puritan virtues – his integrity, his courage, his scorn of pleasure, his material resourcefulness" [LP, p. 221]. This allowed him to cause her harm in good conscience: as his governess put it, "how cruel of him to march off like that, without asking her advice, so plainly saying that henceforth in his life she counted for nothing" [LP, p. 218]. His respect for her is irreversibly undermined by what he recognizes as her "irresistible need of misrepresenting the facts, as she couldn't help but knowing they were, in order to render them conformable to her imaginative impulse" [LP, p. 323]. Luckily for her, rejection by her son did not really hurt her because "she had nothing to retract. She had been right in everything" [LP, p. 337].

Oliver's father, Peter, is also a moralist, and his moralism is harmful to himself. As a young man, he thought of himself as "a hopeless failure" [LP, p. 30]. Later, he complimented his wife, but that was "an apology, in his mind, for not really loving her" [LP, p. 84]. On the one hand, Peter Alden rejects America "because it imposes vices which regard themselves as virtues... it imposes optimism, imposes worldliness" [LP, p. 186]. On the other hand, he rejects the Germans for believing "that there is only one living or respectable philosophy in the world at a time" [LP, p. 187]. The result of this moral rejec-

tionism is that he could never really love himself, and escaped into aimless travel and drug abuse. If his life was the taking of a position against people like his brother, Nathaniel, he stands for democracy versus excellence, laxity versus strictness, change versus tradition. But his more flexible morality did not make him a better or a happier person. He was "an incorrigible Epicurean", but "a rather troubled one" [LP, p. 238]. He was still a moralist, and failed to meet his own standards.

Peter is also harmful to his son. When Oliver chooses something less than what his father wants, "he could feel the disappointment, the bitterness, in his father's kindness; the mixture of contempt and consideration with which he allowed his son to choose the duller, the safer, the meaner course" [LP, p. 222]. This was moralistic judgment at its most passive-aggressive. Peter recognizes in his son "this element in him of petrified conscience, or moral cramp" [LP, p. 317]. But Oliver judges his father's lifestyle just as harshly: "I hate pleasure. I hate what is called having a good time. I hate stimulants. I hate 'dope'. It's all a cheat" [LP, pp. 357-8].

Oliver's uncle, mother, and father are somewhat stereotypical moralists, representing Santayana's idea of New England business-people, women, and the idle rich. But Oliver himself is Santayana's model for the deepest, most subtle, and most important aspects of New England moralism. He represents a variation on the theme of the genteel tradition described above. Paradoxically, "he convinced himself, on puritan grounds, that it was wrong to be a puritan", as his cousin and friend Mario put it [LP, p. 14]. But he could not change: although he "thought it was his clear duty to give puritanism up, he couldn't" [LP, p. 14]. The narrator quotes another person describing the type: "people [like him] were far too conscientious and self-critical; [but] it was so wrong and cruel to stunt oneself" [LP, p. 14]. And "I could never convince him that reason and goodness are necessarily secondary and incidental. His absolutist conscience remained a pretender" [LP, p. 17]. We shall proceed to unpack the meaning of these sentences.

That reason and goodness are necessarily secondary is another way of saying that there are other equally or more important dimensions in life. Santayana thinks that a stubborn animal consciousness prioritizes the need to live in the face of the difficulty of understanding. Man, he says, was not made to understand the world, but to live in it. As for himself, "The world was my host; I was a temporary guest in his busy and animated establishment. We met as strangers; yet each had generic and well-grounded ideas of what could be expected of the other" [PP, p. 539]. For that reason, values must be assigned to everything. The most common error is to assign values to the past and by inference assign them to the future, but in such cases it is the imagination that is doing the work and consequently the basis of such assignments of values is neither rational nor transcendental, but random and doubtful [LE, pp. 24-26]. A moralist always assigns things the same type of value based on an ideal or a principle that acts as an inflexible standard for the assignment of values. Santayana says that the standard for the assignment of values, like other standards, should be unitary, but the ideal that always demands rationality is always based on a contemporary interest and can always change at any moment [LR, pp. 63-64].⁴ He defends a realist morality of the present moment, always changing and unstable, with an undeniable empirical basis that breaks from the compact and objective attitude of the transcendental moralist. And thus he concludes that the problem is never morality, the true obstacle is never morality, because if it were then the problem would disappear upon renunciation of some unnecessary prejudice or some dogmatic principle. And that does not usually happen. For Santayana, it is material life or nature that makes the rules and advises that it is the moralist's problem when one chooses to judge, for example, basing himself on the experience of centuries, that promiscuity is less virtuous than fidelity. "Instead of crying, How shocking! The moralist has only to familiarize himself with their view, sanctioned by the experience of ages, in order to recognize that promiscuity may be virtuous no less than a fidelity imposed by oaths and fertile in jealousy and discord" [PP, p. 34].

Santayana recognizes how deep our moralistic feelings can be. Oliver's "herd-instinct" was "not Living for Others; it was not Doing Good. Those were just words to cover the desire of busy-bodies to manage other people, and make the world over according to their own fancy" [LP, p. 129]. Rather, moralism was something under the skin, something he could not get away from just by rejecting cant. It affected his whole life: as a schoolboy he "had no favorites", which meant he "seemed to make no friends" [LP, p. 131]. His "lessons and sports seemed to be taken up as duties" [LP, p. 131]. As his governess puts it, "the friends he makes... seem to mean very little to him, except more weight of obligation" [LP, p. 135]. He could "not relish delights; he demanded ... sound principles and sure possessions" [LP, p. 527]. The narrator describes the bundling of all of Oliver's thinking with morals: "All sensation in Oliver was, as it were, retarded; it hardly became conscious until it became moral" [LP, p. 159]. Santayana is suggesting that some of our sensations might well be left outside of the realm of morals.

Later, when Oliver is older, he is still a moralist but he cannot always figure out what the moral thing to do is. When Jim Darnley is overly familiar with Oliver's father, he asks himself, "was such familiarity odious? Or were the reserve and cramp odious which had always prevented such familiarity at home? Was this interloper offensive, or was Oliver himself cold, shriveled, heartless, and unacquainted with the feelings of a son?" [LP, p. 150]. He eventually thinks he learns from Darnley that "I don't like lies; and I don't like them in favor of morality, any more than against morality. They make morality false, they make it hypocrisy.... [it is] the 'moral' people who are cowards and liars" [LP, p. 165]. Darnley was "one of those affectionate and fatalistic creatures who are not sensitive to justice and injustice", and in many cases that was a good thing [LP, p. 168]. And Oliver learns to accept moral variety: at first he thinks his father's escape from difficulties of life by the use of dope was "the worst thing possible... the very denial of courage... a betrayal of responsibility" [LP, p. 170]. Then he comes to recognize that maybe

“life, as the world understands it, was the veritable *dope*, the hideous, beastly vicious intoxication” and “obedience to convention and custom and public opinion perhaps only an epidemic slavery, a cruel superstition” [LP, p. 170]. But then he recognizes Walt Whitman’s celebration of the rejection of conventional morality as yet another form of *dope* [LP, p. 179].

One of the effects of moralism is resistance to moral change or moral variety. Peter Alden is disappointed by Oliver’s “reluctance... to come to close quarters with anything morally new or alien” [LP, p. 193]. He was “spiritually a coward” [LP, p. 193]. This is a moralistic judgment on a moralistic personality. But Peter has moral flaws, too. As Oliver’s governess exposes it, “the people who leave you free are really cowards, undecided on every important question”, and thus when Peter lets Oliver make his own decisions “he abdicates his rights and avoids his duties” [LP, p. 214]. But it is hard to escape moralism: this is a moralistic judgment on someone who is posing as unmoralistic. The governess has many good, judgmental insights: “we women too like to have our own way, but under cover of some authority, God, or a husband, or at least public opinion” [LP, p. 217]. That way they get what they want without taking responsibility for it.

There is always something that is self-destructive about Oliver’s moralism. He was “tightly controlled and inhibited ... in his waking hours by all sorts of critical judgments and moral anxieties” [LP, p. 263]. His life “was always the same trap, the same circle of compulsions” [LP, p. 426]. He recognizes that “I have been trained to disguise everything, to conceal everything, to find it intolerable that the truth should be what it can’t help being” [LP, p. 270]. His romantic life is a failure because “he seldom followed his first impulses” – everything had to be thought over – [LP, p. 273]. His best offer to a woman is to invite her to marry him in order to help him do his duty in the world [LP, p. 456]. He rejects the selfishness of “the wish to be happy” and opts for “the wish to do right, to make yourself and the world better” [LP, p. 486]. As he puts it, “I wish to

do right, to be brave and independent... [but] I don't know how" [LP, p. 546]. That leads to the situation described by his worldly and careless cousin Mario: "only accidental worthless people like himself had a good time in this world, while the great and the good like Oliver were unhappy" [LP, p. 298].

The puritanism of Oliver, the last puritan, is exhausted in him because it is overcome by circumstances; he is spiritually a puritan by birth but born too late, which leads him to doubt the traditional myths and dogmas. He lacks courage because he recognizes that he lacks focus; his spirit knows that it has done all it has to do; his moralism has no further purpose; his puritanism makes no sense. In the new preface of 1937 Santayana provides us with a key: "what was sad about Oliver was not that he died young or was stopped by accident, but that he stopped himself, not trusting his inspiration: so that he knew 'the pity, not the joy, of love', the severity of intellect and not its glory" [LP, p. 9]. His "vocation remained vague: he had not the insights or the courage to make it definite" [LP, p. 9]. He "saw what the rich man in the Gospel would have been if he had offered to sell his goods and give to the poor, but then had found no cross to take up" [LP, p. 9]. In another place, Santayana gives an example, surprising and clarifying, of what he wants to say: "I should have loved the Gracchi; but not the belated Cato or the belated Brutus. All four were martyrs; but the first two spoke for the poor, for the suffering half of the people, oppressed by a shortsighted power that neglected its responsibilities; while the last two were conceited ideologues, jealous of their traditional rights, and utterly blind to destiny" [PP, p. 542]. Santayana sounds like an Enlightened democrat here. Elsewhere, he wrote to a friend that "the Russian Bolsheviks are right... in their sense for values, in their equal hostility to every government founded on property and privilege" [McCormick 1987, p. 243]. But for all that, he could not join with John Dewey in what Santayana described as the latter's "social moralism" [McCormick 1987, p. 267].

For Santayana, the task of philosophy is to fight against militant philosophies that are infected by moral presumption and prevent

us from living a reasonable life, a life expressing the values and beliefs inherent in natural life [Letters, p. 223].⁵ That natural and reasonable life is both difficult and contradictory. In *The Last Puritan* there are numerous example of efforts to undermine the legitimacy of moralistic systems based on the distinctions between social classes. In the ensuing confusion school, education, and life provided rich scenes of nuance because people tried to maintain the social order even as they questioned it. Oliver has to learn for himself, despite his diligent and moralistic teachers, what is good and what is bad, not from their moralistic perspective, but from the perspective of facts, almost from the perspective of biological utility; or, as Woodward puts it, an unusual mix of materialism and relativism [Woodward 1988, p. 142].⁶ His father, Peter, asserts that “there is an obscure natural order in the universe, controlling morality as it controls health” [LP, p. 303] – which may be a Nietzschean insight. And “in the universe at large the moral nature of man is a minor affair” [LP, p. 304]. But we overestimate it because “our moral nature is everything *to us*” [LP, p. 303]. Thus Oliver “could find no peace unless he justified his natural sympathies theoretically and turned them into moral maxims” [LP, p. 306]. He recognized that “your hard-boiled moralists were idolaters, worshipping their own fancies, and hypnotized by their own words” –but he could not stop doing this himself [LP, p. 307]. A well-meaning Vicar tries to persuade him that “if man’s moral nature contradicts the world and runs counter to it, ought not that moral nature to be transformed and made harmonious with the reality?” [LP, pp. 497-8]. But “Oliver’s integrity could not stomach any double or ambiguous philosophy”: it was “beyond Oliver’s apprehension” [LP, p. 498].

The tragedy of Oliver was the incapacity of late puritanism to focus moral development in an appropriate direction. The deaths in the 1880’s and 1890’s of five or six young poets disconcerted Santayana [LP, p. 5]. He could not understand why they were incapable of finding an appropriate purpose for their intellectual energy that would have helped them dominate their circumstances and convert

the negative and unfavorable in that energy into a triumph of life and its expression. Thus he felt he had to fight against the intellectual dryness and moral impotence so evident in the distinguished figures of New England and in his teachers and colleagues at Harvard. *The Last Puritan* was a therapy for the excesses of the diabolical moralism that defends a specific social, religious, and political state. This moralism is defined by Santayana as taking as "a principle of cosmology and religion the actual dominance of reason or goodness over the universe at large" [DP, p. 502]. He wants to teach us how to eliminate the excessively moralistic, the exaggerated moralism, from a philosophy that is heroic but at the same time miserable. His philosophy covers everything, accepts everything, because everything is part of nature and there is nothing that can demonstrate its moral superiority over everything else.

SANTAYANA'S MATERIALIST MORALITY AND CRITIQUE OF MORALISM IN *PERSONS AND PLACES*

The discussion of natural morality above prepares us for understanding Santayana's materialist morality. It can be found in many of his works, but a good survey and synopsis of it may be found in his autobiography, *Persons and Places*. As he put it, "I have made the *authority of things* as against the presumption of words or ideas, a principle of my philosophy" [PP, p. 18; see also p. 284]. Paradoxically, this made for an easier life because "nature is far kindlier than opinion" [PP, p. 24]. And it may be true that much more of human suffering comes from the opinions we form about guilt, evil, sin, obligation, vengeance, and so forth than from mere physical harm. So the best way to adopt a moral scheme is to have it emerge naturally. The opposite extreme, "that you ought to choose your manners and your opinions", rather "prevents them from ever being spontaneous and really expressing your mind" [PP, p. 63]. Santayana preferred custom and tradition: "for me it was a great relief to hear that things were the custom, and not that they were right, or necessary,

or that I ought to do them" [PP, p. 109]. Note that this means morals without moralizing: one can live by custom without moralizing everything. "All moralising", he wrote, rings "hollow in my ears" [PP, p. 133]. Among other things, this meant that "the sectarian politics and moralising of most historians made history an impossible study for me for many years" [PP, p. 142].

As his biographer puts it, for Santayana "moral judgments are the result of natural causes, not of transcendental notions of abstract justice"; his is a "naturalistic definition of morality" [McCormick 1987, p. 132; see also 476]. He also refers to "Santayana's special meaning of moral as what is indigenous and natural to the individual" and "his definition of 'moral': that which is appropriate to the nature of the entity involved" [McCormick 1987, p. 195]. In one of his last books Santayana observes that "in this world nothing is merely moral. Moral realities must have a physical basis" [DP, p. 443]. In politics, one's natural morality was what developed as "a given seed, towards its perfect manifestation" [PP, p. 224]. Thus he could "love Tory England and honour conservative Spain, but not with any dogmatic or prescriptive passion. If any community can become and wishes to become communistic or democratic or anarchical I wish it joy" [PP, p. 227]. But he worries that if those who pursue such goals "fancy them to be exclusively and universally right", that is an "illusion pregnant with injustice, oppression, and war" [PP, p. 227].

From Spinoza Santayana learned that "morality is something natural" [PP, p. 234]. Yet he did not trust him in morals: "he had no idea of human greatness and no sympathy with human sorrow" [PP, p. 235]. Santayana strove to provide these dimensions. He found them, at least in part, in the Greeks. "Greek ethics wonderfully supplied what was absent in Spinoza" [PP, p. 257]. They recognized "that the power of nature infinitely exceeds and ultimately destroys the power of each of its parts" and thus were "saved from arrogance without condemning themselves to littleness" [PP, p. 257]. He had two models: Epicurus, who "renounced most of the things called pleasures,

for the sake of peace, equanimity, and intelligence” and “Solon’s heroes who renounced life itself for the sake of a beautiful moment or a beautiful death” [PP, p. 259]. That meant that “content, like Spinoza, with my share of [fugitive joys], I dislike all the quarrels and panaceas of the political moralists, [and] turn my back on the disaffected and on the fanatics of every sect” [PP, p. 502].

Santayana knew what he did not like in moralism. Boston was a “highly moralised” society, in which money ruled [PP, p. 353, 354]. The “Great Merchants” knew that “there was an absolutely right and an absolutely wrong side to every war and every election” [PP, p. 358]. “It was usual, especially in America, to regard the polity of which you happen to approve as sure to be presently established everywhere”, which was a “moralistic obsession”, he wrote [PP, p. 368]. But critics of American imperialism were moralists, too, and William James was upset about the American annexation of the Philippines because “he held a false moralistic view of history, attributing events to the conscious motives and free will of individuals; whereas individuals, especially in governments, are creatures of circumstance” [PP, p. 403]. He should have realized that political “passions are themselves physical impulses, maturing in their season” [PP, p. 404]. So moralism is just as much a product of nature as healthy morals are. Yet another moralistic friend wanted it to be the case that “no one should suffer, and that all should love one another; in other words, that no one should be alive or should distinguish what he loved from what he hated” [PP, p. 438]. Being alive in nature includes suffering and hating.

Seeking conditions that would enable him to philosophize in a natural way, Santayana chose his lifestyle in order to philosophize freely, and not his philosophy in order to live his life in accordance with it. In a note he wrote that “There are three traps that strangle philosophy: the Church, the marriage-bed, and the professor’s chair. I escaped from the first in my youth; the second I never entered, and as soon as possible I got out of the third” [Grossman 1964, p. 68]. He became, as he put it, “a sort of hermit, not from fear

or horror of mankind, but by sheer preference for peace and obscurity" [PP, p. 422]. "I have cut off all artificial society. Reducing it to the limits of sincere friendship or intellectual sympathy... I have distributed my few possessions, eschewed... anything that would pin me down materially or engulf me in engagements" [PP, p. 422]. The upshot of this was that "I am happy in solitude and confinement, and the furious factions into which the world is divided inspire hatred for none of them in my heart" [PP, p. 422].

Santayana's philosophy may at times seem insensitive and morally confused. For example, in a letter to Bertrand Russell in December of 1917, in the middle of the devastating slaughter of World War I, we see his neutrality and lack of involvement in the face of the evils of the world. He does not seem upset by the dead and the economic catastrophe, but merely remarks that if they had not died in the war many of those youths would have lived to old age, dying of the flu or kidney failure or hanged at the end of useless lives [Letters, p. 303]. This might seem heartless, floating above good and evil, but maybe it is only resignation to the facts of life. His much-admired Lucretius wrote that: "Sweet it is, when on the great sea the winds are buffeting the waters, to gaze from the land on another's great struggles; not because it is pleasure or joy that anyone should be distressed, but because it is sweet to perceive from what misfortune you yourself are free" [Lucretius 1947, II, pp. 1-4]. But Santayana never celebrates his own avoidance of the suffering of others, nor revels in *Schadenfreude*. He did not say it was sweet to watch the suffering. There is some compassion for others: the prologue to *Soliloquies in England* opens with musings on "the daily casualty list, the constant sight of the wounded" and the "very bitterness and incubus of horror" of the war, and includes two original poems in memory of fallen soldiers, although they are rather grim [SE, pp. 7-8]. As one scholar put it, he was not cold, but he kept himself disengaged, especially concerning the little things, and although he was often wrong in his political predictions and sympathies, what saved him from disaster was that he never took political action in any sense [Epstein

2009, pp. 9-16]. Later, Santayana could say that "I... have been enjoying peace for thirty years, in the midst of prodigious wars" [PP, p. 515]. It is not that he has contempt for mankind but that he cannot participate in their ignorance and madness.

One way of coming to terms with disasters is to recognize that "there are no necessary facts. Facts are all accidents. They all might have been different" [PP, p. 439]. In Santayana's terms, "all phases of life are equally natural and spontaneous" [PP, p. 453]. Both "tribal" and "commercial morality" are "phases in human civilization", and only accidents of temperament or circumstances make one sympathize with one or the other [PP, p. 527]. So it is better just to experience life as it comes. That was one reason he liked the stories of *Arabian Nights*: "there is no moralising in them, nothing by way of a lesson" [PP, p. 463]. They were much healthier than the "moral fables" that construct "an anthropomorphic picture of the universe given out for scientific truth and imposed on mankind by propaganda, by threats, and by persecution" [PP, p. 546].

One idea that appeared often in Santayana's philosophy was the supreme confidence in rationality of the classical Hellenistic philosophy of the stoics and epicureans. Santayana answered it with "his lifelong skepticism about the effectiveness of human rationality" [McCormick 1987, p. 147]. But he accepted their goals: what counted for them was the individual human being and the good life that could be achieved by means of his or her natural faculties. The difference between stoicism and epicureanism, on the one hand, and skepticism, on the other, is that the former held a positive conception of the world, and argued for a system of rules for human well-being, while the latter rejected the theories of their rivals and opted for suspension of judgment and the freedom from worry that followed. Santayana was both an epicurean and a skeptic for whom the knowledge of nature should only consist in bringing out, with the cruelty of frankness, the misery and errors of human beings [Laursen and Román 2015]. His anti-moralism is a complement to his eclecticism and anti-dogmatism in philosophy. There is

nothing more foreign to Santayana than the division of our actions into good and bad. There is no idea or prevailing reason that brings order to the world.

All of Santayana's work was an open or hidden fight against idealism, against the excessive moralism that made up the typical morality of his time. From his Spanish upbringing he knew well the disasters of this idealism or moralism that corrodes, an attitude befitting Don Quijote that leads to disaster "when one does not know the reality of things" [Garrido 2002, p. 16]. His point of departure was fatal for philosophical moralism: "The unit in ethics is the person" [POML, p. 195]. His criticism of the gregarious character of morality and of the impossibility of finding oneself fully satisfied in a system of values, in a single, shared ethics, broke with the traditional moral obligations without neglecting political rationality or the spiritual necessity of freedom. He defended exactly the contrary of a party or group morality, making the case for individuality and independence as the only possibility for dignified living in the face of the social impulses that seek to dominate people and impose a tribal life. He opposed ideals of organic unity that repressed greatness of spirit, intellectual curiosity, liberty of thought, and personal growth, and instead recommended more solitude and individuality: "This possibility of living alone with God, with nature, or with thought has the deepest biological roots; and supplies the moralist with his ultimate criterion in two directions: politically, for judging the justice and rationality of institutions, and spiritually, for opening the gates to freedom in art, in love and religion" [POML, p. 195].⁷ He often referred to the university as a place of moral organicism: I "was living among sects, or among individuals eager to found sects; and I should have seemed to them vague and useless if I had been merely a historian and critic in philosophy"; "it was an anonymous concourse of coral insects, each secreting one cell, and leaving that fossil legacy to enlarge the earth" [PP, pp. 393, 397]. He can be almost cruel, as for example in the preface to the 1937 edition of *The Last Puritan* he said that he proposed to compare the moral devel-

opment of two friends at Harvard but quickly realized that university life provided no such moral development, and not even materials for a light comedy [LP, p. 5].

Santayana recognizes difference and confrontation and against the demands of the more monolithic schools he demands tolerance of new ideas. He observes that his philosophy is unattractive to university professors precisely because it is not artificial and it is a system of presuppositions and categories that work well together internally but that cannot be exported like a uniform to dress everyone else. To live rationally only requires two conditions: the first is to know oneself, and the second is an extensive knowledge of the world and its doctrines in order to know all of the possibilities and choose the most reasonable [PP, p. 542]. He prefers the common virtues and the usual beliefs even though they are simple and partial, to the emphatic fatuousness of the moral and philosophical systems. His philosophy is the opposite of a militant moralism. It is a cosmological system, a vision of nature and of history in which there are no moral judgments: "we speak of the fair, says a Spanish proverb, as we fare in it; and our personal fortunes may justly color our philosophy only if they are typical and repeat the fortunes of all living beings" [PP, p. 167]. The "moralistic philosophers", in his understanding, are far from this attitude, since they embrace religious dreams without any logic and condemn those who do not have the least bit of superstition. Santayana observed that "All this liberalism, however, never touched the centre of traditional orthodoxy, and those who, for all their modernness, felt that they inherited the faith of their fathers and were true to it were fundamentally right" [GT-COUS, p. 31]. The shudders of the Unitarians in the face of the doctrine of eternal damnation, the fears of the Calvinists about salvation, and the reflexive suffering of both when thinking about the painful flames of hell were comical if seen as the products of a childish and violent imagination. Early on Santayana distinguished good and bad religions by the contributions that they make to a morality that creates happiness in the world [SE, p. 254]. That is, morality

only has sense if it helps us be happy, not if it stores up fear and regrets. But later he became “less exacting” and recognized that religions do not need a rational justification [SE, p. 254].

A STRANGELY MORAL MATERIALISM: MORAL BUT NOT MORALISTIC?

Notice that Santayana’s materialism provides for a sort of morality, but seems designed to avoid moralism. Nature does not justify the assignment of so much importance to morals that moralism is justified. In chapter XI of *Persons and Places*, Santayana describes his philosophy as a voyage from the idealism of his youth to the materialism of an adult philosophical traveler [PP, p. 159ff.]. Elsewhere, he explains that in his materialism “every particular fact is contingent, arbitrary, and logically unnecessary” [RB, p. 407]. Matter is the principle of existence; it is imperfect and not conducive to tranquility since it produces constant conflict among things and is in constant flux [RB, p. 267ff.]. A “sour moralist” might consider it malignant [RB, p. 183], but for Santayana matter is simply the natural foundation of everything, not something discursive but all that there is. Santayana insists that nothing can happen against nature: “Moralists and ignorant philosophers like Socrates –of whom women and young men often think so highly- do not distinguish nature from convention, and because madness is inconvenient to society they call it contrary to nature. But nothing can be contrary to nature...but only to the habit of the majority” [DL, pp. 37-38]. In itself it is neither good nor bad, but can be perceived either way from the point of view of our faith or nature. Moral values cannot be said to govern matter or nature because those values are the products of natural forces. The kingdom of nature is the matrix and the truth, but it cannot dictate our esteem or opposition to it: they are not matters of fact but of preference. The realm of matter is composed of physical substances distributed in space and subject to perpetual change according to certain laws [RB, p. 183ff.]. But this matter is

singular since it includes everything that exists, everything that exercises power, the contingent and the dynamic, that is, we who are made of matter nevertheless can transcend it with spirit, including religion, art, and philosophy, without renouncing our ontological-material origins.

Values are thus the result of the work of matter and spirit in harmony together. Santayana calls the physical origin of this action “impulses”, a charge of energy directed at something or at achieving something, and the moral life is no more than an attempt to put into some order the proliferation of our impulses for the final purpose of a just and happy existence. As one scholar put it, “The ideal of such maximal satisfaction is what Santayana calls ‘the life of reason’. In this life, we desire and work for the consummation of the largest compatible set of our impulses” [Lachs 1988, p. 95]. Santayana is a very subtle reader of Plato, who often confuses the physical, the psychological, and the moral, as well as the ontological and the ethical. In the *Republic*, when Socrates accepts the challenge of Glaucon and Adeimantus and tries to demonstrate that justice is represented by “health, beauty, and a good disposition” and that evil is “illness, ugliness, and weakness”, Plato is replacing his ideal theory, in which justice is the perfect virtue and is meaningful in itself, and changing the meaning to something that is manifested in behavior in relation to others, connecting justice with happiness [Plato, *Republic*, IV, 444d-e]. Vallejo Campos writes of Plato’s intention to improve the immoralism of the sophists, replacing it with a teleological ethics that identifies happiness and justice “because this represents natural perfection and the good that our souls can achieve” [Vallejo 2012, pp. 32-33]. But surely Santayana, as we have seen, could have nothing to do with this kind of Platonism. As he explained in a letter, he was not trying to achieve any sort of perfection: “I write for fun or by impulse,” “I did not feel that I was *doing good*” [McCormick 1987, p. 477]. He was just doing what his nature made him do. And he thought nature made different people do different things: Plato is “like any other moralist who disre-

gards the vital liberty of nature, and the consequent diversity of attainable goods" [DP, p. 119]. "The poet in Plato has been entrapped by the moralist" [SE, p. 231].

In his big book on politics, Santayana spelled out how moral judgments can tip into being moralistic judgments: "the danger of passing unreasonable judgments ... in politics at large, comes from not considering how natural and how changing are the criteria of benefit and injury involved in living" [DP, p. 74]. To avoid moralism, you may have to imitate Goethe, that "not too moralistic sage", who "finds two souls, alas! dwelling in his breast" and "the only trouble is that he loves them both and finds them, alas! incompatible" [DP, p. 182]. That is o.k.: one can simply avoid moralistic judgments that either one of them is "wicked in itself" [DP, p. 182]. Another way of avoiding them is wide education: "in the very act of studying the various forms of order and comparing their fruits, [the philosophic mind] will absolve itself from blind obedience to any one of them" [DP, p. 240]. One should always remember "the biological status of perception, opinion, and moral judgment" [DP, p. 302]. What is wrong with recent communism is its claim to "dogmatic unanimity" [DP, p. 310]. But anarchism is even worse: "the great moral error is not to admit authority at all" [DP, p. 325].

At the root of Santayana's anti-moralism was his critique of progress. "I think it is not possible, impartially or rationally, to establish any moral progress in the forms of being" [DP, p. 340]. Rather, "all experiments in politics and morals... take their chances... in the lottery of life" [DP, p. 364]. Nevertheless, there are standards of appropriateness, and Santayana prefers government by "anthropologists, medical men, and scientific psychologists" rather than "prophets, reformers, agitators, politicians, or demagogues" [DP, p. 434]. If those are the standards, it will be hard to tell which is which because every potential leader will claim to belong to the former and eschew the latter. Variety seems to be a fundamental goal: Santayana can see a future resembling Cyrus's empire: "making room... for various definite moral bodies... may have a great future" [DP, p. 452]. A

“universal government must have no arbitrary moral tradition”, and thus if the Soviets were to take on the role they would “have to renounce all control of education, religion, manners, and arts...” such that “all culture in the German sense of the word... must be left to free associations” [DP, p. 454-55]. This, of course, was not about to happen. His last word is that “born dogmatists... impose needless duties and taboos upon one another” and that such moralism must be rejected [DP, p. 462].

Santayana's singular and moderate skepticism, like Sextus Empiricus or Hume, situates morality in our habits and customs, since without the confidence and beliefs they naturally generate in us we would fall into despair [Hume 2000, p. 414].⁸ The key is his concept of “animal faith”, which implies a moderate skepticism but opposes absolute skepticism on the ground that natural beliefs cannot be called into question, at least not all at the same time [SAF]. And this is where his new idea that even if we concede that the existence of the world is not demonstrable, if anyone has any doubts about it the philosopher calls upon animal faith, a faith that has nothing to do with religion, but is a faith that we share with the animals in the existence of the natural world. As is the case with the ancient and early modern skeptics, it is this faith that means that when we see a rabid dog we climb up a tree, although we are not sure of its existence. If a car is about to hit us we jump out of the way and later ask ourselves if it would have hurt us. This is a moral model that can be based in neutrality, without commitments and doctrines, and is directed by an internal purpose of our impulses, beyond the control of reason. These may be neurophysiological impulses, and they may be at the foundation of beliefs and actions, and even of our sense of self. It amounts to a defense of what he called primary morality, which, “inspired by love of something naturally good, is accordingly charitable and ready to forgive”; and a critique of what he called “secondary morality”, which, founded “on prejudice, is fanatical and ruthless” [LR, p. 271].⁹

Santayana criticizes moralists without trying to substitute his own morality in any evangelical missionary sense. British satirists

make fun of snobbery, but “are these moralists in fact only envious and sulky?”, he asks [SE, pp. 45-6]. It is hard to avoid moralism: “language is terribly moralistic” [SE, p. 49]. He celebrates “humility, that most liberating of sentiments” [SE, p. 65]. With Charles Dickens, he opposes “those moralists who summon every man to do himself the greatest violence so that he may not offend them” [SE, p. 71]. Many moralists divide “the world materially into right and wrong things; but nothing concrete is right or wrong intrinsically, and every object has both good and bad effects in the context of nature”, and “all facts and objects in nature can take on opposite moral tints” [SE, pp. 139-40]. If we recognize that “this world is contingency and absurdity incarnate, the oddest of possibilities masquerading momentarily as a fact... the arbitrariness of the actual begins to be discovered” [SE, p. 142]. That recognition makes moralism hard to defend, but it is not necessarily a moralism to recommend such a recognition.

Santayana’s critique of liberalism is in part a critique of its moralism. Liberal reformers retain “the classic theory of orthodoxy, namely, that there is one right or true system –democracy and free thought... which it is the reformer’s duty to establish” [SE, pp. 173-74]. For all that, “in practice liberal countries have never reached this ideal of peaceful anarchy, but have continued to enforce state education, monogamy, the vested rights of property, and sometimes military service” [SE, p. 174]. If you disagree with them you are “not simply different, you are arrested and perverse” [SE, p. 181]. Yet they claim they are not moralists. But they are: “how moralistic, how overbearing these intellectuals with a mission! All these important people are eaten up with zeal, and given over to rearranging the world, and yet without the least idea of what they would change it into in the end, or to what purpose” [SE, p. 204]. Liberals would say this is unfair, and that Santayana has allowed his anti-moralism to develop into a moralism. Santayana may fall into the same trap as Oakeshott: anti-moralism may spill over into the very moralism it is supposed to defeat [Laursen 2013, p. 78ff.].

Santayana's morality is a changing morality, in constant and continual transformation, always on the move, with the philosopher far from pretending to demonstrate anything, but rather showing his own path from formation to growth to sidetrips, but never to a final state. This must help prevent it from becoming a moralism. Beltrán suggested a similarity with Hindu thought: "this way passes by process of negation, of disinterestedness, of alienation, of disenchantment, and of disillusion (the 'it's not that, it's not that' –*neti neti* of the Hindus)" [Beltrán 2009, p. 55]. Santayana may not be that negative: he is a special moral thinker, a decentered moral thinker, not focused on his own time [Savater 1987, p. 5]. In the words of William James, Santayana was like a rhinoceros with his own destiny, and one had to let him follow his own path [Garrido 2002, p. 26].¹⁰ Another analogy is that of a penguin sliding for fun without stopping at any one place. He expounded his ideas and each reader could respond with his or her own texts. He did not pretend to be a teacher of a dogma and did not seek followers. "I had nothing to *teach*. I wished only to learn, to be always the student, never the professor. And with being eternally a student went the idea of being free to move, to pass from one town and one country to another, at least while enough youth and energy remained for me to love exploration and to profit by it" [PP, p. 506]. He just wanted to continue freely exploring ideas, including ideas about morality. His anti-moralism gave him that freedom.

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NOTAS

¹ Some recent discussions of moralism, with definitions, may be found in Williams 2005, Taylor 2012, Satkunanandan 2015.

² See Laursen 2013, esp. pp. 72-73.

³ We would like to thank Professor Flamm for some valuable comments and questions concerning moralism in Santayana's work. We have tried to answer some of them, but of course he may not be satisfied with our answers.

⁴ Cf. LR, p. 64: "In estimating the value of any experience, our endeavor, our pretension, is to weigh the value which that experience possesses when it is actual".

⁵ Letter to B. A. G. Fuller on the meaning of philosophy (August 4, 1915, Oxford, England).

⁶ Cf. Lachs 1964, pp. 44-61.

⁷ Note that here "moralist" means merely moral thinker, and does not imply that Santayana is charging the person who lives alone with God or nature or thought with moralism.

⁸ Hume wrote that philosophy would turn us into Pyrrhonists if nature was not too strong for that: see Laursen and Román 2015.

⁹ There is a parallel here with Michael Oakeshott, who also distinguished two types of morality: "moral life as a habit" and "moral life... as reflective application of a principle". See Laursen 2013, pp. 72-73.

¹⁰ Letter of William James to the faculty at Harvard explaining the resignation of his one-time assistant. In *Person and Places* Santayana writes that a certain kind of man's true interest may be "to wander alone like the rhinoceros", with obvious reference to himself [PP, p. 543].

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