

limbo

Núm. 37, 2017, pp. 75-96

ISSN: 0210-1602

Art as reasoning, Santayana's synthetic approach

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ABSTRACT

The paper considers *Reason in Art*, the fourth book of *The Life of Reason*, as a pragmatist classic text. In accounting for such a definition, the paper (a) will elaborate on Santayana's pivotal and neglected conception of synthesis. In this way, I hope to show in the conclusion that difficulties in considering Santayana as a pragmatist are the very same difficulties that pragmatism had in comprehending its own synthetic drive as one of its most crucial characteristics. Furthermore, the paper will examine the impact of this synthetic approach on both philosophy of art and art, showing (b) the kinds of ancient philosophical questions on art that this approach can solve and (c) whether Santayana's understanding of art remains relevant today. This outcome will also illustrate an original, contemporary contribution to philosophy of art and art that can be offered by contemporary pragmatism.

Keywords: cognitive power of arts, synthesis, pragmatism, gesture

RESUMEN

El artículo considera que *La razón en el arte*, el cuarto libro de *La vida de la razón*, es un texto pragmatista clásico. Como apoyo a esa definición, el artículo (a) abordará la concepción santayana de la síntesis, central aunque descuidada. En esta línea, espero mostrar como conclusión que las dificultades de considerar a Santayana como pragmatista son exactamente

las mismas que el pragmatismo tuvo para captar su propio giro sintético como una de sus características más cruciales. El artículo examinará además el impacto de ese acercamiento sintético tanto en la filosofía del arte como en el arte, mostrando (b) el tipo de cuestiones filosóficas tradicionales sobre el arte que tal acercamiento resuelve, y (c) si la comprensión santayanaiana del arte sigue siendo relevante en la actualidad. Ese resultado ilustrará también una contribución contemporánea y original a la filosofía del arte y al arte ofrecida por el pragmatismo original.

Palabras clave: poder cognitivo de las artes, síntesis, pragmatismo, gesto

In a memorable sentence written in a letter to his art dealer, the French painter Cézanne wrote: “Don’t be an art critic. Paint. Therein lies salvation” (July 25, 1904, Cézanne 2016). This would have been a fitting epigraph to the book on *Reason in art* within Santayana’s *The Life of Reason*. In this sense, the 1905 book belongs to the broad anti-rationalist current, which encompasses Santayana’s oeuvre and the pragmatists’ common vision. Many scholars have questioned Santayana’s pragmatism, and with good reason.¹ His later stress on the dualism between essence and matter seems to undermine the clear statements contained in this early masterpiece on topics to which Santayana returned with shifting viewpoints over the course of his life. In his last revision of the text, performed when he was in his 80s, he found it “much like [his] latest views” (LGS 8: 396, 401, 402).² In this paper, I will show that there can be little doubt that *The Life of Reason* should be considered a pragmatist text.³ Recently, and on the base of many years of research on pragmatism, Rosa M. Calcaterra, G. Marchetti and I defined this pragmatist common project according to six standards: 1) An adherence to the pragmatic maxim and to consequentialism. 2) The acceptance of evolutionism more as a method than as a doctrine. 3) Anti-cartesianism as refusal of immediate knowledge. 4) An agreement that the nature of reality consists in a deep continuity. 5) The acknowledgment of the mediated and fallible nature of knowledge. 6) Anti-Kantism as

unity of normative sciences and relevance of interest within human conduct in any field [Calcaterra, Maddalena, Marchetti (2015), pp. 13-18].⁴

Santayana declares his allegiance to the first topic (1) in the first fundamental book of *The Life of Reason*, the one on *Reason and Common Sense*.

For truth, at the intelligible level where it arises, means not sensible fact, but valid ideation, verified by hypothesis, and inevitable, stable inference [Santayana (2011), p. 122].

“Truth happens to an idea”, William James, Santayana’s professor and colleague at Harvard used to say [James (1907), p. 201]. Santayana learned the lesson well even if he afterwards seemed to despise this way of shaping the principle. William James himself explained that the motto did not mean that truth changes or that it is subjective, but only that it establishes itself over time [James (1909), pp. 41-2]. You will recognize an idea from the fruits it bears.⁵ In a certain sense, the scope that Santayana indicates at the end of the first book of *The Life of Reason* is really that of following these ‘fruits’ throughout the rest of the work.

To give a general picture of human nature and its rational functions will be the task of the following pages. ...Illustrations might have been sought in some fictitious world, if imagination had not seemed so much less interesting than reality, which besides enforces with unapproachable eloquence the main principle in view, namely, that nature carries its ideal with it and that the progressive organization of irrational impulses makes a rational life [Santayana (2011), p. 175].

With this theoretical move, Santayana also accepts the second topic (2), the adherence to evolutionism as a method. Indeed, as for Peirce and Dewey, here we see more of Hegel than Darwin. Santayana himself explained that the first idea in the book stemmed

from the reading of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* [Santayana (2015), p. 214]. Even clearer is the fact that Santayana takes a position on the anti-Kantian front, aligning himself with the rest of the pragmatists (6). From beginning to end *The Life of Reason* is a comment on reason as a “definite interest” [Santayana (2011), p. 30] with which the Spanish-American author opens the book.

As life is a better form given to force, by which the universal flux is subdued to create and serve a somewhat permanent interest, so reason is a better form given to the interest itself, by which it is fortified and propagated, and ultimately perhaps, assured of satisfaction. When definite interests are recognized and the values of things are estimated by that standard, action at the same time veering in harmony with that estimation, then reason has been born and a moral world has arisen [Santayana (2011), pp. 29-30]

It is difficult to conceive of a more anti-Kantian version of reason and morality. Contrary to the German thinker, Santayana freely mixes theoretical, moral, and aesthetic understanding of reason and its functions. Moreover, he grounds this description on interest, a topic at least suspicious in Kant’s comprehension of morals. Additionally, *Reason in Art* has powerful passages on the specific moral interest that art implies and on the social justification that art requires. Continuing on the anti-Kantian entanglement of normative sciences, the import of logic to art is less evident, but, as we shall see in this paper, it is also more fundamental. Certainly, in *The Life of Reason* Santayana confirms this anti-Kantian standard central to pragmatism.

More interesting questions can be raised on the refusal of immediate knowledge, intuition, and mediating tools of reasoning, points 3, 4 and 5 from our list. This paper is an attempt to respond to such questions by (a) utilizing the synthetic approach contained in Santayana’s philosophy. I will examine (b) the kinds of questions that this approach can solve when applied to art to see (c) whether

Santayana's understanding of art remains relevant today. In this way, I hope to show in the conclusion that difficulties in considering Santayana as a pragmatist are the very same difficulties that pragmatism had in comprehending its own synthetic drive as one of its most crucial characteristics. This outcome will also illustrate an original, contemporary contribution to philosophy of art and art that can be offered by contemporary pragmatism.

I. SYNTHESIS AND CONTINUITY

Santayana is no less attached to the idea of reality as continuous flux than all classic pragmatists. Human reason operates as a synthesis throughout the perennial flux of life. Therefore, we cannot conceive of reason as a primarily analytic tool. Santayana makes it clear that Kant's transcendental method is an ingenious but wrong way to describe the activity of reason. He identifies the error mainly in the a-historicity of Kant's construction. Our common sense knowledge does not perform a complicated sum of different detached images. Santayana's perplexity with regard to the German thinker is that "thought is not a mechanical calculus, where the elements and the method exhaust the fact. Thought is a form of life, and should be conceived on the analogy of nutrition, generation, and art" [Santayana (2011), p. 43]. Santayana blames Kant's intellectualism because he considers instinct rather than rationalist self-assurance to be the foundation of human reason. Furthermore, he uses a different description of the main elements of the flux of reality. The core of this latter is transition, in which human beings' reasoning must recognize some sort of identity.

It is not identity in the substance impressed, but growing complication in the phenomenon presented, that makes possible a sense of diversity and relation between things. The identity of substance and spirit, if it were absolute, would indeed prevent comparison, because it would exclude modifications, and it is the survival of past modifications

within the present that makes comparisons possible. We may impress any number of forms successively on the same water, and the identity of the substance will not help those forms to survive and accumulate their effects. But if we have a surface that retains our successive stampings we may change the substance from wax to plaster and from plaster to bronze, and the effects of our labour will survive and be superimposed upon one another. It is the actual plastic form in both mind and body, not any unchanging substance or agent, that is efficacious in perpetuating thought and gathering experience [Santayana (2011), pp. 44-45].

If Santayana had known Peirce better, he would have found it illuminating that Peirce considered the analytic identity $A = A$ as a degenerate case of the more original identity $A = B$ (NEM IV: 325-328). In fact, Peirce was also reflecting on the fact that modifications through time and, moreover, transitions among modalities are a keener description of the flux of reality than the transcendental complicated sum of detached sensations, perceptions, and concepts. According to all pragmatists, the transcendental method can only partially describe the much more interesting relationships between matter and spirit that are not “fix static terms” [Santayana (2011), p. 43], with which our reasoning can operate with “luminous deductive clearness” [Santayana (2011), p. 43]. If reality is not static, and if any analytic definition can respect only a small portion of its flux, we will require a different pattern of reasoning in order to interact with it. Santayana calls this different, more original kind of thought ‘synthesis’, but his conception of the term is very different from that of the transcendentalists. This stress on synthesis is not obvious because, curiously enough, Santayana, like other pragmatists, did not challenge Kant’s definition of synthesis, even though he comes very close to a severe, direct critique by pointing out a distinction between two kinds of synthesis.

Before describing the two types of synthesis, which will be the origin of the conception of art, let us sum up Santayana’s theoretical

move. Reality is a continuous flux, in which human life emerges from nature in the same way that human reason develops from instinct. Human life, at both instinctive and intellectual levels, has an interest in unifying this flux in order to achieve satisfaction. Therefore, the surest kind of satisfaction can be reached when reason respects the fundamental transition central to existence. Of course, reason can also operate by interrupting the flux in itself, by defining and calculating the relationships contained within reality as if they were static. According to Santayana, constructions drawn from the two kinds of reasoning, the dynamic and the static one, are both synthetic, but we must define two different kinds of synthesis in order to understand different actions in the world. Certainly, intellectualism has made the theoretical move of considering the static kind of synthesis as the only possible one, thus causing us to overlook the more natural and satisfactory one. This is a theme that Santayana will continue to develop in further works [Santayana 1923].

There are two syntheses in our knowledge. The first one, and the most important one, works by similarity, is dynamic and qualitative. The second one is the usual, static one and it works by contiguity. The two kinds refer to time and space respectively. These syntheses allow us to move our interests within the flux of reality in transition. When we are interested in retaining in memory a qualitative identity we tend to recognize some qualities that become our ideas. When we concretize them into spatial existence we have the common experience of objects.⁶ Therefore, ideas and things, essences and matter, are the extreme poles of a continuum of knowledge of reality in transition. Correctly, Santayana observes that the pole constituted by contiguity has received more attention because it comes first on a physiological level, even though it is less fundamental than the other pole, which comes first for consciousness and logic [Santayana (2011), p. 104]. Only by understanding this pattern of a continuous reality in transition with a double synthetic polarization, can we solve the enigma of Santayana's pragmatism and his later

philosophical stands as a shift of attention from the continuity of transition to the two extreme poles. Moreover, this understanding is key to revealing where Santayana's originality lies. He was criticizing the rationalist description of synthesis and proposing a different pattern for it. Unfortunately, Santayana lacked mathematical and logical tools for proposing this pattern in technical terms. He did not know that Peirce had developed a logical system —the existential graphs —that would have accounted for what Santayana was writing in a more figurative form [Maddalena (2015), pp. 30-42; Zalamea (2010)]. However, Peirce himself missed the importance of his discovery as a critique to Kant's description of synthesis. Besides, even if Santayana did not possess sufficient familiarity with logic, in contrast to Peirce, he had a marvelous aesthetic sense. He wisely developed his synthesis on this level, explaining how the embodiment of this synthetic dialectic could be found in arts and how this can solve ancient dilemmas in aesthetics.

2. THE BACKGROUND QUESTION

The macro-question underlying any study of aesthetics concerns the power of knowledge of artistic endeavor at both theoretical and practical level. As we shall see, for Santayana as for any pragmatist, this distinction makes no sense. However, this question about art and aesthetics as cognitive or non-cognitive attitudes pervades the whole history of thought. Philosophy provided two main alternative answers until the beginning of the twentieth century.

On the one hand, Plato's answer occupies one pole in its clarity and earnestness. To put it simply, art is no knowledge at all. According to the Greek master, art is an imitation of existence, which is itself an imitation of the reality of ideas. Therefore, art is imitation of imitation and, as such, it leads only to confusion [Plato (1978)]. It estranges its followers from the truth of ideas, and even from the vague opinions of appearance. In the famous dialogue *Ion*, Plato's Socrates makes fun of the traditional knowledge of the

rhapsode Ion who cannot demonstrate any scientific or technical knowledge of poetry itself, since he knows only Homer and not the theory of poetry, and of the various contents that he sings. In fact, Ion sings of soldiers without being one, of physicians without operating, and of drivers of chariots without displaying any direct knowledge of chariots. Art is divine, according to Plato, namely, it is no knowledge but inspiration coming directly, and uselessly, from above. Consequently, Plato bans artists from his ideal Republic. Aristotle and the Middle Age philosophers tried to sweeten the harsh judgment but they did not change the Platonic pattern radically: Art is to be considered an imitation of reality, although that reality will be closer to us than Plato's heaven, and it can help sustain us morally or psychologically.

On the other hand and at the opposite extreme, many centuries later, Nietzsche maintained that art is the only knowledge available. Life is an obscure, nonsensical chaos and the real human being, the superman, will have the courage to stare at it without inventing gods or heavens but re-creating his own life artistically and continuously [Deleuze (1965)]. Life is art and art is a creative array of metaphors with which we can handle the tragic nature of human existence. Here Nietzsche gives the opposite answer while remaining on a common ground with Plato. Reason is the capacity for demonstration offered by Socrates, Plato, and the rationalist philosophers. However, they considered reason a mere mask invented to help us tolerate existence by shielding our gaze from the abyss, while art is the only true reason for those who do not fear its emptiness. In Nietzsche, art is praised for the very irrationality that Plato despised. The rationality of irrationality has also served as the cipher for Heidegger's philosophy after his *Khere*, as well as for post-modern art and philosophy of art.

Between these two alternatives, many philosophies tried to offer different answers, usually based on the Hegelian confidence that art expresses the spirit of an epoch, both in its spiritualist and materialist versions. To quote only a few, Croce, Lukacs, Benjamin

and Barfield each provided different sorts of Hegelian alternatives to the Plato-Nietzsche dilemma. Classic pragmatists fall under this category, with their original answer. They did not see the spiritual or the material element prevail because they considered the spiritual and the material to be so profoundly intertwined as to exclude the possibility of separation. This is why they argued strongly against Kant's rationalist separation of realms of knowledge.⁷ Theoretical, practical and aesthetic knowledge must be considered together and, moreover, serve to reinforce and inform one another. However, in Peirce this powerful response to Kant remained a theoretical one, locked within his wonderful staircase of sciences, but unable to become a living act (EP2: 258-62). Notwithstanding his claim of anti-intellectualism, James did not elaborate on art as an embodied form of idea by concentrating on morals as Royce did. Dewey was the pragmatist who most occupied himself with aesthetics [Dewey (1934)]. However despite his anti-Kantism, Dewey's distinction between experience-had and experience-known combined with something of the Enlightenment in his tone, led him to a theoretical analysis of what art should be and should do. This was repeated by Mead in his openly re-performance of Dewey's first attempts on art [Mead (1926)].

Nobody but Santayana has pushed the pragmatist insight to such an extreme as far as art is concerned. In a few words, for Santayana artwork is the embodiment of the idea to the same extent that the idea is the outcome or the development of an artwork. As we shall see, Santayana understood the act of creating art as an exercise in reasoning and morals. Moreover, he put his philosophy into practice by writing a novel himself, in other words, by making a work of art [Santayana (1935)]. The ancient debate between Plato and Nietzsche finds a possible third voice in Santayana, more so than in any other contemporary thinker. Art is knowledge, contrary to what Plato argued, but knowledge is not irrational at all. We will have to change our paradigm of rationality to understand what true rationality is. As John Lachs puts it,

The unity of theory and practice has been thoroughly explored by such action-minded thinkers as Karl Marx and John Dewey. Their point is that philosophers must not be satisfied with words and thoughts; they must enact their convictions. Santayana's view is the reverse of this. He demands that philosophers believe what they enact and derive their philosophical opinions from their everyday practice [Lachs (2006), p. 16].

As we have seen, the new pattern that moves from what has been accomplished already, or rather, from what we are accomplishing, is a synthetic one, which Santayana considers in such a broad extension as to posit two kinds of synthesis within the transition of reality. In the end, this description does not appear to be the best way to indicate the change of paradigm that we need in order to obtain the complete unity that Santayana requested, but his description of the actual realization of this synthetic unity is the force of *Reason in Art* and possibly one of the most original legacies to stem from Santayana's work.

3. ART AS SYNTHESIS

In Santayana's description of *Reason in Art*, art works on two levels as a medium between many types of continuity such as ideas and sensation, or imagination and calculus. Here again, we see the pragmatist project at work. There is a continuity of reality, within which art operates as a force to improve our lives. In this sense, the first level of art is any kind of human action that serves to this end. At a second level, fine arts are those human works of outstanding aesthetic values, and these values are "inherent in imagination" [Santayana (2015), p. 10]. Artwork is properly considered the act of giving form to these kinds of values. The most interesting aspect of this operation of "embodiment" is its power of "synthetic representation," balancing in a middle ground between sensation and abstract ideas. Art is the form of synthesis

that we apply when the primitive qualitative synthesis has failed to transform the entire material of life and reality into fixed ideas. Imagination is thus vague. It creates that world of imagination in which contradictions are possible. However, it is also the richest of our dimensions, the dimension we explore in order to discover new syntheses that serve our interests. Santayana is clear in affirming that this kind of synthesis is always cognitive and is always at the service of the ideal of reason with the goal of living better, “to increase man’s comfort, knowledge, and delight” [Santayana (2015), p. 11]. Aesthetics is allied with ethics, and —interestingly enough— with politics and social sciences. In fact, Santayana considers art to be a special kind of synthesis, a synthesis that operates over a qualitative residuum that the usual transformation of reality into ideas had not successfully processed. Therefore, art fulfills human reason’s task of taking control of the life from which it stems. On these premises, Santayana’s later dualism is comprehensible. Essences, ideas, products of our imagination are different names for this qualitative synthesis in which we must immerse ourselves every time we need to better know and actively improve our quality of life. The contemplation of this world can be absorbing to the point at which it must be considered a world in itself, to at least the same extent as the material world, its opposite theoretical pole. Later on, Santayana will explore the possibility of experiencing the two poles at once in a unique act.

The synthetic structure that is at the heart of any artwork reflects itself in the progressive development of the arts. From gestures and music to plastic representation passing by words and speech, different forms of art are syntheses between extremes which move in opposite directions: essences and matter, ideas and sensation, spirit and body. According to Santayana’s idea of synthesis, explained in the first section, insofar as the arts find a way to embody a meaning or an idea into a definite form, they become one of humanity’s most intelligent ways to know the world, namely, to transform it into a better or a happier place for human beings. Santayana’s well known,

progressive development of arts singles out the double meaning of a “medium”. Arts are media for being both the determinate matter in which an imagination finds its embodiment and the middle way between the two extremes of a continuum. Instinctive chaos and “congealed ideality” [Santayana (2015), p. 19], pure spontaneity and mere utility, individuality and sociality, science and action [Santayana (2015), p. 138], distraction and sophistication (for music), euphony and mathematics (for poetry, [Santayana (2015), p. 47]), casual beauty and intelligible structure (for decoration), plain imitation and criticism (for any plastic representation) are some of the extremes that Santayana cites to indicate the completeness of the artistic embodiment that he considers necessary in order to achieve the ameliorative task of art. *In medio stat virtus*, the ancient Latin motto said. In some sense relying upon the same ancient culture, Santayana at the same time embodies it fully. However, the reason of this acceptance is completely different from the ratio of the ancient morals. While the ancients were avoiding the dangerous radicalization of passions, Santayana is trying to avoid the rationalism of Kantism. While Greeks feared the infinite, Santayana fears intellectualism and materialist reductionism that deprive art of life and life of beauty. The ancients tried to distinguish ideas and matter and to explain away their relationship. Santayana is trying to use them together by describing their more or less successful unification.

The idea of medium as synthesis, of synthesis as embodiment, of embodiment as socially justifiable project allows Santayana to offer judgments on artworks. Contrary to postmodern political correctness, according to Santayana an artwork can be more or less successful according to the completeness of its aesthetic harmony. However, incomplete works can be just as revealing as complete ones when examining the mechanism of synthesis in art. From this mechanism, the satisfaction of art stems too.

To have grasped such an appearance, to have embodied a form in matter, is to have justified for the first time whatever may underlie

appearance and to have put reality to some use. It is to have begun to live. As the standard of perfection is internal and is measured by the satisfaction felt in realizing it, every artist has tasted, in his activity, what activity essentially is. He has molded existence into the likeness of thought and lost himself in that ideal achievement which, so to speak, beckons all things into being. Even if a thousand misfortunes await him and a final disappointment, he has been happy once [Santayana (2015), pp. 132-33].

Summing up, the combination of the first book of *The Life of Reason* with the fourth on *Reason in Art* reveals the shape of Santayana's pragmatist pattern of rationality. Reason works mostly in a synthetic way operating on the continuum of reality. Synthesis is primary in our knowledge but there are two levels of synthesis. Analysis, which is often mistaken as the most important part of human reasoning, is only one small part of it and always threatened by doubts, as Santayana will make clear in *Skepticism and Animal Faith* (1923). Analysis is a kind of attitude that derives from quantitative syntheses. We should define it as a part (the analytical one) of a part (the quantitative synthesis). Art shows the other, more interesting part — i.e. qualitative synthesis in its forming, namely, in action. Artwork operates on the flux of life that our intellect has yet to transform into ideas. Therefore, art reveals the first step of our qualitative reasoning by showing its main characteristic: the process of embodiment from vague imagination into plastic matter.

This paradigm corresponds to the criteria of continuity (4), to the intermediated knowledge by a complex system of synthesis (3), to a scrupulous inquiry on development of arts as medium of this synthetic project (5) that I proposed in the first lines of this essay.

However, Santayana himself was not completely aware of the novelty of the paradigm that he was proposing and he often misinterpreted his own early pragmatism. When one indicates, as I have, the different points of view adopted by Santayana on the continuum of reality and life over the course of his career,

questions regarding the unity of Santayana's philosophy become less puzzling. Nevertheless, the enigma does not disappear if we consider his more general lack of awareness of the synthetic drive that his philosophy implied. Furthermore, the enigma grows if we expand our gaze to encompass the entire movement, in which none of the authors ever recognized or acknowledged this peculiar, anti-Kantian characteristic as an essential one. Moreover, even if we solve this enigma related to pragmatists' self-awareness, what advantage could be in using Santayana's philosophy of art for contemporary philosophy, philosophy of art, and art itself? The next two sections will attempt to answer these questions.

4. THE PUZZLE OF PRAGMATISM

Santayana himself questioned and criticized his early pragmatism. However, as we have seen, he undoubtedly belonged to that tradition. Santayana is not the only such case. As is well known, Peirce himself would have liked to change the name of the current of thought that he himself baptized (EP2: 335). James thought that his radical empiricism was independent from pragmatism [James (1907), p. ix]. Royce considered himself an idealist; Dewey tried to enlarge the picture of pragmatism to metaphysical naturalism, Mead to a broader sociology. All classic pragmatists seem to question the movement of thought somehow. One obvious explanation recalls what Papini affirmed in his corridor metaphor, quoted by James [James (1907), p. 54]: Pragmatism is like a corridor from which you can enter different rooms containing people concerned with disparate activities and inquiries. The corridor is the method granted by the pragmatic maxim, and this exhausts the common root of the movement. There is much truth in what Papini said, and it partially explains the puzzle. In the introduction of this paper, I proposed to expand the criteria to which we can refer in defining pragmatism. However, this explanation is not completely convincing. All classic pragmatists agreed on the method, and

possibly, they would have agreed on the enlarged list of criteria, but they found it insufficient for defining the enterprise of pragmatism. They all wanted pragmatism to be broader, more precise, or more inclusive. Somehow, they felt there was something missing in the description of this movement, something that escaped themselves as well as their readers.

Santayana's *Reason in Art* provides an interesting document, which fills in a piece of the puzzle. As we stressed, the building blocks of the whole book are different kinds of synthesis. Art shows the peculiar action of one of those syntheses, the one involved in the formation of thought at a vague level. Notwithstanding the relevance of this construction, Santayana did not realize that he was opening the way toward a different paradigm of thought, which should have replaced the Kantian one on the analytic/synthetic distinction. There is no room here to show how central this synthetic drive was to all classic pragmatists' philosophies and how all of them overlooked the significance of this novelty. They attacked Kant on many topics but rarely understood that their anti-rationalism was very precise in zeroing in on the core of Kant's definition of reasoning, a definition that was looking for necessity and universality of analytic judgment in the synthetic realm as well [Hanna (2001), pp. 181-233]. The sophisticated construction of a priori synthetic judgments was the remarkable symbol of this construction to which Western culture owes so much. The kind of synthesis that Santayana displayed in his *The Life of Reason*, and especially in the portion dedicated to art, was a complete denial of the Kantian version of synthesis, in exactly the same way as were Peirce's existential graphs, James's psychology, Dewey's logic, etc. Synthesis is not universal and necessary at all, according to Santayana. Synthesis happens and, as art can show, it is the fruit of education and development of human knowledge. Besides, synthesis happens only a posteriori and is primary while analysis is secondary. Finally, Santayana's synthesis works in the opposite way with respect to the Kantian one. Kant was trying to match sensations with the structure of the intellect

while Santayana was describing the actual embodiment of ideas into matter. The problem is that Santayana, like all classic pragmatists, made no attempt to compare the two approaches directly, and thus he never did develop a robust, theoretical description of synthesis. If he had done so, he would have discovered that the relationship between continuity and synthesis led toward a pattern of synthetic reasoning as “recognizing of identity through changes”⁸ which would have corresponded to all the different characteristics that he singled out during his description of the phenomenon of synthesis and art. He would have also discovered that this drive toward synthetic knowledge was the secret heart of the pragmatic maxim and the common ground of the entire movement. Somehow, Santayana’s pragmatism remained incomplete and provoked his alleged abandonment of the entire pragmatic culture. Restoring the centrality of synthesis in *The Life of Reason* would help us to comprehend Santayana’s pragmatism better.

5. PHILOSOPHY OF ART AND ART

A collateral effect of the novelty of the rational synthetic pattern of knowledge would be to solve the ancient problem of knowledge and art. Insofar as it is a form of synthesis, art has a cognitive role, in direct contrast to what Plato said. However, this cognitive role depends on its intrinsic rationality and not on its intrinsic irrationality as Nietzsche proposed. Once again, Santayana’s classic pragmatism and aesthetics finds itself on the middle ground between the two extremes that we saw in section 2. It is an original view that paves the way for more decisive understandings of aesthetics that can still be significant in the twenty-first century. As the possibility of defining art faded away in analytic studies from Moore to Danto, the pragmatist tradition with its peculiar love for description of artwork rather than research of definition has come back into fashion. Margolis and Shusterman, among others, proposed two pragmatic aesthetics, which focus on the relevance

of culture in forming our perceptions, sensations, and the decisive role of our bodies [Margolis (1999); Shusterman (1992)]. Relying on pragmatism, Margolis stresses the import of a true naturalist account of artwork, while Shusterman takes a stand against the elitism inherent in the position of many art critics with regard to what should or should not be considered art. Santayana's aesthetics is compatible with both intentions in presenting art as a synthetic embodiment and, as such, as a rational enterprise in which body and matter play a fundamental role. Moreover, responding to Shusterman's requests, Santayana presents fine art as a special case of the more general view of art as any operation that humanizes and rationalizes objects with which we interact in the course of our lives. In other words, Santayana's old fashioned aesthetics were very advanced in underlining that the entanglement between matter and ideas, even if ontologically based on the first term, should have been understood as a synthetic operation of embodiment of ideas. In this way, he avoided both any analysis of perceptions, sensations, etc., and any idealism: art is above all a form of work that develops according to the synthetic use of our reason. This intrinsic rationality allows Santayana on the one hand to sketch a historical overview of the development of the arts and, on the other hand, to judge artwork, returning art criticism to a common-sense realm typical of the pragmatist tradition. Of course, Santayana's work was published more than a century ago and, although we can consider it a successful publication in its one time, it does not attract much attention in the arena of aesthetic discussion nowadays. However, in this correct re-edited, a fresh reading is possible if we consider the possibility of a new comprehension of synthetic reasoning. Far from the ideological claims of the debate between analytic and continental philosophies and far from the ancient idealist vs. materialist controversy, Santayana's naturalism can represent an inviting possibility for those who want to accept the anti-dualist stand of pragmatism in a deep and original way. Finally yet importantly, Santayana's aesthetics can be useful to artists

themselves, thus confirming Santayana's vows to write something that was not only a theory. I translated Santayana's operation of form on matter to improve the world into the expression "gesture" [Maddalena (2015)]. In the same vein, and leaving aside the philosophical description of the pattern of syntheticity defined as "recognition of identity through changes", I listed a series of complete and incomplete gestures from the phenomenological and semiotic standpoints, which form the base of my theory. In different terms, Santayana understood that art can be more or less synthetic. Of course, he praised completion and a sort of classic idea of harmony. However, the embodiment or the gesture of artwork fits the developments of art as action, experiment, performance. Sometimes these artistic gestures are incomplete, but the history of art of the last century is rife with examples of art as rational research, incomprehensible on other bases. Sometimes, artists want to defy conventions and surpass limits. Their gestures are only partially complete but they are never meaningless. Besides, these gestures are often a sincere attempt to understand themselves and the world we inhabit. The reading of Santayana's aesthetics in *The Life of Reason* can foster the comprehension that artists have of themselves and their work, placing it not among oddities but in the field of any rational inquiry in order to improve our condition in the world. On the other hand, teaching Santayana's aesthetics should foster the awareness on the part of non-artists of the artistic value present in all human endeavor, from science to sport and even to politics. Following Santayana and pragmatist approaches to aesthetics, we may even discover that life itself is artwork, in a sense very different from the Nietzschean one.

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NOTES

¹ For a good summary of other authors' positions on Santayana's pragmatism see Coleman 2009.

² See also Coleman 2017 for the editorial history of the book.

³ In his autobiography in *The Philosophy of George Santayana*, edited by Schilpp (1940) Santayana stated that *The Life of Reason* was "a sort of pragmatism" [Schilpp (1940), p. 14].

⁴ This list is an evolution of the list presented by M.H. Fisch in his book *Classic American Philosophers* (Fisch 1996). In comparison to Fisch's list, this one underlines the central topic of continuity and its effects but there is nonetheless a strong correspondence between the two lists. In ascribing these characteristics to Santayana, this paper is also a response to the list of alleged differences that Levinson (1992) proposes at the beginning of his book dedicated to Santayana and pragmatism. Although I concur with many of Levinson's own responses and with his characterization of Santayana as a "pragmatic naturalist", I think that categorizing Santayana as a pragmatist should be based on more technical grounds.

⁵ Cf. C.S. Peirce, "All pragmatists will further agree that their method of ascertaining the meanings of words and concepts is no other than that experimental method by which all the successful sciences have reached the degree of certainty that are severally proper to them today...a particular application of an older logical rule, 'By their fruits ye shall know them'" [EP2: 400; 1907].

⁶ Levinson misses the importance of the synthetic pattern in this distinction [Levinson (1992), p. 140]. As we shall see, this overlooking derives from classic pragmatists' weak self-awareness about the profound change in the conception of synthesis. Santayana, who maintained that "the intellect's essence is practical" [Santayana (2016), p. 102], did not account for the actual working and the structural pattern that this affirmation should imply.

⁷ Certainly, there are different readings of Kant's work. However, classic pragmatists relied heavily on the first Critique, adhering to a kind of reading that nowadays we call the "two worlds" reading.

⁸ For this definition see Maddalena (2015), p. 43. In the same paradigm there is also room for a new definition of analytic judgment and for a vague judgment.

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