

limbo

Núm. 36, 2016, pp. 153-155

ISSN: 0210-1602

Report on the 5th International Conference on Santayana

ANDRÉS TUTOR DE URETA

In 2016, through the initiative of the Berlin Practical Philosophy International Forum e. V., and thanks to the organizational skills and efforts of Maja Niestroj and Chris Skowroński, the 5th *International Conference on Santayana* took place in Berlin from July 12 to July 14. The conference was titled “The Life of Reason in the Age of Terrorism.” The appellation most accurately captures the situation of philosophy in our contemporary world. I will, in what follows, try to summarize the event, not in any way from the point of view of the stenographer, but from the perspective of an everyday person just interested in philosophy. What happened at the 5th International Conference on Santayana?

The principal aims of the organizers of the conference were to gather veteran and new scholars interested in Santayana, and to stress the fertility of this thinker’s philosophy with regard to contemporary problems. Both aims were completely fulfilled. First of all, researchers from all around the world (Germany, Hungary, Italy, Montenegro, Poland, Spain, Switzerland, USA...) came together and enjoyed the opportunity of meeting—or seeing again—one another. The exchange of ideas, perspectives and interests is, undoubtedly, one of the fundamental stimuli that foster academic and scientific research; in this respect, the conference acted as an excellent melting pot. As for the question of bringing Santayana’s thought to life by linking it to our contemporary context, the range of the debates that took place during the conference speaks for itself: not only was the topic of terrorism directly discussed in its logic, its

aims, its strategies, and its varieties —from barbarism to organized crime— or its most advanced possible manifestations, like drones, but the very same concept of terrorism provided the opportunity for discussing, always with a Santayanan scent floating in the air, topics such as rationality, madness, liberalism, conservatism, beauty, art, egotism, human belonging, and love. After the introductory part on the part of professors Chris Skowroński, Herman Saatkamp, and Matthew Flamm, the conference offered, from Tuesday the 12th to Thursday the 14th, the occasion to discuss critically Santayana and, in what is probably a clear sign of genius in any philosopher, of rationally exchanging ideas employing the very vocabulary of the philosopher, himself or herself, to another context and time. The life of reason (one may half-hopefully, half-conceitedly think) is still very much alive.

Now, a good conference offers food for thought not only during the proper sessions, but also afterwards, in the moments usually devoted to pondering calmly over the talks heard during the day. It was therefore extremely satisfying to attend the “Living Books Event,” an evening that invited speakers nearer to real life situations, to share their stories of how so often, on many occasions and in many ways, discrimination and prejudice hamper human lives. Similarly, the conference ended on the afternoon of Thursday the 14th, by bringing together all speakers to discuss the presence of philosophy in the social media. Is philosophy falling behind the times? What can we, as philosophers and teachers do to alter our perceived mass media invisibility and make our voices heard? Again, if we want philosophy to actually be part of our lives, initiatives like these should be promoted and seriously considered.

Another episode worth mentioning that happened during the conference and that allowed us to learn, thanks to Daniel Moreno and Charles Padrón, about the existence of many pages dedicated to Santayana, was a session devoted to Santayana on the internet. It may strike one as incredulous to find out that Santayana is already on Twitter (@HermitofCarmel), as a result of the constant and en-

gaging effort of certain people at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis. Going back to the question of philosophy and “the internet of things,” one can be quite sure that, whatever the future holds, social networks will be the way to be a part of it, and for this reason it is so important for philosophy to make efforts like this, to keep up with the quick pace of technology. On the other hand, one may be also quite optimistic about the continuance of academic studies on Santayana, since the conference was preceded, on July 11, by a seminar devoted to young scholars discussing Santayana. May the energy and vitality that characterized those sessions serve as the best proof of the fecundity and attractiveness of the Spanish philosopher, which conferences like this one in Berlin, allow one both to reflect on and enjoy being a part of.

*Universidad de Castilla La Mancha
Facultad de Humanidades
Edificio María de Pacheco y Juan de Padilla
Plaza de Padilla, 4
45071 Toledo
E mail andrestdu@gmail.com*