EXISTENCE, ESSENCE
AND
THE ORIGINS OF A MORAL THEORY

A Study of George Santayana's Philosophy

A Thesis

by

GLENN ANTHONY TILLER

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
The University of Manitoba
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

August 1995

Major Subject: Philosophy

National Library
of Canada

Acquisitions and
Bibliographic Services Branch

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0N4

Bibliothèque nationale
du Canada

Direction des acquisitions et
des services bibliographiques

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa (Ontario)
K1A 0N4

Your file Votre référence

Our file Notre référence

ISBN 0-612-16337-7

Canada

Name _____

Dissertation Abstracts International is arranged by broad, general subject categories. Please select the one subject which most nearly describes the content of your dissertation. Enter the corresponding four-digit code in the spaces provided.

Philosophy
SUBJECT TERM

0422
SUBJECT CODE

U·M·I

Subject Categories

THE HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

COMMUNICATIONS AND THE ARTS
Architecture 0729
Art History 0377
Cinema 0900
Dance 0378
Fine Arts 0357
Information Science 0723
Journalism 0391
Library Science 0399
Mass Communications 0708
Music 0413
Speech Communication 0459
Theater 0465

EDUCATION
General 0515
Administration 0514
Adult and Continuing 0516
Agricultural 0517
Art 0273
Bilingual and Multicultural 0282
Business 0688
Community College 0275
Curriculum and Instruction 0727
Early Childhood 0518
Elementary 0524
Finance 0277
Guidance and Counseling 0519
Health 0680
Higher 0745
History of 0520
Home Economics 0278
Industrial 0521
Language and Literature 0279
Mathematics 0280
Music 0522
Philosophy of 0998
Physical 0523
Psychology 0525
Reading 0535
Religious 0527
Sciences 0714
Secondary 0533
Social Sciences 0534
Sociology of 0340
Special 0529
Teacher Training 0530
Technology 0710
Tests and Measurements 0288
Vocational 0747

LANGUAGE, LITERATURE AND LINGUISTICS
Language
- General 0679
- Ancient 0289
- Linguistics 0290
- Modern 0291

Literature
- General 0401
- Classical 0294
- Comparative 0295
- Medieval 0297
- Modern 0298
- African 0316
- American 0591
- Asian 0305
- Canadian (English) 0352
- Canadian (French) 0355
- English 0593
- Germanic 0311
- Latin American 0312
- Middle Eastern 0315
- Romance 0313
- Slavic and East European 0314

PHILOSOPHY, RELIGION AND THEOLOGY
Philosophy 0422
Religion
- General 0318
- Biblical Studies 0321
- Clergy 0319
- History of 0320
- Philosophy of 0322

Theology 0469

SOCIAL SCIENCES
American Studies 0323
Anthropology
- Archaeology 0324
- Cultural 0326
- Physical 0327

Business Administration
- General 0310
- Accounting 0272
- Banking 0770
- Management 0454
- Marketing 0338

Canadian Studies 0385
Economics
- General 0501
- Agricultural 0503
- Commerce-Business 0505
- Finance 0508
- History 0509
- Labor 0510
- Theory 0511

Folklore 0358
Geography 0366
Gerontology 0351
History
- General 0578
- Ancient 0579
- Medieval 0581
- Modern 0582
- Black 0328
- African 0331
- Asia, Australia and Oceania 0332
- Canadian 0334
- European 0335
- Latin American 0336
- Middle Eastern 0333
- United States 0337

History of Science 0585
Law 0398
Political Science
- General 0615
- International Law and Relations 0616
- Public Administration 0617

Recreation 0814
Social Work 0452
Sociology
- General 0626
- Criminology and Penology 0627
- Demography 0938
- Ethnic and Racial Studies 0631
- Individual and Family Studies 0628
- Industrial and Labor Relations 0629
- Public and Social Welfare 0630
- Social Structure and Development 0700
- Theory and Methods 0344

Transportation 0709
Urban and Regional Planning 0999
Women's Studies 0453

THE SCIENCES AND ENGINEERING

BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES
Agriculture
- General 0473
- Agronomy 0285
- Animal Culture and Nutrition 0475
- Animal Pathology 0476
- Food Science and Technology 0359
- Forestry and Wildlife 0478
- Plant Culture 0479
- Plant Pathology 0480
- Plant Physiology 0817
- Range Management 0777
- Wood Technology 0746

Biology
- General 0306
- Anatomy 0287
- Biostatistics 0308
- Botany 0309
- Cell 0379
- Ecology 0329
- Entomology 0353
- Genetics 0369
- Limnology 0793
- Microbiology 0410
- Molecular 0307
- Neuroscience 0317
- Oceanography 0416
- Physiology 0433
- Radiation 0821
- Veterinary Science 0778
- Zoology 0472

Biophysics
- General 0786
- Medical 0760

EARTH SCIENCES
Biogeochemistry 0425
Geochemistry 0996
Geodesy 0370
Geology 0372
Geophysics 0373
Hydrology 0388
Mineralogy 0411
Paleobotany 0345
Paleoecology 0426
Paleontology 0418
Paleozoology 0985
Palynology 0427
Physical Geography 0368
Physical Oceanography 0415

HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES
Environmental Sciences 0768
Health Sciences
- General 0566
- Audiology 0300
- Chemotherapy 0992
- Dentistry 0567
- Education 0350
- Hospital Management 0769
- Human Development 0758
- Immunology 0982
- Medicine and Surgery 0564
- Mental Health 0347
- Nursing 0569
- Nutrition 0570
- Obstetrics and Gynecology 0380
- Occupational Health and Therapy 0354
- Ophthalmology 0381
- Pathology 0571
- Pharmacology 0419
- Pharmacy 0572
- Physical Therapy 0382
- Public Health 0573
- Radiology 0574
- Recreation 0575
- Speech Pathology 0460
- Toxicology 0383

Home Economics 0386

PHYSICAL SCIENCES
Pure Sciences
Chemistry
- General 0485
- Agricultural 0749
- Analytical 0486
- Biochemistry 0487
- Inorganic 0488
- Nuclear 0738
- Organic 0490
- Pharmaceutical 0491
- Physical 0494
- Polymer 0495
- Radiation 0754

Mathematics 0405
Physics
- General 0605
- Acoustics 0986
- Astronomy and Astrophysics 0606
- Atmospheric Science 0608
- Atomic 0748
- Electronics and Electricity 0607
- Elementary Particles and High Energy 0798
- Fluid and Plasma 0759
- Molecular 0609
- Nuclear 0610
- Optics 0752
- Radiation 0756
- Solid State 0611

Statistics 0463

Applied Sciences
Applied Mechanics 0346
Computer Science 0984
Engineering
- General 0537
- Aerospace 0538
- Agricultural 0539
- Automotive 0540
- Biomedical 0541
- Chemical 0542
- Civil 0543
- Electronics and Electrical 0544
- Heat and Thermodynamics 0348
- Hydraulic 0545
- Industrial 0546
- Marine 0547
- Materials Science 0794
- Mechanical 0548
- Metallurgy 0743
- Mining 0551
- Nuclear 0552
- Packaging 0549
- Petroleum 0765
- Sanitary and Municipal 0554
- System Science 0790

Geotechnology 0428
Operations Research 0796
Plastics Technology 0795
Textile Technology 0994

PSYCHOLOGY
General 0621
Behavioral 0384
Clinical 0622
Developmental 0620
Experimental 0623
Industrial 0624
Personality 0625
Physiological 0989
Psychobiology 0349
Psychometrics 0632
Social 0451

EXISTENCE, ESSENCE AND THE ORIGINS OF A MORAL THEORY

A Study of George Santayana's Philosophy

BY

GLENN ANTHONY TILLER

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of the University of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

ABSTRACT

EXISTENCE, ESSENCE AND THE ORIGINS OF A MORAL THEORY

A Study of George Santayana (August 1995)

Glenn Anthony Tiller, B.A., The University of Manitoba

Chair of Advisory Committee: Dr. Michael Stack

Existence and essence represent two ultimate ontological categories in Santayana's philosophy. These categories may be seen to have influence in other areas of his thought. The purpose of this thesis is to articulate the connection between Santayana's ontological dichotomy of existence and essence and his moral theory. This thesis is divided into three sections. The first section presents a critical overview of Santayana's ontological categories of existence and essence. The second section examines how these categories play a role in formulating the basis of Santayana's moral theory. The third section examines three distinct elements of Santayana's moral theory, specifically: moral non-naturalism, moral anti-realism and moral non-cognitivism. The justification for attributing these positions to Santayana is that they are most in accordance with his ontological categories of existence and essence. Also in the third section is an examination of the charge that Santayana's philosophy leads to moral nihilism. The position defended is that, in full consideration of Santayana's ontological categories, there is no meaningful sense of nihilism which can be attributed his moral philosophy.

DEDICATION

To Barbara Anne

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

TITLE PAGE..... i

COPYRIGHT..... ii

APPROVAL FORM..... iii

ABSTRACT..... iv

DEDICATION..... v

TABLE OF CONTENTS..... vi

GENERAL INTRODUCTION..... 1

EXISTENCE AND ESSENCE: AN ONTOLOGICAL DICHOTOMY

Introduction..... 5
Essences..... 6
Existence and the Realm of Matter..... 10
Scepticism, Consciousness and Essences..... 14
Why Essences Do Not Exist..... 16
Occam's Razor..... 20
'To Be' Is To Be The Value Of A Variable: Logic and Existence..... 24
The Narrowness of the Quantification Reading of Existence..... 27
An Internal Threat: The Paradox of the Essence of Existence..... 31
Conclusion: Reconsidering the Categories..... 33

FROM EXISTENCE AND ESSENCE TO MATTER, MIND AND MORALITY

Introduction..... 36
Matter and Morality..... 37
Mind and Morality..... 38
A Final Word of Introduction..... 40
The General Features of Matter or Substance..... 40
The Irrationality of Material Reality..... 45
A Single Causal Nexus..... 46
Materialism and the Nature of the Individual: Body, Organism and Psyche..... 47
The Psyche and the Origin of Animal Interests..... 49
The Psyche and the Origin of Preference and Morality..... 52
The Phenomenology of Morality..... 54
Santayana's Aesthetic Account of Consciousness

(continued)

and its Value..... 59
Conclusion..... 63

SANTAYANA'S MORAL THEORY

Introduction..... 65
Santayana and Metaethical Non-Naturalism..... 66
Metaethical Non-Naturalism Defined..... 67
G.E. Moore and Metaethical Non-Naturalism..... 69
The Case for Santayana as a Metaethical Non-Naturalist..... 70
Santayana and Moral Anti-Realism..... 75
Moral Realism Defined..... 75
Misinterpreting Santayana as a Moral Realist..... 77
Santayana and Moral Non-Cognitivism..... 86
The Denial of Nihilism..... 89
Conclusion..... 103

GENERAL CONCLUSION..... 105

BIBLIOGRAPHY..... 107

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the implications of Santayana's ontology on his moral theory. In particular, I wish to show that Santayana's ontological dichotomy between existence and essence plays a key role in shaping the various aspects of his moral theory. The motivation behind the subject of this thesis is the fact that while Santayana offered many 'scattered observations' (Sprigge, Santayana 189) on the questions of morality and ethics, he never 'developed a systematic and comprehensive view of ethics, nor has he made the attempt to relate his scattered statements about the nature of morality to his ontology as a whole' (Lach, *Santayana's Moral Philosophy* 331). This thesis attempts to go a small way in shedding some light in these areas.

This thesis is divided into three sections. In the first section I attempt a critical overview of Santayana's ontological dichotomy between existence and essence. The categories of existence and essence are, for Santayana, the two ultimate categories in ontology. While the category of essence signifies a realm of being representing all real and possible characteristics and qualities, in other words an ideal reality, the category of existence signifies that reality characterised by external relations and change, or a material reality.

An ontology which demarcates between existence and

essence raises a number of objections. For example, Santayana's realm of essence can be challenged on the grounds that it violates the dictum of Occam's Razor, inflating our ontology beyond all plausibility. Another objection is that Santayana's ontological dichotomy makes unwarranted use of 'existence' as a category of being. After examining Santayana's ontological categories, I will address these objections. As I will try to show, neither of these objections are as serious as a altogether different threat, namely, the objection that Santayana's ontology generates an internal and perhaps unacceptable paradox.

In the second section I examine some of the implications of Santayana's ontology on his moral theory. My focus in this section is on the transition from accepting the ontological dichotomy of existence and essence to formulating the basis of a moral theory. As I shall try to elucidate, the categories of existence and essence underlie a view of the human condition which sets the stage for Santayana's moral theory.

Fleshing out Santayana's category of existence is his view of material reality. In other words, what 'exists' is material reality or the physical world. One of the many features of material reality is the fact that it gives rise, as Santayana states, to 'animals in whom there are feelings, images and thoughts'. These animals find themselves with a specific biological nature or psyche. Santayana's notion of the psyche with its system of impulses and interests, needs and aspirations, introduces the basis animal preference; and

preference, for Santayana, introduces the basis of morality. Thus we begin to see the origins of Santayana's moral theory.

However, it is not until we consider the role that consciousness plays in animal life that the idea of 'morality' finds its full expression in Santayana's philosophy. And, it is here that Santayana's category of essence plays a defining role. Material reality, for Santayana, is utterly devoid of value. It is only when consciousness is introduced that good and evil enter the world. 'Good' and 'evil', in Santayana's ontology, belong exclusively to the realm of essence. Hence, they find their only instantiation in consciousness. Without consciousness and its capacity to intuit moral essences, the strivings and operations of the psyche would go on unnoticed; our 'morality', if we could call it that, would be blind mechanical behaviour. In short, we find that consciousness and the realm of essence is the all important counterpart to Santayana's material basis of morality.

In the third and final section I attempt to articulate in a precise way what type of moral theory emerges from Santayana's ontological foundation. Specifically, I examine three positions which I find conspicuously present Santayana's philosophy: metaethical non-naturalism, moral anti-realism and moral moral non-cognitivism. While not all critics have agreed, I believe these three positions accurately characterise Santayana's moral theory. As I shall argue, any interpretations to the contrary run into conflict with Santayana's ontology.

Finally, in the third section, I shall examine the charge that Santayana's philosophy ultimately leads to moral nihilism. One may argue that Santayana's moral philosophy leads to nihilism from a number of different approaches, depending on one's definition of nihilism. Taking up this objection I examine three definitions of nihilism. The first definition states that a moral philosophy is nihilistic if it allows for unresolvable moral conflict. The second definition states that a moral philosophy is nihilistic if it leads to as sense of despair or pessimism. And the third definition states that a moral philosophy is nihilistic if it leads to what may be called 'moral anarchy'. The position I argue for is that while the first definition carries some weight, it is nevertheless unjustified because it rests on an unwarranted presupposition. As for the other two senses of nihilism, neither are accurate descriptions of Santayana's philosophy. Thus, the conclusion I offer is that Santayana's philosophy is not 'nihilistic' in any meaningful sense of the word.

EXISTENCE AND ESSENCE: AN ONTOLOGICAL DICHOTOMY

Introduction

Late in his life Santayana reflected that Josiah Royce was both accurate and prophetic when he stated that 'the gist of [Santayana's] philosophy was the separation of essence from existence' (Santayana, *Apologia Pro Mente Sua* 497). This separation of essence from existence in Santayana's philosophy is fundamental to his thought in that it establishes two ultimate ontological categories; for Santayana, the separation of essence from existence establishes two realms of being which have 'very different kinds of reality in themselves and a different status in respect to my knowledge of them' (Santayana, Scepticism and Animal Faith 309). Further, Santayana thought that these ontological categories must account for and 'evidently be present in every aspect of our experience' (Lach, *Santayana's Moral Philosophy* 331). Indeed, it is fair to say that Santayana built up his entire philosophy on the foundation of an ontological dichotomy. This dichotomy determined not only the character and shape of his metaphysics, but of his epistemology and moral philosophy as well. According to Santayana, the very parameters of reality and our understanding of reality are set out in these different realms of being. Thus, anyone with a basic understanding of Santayana's thought must agree with Royce: the gist of Santayana's philosophical system is the separation of essence

from existence.

Accepting Royce's interpretation of Santayana, it would seem of importance to closely examine Santayana's ontological dichotomy, at least if one wants to be clear about any other aspect of Santayana's philosophical thought. And, that is my present purpose in this section. Specifically, I wish to critically examine Santayana's ontological dichotomy and try to present it in the most favourable light possible. In the process I will examine a number of objections to Santayana's ontology. First, I will consider the threat from Occam's razor. Second, I will defend Santayana's ontology against what may be generally called the Russellian programme. The Russellian programme tries to undermine the type of ontological dichotomy Santayana proposes by denying that the concept of 'existence' is properly speaking an ontological concept. After contending with objections of the Russellian variety, I will raise what I think is the most serious difficulty concerning Santayana's ontology, namely, that his concept of material existence raises a paradox. First, however, I will attempt to make clear what Santayana means by 'essence' and 'existence' and illuminate his reasons for maintaining that 'essence' and 'existence' represent two distinct ontological categories.

Essences

The ontological category of essence represents all real and possible characteristics and qualities. With some caution we can say that for Santayana essences can be variously

described as: *terms of thought*, *universals*, *descriptions*, *attributes* and *properties*. Perhaps the best way to think of essences is given in Santayana statement that essences are 'the infinite multitude of distinguishable ideal terms' (Santayana, Essence viii.).

Important to our understanding of essences is Santayana's assertion that the principle of essence is logical identity. Thus, 'the being of each essence is entirely exhausted by its definition' (Essence 18). What Santayana means by this is that when I focus on the *character* of some object or quality and claim that it is what it is, such as if I were to say 'fun is fun', I invoke the principle of identity. By doing so I thus recognise in the object or quality its 'ideal or formal nature, any thing always necessarily identical with itself' (Santayana, *Meanings of the Word 'Is'* 191). And, any ideal or formal nature is precisely what Santayana means by the term 'essence'.

Because it is the principle of identity which exhaustively defines the nature of essences, they are, for Santayana, necessarily implicated in an ontological realm distinct from existence or the material world. I shall examine this claim more closely in a moment. For now, we can simply note Santayana's convictions when he writes that essences occupy distinct ontological realm:

> They [essences] possess intrinsically, in their own ontological plane, only logical or aesthetic being; and this contains no indication whatever of the material act of

> speaking, touching, or looking which causes them to appear. All possible terms in mental discourse are essences existing nowhere; visionary equally, whether the faculty that discovers them be sense or thought or the most fantastic fancy. (Essence viii.)

What is of particular importance to note about this passage is Santayana's remark that essences have logical or aesthetic being *independent of any act which causes them to appear.* In other words, essences are not mind-dependent for their reality.

Of course, one can ask what Santayana means by 'logical or aesthetic being'. We have already seen that Santayana thinks that the principle of each essence is 'entirely exhausted by its definition' (Santayana, Essence 18). This principle designates essences as universals. Thus, they are outside of space and time. As Santayana writes:

> This inalienable individuality of each essence renders it a universal; for being perfectly self-contained and real only by virtue of its intrinsic character, it contains no reference to any setting in space or time, and stands in no adventitious relations to anything. Therefore without forfeiting its absolute identity it may be repeated or reviewed any number of times (Essence 18).

Thus, while Santayana thinks that an essence is 'no abstraction, no unrealisable generality' (Essence 40), but rather an ideal term with a precise character, he did think of them as universals in the sense that they are infinitely repeatable as forms or in consciousness and outside space and time. Furthermore, we can add that Santayana thought that once we have granted the being of essences, the concept of a infinite *realm* of essence immediately follows. To be sure, this 'realm' is not a 'portion of our cosmos', but rather an 'elucidative category' (Lach, Santayana 63). As we have seen, the 'principle of essence' is logical identity. This principle alone distinguishes each particular essence from every other possible essence; thus, we derive the category of the realm of essence. As Santayana puts the matter: the identity of each essence with itself and difference from every other essence suffices to distinguish and define them all in eternity, where they form the Realm of Essence (*Some Meanings* 193).

With these considerations we have set out the principle features of essences. Essences are ideal terms exhaustively defined by the principle of identity. Being entities of pure character, essences possess only logical or aesthetic being. This type of logical or aesthetic being native to essences is not mind-dependent. Santayana is quick to assert that essences are not 'at all a mental state, a sensation, perception, or living thought; it is not an 'idea', as this word is understood in British philosophy' (Essence 41). As mind-independent, ideal terms, essences occupy a unique

ontological plane. The type of ontological plane that essences occupy identifies them as universals. Possessing a purely formal nature, essences are outside of space and time. Thought of collectively, the ontological category which individual essences comprise is the realm of essence: a realm of being entirely distinct from the ontological category of existence.

Existence and the Realm of Matter

It is in regard to existence and the material world that Santayana's true ontological colours are revealed. This claim has merit given that Santayana considered materialism the ground of 'so much' of his philosophy (Apologia 504). While there is some dispute as to whether Santayana considered the term 'existence' a proper predicate, John Lach claims, for example, that in Santayana's philosophy 'existence' 'is not a character or quality; it is sheer material presence' (Lach, Santayana 71), there is no doubt that Santayana considered the term 'existence' one of the meaningful designations of the word 'is'. Santayana writes:

> When I assume that there *is* a substance perhaps without pretending to know what it is, save that I have this local and temporal encounter with it, I am using the word 'is' in an entirely different sense in which it means existence. (*Some Meanings* 202 - italics mine.)

From this passage it would seem that for Santayana

'existence' does have some place as a predicate. And its place as a predicate, one may claim, is to *designate*, as Lach states, sheer material presence.[1]

The use of the term 'existence' as a meaningful predicate ascribing or denying material presence to something has been rejected by many philosophers as a meaningless confusion or a grammatical redundancy. To select one famous example, Kant was a harsh critic of those who thought 'existence' could designate some property a thing could possess:

> By whatever and by however many predicates we may think a thing - even if we completely determine it - we do not make the least addition to the thing when we further declare that this thing *is*. Otherwise, it would not be exactly the same thing that exists, but something more than we had thought in the concept; and we could not, therefore, say that the exact object of my concept exists. (Kant, Critique of Pure Reason A600, B628)

The nature of the dispute between Kant and Santayana is not merely a disagreement between grammarians arguing what one can and cannot say in proper speech, but more truly a dispute over the recognition of an ontological category. I will

---

[1] Indeed, Santayana himself uses the term 'existence' quite freely as a predicate to ascribe or deny material presence, such as when he writes that 'Thomas and modern Spiritualists, require their spirits to be tangible as well as visible, to come and go and preserve a continuous physical existence' (Santayana, The Realm of Spirit 4).

examine this dispute more closely momentarily; for now we can simply note that on one side we have Kant and a host of other philosophers who think that to say, for example, 'this chair exists', as I point to a chair, is 'not false but has no meaning at all' (Russell, The Philosophy of Logical Atomism 121). What these philosophers are saying is that one cannot demarcate between 'existence' and some other category of reality. The alleged meaninglessness of saying that some object does or does not exist confirms their allegiance to such an ontological position. On the other side of the debate is Santayana, and perhaps a minority of philosophers following the Platonic tradition, who think it is indeed meaningful to say that some particular thing exists or that some particular individual exists.

In fact, Santayana is quite specific as to the connotations behind the the word 'existence'. According to Santayana, one uses the word 'existence':

> to designate such being as is in flux, determined by external relations, and jostled by irrelevant events. (Scepticism 42)

Again, in a similar passage Santayana writes:

> Everything that arises is liable to lapse; everything that exists exists by conjunction with other things on its own plane; it belongs somewhere and to a certain time by virtue of the external relations which pin it there. (Santayana The Realm of Matter 276)

Thus, when I say 'this chair exists', I am saying this chair

has material presence, it is not a mere idea in my mind. The chair is distinct from my idea of it because it is in external relations (for instance to *me*, so that I can sit on it as long as it remains intact). In short, contrary to essences, that which exists embodies external relations in space and time and is not infinitely repeatable as a universal.

Santayana calls this reality imbued with existence the realm of matter. For Santayana, matter is the proper name for substance (Matter 234), and makes up a dynamic or physical field of action. Matter is in flux, is external to the thought which posits it and constitutes physical space and time (202). Thus we find an ontological realm distinct from the essences discussed earlier. The realm of matter is distinguished from essences in that matter has existential status. One may say that matter is the ontological impetus behind the category of existence. Or put another way, describing his materialism, Santayana wrote: the dominance of matter in every existing being is the great axiom of materialism (Matter 292).

The other side of Santayana's ontological dichotomy is now before us. While the principle of essence is identity, we could say that the material world is the principle of existence (Santayana, *On the False Steps of Philosophy* 146). 'Existence' is a term for Santayana with a specific designation. It implies first and foremost the presence of external relations, change or flux and some sort of causal nexus. And, embodying these features is material reality - a

reality radically distinct from that of essence.

Scepticism, Consciousness and Essences

In order to make clearer the the dichotomy between existence and essence it is instructive to turn to Santayana's account of scepticism. Santayana's writings on systematic scepticism, as I shall try to show, provide an avenue to a fuller understanding of why essences are real but do not exist.

Santayana thought the ontological reality of the realm of essence was essentially self-evident, at least to the extent that he was led to say 'If you deny that realm, you acknowledge it' (Essence 167). That said, Santayana thought there were various ways in which consciousness could discover or, more accurately, *turn its attention* to the realm of essence. To focus on one example, in Scepticism and Animal Faith Santayana shows how the mental exercise of systematic or methodological scepticism can lead to the discovery of essence. According to Santayana, the radical sceptic, suspending all belief, is led to a vacant solipsism of the present moment. Without delving into the arguments which fuel Santayana's sceptical attack on the belief in indubitable, transitive knowledge, we can state that Santayana's official epistemological position on scepticism is summed up in his claim that:

> Belief in the existence of anything, including myself, is something radically incapable of proof, and resting, like all belief, on some

> irrational persuasion or prompting of life. (Scepticism and Animal Faith, 35)

Thus for Santayana the resting place for doubt is ultimate scepticism, a type of solipsism of the present moment, and the consequent dissolution of all belief. Methodological scepticism culminates with the suspension of all belief. However, it is in such a state of non-belief, when the mind is free from belief in the existence of anything, that essences, in all their purity, present themselves to consciousness. To be sure, ultimate scepticism is not a mystical state of divine revelation, but simply the deliberate suspension of belief. The solipsist, being conscious, will still have mental contents, despite the suspension of belief; and, these contents will be essences:

> The sceptic, then, as a consequence of carrying his scepticism to the greatest lengths, finds himself in the presence of more luminous and less equivocal objects than does the working and believing mind; only these objects are without meaning, they are only what they are obviously, all surface... Scepticism therefore suspends all knowledge worthy of the name, all that transitive and presumptive knowledge of facts which is a form of belief; and instead it bestows intuition of ideas, contemplative, aesthetic, dialectical, arbitrary. (*Scepticism* 70)

Why Essences Do Not Exist

Granting that radical scepticism is one way of discovering essences, it still remains to be shown why essences do not exist. Santayana has an 'official' argument for his claim that essences do not exist and thus comprise a distinct ontological realm from matter. The argument rests on the premise that 'nothing given exists'. The following is a reconstruction of Santayana's argument.

As indicated above, even a radical scepticism leading to solipsism of the present moment will not banish the contents of consciousness. On the contrary, the radical sceptic, once all belief in transitive knowledge is suspended, is left with the discovery of essence. These essences are the immediate data of consciousness. Thus, essences are 'given'. For something to be a 'given', under Santayana's terms, one 'must be conscious of it immediately, that is one's consciousness of it must not be mediated by one's consciousness of something else, and one must be conscious of it indubitably, in the sense that one's consciousness cannot distort its character' (Sprigge, Santayana 66). This characterisation of the given is precisely how Santayana characterises the essences discovered after radical scepticism. They are the objects which Santayana says are 'all surface'; they do not stand for anything else, as when I believe the immediate datum present to my consciousness reveals to me a material object.

The reason why Santayana thinks the given does not exist may be obvious at this point. The given is an essence.

Essences are pure character. No part of the given's character implies external relations; hence, external relations are something adventitious to the given. Therefore, nothing given exists:

> In each datum taken separately there would be no occasion to speak of existence. It would be an obvious appearance; whatever appeared there would be simply and wholly apparent, and the fact that it appeared...would not appear in it at all. (Scepticism, 44)

For example, one can think of a black, two-dimensional square. What one conjures up to consciousness, approximately, is a black plane figure having four sides of equal length and four right angles. But, no part of this essence's character implies external relations or presentation to consciousness. Indeed, Santayana goes so far as to say that for the given, and thus for any essence, existence is something which cannot even be predicated. Santayana writes:

> the notion that the datum [or any essence] exists is unmeaning, and if insisted upon is false. That which exists is the fact that the datum is given at that particular moment and crisis in the universe; the intuition, not the datum is fact which occurs...That which is certain and given, on the contrary is something of which existence cannot be predicated, and which , until it is used as a description of something else, cannot be

either false or true. (Scepticism, 45)

Thus we have Santayana's argument for the claim that 'nothing given exists'. Contemplating any datum given in consciousness, and Santayana does think that if 'I am conscious at all, I am intuiting an essence' (Sprigge, Santayana, 65), we find that existence is no part of an essence's character. This realisation is particularly acute when one meditates upon essences after the rigours of radical scepticism. Contemplating essences in their pure form, the very idea of existence fades away as an extraneous property to any given character.

It may be useful to expand a bit on this argument that 'nothing given exists'. We noted that existence was not part of the given's character. Thus, existence is not given in intuition. What is given in intuition is always and only an essence. We know, however, that essences, according to Santayana, are universals in the sense that they are eternal objects - timeless objects which do not undergo change. Finding an a philosophical ally in A.N. Whitehead, Santayana contends that Whitehead's 'eternal objects' articulate his idea of 'essences'. Whitehead writes that each 'eternal object is an individual which, in its own peculiar fashion, is what it is' (Essence 171). These two ideas, namely the timelessness of essences coupled with the individual identity of essences, bring out the idea that essences cannot in any meaningful sense be said to exist. It will be remembered that one of the things that makes a tennis ball, for example, an existing object, is its external relations to a tennis

racket, a net, the court, etc. As Santayana puts it:

> A mutual externality...an alternation of centres such as moment and moment, thing and thing, place and place, person and person - is characteristic of existence. (Matter 202)

This observation about the nature of existence, however, brings out another, namely, that the external relations of any existent are always open to change or alteration. They are subject to a continuous Heracleitian flux. Thus, the ball can be smashed by the racket and end up at another area of the court. In other words, we can say that:

> External relations are such as are due to the position, not to the inherent character, of the terms. They are always variable, and existence, although it may endure by accident for any length of time, is inherently mortal and transitory...(Matter 206)

In contrast with this view of existence and shifting external relations is the eternal identity and individuality of essences. From the above one can infer that essences cannot enter into the field of existence precisely because any essence is real 'only by virtue of its intrinsic character, and stands in no adventitious relations to anything' (Essence 18). As Lach concisely puts the matter:

> ...each datum is a self-contained world whose parts are internally related to - which is to say, immutably necessary for - the whole...no existence has these features.(Lach, George

Santayana 37)

The necessary, internal relations of each essence renders them immune from the demands of existence. Their individuality is comprised solely of *intrinsic* and *unchanging* relations. Thus, no essence is what it is because of external or existential relations. These considerations about essences reinforce Santayana's claim that the realm of essence has no place in the realm of existence.

Thus we have before us the main reasons why Santayana thinks that existence is no part of essences. The ontological demarcation is now complete; essences being implicated in one realm of being, a realm of timeless self-identity, and matter being implicated in another, a realm of external relations and alteration.

The result of this dichotomy between existence and essence, however, is not intuitively compelling to everyone. Santayana's type of ontology has no shortage of critics. The contrasting views of Russell and Kant were touched upon earlier, and with Santayana's ontology before us, we may now address their criticisms directly. First, however, there is a knee-jerk reaction to the type of ontology that Santayana proposes which deserves to be addressed.

Occam's Razor

Prima facie, Santayana's ontology would seem to fly in the face of Occam's methodological principle, which states that entities are not to be multiplied beyond necessity. By separating existence from essence, Santayana introduces an

infinite realm of essence, and his ontology becomes 'bloated' with universals. This type of ontology does not appeal to everyone. Quine, for example, would protest that Santayana's doctrine of essences 'offends the aesthetic sense of us who have a taste for desert landscapes' (Quine, From A Logical Point of View 4). No doubt, Quine's aesthetic sense for desert landscapes is a natural outgrowth of his faith in Occam's principle. Quine states that we should accept an ontology on the same principle as we accept a scientific theory, that is: 'we adopt, at least insofar as we are reasonable, the simplest conceptual scheme into which the disordered fragments of raw experience can be fitted and arranged' (16). Santayana certainly has not adopted his ontology according to this methodological principle. His ontology may thus be unjustified with its rank body of postulations and abstract entities. In short, Occam's razor would make neat work of Santayana's essences.

It is clear that Santayana's aesthetic sense is diametrically opposed to Quine's. Whereas as Quine states his penchant for desert landscapes, Santayana responds 'I see no lilies of the field, I see only an expanse of coal-dust' (Santayana, The Realm of Truth 104). Of course, aesthetic sense does not amount to a justification for an ontology. And, Santayana does have a reply to Occam. First, as discussed above, Santayana thinks that 'nothing is ever present to me except some essence; so that nothing that I possess in intuition, or actually see, is ever *there*' (Scepticism 99). Given this proposition, it would seem *a*

priori impossible to deny the ontological reality of essences by employing Occam's razor, since, according to Santayana, the principle must itself be an essence and to entertain it in consciousness is to admit essences into one's ontology. Second, Santayana thinks the principle dubious if taken categorically. Santayana poses the question: 'As to the truth of simple rather than elaborate ideas, what evidence does nature or history afford such a presumption?' (Truth 104). Even Quine, we may note, recognised 'essences' in some sense, given that he thought, at least for mathematics, a platonic ontology can be a good and useful myth (From a Logical 18). Third, from Santayana's description of the realms of existence and essence, it is clear that it is not essences which fall out of line with Occam's principle, but only our assumptions about that which exists. The reason for this claim is that in discovering essences we are distinguishing types of being and not multiplying the furniture of the universe. It is false to think that we are unnecessarily multiplying entities when we 'posit' essences. Strictly speaking, essences cannot be posited, like some distant planet in a physical description of our cosmos. According to Santayana, Occam's razor, as a methodological principle, applies only to our descriptions about *facts*. It is useful to quote Santayana at length on this matter:

> The anxiety of the honest Occam to stick to the facts, and pare his thoughts to the quick, had this justification in it, that sometimes our images and distinctions are misplaced.

> Grammar, usurping the role of physics, created metaphysics, the trouble with which is not at all that it multiplies entities, since no metaphysician can invent anything that did not lie from all eternity in the realm of essence, like the plot of unwritten novels, waiting for someone with wit enough to think of it. The trouble is rather that the metaphysician probably gives his favourite essences the wrong status. These beings may well be absent from the time and place to which he hastily assigns them; they may be incongruous altogether with what happens to exist anywhere. (Santayana, Soliloquies in England and Later Soliloquies 196)

This passage drives home Santayana's point: Occam's razor applies only to our descriptions of nature, not to nature itself nor to the 'images and distinctions', i.e., essences, which we employ to describe the physical world. Given that essences are not physical objects, there is no danger of Santayana's ontology violating Occam's razor. When we admit the reality of essences we are not multiplying entities unnecessarily, but rather distinguishing different types of being. Indeed, the only danger of violating Occam's razor is when we falsely think that certain essences do exist and we hypostatise them.

Of course, Santayana's objections to Occam's razor turn on the dichotomy between essence and existence. And, at this

point another objection may be raised: is the distinction not artificial? More specifically, is Santayana's definition of 'existence' legitimate?

'To Be' Is To Be The Value Of A Variable: Logic And Existence

Santayana's theory of essences contains all that Russell and those who take their lead from Russell's famous 'Theory of Descriptions' wish to deny. As noted earlier, Santayana thinks that one of the many meanings of the word 'is' is existence. Thus, if I were to say 'Pegasus is not', I am saying that Pegasus does not exist. To say that Pegasus does not exist is to say that there is no chunk of matter exemplifying the characteristics of a winged horse, in external relations and subject to change or alteration. Conversely, to say that 'my cat exists' is to designate my cat as being not merely an essence, like Pegasus or the number 7, though my cat certainly has an essence, but as a material entity - a part of the physical world.

Russell could not accept this analysis. His theory of descriptions forces us to say that the phrase 'Pegasus does not exist' actually translates into a descriptive statement with a false truth value of the form: 'There is an x such that x is a white winged horse and x is identical to itself'. On Russell's analysis, the meaning of existence turns entirely on the satisfaction of propositional functions. For Russell, 'existence' means that some 'propositional function is true in at least one instance' (Logical Atomism 98).

Further, under Russell's theory, to say of some thing in the world that it embodies the properties set out in a proposition, that it further 'exists', is 'not false, but has no meaning at all' (121).

Russell also maintains that a sentence like 'Pegasus does not exist' does not implicate one in positing an ideal realm of objects like Santayana's essences, because under logical analysis the name 'Pegasus' is actually found to be an abbreviated description (such as the one given above). The description, of course, holds of nothing, or there is nothing which can be the value of the variable 'x'. Thus, the once existential statement with ontological import becomes a descriptive statement. It is this logical analysis of language which Russell, and those who follow his method, believes avoids the trappings of an ontology with 'unreal objects':

> "A unicorn" is an indefinite description which describes nothing. It is not an indefinite description which describes something unreal. (Russell, *Descriptions*, 20th-Century Philosophy: The Analytic Tradition 148)

No doubt we can take 'essences' as an example of what Russell would call 'something unreal'. By turning 'existence' into the property of propositional functions, ontological status is ascribed only to those things that are exemplified in the real world: some *thing* is found to fulfil the variable in a descriptive proposition, 'existence' becomes merely a quantifier, the proposition is given a truth value and that

is the end of the matter. There is no need to talk of ideal objects with mysterious ontological status.

Russell has many followers. Indeed, one may put Russell (or perhaps Frege) at the head of a well established tradition that cashes out the meaning of 'existence' in logical analysis. More recently, C.J.F. Williams, though not in whole agreement with Russell, maintains what may be called Russellian position. In the tradition of Russell, Williams holds that existence is what the existential quantifier expresses and that:

> a use of the verb 'be' will count as existential only if the proposition in which it occurs can be paraphrased by using instead the existential quantifier. (Williams, What is Existence 294-5)

For Williams, logic is the true heir of metaphysics. Logical analysis puts 'existence' in its proper place and so removes Russell's worry about 'false philosophy'. Like Russell, Williams maintains that any use of the word 'existence' is meaningful only in regard to logical quantifiers and any existential sense of 'be' is 'explicable in terms of the notion of *variable*' (324). The terms 'there is' and 'be' have purely syntactical role, not a semantic one. Thus, in employing logical analysis, Williams banishes any ontological reading of 'existence'.

The Narrowness Of The Quantification Reading Of Existence

In defence of Santayana one can make the objection that all theories which define the concept of existence in terms of quantification are conceptually narrow and miss an equally, if not more plausible *ontological* reading of existence. In making this objection we are defending the view that 'existence' signifies an ontological category; a type of reality that we may attribute to some objects and not to others.

First, it is important to note that Santayana does not want to maintain that every proposition has *existential* import. What Santayana does maintain is that existence can be understood as an ontological category; it is one mode of reality we can distinguish in our experience. Language, however, does not commit us to claims about existence. Briefly, Santayana would regard a proposition like 'Pegasus is white' as a simple case of predication where the copula 'is' predicates an adjective of a noun. Both terms, viz., 'Pegasus' and 'white', are simply essences and in the act of predication we are merely describing or analysing one aspect of a larger essence. The main point is, however, that in predication we are only contrasting essences and are not forced into existential claims:

> In the realm of essence, however, all elements are simply juxtaposed, and the trick of predicating one essence of another is only a means of carrying attention from some whole in

> which it is a feature; in other words a means of analysis or synthesis. (Some Meanings 202)

On the other hand, Santayana's understanding of what happens during predication does involve, at the bare minimum, the recognition of properties. This is what predication does: it describes one property or essence in terms of another. Thus, in the act of predication we are committed to some ontological import at the very least for the essences which we invoke in the act of predication, though we are not committed to granting these essences existential status.

Returning now to the main argument, what all those who follow the Russellian account of existence have in common is that they think the 'only philosophically sound analysis of the concept of existence is that which takes existence to be a matter of instantiation' (Munitz, Existence and Logic 86). Russell, as noted, thinks 'existence' is a property of propositional functions. Indeed, Russell thinks this gives us the 'fundamental meaning of 'existence'' (Logical Atomism 98). The question now is why must we accept such a narrow understanding of 'existence'? Does logical analysis really give the fundamental meaning of 'existence'?[2]

Santayana's treatment of existence as an ontological category can be saved if we reject the Russellian programme. Munitz proposes just such an approach. Following Munitz, we can ask if it is not entirely plausible to keep 'existence' as an ontological concept and regard 'there is' as the proper

---

[2] William Barrett raises this type of objection when he asks: 'Did Bertrand Russell, the man, ever believe that he existed in the same sense in which the root of an equation exists?'. Irrational Man. p.300.

reading of Russell's existential propositions. In doing so we are then regarding Russell's existential propositions as 'making instantiation claims about concepts', which is categorically distinct from 'making ontological claims about the existence of individuals in the world as of the world itself' (Existence and Logic 88). Note that this proposal in no way jeopardises the Russellian programme. One can make instantiation claims as much as one likes. As Munitz states: 'the use of 'there is' to mark an instantiation claim cuts across all sorts of different subject matters, and can be used in connection with predicates ('F's) as widely varied as you please, while itself remaining univocally constant. It simply means that the predicate 'F', whatever that might be, holds or applies for some cases or instances.' (Existence and Logic 89). Thus I am able to to say 'Pegasus exists', but instead of this turning into a (false) Russellian existential proposition, it will be read in this case as an instantiation claim of the form 'The concept *Pegasus* has instances'. The upshot of the conceptual-instantiation reading is that it does 'not follow that if we can say some concept is *instantiated* that the *instance* must be an *object* or that it *exists*' (Existence and Logic 90). Hence, under this re-reading of the Russellian programme, we can say that existence is not a matter of instantiation, or satisfying propositional functions. We can make a differentiation between 'existence' meaning 'there is', as in 'there are instances of some concept', and 'existence' in the ontological sense. This later sense of 'existence' diverges

from 'there is' as logical constant in that it represents something we can ask of the concepts which have instances, viz., '*do they exist* ?'. In Santayana's terms we could ask if the concept has any 'exemplification in matter or in events' (Essence 121). And, once we ask this question, we are recognising 'existence' as an ontological concept. Of course, two people need not agree as to what 'existence' *qua* ontological concept means, but the fact remains that the meaning of existence is rejected as being solely a function of predicate logic.

In conclusion we can say that the Russellian reading of 'existence' suffers from a shortcoming in that it captures only the analytical reading of existence as meaning 'there is' or 'has instances'. The Russellian programme is flawed in that it does not capture the meaning of 'existence' as an ontological concept. There is no reason why we should be forced to think that the entire meaning of 'existence' is cashed out in the existential quantifier. Following Munitz's suggestion of taking Russell's existential propositions as making instantiation claims about concepts, we can always ask whether the concepts which have instances are representative of objects or individuals. This would seem congruent to Santayana's claim that it is always an open question whether or not some particular essence is exemplified or manifested in matter. Thus we can see that by rejecting the Russellian treatment of existence as being incomplete or too narrow, we are able to preserve the ontological reading of 'existence' and defend Santayana's ontological dichotomy.

An Internal Threat: The Paradox Of The Essence Of Existence

There is another far more pressing difficulty with Santayana's dichotomy between existence and essence that does not come from rival philosophical camps. Rather, it is a paradox inherent in Santayana's own ontology. The paradox results directly from any attempt to define 'existence', given that any definition, according to Santayana, will merely invoke an eternal essence.

Levinson touches on the problem when he writes that 'there is a difference between *what* something is and establishing *that* it has actually happened, is happening, or will happen' (Levinson Santayana, Pragmatism, and The Spiritual Life 214). We may well agree, but the question is: what is this difference? Two considerations must be remembered for this paradox to come to light. First, Santayana's definition of material existence. For Santayana, the existing material world is:

> ...the only power...It determines the character, order and tempo of all events. (Apologia 521).

Second, we must remember that for Santayana essences are ideal terms. As such essences are:

> ...prior to existence, but being infinitely various they cannot determine existence to take one form rather than another. (Essence 81)

In other words essences are impotent; they are powerless. By definition, the material existence represents the only power. And, here lies the paradox: what quality, or essence, does the material world posses such that it can manifest essences? What quality does existence have to bring about the material world of external relations, flux and causation? Of course, to designate a feature is to designate an essence - and we know that no essence can be a force of actualisation or determine existence. Thus, it seems that we cannot make intelligible the concept of existence within Santayana's ontology. John Lach sums up the problem concisely:

> If we look for the feature of matter that makes this remarkable feat possible [actualisation of essence], we are sure to be disappointed. Each characteristic is an essence, and essences, being impotent, are unable to accomplish their own actualisation. As a result, there can be nothing specific in matter that is responsible for existence, it can itself have no nature, not even the nature of giving embodiment to forms. (Lach, Santayana 138)

This paradox cannot be thought of as anything but a serious problem for Santayana's ontology. In some ways it is a return to Kant's question of 'what are we adding to a concept of a thing when we say that it exists?'. Under Santayana's ontological categories we are forced to draw a blank.

At the very least, we can say that Santayana appears to

have recognised this problem. His reply was to say that existence is a surd (Realm of Essence 109); it is an unintelligible force that is 'groundless; essentially groundless' (Apologia 505). Indeed, this appears to be all he could say. On the other hand, Santayana appears to have been content with this answer. He claimed to consider his materialism a *presupposition* and not a conclusion. He writes: 'I ask myself only what are the fundamental presuppositions that I cannot live without making. And I find that they are summed up in the word materialism' (Apologia 505). And, if this problem irritated the dialectician, Santayana thought it was of no consequence because 'any attempt to deny [material existence] would be idle; the denial itself would reintroduce the very categories of existence, flux, self-transcendence and truth (Essence 120-121). Thus, Santayana seemed content to accept the notion of existence as an groundless surd. While material existence does play a fundamental role in Santayana's ontology, we are left without an answer as to how material existence becomes the ontological category that it does. Since we cannot point to any one feature of existence which accounts for the material reality of the physical world, we are obliged to take the reality of the material world on faith - one of the inevitable presuppositions of daily life.

Conclusion: Reconsidering The Categories

Finally, in way of closing, we can note that there is at

least one philosopher who thinks that Santayana need not be saddled with accepting material existence as an 'unintelligible surd' that exemplifies essences. Angus Kerr-Lawson rejects the view that Santayana must treat material existence as being completely divorced from substance. As Kerr-Lawson reads Santayana, Santayana always thinks *form* is conceptually part of matter. Thus, to 'say that existence is a surd, as Santayana does, is not to say that matter is formless in its inner being'. 'It is rather to say that this nature is a mystery, probably not definable in any terms known to humanity' (Angus Kerr-Lawson, *The Nicene Creed* 31). Contrary to Lach's analysis, and perhaps Santayana himself, Kerr-Lawson forces us to rethink the ontological dichotomy of existence and essence. Kerr-Lawson would have us accept a dichotomy of essence and existence/essence or *substance.* The paradox of Santayana's ontology discussed above does not arise for Kerr-Lawson because, according to him, there is no *particular feature* of existence which accounts for change and the exemplification of essences. On the contrary, 'some features of matter *may* relate to causal force, so long as we do not insist on abstracting that feature from the substratum, and asking it *solely* to be responsible for change' (31).

This interpretation of Santayana's ontology changes the purity of the categories. While essences retain their distinction, existence cannot be separated from essences. In addition, it may not solve the paradox. If Kerr-Lawson claims that we may safely interpret Santayana's realm of matter as

intrinsically having form as part of itself, we can still ask what this 'itself' is that combines with essences to create material reality. Thus, to say that 'some features of matter may relate to causal force' would seem to merely alter the paradox of how *one* particular feature can account for the nature material existence, to how a *some* or a collection of features can. In any case, the problem remains the same, and so accepting material existence as an 'unintelligible surd' may, in the end, be more desirable than any solution which attempts to redraw the conceptual lines around Santayana's ontological categories.

FROM EXISTENCE AND ESSENCE TO MATTER, MIND AND MORALITY

Introduction

So far I have examined two ultimate categories in Santayana's ontology. As I have shown, the ontological categories of essence and existence represent two kinds of reality Santayana finds conspicuously present in experience. On the one hand are essences or the recognisable character of any object or feeling. Essences are the immediate data of consciousness; they are the only things which 'can ever be observed with direct and exhaustive clearness' (Santayana, *Proust On Essences* 273). On the other hand, belief in anything beyond the immediate datum of consciousness - that is, in the material world - invokes the category of existence. The category of existence delineates all of our common sense beliefs about the physical world. Thus we find that belief in essence and existence is 'inevitable to a thought attentive to appearance, and honestly expressive of action' (Scepticism 308).

The next step in understanding how Santayana's ontology generates his moral theory is to show how the categories of essence and existence factor into the human condition. My objective in this section is to explicate how Santayana's ontological categories determine a vision of the human condition which lays the foundation for his moral theory. Having already examined Santayana's ontological dichotomy,

the purpose of this chapter is to elucidate the ideas contained in the transitional step of Santayana's proposition that: *ontology justifies materialism, and the materialism justifies rational ethics* (A General Confession 24); that is, the step from ontology to materialism and then materialism to morality. To accomplish this task one must determine what implications Santayana's category of existence has on our understanding of the world and our place in it, and what role essences play for us as sentient creatures. Answering these questions takes us in two different directions. These two different directions may be loosely described as, first, the implications for the life of the individual as far as the individual is a physical organism and, second, the life of the individual insofar as he or she is endowed with consciousness. In sum, one may say that revealing how Santayana's ontological categories factor into the human condition involves an explication of both Santayana's materialism and his account of consciousness.

Matter And Morality

In the first part of this section I shall examine the general features of Santayana's materialism in order that we may trace out the implications for the human condition. In particular, I will first present what are, for Santayana, the main features of the material world. Second, I will show how this vision of the material world gives rise to what Santayana calls a *psyche*. The psyche may be otherwise described as the material organisation of the body. Generated

by the material world, the psyche is the source of order and direction for the individual as a biological organism. Finally, once I have developed this understanding of the psyche, I will reveal the connection between Santayana's conception of the psyche and his moral theory. As I will try to show, because the psyche is the origin of all interests and preferences for the individual, it is the key to the origin of values and, ultimately, to the material foundation of Santayana's moral theory.

Mind And Morality

In the latter part of this section I shall discuss Santayana's account of consciousness, or as he calls it, 'spirit'. Here my specific purpose is to show how Santayana's account of consciousness, invoking an ontological realm distinct from that of existence, gives rise to moral values as they are commonly understood, viz., in the language of 'good' and 'evil'.

Briefly, Santayana's account of consciousness is epiphenomenalist: although consciousness is generated by organic neurological processes of the brain, it is itself an immaterial by-product of the physical world. Consciousness does not have any causal force over the body, nor does one act of consciousness have any effect over another. Rather, consciousness is realised as a powerless neutral state. Thus we find Santayana describing consciousness the 'residue of existence' (Santayana, Reasons and Common Sense 125). Hence, ontologically, consciousness invokes the realm of essence.

Furthermore, in addition to taking immaterial essences as its terms of thought, consciousness is divorced from the realm of existence for the reason that, keeping in line with epiphenomenalism, 'moments of spirit [or states of consciousness] are not facts or events in the physical world and cannot be identified with anything which could be found within a human head or in any other place' (Sprigge, Santayana 107).

Santayana's epiphenomenalist account of consciousness, however, does not render consciousness meaningless or without purpose. Instead, the reality of consciousness opens up the realm of essences and therefore the possibility of value. Among the multitude of essences consciousness may 'contemplate', or take as its ideal object, are moral essences: good and evil. In doing so consciousness becomes the (impotent) register of values and the mental transcript of the life of the psyche. Indeed, far from being meaningless, the life of consciousness ultimately determines the '*inner* difference between being awake or asleep, alive or dead', and 'this difference is morally absolute' (Spirit 18). In the absence of consciousness moral intuitions could never arise; there could only be the blind mechanism of existence grinding away. There would be no occasion for the world of morality. As Santayana states in The Sense of Beauty, echoing Spinoza's famous phrase, 'In removing consciousness, we have removed the possibility of worth' (13). Thus, Santayana's account of consciousness, with its function as the intuition of essences and the mental transcript of the life of the

psyche, generates a phenomenology of value - indeed, a truly moral life - that would otherwise be absent from the world.

A Final Word Of Introduction

As a final introductory note, I should perhaps state that much of what I present on Santayana's materialism and his account of physical reality will be of value for the following chapter. The body of this chapter is mainly exegetical; I wish to describe the transition in Santayana's philosophy from ontology to materialism to morals. Thus, this chapter will be an important reference point when, in the next chapter, I investigate precisely what type of moral theory emerges from Santayana's ontology and materialism.

The General Features Of Matter Or Substance

At one time Santayana wrote that 'in natural philosophy I am a decided materialist - apparently the only living one' (Scepticism vii). For Santayana, being a materialist meant accepting a certain set of propositions about the nature of matter or substance. Now, there are two preliminary points which deserve attention before presenting Santayana's description of matter or substance. First, I have been using the terms 'matter' or 'substance' to refer to *that which exists*. One may say that 'substance' is simply the stuff of the material world, a possible object of scientific investigation. Taking 'substance' in this sense, we can equate 'substance' with 'matter'. However, not all critics would agree with this analysis. Lach, for instance, denies

that 'matter' and 'substance' are synonymous in Santayana's philosophy. He thinks that the idea of matter is 'frankly ontological', the idea being that 'its function is to help us understand the different modes of being, not to call attention to the nature of the world in whose bosom we live' (Lach, Santayana 73). I have tried to respect Lach's main point of distinguishing between an ontological category and a possible *object* of knowledge or scientific investigation by making Santayana's ontology turn on a dichotomy between existence and essence. The 'frankly ontological' category Lach calls 'matter' I have called 'existence'. Thus, if Lach rejects this reading of equating substance with matter I think the dispute is merely verbal. Furthermore, Santayana provides good reason for thinking of 'matter' and 'substance' as the same *physical* thing when he writes:

> Matter is properly a name for the actual substance of the natural world, whatever that substance may be. (Matter 332)

And, in another example, when he writes:

> Matter...which is what the Greek naturalists tried to describe, is not a metaphysical but a physical substance: it is weighed, measured, and operated on in chemistry, physics, and the arts. (Santayana, *Appearance and Reality* 142)

In short, I think one may safely think of 'matter' and 'substance' as being synonymous given that one may preserve Lach's ontological/physical dichotomy by distinguishing between 'existence' and 'essence' on the ontological side,

and on the physical side 'matter' or 'substance'.

The next point which must be mentioned before presenting Santayana's description of matter or substance is that Santayana's materialism is not properly a scientific theory nor a collection of conclusions from analytic arguments. Santayana states that his materialism 'is no academic opinion'; rather, 'it is an everyday conviction...from experience and observation of the world at large' (A General Confession 12). Thus, when Santayana describes the nature of substance he does not pretend to be describing the ultimate nature of physical reality. Santayana writes:

> But my materialism...is not metaphysical. I do not profess to know what matter is in itself, and feel no confidence in the divination of those *esprits forts* who, leading a life of vice, thought the universe must be composed of nothing but dice and billiard balls. I wait for the men of science to tell me what matter is... (Scepticism viii).

Instead of pretending to describe what matter is in itself, Santayana's materialism is merely an expression of the convictions of common sense. In describing the nature of substance, Santayana is describing the physical world in the most general way. He is saying that if you grant the existence of the material world, if you believe, as common sense naturally does, in the reality of substance, then here are the tenets about the natural world to which, however tacitly, you pledge allegiance. With these preliminary points

out of the way, we can turn to Santayana's account of the material world.

Santayana writes that belief in the existential reality of matter or substance is the 'presupposition not only of all natural science but of all deliberate action' (Apologia 505). But what are the particulars of this presupposition? Santayana is quite specific. First, Santayana lists the so-called 'indispensable' properties of substance. They are as follows:

1. Substance is external to the thought which posits it.
2. Substance has parts and constitutes a physical space.
3. Substance is in flux and constitutes a physical time.
4. Substance is unequally distributed.
5. Substance composes a relative cosmos.

(Matter 202-203)

The first of these indispensable properties of substance reiterates Santayana's principle of existence as being comprised of external relations. Yet, Santayana believes that each of these propositions are true of physical reality. More accurately, we can say that Santayana thinks they are the indispensable *assumptions* of an uncompromising materialism. Again, Santayana is content to emphasize that these propositions are the tacit assumptions about the world which one cannot help but making in day to day life and action. As Sprigge writes: 'The special status Santayana claims for

these five propositions is that they are implicated in any sense that we have of our own animal needs, and that it is this sense which forces us to abandon scepticism' (Sprigge, Santayana 137-138). Indeed, we could say that the central purpose of Santayana's materialism is, as O'Sullivan indicates, 'no more than a fundamentally untechnical attempt to stick to what common sense teaches everyone' (O'Sullivan, Santayana 58). In the upshot, Santayana's materialism is thus more ethical than scientific in that ultimately it does not aim at 'a literal description of the external world, but at pragmatically identifying the conditions of human happiness' (58).

Santayana adds five more 'presumable properties of substance' which he finds evident in normal life and thus 'may be assumed in natural philosophy' (Matter 233). These additional properties are listed as follows:

6. Substance sometimes takes the form of animals in whom there are feelings, images, and thoughts. These mental facts are immaterial.
7. The same mental facts are manifestations of substance.
8. The phases or modes thorough which substance flows are continuous.
9. The quantity of substance remains equivalent throughout.
10. Each phase or mode of substance, although not contained in its antecedents, is

> predetermined by them in its place and quality, and proportionate to them in extent and intensity.(Matter 233-234)

Having thus listed the general features of matter or substance we can now trace out the important implications for the human condition.

The Irrationality Of Material Reality

First, the individual must recognise that there is no necessity in the existential reality of matter nor in the forms it takes. The individual simply finds himself in a material world which manifestly embodies a certain set of characteristics. In the previous chapter it was discussed that existence is a surd. For Santayana this implies the ultimate contingency that matter should exist at all, let alone take on any particular form. There can be no rationale for existence of matter or substance. To designate a qualitative reason for the existence of matter is to merely define an eternal essence, and no essence can have power over reality. Furthermore, any *reason* for existence would itself call for justification and explanation. Santayana writes: 'if I thought I saw a ground for [existence], I should have to look for a ground for that ground, *ad infinitum*. I must halt content at the *quia*, at the brute fact' (Apologia 505). Existence, in short, is a brute fact. Thus, at the outset, the individual must accept the ultimate irrationality of existence of the physical world.

A Single Causal Nexus

Next, the individual must recognise their physical relationship to the material world, which constitutes a unified field of action. For the individual, reality is not to be identified with a series of passing intuitions of sense data; it is not the solipsist's dream. Rather, substance *exists*: it lies external to *me* and constitutes an objective world of causal interaction. As Santayana writes: 'all recognisable substance must lie in the same field in which the organism of the observer occupies a relative centre' (Matter 203). Proposition 6 affirms that substance sometimes 'takes the form of animals'. Hence, as individuals we are one of the 'unequally distributed' (p.4) portions of substance engaged in action with other portions of substance. Thus, the individual, as a physical body, is caught up in a single field of action, a web of change and alteration constituting a physical space and time (i.e., what Santayana calls in proposition 5 a 'relative cosmos'). In sum, since 'all existent reality is continuous with my body, everything capable of affecting me must lie in a single spatiotemporal matrix' (Lach, Santayana 47).[3]

[3] Santayana maintains that the material world is *causal* or deterministic in character. Since substance is constantly in flux (p.8), and since the quantity of substance of our relative cosmos remains equivalent throughout (p.9), we end up with the conclusion that the different phases or modes which substance takes is predetermined by antecedent phases or modes (p.10). Santayana's convictions about the deterministic nature of material reality are summed up when he writes that 'anyone who can at all catch the drift of experience...must feel that mechanism rules the whole world' (Santayana, Reason and Science 76).

Materialism And The Nature Of The Individual: Body, Organism And Psyche

One of the contingent facts about the material world is that it 'sometimes takes on the form of living animals' (proposition 6). Ignoring, for the moment, the fact that we are animals endowed with consciousness, Santayana's account of the material world forces us to recognise that the individual is, first and foremost, a substance: a chunk of matter in a mechanical, spatiotemporal matrix. Thus, in the most general way, we can say that the individual is a *body* . And, 'this places man quite correctly in the realm of matter amongst other bodies, but it treats them summarily and external as gross units and dead weights, ignoring their immaterial properties and their subtle physical substance and relations'.(Spirit 15).

Yet, the individual is more than a body with a specific dead weight. The individual is alive or animated. The individual is thus an *organism*. Specifically, the individual is more than a body 'by virtue of its vital power of nutrition and reproduction' (15). We can thus refine our definition of the individual as a 'body' by noting a unique aspect of animal bodies: they actively work to sustain themselves and reproduce.

Accepting these general observations we come to one of the most important aspects of Santayana's materialism and the nature of the individual: namely, the *psyche*. The 'psyche' is Santayana's concept for the activities and operations of biological organisms; it is essentially an explanatory tool

and considered a semi-mythical entity (Sprigge, Santayana 98). To understand Santayana's notion of the psyche it is first necessary to explain his notion of a *trope*. A trope is the total essence or description of 'any event as distinguished from that event itself'(Matter 294). The difference between any trope from the event it exemplifies is simply that the event is enacted and belongs, ontologically, to the realm of existence, while the trope is the *form* of that event - the event's description taken as a universal (293). In this sense, a trope is a truthful description of any event. As Santayana states: 'it is the essence of that sequence seen under the form of eternity' (294). Applying this notion of a trope to the individual as a living organism, we can say that the psyche is a trope, 'which defines a life and marks its course from birth to death in some human creature' (328). In this sense, the psyche is not a substance; it is not synonymous with the human body. It is more akin to Aristotle's conception of the psyche or 'soul' as 'the form of a natural body having life potentially within it' (De Anima 412a 20). Thus, while the object of the psyche is a material organism, the psyche itself is a system of characteristics 'inherited or acquired, displayed by living bodies in their growth and behaviour' (Matter 331).

To help illustrate Santayana's notion of the psyche it may be useful to note that Santayana claims the psyche is the observable 'object' of biology (333). What Santayana means is that 'To understand the psyche is to understand the predetermined character of any living organism, our dynamic

physical being'; it is to understand the 'material nucleus of order...by which the requisite elements are selected, arranged, and kept for a time (which we call life) in organic circulation' (Physical Order 198). Therefore, to study the life of an organism, be it the programme of embryology or geriatrics, is to study the psyche.

The Psyche And Origin Of Animal Interests

Santayana vigorously rejected any empiricist notion of the self as 'nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions' (Hume, A Treatise of Human Nature I, iv, 6). Santayana felt that this phenomenalistic conception of the self left 'no room for anything latent', and 'in a living being, especially in a nice Englishman, what is latent is the chief thing' (Soliloquies 217). For Santayana, the assumptions of materialism, as presented above, must underlie any understanding we have of the individual. 'Man, in so far as his being is rooted in what Santayana describes as the physical order of the psyche, belongs to the causal world' (O'Sullivan, Santayana 56-57). Staying within the tenets of materialism, the psyche is 'that habit in matter which forms the human body and the human mind' (Soliloquies 221). However, by taking the psyche as the habit of matter which *forms* the human body and human mind, the psyche become the principle of the long-term *development* of the body. As such the psyche 'defines a life': the psyche is a 'material system, stretching over both time and space' (221). Contained within our psyche:

> There is our whole past, as it were, knocking at the door; there are our silent hopes; there are our future discourses and decisions working away, like actors rehearsing their parts, at their several fantastic arguments. All this is the psyche's work. (Matter 337)

Thus, we can say that the psyche accounts for everything that is latent in the self; it embodies all the potentiality of a human life from its beginning to its final development.

To say that the psyche embodies all that is potential within us and accounts for our material development is to view the psyche as the ultimate origin of animal interests. We could say that the psyche accounts for all physical *predispositions* of animal life. These predispositions, such as the habit of the body to repair itself after being injured, may be considered 'animal interests' insofar as they represent the (innate) physical course of development of some animal organism. Of course, we are here taking the terms 'animal interests' and 'predispositions' in a purely mechanistic way; we are noting, to repeat Santayana's phrase, the 'habit of matter'; the operations of a psyche, in regard to some material organism.

Again, it is precisely because the psyche represents the predetermined, specific direction of an animal life, that it follows that the psyche constitutes a set of interests for the individual. This fact is obvious enough if we think of the general features of the human organism. For example, we instinctively seek to avoid pain; this fact alone presupposes

the existence of a determinate nature; specifically, a psyche with a set of constitutional interests wound up for self-preservation (Common Sense 223-227). Even more generally, we need only think of *any* experience which causes alarm or some intense sensation within us, be this sensation pleasant or unpleasant. Santayana uses the term 'shock' to refer to some intense sensation we may perceive, and he writes:

> What shock proves, if it proves anything, is that I have a nature to which all events and all developments are not equally welcome. How could any apparition surprise or alarm me, or how could interruption of any sort overtake me, unless I was somehow running on in a certain direction, with a specific rhythm? Had I not such a positive nature, the existence of material things and their most violent impact upon one another, shattering the world to atoms, would leave me a placid observer of their movement. (Scepticism 146)

As noted, in referring to the 'interests' of some definite nature we are staying within the realm of materialism. In fact, Santayana often employs the word 'impulse' over 'interest' to represent the 'specific direction' of a psyche and still remain within the parameters of physical language talk. For example, we can think of the most basic impulse as the act of breathing. We do this act involuntarily, and if somehow we are hindered in this act our impulse to breath becomes all the more vigorous. This impulse to breath -

perhaps a more plausible phrase over 'our interest in breathing' - also represents a 'specific direction' of a psyche. And, for the philosophical materialist, thwarted *impulse* can only indicate the presence of a determinate nature and set of interests:

> Yet there is one thing that is equally intolerable, and that is to be forced to move in a direction that arrests and reverses an impulse already afoot. If nothing in particular were afoot in us we should not be alive; we should not even be material factors in the world, with specific properties and effects. (Physical Order 203)

In summary, because the psyche represents a system of characteristics and predispositions for some animal life, it is the origin of interests or impulses: the specific direction of some animal life.

The Psyche And Origin Of Preference And Morality

Accepting that the psyche accounts for all predispositions of animal life, that it is the source of animal interests, has important implications. According to Santayana, this fact alone accounts for the origin of morality:

> This predetermined, specific direction of animal life is the key to everything moral; without it no external circumstance could be favourable or unfavourable to us; and spirit

> within us would have no reason to welcome, to deplore, or to notice anything. (Soliloquies 219).

Granting that the psyche represents a determinate nature, a set of constitutional interests or a collection of impulses, it may not be self-evident why the psyche is the key to everything moral. The reason, stated concisely, is that the psyche establishes the ultimate *criteria of preference* for the individual and, for Santayana, morality is grounded in preferences - preferences as determined by the psyche with its system of 'impulses' and 'interests'.

Santayana proclaims that: 'The root of morality is animal bias' (Truth 77), and that the 'nerve of moral judgment is preference: and preference is a feeling or impulse to action' (Santayana, The Realm of Truth 67). Hence, for Santayana, the 'fact that certain things are preferable relative to the nature of the individual psyche is the basis of morality' (Lach, *Santayana's Moral Philosophy* 332). Thus, it is precisely because the psyche establishes a determinate physical nature, a system of relative interests and specific impulses to action, and therefore the ultimate basis of preference, that the concept of 'morality' comes into play. In short, 'morality, like health, is determined by the existing constitution of our animal natures' (A General Confession 25).

I shall discuss in detail the larger picture of Santayana's moral theory in the next chapter. For now, my main purpose is simply to reveal how Santayana's materialism,

the embodiment of existential reality, supplies the foundation for morality. Even the brief description above should suffice to show that it is Santayana's assumptions about the material world which lead to his conception of morality. 'Morality', as Santayana understands it, is contingent upon the disposition of the psyche with its system of interests. In the absence of some definite nature, if the individual were not a biological organism with a predetermined, specific direction of animal life, there could be no basis for preference, and so no occasion for morality. In short, while Santayana's ontological category of existence conceptually frames his materialism, his materialism supplies the foundation for his moral theory.

The Phenomenology Of Morality

Thus far in discussing Santayana's account of the psyche I have done so in light of his materialism. Discussing the nature of the material world, that it gives rise to biological creatures with specific characters or psyches, and that these psyches embody a physical order or 'habit of matter', is a purely descriptive enterprise. It is Santayana's account of physical reality and the human condition. However, in discussing Santayana's account of the origin of morality it becomes difficult to remain within the framework of value-free language. For instance, it is somewhat misleading to talk of 'interests' given the value-judgment overtones of such a term; saying that the psyche has some 'interest' seems to take us into the normative

sphere. However, in reality, such terms are merely 'moralistic names naturally given to biological habits by current language' (Santayana, *Mind Liberating and Deceptive* 137). As Lach states, what we are really discussing when taking about the 'interests' of the psyche is what Santayana would consider 'moral action', such as the bodies habit to mend itself after injury so that it will survive. From a strictly materialist viewpoint this 'moral action' of the psyche is purely mechanical - it is 'blind behaviour' (Lach, Moral Philosophy 333). In order to present Santayana's 'moral theory' in a way perhaps more commonly understood, namely, in the language of 'goods' and 'evils', it is necessary to depart from the ontological category of existence and the material world and invoke an altogether different realm of being.

From the standpoint of spirit or consciousness the preferences and interests of the psyche are reflected in an altogether different way. Proposition 6 and 7 of Santayana's 'presumable properties of substance' state that substance sometimes takes the form of animals in whom there are feelings, images and thoughts. Further, these feeling, images and thoughts are held to be 'manifestations of substance'. What this means is that for Santayana the contents of consciousness are mental manifestations of physical events which take place in the body. Consciousness, in short, is the expression of bodily life (Common Sense 207). This is Santayana's epiphenomenalist theory of mind mentioned earlier. Under this theory - which is really the natural

development of Santayana's uncompromising materialism (Apologia 521) - matter is the only power and consciousness is but an epiphenomena of the psyche, a by-product of the biological/neurological processes of the brain. Of course, in the previous chapter it was noted that, according to Santayana, the contents of consciousness are essences. All the mind ever has before it is some essence, some qualitative term of thought. If one is conscious at all, then one is intuiting an essence. The given of consciousness, be it the given of some fantastic dream or of 'everyday types of consciousness', 'consists of pure essences' (Sprigge, Santayana 66). Hence, what is reflected in the epiphenomena of consciousness is always and only some essence.[4]

Taking these two ideas together, namely, Santayana's epiphenomenalism and his account of essences being the data of consciousness, we reach the conclusion that *moral* essences given in consciousness are merely the mental transcripts of the impulses of the psyche (Spirit 43). Thus, the blind 'moral action' of the body generates in consciousness the phenomenology of morality:

> Now the body is an instrument, the mind its function, the witness and reward of its operation. Mind is the body's entelechy, a

[4] To put the matter another way we could say that, as far as his philosophy of perception goes, Santayana is a critical and not a naive realist. We do not directly perceive the *object* of perception, which is a material object, but instead the act of perception is mediated by essences. Again, the contents of consciousness is always an immaterial essence.(See - *Three Proofs of Realism* in Essays in Critical Realism 163-184; and Scepticism and Animal Faith Ch.XVIII, p.164-181)

> value which accrues to the body when it has reached a certain perfection, of which it would be a pity, so to speak, that it should remain unconscious; so that while the body feeds the mind the mind perfects the body, lifting it and all its natural relations and impulses into the moral world, into the sphere of interests and ideas. (Common Sense 206)

Here we can emphasize two important points. The first is that it is only because of the psyche, and that one of the by-products (of the material organisation) of the psyche is consciousness, that moral terms enter into the world:

> Where there begin to be elastic and self-recovering organisms the ground is laid for moral experience...the instinct of self-preservation, struggling to maintain certain characters in being, causes those characters to be noticed and esteemed by the awakened mind. Good and evil enter the world.(Physical Order 201)

Put another way, we can say that the 'feelings of animals express their bodily habit' (Scepticism 64). Thus, on the one hand, while we can define the 'interests' of the psyche objectively in non-moral terms, such as Santayana's phrase of 'struggling to maintain certain characters in being', on the other hand we must recognise that at the level of spirit or consciousness the interests of the psyche are manifested in corresponding moral essences.

The second point we can emphasize is that the reflection in consciousness of the life of the psyche 'brings into play a radically new and irreducibly different mode of being' (Lach, Moral Philosophy 333-334). Consciousness, and the essences given in consciousness, because they do not belong to the realm of matter, cannot be accounted for under the category of existence. Since consciousness is an epiphenomena of the neurological processes of the brain, and since the essences given in intuition are themselves not part of physical reality, a type of being distinct from existence is necessarily invoked:

> the mind is a concomitant spiritual expression, invisible, imponderable, and epiphenomenal...for in it the moving unities and tensions of animal life are synthesised on quite another plane of being, into actual intuitions and feelings. (A General Confession 18)

It is at this point that we see how Santayana's ontological dichotomy provides the conceptual framework for his account of moral experience. While it is the category of existence which provides the conceptual framework for the *material* basis of morality, once we begin talking about consciousness and *moral terms* we introduce a distinct ontological category, viz., the realm of essence:

> ...moral essences, are so far from being units in nature, or special miraculous forces, that they sprawl over various realms of being.

> Their basis is in the realm of matter, since they are evidently relative to the interests and instincts of animals already existing....Yet moral essences pass over into the realm of spirit; they become objects of intuition...In essence they are irrelevant to their basis in nature, and for contemplation do not suggest it. (*The Projection of Values* 350-351)

In summary, for Santayana the moral world is part of the sphere of ideas (Common Sense 206). The phenomenology of moral experience, though generated by the biological processes of the body, is part of the epiphenomenal world of consciousness. 'Good' and 'evil', like all other essences given in consciousness, 'belong to a reality utterly immaterial and incapable of existing otherwise than speciously' (Essence 154).

Santayana's Aesthetic Account Of Consciousness And Its Value

Taken together, Santayana's epiphenomenalism and his phenomenology of moral experience amount to an aesthetic account of consciousness (A General Confession 24). With the denial of any type of 'mental machinery' (Matter 140), the role of consciousness becomes, in one sense, purely expressive. I have already discussed how intuitions of moral essences are expressive of the preferences and interests of the psyche. In the intuition of moral essences we find the

aesthetic nature of consciousness bringing to light a world of values; as Santayana states: 'good and evil enter the world' (Physical Order 201). Notice that the case is fundamentally the same for other types of essences given in consciousness, be it the sensation of pain or the complex flavour sensations of a fine wine. The intuition of such essences are only other types of aesthetic experience.[5] For example, Santayana's description of the phenomenology of moral experience is directly parallel to the apprehension or experience of 'beauty'. According to Santayana, the intuition of beauty can only be the *end* result of a 'convergence in the psyche of many assaults and many reactions, from far and near' (Essence 152). Thus, the intuition of beauty is, like the good, generated by and expressive of the psyche. Furthermore, as to the ontological status of beauty :

> The beautiful is itself an essence, an indefinable quality felt in many things which, however disparate they may be otherwise, receive this name by virtue of a special emotion, half wonder, half love, which is felt in their presence. The essence of the beautiful, when made an object of contemplation by itself, is rather misleading: like the good...it requires much dialectical and spiritual training to discern it in its

[5] Though, of course, we may take the intuition of such essences to be indicative of objects and events in the material world, and so the intuition of essences naturally acquires another function. see - Reason In Common Sense, chapter III and Scepticism and Animal Faith, chapter XVIII.)

> purity and in its fullness. At first the impetuous philosopher, seeing the world in so many places flowering into beauty, may confuse his physics with a subjective or teleological reference to the beautiful, thereby turning this essence, which marks a spiritual consummation, into a material power...[but]...The most material thing, in so far as it is felt to be beautiful, is instantly immaterialised, raised above external relations, concentrated and deepened in its proper being, in a word, sublimated into an essence. (Essence 8)

From such passages it is evident that the apprehension of beauty in consciousness is parallel to the apprehension of moral essences. Both examples indicate the aesthetic nature of consciousness. The occurrence of each essence in consciousness is expressive of and finds its origin in the psyche of some animal life. 'Beauty' and 'goodness', being essences or qualitative terms of thought, share the same ontological status.

The most important consequence of Santayana's aesthetic account of consciousness is that it brings values into the world, and in doing so consciousness acquires an intrinsic value of its own. The value in consciousness is derived by the simple fact that it is only because of consciousness that moral essences, and essences such as 'beauty', are ever realized. Without the life of consciousness there would only

be blind 'moral action' or mechanical behaviour, such as the moral action of the psyche's impulse to avoid injury. Consciousness, however, in expressing the preferences and interests of the psyche through moral (or other types of *dramatic*) essences, bestows worth on a mechanical world which intrinsically has 'no element of value whatever' (Santayana, The Sense of Beauty 13). Understood in this way, the aesthetic life of consciousness could otherwise be known as what Hume called the 'office of taste'. For Hume the 'office of taste' was that faculty which 'gives the sentiment of beauty and deformity, vice and virtue' (Hume, An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals 135). Santayana would agree with Hume that it is the 'office of taste' - or the presence of consciousness - which is responsible for 'gilding or staining all natural objects with the colours, borrowed from internal sentiment' (135). And, it is for this reason that Santayana finds an internal value in consciousness. Santayana's epiphenomenalism, coupled with his phenomenology of value, far from turning consciousness into an impotent and therefore useless phenomena, a dumb and shifting panorama of images and qualities, instead works to bestow value on to that which is intrinsically without value. For this reason:

> Santayana...cherished epiphenomenalism for bringing home to us the *true* dignity and worth of consciousness which does not consist in the work it accomplishes but in the moral significance it gives to what would otherwise be mere meaningless happening. For without

> spirit's living sense of the goodness of that at which the psyche aims, and the evil of its frustration, it would simply not matter how far the psyche in a certain sense 'prospered' or not. (Sprigge, Santayana 112).

Thus, the end result of Santayana's aesthetic account of consciousness is that it defines not only the sole function but also the sole value in consciousness.

Conclusion

Santayana's ontology determines a vision of the human condition insofar as it is the conceptual framework for his materialism and aesthetic view of mind. While the ontological category of existence frames all that Santayana has to say about the material world, moments of consciousness can only be explained by an appeal to the realm of essence. For Santayana, consciousness is an epiphenomena, an immaterial by-product of the neurological processes of the brain, while each 'moment of consciousness' is simply the intuition of some essence (Sprigge, Santayana 107).

It is through materialism and epiphenomenalism that the foundation for Santayana's moral theory is established. On the one hand, we have seen that it is Santayana's materialism, conceptually framed by the ontological category existence, which lays the foundation for his moral theory insofar as it qualifies the individual as a living organism, in a unified field of action or physical reality, endowed with a certain set of constitutional interests. These

constitutional interests, brought about by the presence of a psyche or the material organisation of some animal life, may be viewed at the material level as impulses to action. Far from constituting value, however, the operations of the psyche represent blind mechanical behaviour: the habit of matter in some physical organism.

On the other hand, Santayana's epiphenomenalism and aesthetic account of consciousness, conceptually framed by the ontological category of essence, is the necessary counterpart to his materialistic account of morality. According to Santayana, while morality has its basis in the material world, its true reality is found only in intuition. Under Santayana's epiphenomenalism, the moral essences given in consciousness represent the mental transcripts of the interests of the psyche and its impulses to action. In other words, it is in consciousness that 'the moving unities of animal life are synthesised on quite another plane of being, into actual intuitions and feelings' (A General Confession 18). Thus, Santayana's aesthetic account of consciousness, invoking a realm of being distinct from existence, produces a phenomenology of morality; 'good' and 'evil', finding their only - but *specious* - reality in the life of the mind, enter the world. Without the presence of consciousness, material reality would be but a mechanical process of 'meaningless happening' (Sprigge, Santayana 112). It is only the presence of consciousness which allows for the possibility of a truly moral life.

SANTAYANA'S MORAL THEORY

Introduction

The purpose of this section is to present a taxonomy and overview of the different aspects of Santayana's moral theory. In particular, I shall present four central positions which characterise Santayana's moral theory: metaethical non-naturalism, moral non-cognitivism, moral anti-realism and what may be called non-nihilism.

Santayana's metaethical position as to the nature of the quality good can best be described as non-naturalist, and as such similar to that of G.E.Moore. The case for Santayana as a non-naturalist rests on three premises: (1) Santayana's position that the quality good is an unanalysable essence (2) his position that the essence good is given only in intuition and (3) his position that the occurrence of the essence good is dependent upon natural properties or non-valuational facts. Taken together, these three positions place Santayana in the metaethical non-naturalist's camp.

Next, Santayana's metaethical position as to the ontological status of 'good' is anti-realist. While there are interpretations to the contrary, I believe that Santayana's fundamental position that moral essences cannot be instantiated in the realm of matter designate Santayana as a moral anti-realist. As I shall try to show, if we take Santayana's ontology seriously, then there is no room for moral realism.

Lending support to the case for Santayana as an anti-realist is his non-cognitivism. Santayana is most explicit on this matter. In regard to the analysis of moral judgments, Santayana clearly denies the presence of anything which could be called 'truth'. Moral judgments, according to Santayana, are expressive and not cognitive. To elucidate Santayana's position I shall note the similarities between Santayana and two other non-cognitivists, namely, A.J. Ayer and C.L. Stevenson.

Finally, I shall address the charge that Santayana's moral theory and its underlying ontology ultimately results in moral nihilism. I think this is an important objection to address, given that once tracing out the link between Santayana's ontology and moral theory, it would seem somewhat disappointing end to arrive at. However, as I shall argue, upon examining the various meanings of 'nihilism', we find that no definition of nihilism offers an appropriate descriptions of Santayana's moral theory.

Santayana And Metaethical Non-naturalism

Santayana's metaethical position can best be described as *non-naturalism*. Accepting this claim, we find that Santayana's metaethical position is similar to that of G.E. Moore, perhaps the most famous expositor of ethical non-naturalism. However, Santayana's reasons for maintaining that 'good' is a non-natural property, which ultimately rest on previous ontological and metaphysical presumptions, clearly diverge form those of Moore and have different implications.

In making the case for Santayana as a non-naturalist, I am going directly against certain interpretations of Santayana's writings, such as Timothy Sprigge's, who maintains that 'the complete contrast which held for Moore between natural 'objects', even indefinable ones such as pleasure, and the non-natural quality of *good* finds no echo in Santayana' (Sprigge, Santayana 104). As I shall try to show, I believe Sprigge is incorrect and there is good reason to place Santayana in the metaethical non-naturalist's camp.

Metaethical Non-Naturalism Defined

Part of the difficulty in interpreting Santayana's account of the good as representing 'non-naturalism' is fixing a meaning for that unfortunate term. In itself the term 'non-naturalism' conjures up mystical connotations; and one skeptically wonders what could possibly be the meaning of attributing 'non-naturalness' to any quality or object. Certainly Santayana would have disapproved of any arbitrary demarcation between the 'natural' and the so called 'non-natural'. Indeed, in one sense Santayana regarded everything given in experience or discovered in nature as perfectly natural, though it may be called otherwise by superstitious minds (Matter 196). Given these considerations, I think there is a very reasonable *prima facie* reaction against the introduction of the natural/non-natural dichotomy into Santayana's philosophy. And perhaps such considerations underlie Sprigge's judgment. However, I believe there is a definition of non-naturalism which clearly applies to

Santayana's assessment of the meaning and the nature of the 'good'.

The definition of non-naturalism I propose to use is derived from two different sources. Specifically, the writings of Menzel and Baldwin. This definition is comprised of three conditions. First, the ethical non-naturalist must say that the quality 'good' is not reducible or definable in terms of 'any descriptive, non-valuational, empirically verifiable properties' (Menzel, *Epiphenomenalism and Metaethical Non-Naturalism* 43). Second, the ethical non-naturalist must hold that judgments about the presence of the quality 'good' 'are made either through intuition or rational insight' (43). Third, the ethical non-naturalist is committed to the view that, in some sense, the non-natural property 'good' is dependent for its occurrence (in intuition or the physical world) on other 'natural' properties, these being the factual properties of science. The rationale for including this third criteria is twofold. First, by not including this third criteria the metaethical non-naturalist is forced to say that the property 'good' is some sort of strange metaphysical power, generating its own occurrence or presence while being entirely independent from the natural features of the universe.[6] Furthermore, Santayana's own ontological dichotomy, as we have seen, certainly rules out the possibility of positing any type of power or agency apart from matter. Second, this last criterion would seem to be

[6] Here the objections found in J.L.Mackie's 'Argument from Queerness' naturally come to mind. See - Mackie, Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong., pp. 38-42.

part of the working definition of non-naturalism. For instance, by including this third criterion I am following in line with Thomas Baldwin who states, in his paper *Ethical Non-Naturalism,* that: 'I shall take as fundamental to the thought that in some sense moral properties are non-natural because they are dependent but not reducible to the properties upon which they depend' (31). Thus, by including this third criteria of non-naturalism I believe that I have made the definition of non-naturalism coherent and broad enough so that it does not simply invoke confusion and so that most, if not all, ethical non-naturalists could accept it.

Before making my case for Santayana as an ethical non-naturalist, it will be useful to give a brief overview of G.E. Moore's position.

G.E.Moore and Metaethical Non-Naturalism

G.E.Moore is the philosophical figurehead of ethical non-naturalism. According to Moore, while trying to discover and understand The Good is the legitimate subject matter of ethics (Moore, Principia Ethica 8), 'good' itself is an indefinable predicate. The are two main reasons why the word 'good' can not be broken down and analysed into meaning some collection of properties. First, Moore states that 'good' has 'no definition because it is simple and has no parts' (9). Thus Moore claimed that 'good' is a word like 'yellow' or 'pleasure' in that it cannot be broken down or explained to someone who does not already know what it means. Second,

Moore maintained that anyone who attempts to define 'good' in terms of some natural property is automatically guilty of committing what he famously called the 'naturalistic fallacy'. It is with the naturalistic fallacy that Moore's claim that 'good' is indefinable finds support. Briefly, the naturalistic fallacy arises when someone fails to distinguish the property 'good' from objects and events designated as good. As the fallacy goes, whenever an ethical naturalist designates a set of natural properties as *the* meaning of 'good', and so states 'the meaning of 'good' is the natural property X' (say 'happiness' or 'satisfying one's desires'), the ethical non-naturalist can always turn and ask the question: 'But is the natural property X good?' (13-17).[7] Moore claimed that his naturalistic fallacy points to the fact that 'good' is both intractably *evaluative* and *undefinable*; that it is a unique property altogether different from the properties of natural science.

The Case For Santayana As A Metaethical Non-Naturalist

In line with Moore, Santayana explicitly agreed that 'good' is an unanalysable predicate. In Winds of Doctrine Santayana addressed this issue directly. Writing on Russell's latest moral theory, which at the time was heavily influenced by Moore's moral realism and non-naturalism, Santayana agreed that Russell (and Moore) were correct in stating that the

[7] Moore's Naturalistic Fallacy is otherwise known as the Open Question argument because whatever definition of good is given it remains an 'open question' whether the property the definition refers to is in fact good or does possess the property good.

predicate 'good' is indefinable and that all definitions of 'good' are 'but designations of the things to which this predicate is applied' (140). In another example, in a letter to a friend Santayana, discussing Moore's work, stated simply and in agreement with Moore that 'Good is a unique predicate' (McCormick, George Santayana 180). To be sure, Santayana's reasons for holding that 'good' is indefinable are not explicit. Sprigge suggests that Santayana likely accepted Moore's arguments that all 'so-called definitions of good really only specify classes of facts which their proponent personally judges to possess the abstract quality "good"' (Sprigge, Santayana 190). In other words, Santayana accepted Moore's naturalistic fallacy. While this may be true, it seems clear that Santayana's reasons for claiming that 'good' is an unanalysable property are buttressed by his doctrine of essence. For Santayana the word 'good' designates a specific essence: an essence capable of being contemplated in itself, 'in its purity and fullness' (Essence 8). As we saw in the first chapter of this thesis, by recognising 'good' as a specific essence, one capable of being contemplated in its purity, Santayana commits himself to the view that 'good' possess an eternal identity only with itself and thus a difference from every other essence (*Some Meanings of the Word 'Is'* 193). Given the implications of Santayana's doctrine of essence, 'good' must be recognised as a unique and unanalysable property: it isn't anything other than itself. Perhaps because Santayana always operated within the conceptual framework of his ontology, and in this case the

implications of his doctrine of essence, Santayana considered the fact that 'good' is unanalysable a 'trifling observation'. (Winds 140). Indeed, that 'good' is unanalysable is such an obvious truth, Santayana remarks, that 'we might perhaps have been absolved from asking the question' (140).

Of course, in agreeing with Moore that 'good' is unanalysable, Santayana is only meeting the first criterion of ethical non-naturalism. The second criterion of non-naturalism, as stated above, maintains that any judgment about the presence of the non-natural property good is made through either intuition or rational insight. In the second chapter I discussed Santayana's account of the phenomenology of morality, and from that discussion it should be clear that for Santayana any judgment about the presence or non-presence of the property 'good' is strictly a matter of one being aware of what intuitions one is presently having. Any judgment about the presence or non-presence of the property 'good' constitutes an appeal to intuition or rational insight because, according to Santayana's view, the quality 'good' is given only in intuition. 'Good' and 'evil', for Santayana, are part of the sphere of ideas (Common Sense 206); they find their only reality by being part of the epiphenomenal world of consciousness; they 'belong to a reality utterly immaterial and incapable of existing otherwise than speciously' (Essence, 154). Put concisely, the world of morality is a product of the mind. Santayana writes:

> ...goods and evils, though created by instincts

> and interests ingrained in animals, are absolute qualities to intuition. (The Projection of Values 333)

And in another example we find Santayana echoing Spinoza's dictum when he writes:

> In removing consciousness we have removed the possibility of worth. (Sense of Beauty 18)

From these considerations it is evident that Santayana follows the non-naturalist in maintaining that judgments about the presence or non-presence of the property 'good' is done through intuition or rational insight.

The third criteria of metaethical non-naturalism states that the non-natural property 'good' is dependent for its occurrence on other 'natural' properties, these being the factual properties of science. Again, keeping in mind the account of the phenomenology of morality given in the previous section, it is clear that Santayana's own position repeats the third criteria of non-naturalism. The occurrence of moral essences in intuition is the by-product of an individual's physiological constitution and the neurological process of the brain - all of which are natural facts. Santayana writes that to ask *why* anything is 'good' - in other words, to inquire into why the essence of 'good' is given in consciousness - is to inquire into the natural foundation of the 'good':

> Why any one values anything at all, or anything in particular, is a question of physics; it asks for the causes of interest,

> judgment, and desire. To esteem a thing good is to express certain affinities between that thing and the speaker...the causes of morality, good or bad, are physical, seeing that they are causes. (Santayana, Reason and Science 214-215)

Indeed, Santayana considered the view that the presence of property 'good' is somehow unconditioned 'astonishing' (Winds 141); and in one sense the ultimate message of his moral philosophy is that the property 'good' is *not* an absolute property that 'attaches to things for no reason or cause, and according to no principles of distribution' (141). For Santayana, while 'good' may be indefinable, its presence in intuition is not unconditioned. To elucidate this point Santayana finds an analogy between the intuition of moral essences and the intuition of colours. Both essences, he says, are indefinable; but this does not mean the intuition of either is unconditioned. Like the property 'good':

> Green is an indefinable predicate, and the specific quality of it can be given only in intuition; but it is a *quality that things acquire under certain conditions*, so much so that the same bit of grass, at the same moment, may have it from one point of view and not from another. (Winds 141 - italics mine).

Contrary to being 'unconditioned', the occurrence of the property good depends on natural facts; certain conditions must be met before it occurs in consciousness. In sum, moral

essences, though given in consciousness, have their basis in the realm of matter (*The Projection of Values* 350). And with this observation one may conclude that Santayana's account of the property good and meaning of the word 'good' is fully in accordance with metaethical non-naturalism.

Santayana And Moral Anti-Realism

Perhaps the most profound implication of Santayana's ontological and metaphysical presuppositions on his moral theory is the resulting moral anti-realism. The fact that there can be no *raison d'etre* for matter, given Santayana's contention that existence is a surd; and the fact that Santayana maintains that moral qualities possess only a specious reality because they are given only in consciousness, clearly work toward ushering in moral anti-realism. Though there are interpretations to the contrary, I believe the preponderance of evidence is on the side of Santayana being completely at odds with the main tenets of moral realism.

Moral Realism Defined

The debate between moral realism and anti-realism is currently in vogue and there is much discussion of what the moral realist must and what the moral realist may or may not maintain. I believe that Richard N. Boyd, in his article 'How to Be a Moral Realist', presents the essential convictions of the moral realist. Following Boyd, one may say the essential convictions of the moral realist are as follows:

1. Moral statements are the sort of statements which are true or false.
2. The truth or falsity of moral statements is largely independent of our moral opinions, theories, etc.
3. It is possible to obtain 'moral knowledge' (Richard N. Boyd, *How to Be a Moral Realist* 182)

Of course, the important implication of these tenets of moral realism is, as Boyd notes, that moral terms, such as 'good' and 'evil', correspond to *real* - that is objective - properties in the physical world (182). Indeed, this claim, it is fair to say, is the idol of moral realism and what the moral realist sees as having the greatest effect on our ontology, epistemology, semantics and general outlook on life.[8] Lastly we can say that, given this statement of what the moral realist is committed to, we find there is nothing which prevents the metaethical non-naturalist from being a moral realist. Indeed, such was Moore's position. Moore maintained metaethical non-naturalism, while also holding that the simple and non-natural property 'good' is a *real* property possessed by material objects (Sayre-McCord, *The Many Moral Realisms* 3). Thus, if Santayana is in fact a moral anti-realist, one must find justification for this position in areas other than his apparent metaethical non-naturalism.

---

[8] For a statement of this view see p.2, and esp. footnote 2, of *The Many Moral Realisms*, by Geoffrey Sayre-McCord.

Misinterpreting Santayana As A Moral Realist

Perhaps the best way to show that Santayana is not a moral realist is to reveal how those who argue that he is go wrong. There is at least one representative example to work with [9], coming from a major Santayana scholar: Henry Samuel Levinson.

In his article *Santayana and Making Claims on the Spiritual Truth about Matters of Fact* Levinson argues that in Santayana's philosophy 'making moral...truth claims proceeds in much the same way that making truth claims about other sorts of conditions, i.e., in terms of evidence and inference' (9). Thus, when it comes to making truth claims, Levinson finds no relevant fact/value distinction in Santayana's philosophy . By arguing that there is no relevant fact/value distinction when it come to making truth claims, Levinson is effectively arguing for moral realism; he is trying to harness Santayana with the convictions of the moral realist. In accordance with the tenets of moral realism given above, Levinson's thesis on Santayana's moral philosophy is that moral statements, insofar as they are similar in kind to factual statements, are the sort of statements which can be true or false. Further, Levinson also wants to say that the truth or falsity of moral statements is independent of our moral opinions, given that I may know the truth or falsity of

---

[9] For another account of Santayana as a moral realist, see Anthony David's (Texas A&M University) thesis of 1991: The Ethical Relativism of George Santayana. David's argument for Santayana as a moral realist is comprehensive, but it seems at times ambiguous on the distinction between the objectivity of constitutional interests and the *objective reality* of moral properties, which I take to be the underlying meaning of moral realism. Somewhat paradoxically, David also argues, and here I am in full agreement, that Santayana is a non-cognitivist.

a moral judgment while you may not (p.10); and, finally, that moral judgments are not dependent for their truth or falsity on our opinions, consensus or public agreement (p.11).

The justification for Levinson's thesis comes from two quarters. First, Levinson states that 'Santayana maintained that a claim about an object or objective...is true, no matter how arbitrary its terms, if the claim expresses a true relation in which these circumstances stand to the self' (9). Under this interpretation, to say that 'a burning match is hot' would be true because when I touch it I have the sensation of a burning pain. Though the terms of the proposition are subjective - or as Santayana would say symbolic - that is, there is no sensation of 'pain' or 'hotness' *in* the burning match, the statement is nevertheless true given that the statement represents, in some sense, an apt description of the burning match in relation to myself. Similarly, Levinson wants to argue, if I were to say 'X is good' and regard this statement as true, under Santayana's terms we need only cash this out as meaning that the X in question comprises a set of characteristics to which my present self and its constitutional interests are directed. Thus, my claim that 'X is good' expresses a true relation of X to myself, just like the burning match and my calling it hot. It is important to note that Levinson fully accepts Santayana's dictum that 'the nerve of moral judgment is preference' (Matter 473), and that what one thinks of as good or bad has its origin in one's constitutional interests. Levinson finds no problem with this aspect of Santayana's

moral theory. What is really important, according to Levinson, is the fact that we can still adhere to a belief in the reality of moral truth, given that moral judgments are true or false depending of whether or not the object or event in question stands in a certain relation to ourselves and our interests. For Levinson, if I presently have a constitutional interest Y, and if X is such an object which could satisfy Y, then my judgment that 'X is good' is true.

Second, the fact that under Santayana's analysis goods and evils are generated by the constitutional interests of the individual, by the material organisation of the psyche, and that this would seem to sweep in a plurality of values for a plurality of different psyche's, does not deter Levinson. In Levinson's opinion, a plurality of individuals with different constitutional interests does not, in his words, 'banish the possibility of overlapping consensus' (9). What Levinson appears to be saying here is that though life forms are 'variable and modifiable', we can still hope for and find overarching moral truths that spread themselves across the entire moral community. While life forms may vary the organization of psyches, we can still expect a certain unanimity of constitutional interests. Levinson articulates his position concisely when he writes:

> I really know that genocide is a vice because, as Santayana put it, 'knowledge is a relation of living bodies to their environment,' [Obiter Scripta:180] and I maintain a justified belief that 'genocide is a vice' is

> as apt a description of that relation as is 'the earth is roundish.' What makes it an apt description is that, without denying either the plural or antinomial character of human impulses, interests, and desires, it captures a way in which that diversity overlaps, only sacrificing an interest or desire antagonistic to the actual moral and spiritual overlap I am trying appreciatively to capture. (10)

In sum, if the moral judgments we make express a genuine relation between ourselves and the object or event deemed good, and if this relation holds for all individuals despite differences in our psyches, then we have established what amounts to absolute moral truths or, as Lach writes, 'objective and eternal verities concerning what is good and bad for every one everywhere' (Lach, *Moral Truth or Empirical Truth about Morality* 15). Thus we find that Levinson's argument for the reality of moral truths amounts to a case for Santayana being a moral realist.

In order to criticize this interpretation of Santayana one must address Levinson's claim that if I make a moral judgment about an object or event, and that object or event does in fact stand in some relation to myself, capable of satisfying my interests and not betraying my vision of it as good, then we have what amounts to objective *moral truth*. Let us employ an example. Say I make the moral judgment 'Listening to music is good'. We must first add that I am not saying listening to music is good for any instrumental

reason, such as removing the tedium of silence or drowning out the din of traffic noise. This use of the word 'good' would, of course, be a factual judgment; but I am making a proper moral judgment and not making a factual assertion about the uses of music. Finally, let us remember that, under Santayana's analysis, in order for me to make the judgment 'Listening to music is good' - and in a *sincere* way so that I am not merely repeating words like a parrot - it must be the case that my psyche is organised in such a way that every time I hear music I concomitantly have the intuition of the essence good. Now we may ask: under Santayana's analysis of moral experience where might we find the moral truth?

First, the judgment 'Listening to music is good' is certainly *not* true because music possesses the moral essence goodness. If this is Levinson's claim then he has failed to consider the full implications of Santayana's ontology. For Santayana, 'goodness' is simply not an 'intrinsic or primary quality' (Winds 147). Hence, and as Santayana explicitly puts the matter: 'there would seem to be no conceivable object or reality in reference to which any type of morality [or moral judgment] could be called *true*' (Matter 474). Goodness is an essence given only in consciousness. Or, as Lach states: 'moral essences repeat no part of the standard comprehensive description of any fact; they cannot be instantiated by matter' (Lach, *Santayana's Moral Philosophy* 336). Therefore, it makes no sense to say that a moral judgment like 'Listening to music is good' is true, because moral qualities are not instantiated in the realm of matter. In regard to our

example, there is simply no moral essence which can be part of the internal nature of music. At the physical level music is but a collection of sound waves, and there is nothing intrinsically moral about sound waves. Once the sound waves strike my eardrum I may, along with hearing music, have the concomitant intuition of goodness: but to then claim that that the sound waves themselves possess this moral essence, as Levinson would apparently have us do, is to commit a category error: it would be to falsely project a portion of the realm of essence, specifically moral essences, onto the the realm of matter. Is is only in primitive or poetic thought, Santayana writes, that 'moral essences should be treated as if they had a personal unity and material subsistence' (Projection of Values 350).

Second, it is also false that the judgment 'Listening to music is good' expresses a moral truth simply because in order for such a judgment to be made in all sincerity it must be the case that music stands in a certain relation to me and my constitutional interests. Levinson claims that a moral judgment like 'Listening to music is good' can be true because the property good, which I intuit when I hear music, is an apt *symbol* expressing something about the nature of my psyche in its relation to music. Here Levinson may avoid the charge that he is attributing moral properties to physical objects. He would also seem to be obviously playing up a pragmatic interpretation of Santayana's philosophy and the nature of truth claims. Without stepping into the debate about just how far Santayana may or may not be regarded as a

pragmatist, it is clear that although a moral judgment expresses some positive interest the psyche has in relation to some object in question, given that Santayana thinks that these are indeed the necessary conditions for such a judgment to occur in the first place, this fact does not establish a moral truth. What is the moral truth, in other words, about having a positive interest in, pro-attitude toward or physical affinity with some object? Clearly Santayana's answer would be: *nothing*. For Santayana our ultimate moral judgments simply express 'preferences we feel; and [thus] it can be neither correct nor incorrect to feel them' (Winds 144). Thus, Levinson is wrong to say that moral judgments can be true or false because they are 'apt symbols' expressing some true relation of the self to the object or action in question.

To repeat, while it is true, as I have tried to stress, that Santayana thinks morality has a naturalistic basis in the dynamic relations of myself to other objects and the organization of my psyche, there is nothing morally true or false about these relations or the psyche's organisation. They are part of the material reality and describable in the language of science. My moral judgments may thus express something about myself and my character: but they are not cognitive. If I say that 'Listening to music is good', someone may respond by claiming that I am physically constituted such that I have the capacity to appreciate music. And, this would be a true fact. But, in regard to the *preference* for music itself, which may be implicit in my

judgment about music, there is nothing about it which can be either true or false, right or wrong. In Santayana's words: 'To speak of the truth of an ultimate good would be a false collocation of terms; an ultimate good is chosen, found, or aimed at; it is not opined' (Winds 144).

Third, Levinson's claim that moral truths may be somehow absolute or universal because certain claims may comply with our 'overlapping nature(s) and needs better than the relevant options' (Levinson, *Spiritual Truth* 11) is also false. Returning to our example, let us suppose that everyone who exists, ever existed or will exist could agree with the moral judgment 'Listening to music is good'. Now, Levinson is correct in saying that it is possible that everyone *may* vocally assent to this claim; or indeed perhaps only I alone know that everyone *would* agree if only they were enlightened as to their constitutional needs and interests. In this later case, as Levinson correctly states, I alone 'know more and know better than everybody else about our overlapping desires and interests, understood in the light of our overlapping natures and needs' (11). But what does this show? Certainly the fact that everyone happens to agree with the claim 'Listening to music is good' does not create a universal moral truth. All this fact shows is that everyone everywhere is physically constituted such that in connection with listening to music the essence good is present in consciousness. And, as Lach states, this 'cosmic accident' reveals a brute fact about the history of the world; an empirical and not a moral truth or eternal value (Lach, Moral

Truth 15); or, as Santayana puts the matter, 'as if the constitutional unanimity of all human animals, supposing it existed, could tend to show that the good they agreed to recognise was independent of their constitution' (Winds 145). In fairness to Levinson, Santayana does at times offer misleading terminology when writing about these matters. For example, Santayana employs the term 'true morally' to indicate a moral judgment, such as 'Listening to music is good', that is 'true' in the sense that most people would agree with it. But, 'true morally' for Santayana does not really mean much more than 'emotional unanimity': it does not mean that the moral judgment is true because the object or action in question is intrinsically good, or because the animal bias expressed in the judgment is somehow 'true'. Indeed, given the following passage from The Realm of Truth, it is quite difficult to see how one could label Santayana a moral realist:

> In strictness we might even say that every moral judgment is repugnant to the truth, and that if consciousness fundamentally gave voice to truth rather than to life, and to the animal partiality involved in life, moral sentiment would be impossible. The cry, *How beautiful!* or *How good!* may be sincere, and it may be applauded, but it is never true. If sincere such a cry is also never false, even if not re-echoed by the public conscience; but because the public feeling that contradicts it

> can also never be true, but at best also sincere. Where sentiment is diffused and unanimous, if one person utters those exclamations, all the rest may no doubt murmur, *How true!* And indeed, to that extent, the judgment will then be *true morally*: that is, it will express the bias of human nature. (Truth 479-480).

In conclusion, Levinson's claim that for Santayana making moral claims proceeds in the same way as factual claims is false. Moral judgments are simply not made in the same manner as factual judgments. And, in light of his ontology, any attempt at labelling Santayana a moral realist is doomed to failure. There is nothing in the realm of matter to which moral essences correspond. Nor can we say there is anything true or false about the animal bias which underlies a sincere moral judgment. And, lastly, we cannot claim either of these two anti-realist claims would be retracted in the event of unanimity in moral judgment.

Santayana And Moral Non-Cognitivism

Perhaps the best indication that Santayana is not a moral realist is his moral non-cognitivism. Santayana's analysis of moral judgments as having a *lack of reference to anything which could be called true* (Truth 474) places Santayana in the moral non-cognitivist's camp. The general thesis of non-cognitivism is that moral judgments are not descriptive, and hence neither true nor false. Instead of

being descriptive, the moral non-cognitivist will sometimes say that moral judgments function either as interjections, such as Ayer who holds that moral judgments express, with varying degrees of passion, only moral sentiments (Ayer, Language, Truth and Logic 107); or the moral non-cognitivist may say that moral judgments function as imperatives and prescriptions, such as C.L.Stevenson, who holds that the primary purpose of ethical terms and judgments is to function as *instruments* in the 'complicated interplay and readjustment of human interests' (Stevenson, *The Emotive Meaning of Ethical Terms* 81).

It is clear that Santayana maintains a moral non-cognitivism similar to both Ayer and Stevenson. For example, Ayer writes that a moral judgment such as "Stealing money is wrong' has no factual meaning - that is, expresses no proposition which can be either true or false' (Ayer, Language 107). For Ayer, 'in every case in which one would commonly be said to be making an ethical judgment, the function of the relevant ethical word is purely "emotive". It is used to express feeling about certain objects, but not to make any assertion about them' (108). Thus Ayer's analysis echoes Santayana's statement that the cry *How good!* may be sincere, 'but it is never true' (Truth 73).[10] Great sincerity or intensity of feeling is, of course, not equivalent to truth. Accordingly, Santayana writes that we may forgive

[10] I say that 'Ayer's analysis of moral judgments echoes Santayana's' for the reason that Language, Truth and Logic was first published in 1936, while Santayana's non-cognitivism is clearly evident in his first publication The Sense of Beauty, 1896. (see - The Sense of Beauty pp.13-16)

those who righteously claim their moral judgments are the *true* moral maxims may be forgiven for merely making a 'technical solecism', but, he cautions, there is a danger: for 'when passion usurps the name of truth, the very idea of truth is tarnished and defiled' (69).

As for Stevenson, there is evidence that Santayana also maintained the position that that moral judgments, though having no truth value, may precipitate action in others through the persuasive force of moral language. Ayer, it should be noted, also accepted the position that it is 'possible to influence other people by a suitable choice of emotive language' (Ayer, Language 22). However, I take Stevenson as putting more emphasis on - and so is more representative of - the position that the 'primary function of moral words...is to redirect the attitudes of others so that they accord more fully with our own' (MacIntyre, A Short History of Ethics 257). One may read Santayana as agreeing with Stevenson's claim that moral judgments may have persuasive power over others given Santayana's assertion that 'expression makes thought a power' (Reasons in Science 180). Moral judgments may thus be persuasive because, being 'an overflow of the physical basis of thought' and 'an audible gesture', moral words acquire a dynamic function (181). Hence, like Stevenson, Santayana would seem to be aligned with the position that though moral judgments have no truth value, they may be persuasive, given that language itself has a dynamic function. And thus we see another connection between Santayana and the tradition of moral non-cognitivism.

Of course, by interpreting Santayana's analysis of moral judgments as non-cognitivist, it would seem to be the case that *any* basis for viewing Santayana as a moral realist is completely undermined. As noted above, the first criterion for moral realism is that moral statements are the types of statements which can be true or false, and Santayana denies this status to moral judgments. Not allowing that moral claims when 'literally construed', as Sayre-McCord puts the matter, are 'literally true or false', Santayana cannot even adopt an 'error theory' which states that while moral judgments should be given a cognitivist interpretation, all moral judgments for one reason or another are false (Sayre-McCord, Moral Realisms pp.5-13). With this considerations it would certainly seem that the case for Santayana as a moral realist is completely closed.

The Denial Of Nihilism

The last issue I would like to address is the charge that Santayana's moral theory, with its underlying ontology, ultimately cashes out in moral nihilism.

Is Santayana's philosophy nihilistic? I think the answer to this question is an unqualified 'yes', but *only if* one accepts a loaded definition of nihilism. This definition, as I shall argue, is based on unwarranted presuppositions by those who demand realism in ethics. Alternatively, if we abandon this definition of nihilism, and consider its other connotations, we find that Santayana's philosophy does not conclude in nihilism. The moral theory generated by

Santayana's ontology does not necessarily lead one into moral anarchy or reflections on the meaninglessness of human existence. Indeed, I believe the moral theory generated by Santayana's ontology, far from leading to nihilism, allows one to live meaningfully and rationally . Although the depth of the issues raised by the charge of nihilism go far beyond the scope of this thesis, I hope in what follows to at least make clear that the charge of nihilism is misdirected.

First, what is 'nihilism'? Robert G. Olson, in his article *Nihilism,* states that nihilism has in fact a double meaning. 'On the one hand', Olson writes, 'it is widely used to denote the doctrine that moral norms or standards cannot be justified by rational argument. On the other hand, it is widely used to denote a mood of despair over the emptiness or triviality of human existence' (Olson, *Nihilism* 515). That said, I think we could add a third definition of nihilism, which may be roughly equated with 'moral anarchy'. Here we would call a moral theory nihilistic if, once adopting it or taking the tenets of the moral theory in question seriously, the life prospects for an individual would be something along Hobbe's line of 'nasty, brutish and short'. Addressing these three meanings of 'nihilism' separately, we can examine how far Santayana may be considered a nihilist.

As we have seen, Santayana's ontology determines his moral theory insofar as the essence good can have no instantiation in the realm of matter; it is an essence with only a specious reality in the epiphenomena of consciousness. While the occurrence of the essence good in consciousness has

a causal explanation, we must never hypostatise the good and so invoke the dogmas of realism and absolute ethics. We have also noted Santayana's non-cognitivism in regard to moral judgments; while moral judgments may express an individual's attitude or disposition, they cannot be true or false, right or wrong.

As Menzel correctly observes, this type of moral theory amounts to a type of 'no conflict relativism', which 'ignores much of moral discourse, where disagreement seems genuine' (Menzel, Epiphenomenalism 54). It is a 'no conflict' relativism because, since good and evils are generated by *relative interests* of some psyche, there arises the possibility of unresolvable moral conflict. I may value X and you may not: both estimations will be true to our relative natures, and thus neither of us are 'wrong'. Once we have moral disagreement we cannot appeal to the facts of the matter to discover what is *really good* or *really bad,* because moral essences do not reside in the realm of matter. Nor can we condemn an individual for making the moral judgments they do. We have examined Santayana's proposition that the 'ultimate intuitions on which ethics rests are not debatable' (Winds 144). An individual's moral judgments are ultimately a product of their body's material organization. To condemn an individual's moral judgments is thus to denounce a portion of the realm of matter as being somehow 'wrong' or 'immoral': it is to criticize a psyche for being the type of psyche it is. Of course, in such a case the critical moralist is merely expressing their own animal instincts and bias; animal

instincts and bias, we may add, which are as contingent and blameless as those he condemns. The critical moralist may be impassioned, but his argument, in the end, amounts to an *argumentum ad hominem* - the only type of argument, Santayana writes, possible in ethics (Winds 147).

With these considerations in mind, it seems clear that Santayana is guilty of holding the position that moral norms or standards cannot be justified by rational argument. There are no moral truths or universal moral norms to which one may appeal. And, if this is nihilism, then Santayana is a nihilist. However, it is clear that 'nihilism' in this sense carries with it an dubious presupposition. The issue is this: this particular charge of nihilism comes at the heels of the presupposition, as Olson notes, that one cannot 'regard any moral code as adequately justified unless there is some standard or touchstone more universal than pure feeling or social pressure to which it may be shown to conform, (Olson, *Nihilism* 516). Thus, the question becomes, in regard to Santayana, that while he may be by definition a nihilist if we take 'nihilism' to simply mean the denial of ultimate and rational justification in ethics, must we consequently regard Santayana's *moral theory* as unjustified?

I think the reply to this question is that this charge of nihilism is merely an expression of the bias of those philosophers who are party to the realist tradition. Hence, the charge is unwarranted. It is one thing to observe that a moral theory allows for unresolvable moral disagreements, as does Santayana's 'no conflict' relativism, but it is quite

another thing to then regard such a theory as unjustified and hence 'nihilistic' in this loaded sense. To those who think that morality is meaningless unless moral disagreement is ultimately resolvable by appeal to overarching moral truths or some sort of universal justification, one may ask: why must the tenets of an ethical theory be universalizable to be meaningful? And: why must our moral judgments be an expression of something beyond our human nature in order for them to be relevant? Clearly there would seem to be no good answer these questions. The antinihilist can only beg the question by repeating the realist's position that without moral truth or categorical imperatives, then ethics is an empty enterprise. It is evident that Santayana had little patience for those philosophers who dogmatically put forth the criteria of realism. These philosophers, Santayana writes:

> seem to feel that unless moral and aesthetic judgments are expressions of objective truth, and merely expressions of human nature, they stand condemned of hopeless triviality. A judgment is not trivial, however, because it rests on human feeling; on the contrary, triviality consists in abstraction from human interests...(Santayana, Little Essays 3)[11]

Taking up Santayana's position, in reply to the philosophers who allege that a moral theory is fundamentally unjustified

---

[11] This quote from Santayana's Little Essays was taken from Santayana:Thinkers of Our Time, by Noel O'Sullivan

if it does not appeal to absolute truth or universal justification, one may argue that keeping morality in the home sphere of animal interests and regarding it as the product of human nature does not show ethics to be an empty enterprise, but indeed reveals its true relevancy. Thus, the first charge of nihilism in its loaded sense would seem unwarranted.

Before addressing the second sense of nihilism, we turn to the criticism that Santayana's moral theory is nihilistic in the (third) sense that it opens the door for moral anarchy. If true, this would seem to be a genuine worry; and it is Munson's when he writes:

> We can be swept away by the noble emotions evoked by Santayana's high sounding phrases. "Socratic self-knowledge," which "signifies only complete, enlightened, ultimate sincerity" (*Realms*, 480, 484), should actually be translated as the feminine eloquence of the psyche, blind to everything but her home interests. (*Realms*, 788) We ought to seriously reflect on Santayana's morality in its consequences, which are far from reassuring. If that which creates morality is "not facts, nor the consequences of facts, but human terror or desire feeling its way amid those facts and those consequences" (*Realms*, 478), what will happen to all of us if some psyche no longer feels the creeping or shrinking of

> the flesh which has made murder criminal? What a chaos is in store for us, since we do not know the scope of our own nature, or its possible harmonies, unless we yield to each of our passions in turn and count the scars of those experiments! (*Dominations* 159) (Munson, The Essential Wisdom of George Santayana 57)

While I think Munson's caveat is well taken, Santayana has a response.[12] To be sure, in regard to Munson's query as to what are we to say to the individual who no longer recoils at the thought of murder, torture, etc., if we are dealing with a genuine psychopath, whose every impulse is to kill and torture other human beings, to the extent that there are no competing impulses to the contrary in the individual's psyche, then there is nothing under Santayana's philosophy which can be said. While we may call such an individual evil, and from our moral perspective regard them and their actions as utterly ghastly and hateful, we cannot blame them for their nature. Such is Santayana's thought when he writes:

> Ethics, if it is to be a science and not a piece of arbitrary legislations, cannot pronounce it sinful in a serpent to be a

[12] In fact, I think Santayana's immediate response to Munson would be a direct assertion to the contrary. In Santayana's opinion, a recognition of the relativity of values and an acceptance of moral anti-realism leads not to moral anarchy but to greater *tolerance*. For instance, in Winds of Doctrine Santayana writes 'I cannot help thinking that a consciousness of the relativity of values, if it became prevalent, would tend to render people more truly social than would a belief that things have intrinsic and unchangeable values, no matter what the attitude of any one to them may be. If we said that goods, including the right distribution of goods, are relative to specific natures, moral warfare would continue, but not with poisoned arrows'. (Winds of Doctrine 151)

> serpent; it cannot even accuse a barbarian of loving a wrong life, except in so far as the barbarian is supposed capable of accusing himself of barbarism. If he is a perfect barbarian he will be inwardly, and therefore morally justified. The notion of a barbarian will then be accepted by him as that of a true man, and will form the basis of whatever rational judgments or policy he attains. It may still seem dreadful to him to be a serpent, as to be a barbarian might seem dreadful to a man imbued with liberal interests. (Science 234)

However, while Santayana admits the possibility of such evil natures, and history has not been lacking in them, it is also evident that Santayana considers such individuals the exceptions that make the rule, and that humankind in general is composed of somewhat more agreeable natures. For example, while Santayana writes 'there is bound to be a margin of the unfit - too bad...to keep in step with any well organised society' (Santayana, Persons and Places 543), he also writes that there is 'in all animal economy, a certain nucleus of self-preserving instincts and habits, a normal constitution of society' (543); and, in a similar vain he states that: 'it is evident that in so far as human nature is distinguishable, and its innate demands constant, there will be a nucleus of principle and aspiration common to all men' (Physical Order 206). The conclusion we can draw from these assertions is

that Munson's charge of Santayana's moral philosophy raising the possibility of moral anarchy is false. If one took Santayana's moral theory seriously, society would not erupt into a murderous frenzy. The fact of the matter is that there exists a general human nature which is, in the upshot, gregarious and non-violent (Santayana, Reason in Society 35-46).[13] Thus Santayana's moral theory is not 'nihilistic' in the sense that it leads to moral anarchy. Indeed, by resting morality upon human interests and human nature, the plight of mankind would seem to be on relatively secure ground, especially given the fact that, in Santayana's eyes, there is no alternative standard to which we can appeal.

Lastly we turn to the question of whether or not Santayana's moral philosophy, and in particular its ontological foundation, leads to despair or a sense of the meaningless of life. Admittedly, this definition of nihilism raises, as Olson states, somewhat less of a technically philosophical issue than a psychological or sociological one (Olson, *Nihilism* 516). However, regardless of the nature of the question, I don't think it true that Santayana's philosophy is 'nihilistic' in the sense that it leads one to despair. There are two reasons. First, Santayana's moral philosophy and ontology do not rule out the possibility of realising the good or the beautiful or any other moral or aesthetic essences. Santayana only denies that such essences have instantiation in matter. Second, Santayana sets out a definite, if not general, approach to the 'good life' or what

[13] For another statement of this view see John Lach's *Santayana's Moral Philosophy*, p.341.

may otherwise be described as a healthy and happy existence. Thus, Santayana's philosophy is not pessimistic, denying that human being can ever attempt to live reasonably or happily.

Before touching on these two responses, we can say at the outset that Santayana personally did not think that his philosophy led to nihilistic despair. His position is that, while accepting the fact that we are causal agents in the realm of matter, that moral essences have only specious reality and that goods and evils are relative to individual natures may be a sobering thought, it need not lead us to suicide or banish our joy in life. Santayana writes:

> I laugh a great deal, laugh too much, my friends tell me; and those who don't understand me think that this merriment contradicts my disillusioned philosophy. *They*, apparently, would never laugh if they admitted that life is a dream, that men are animated automata, and that the forms of the good and beautiful are as various and as evanescent as the natural harmonies that produce them. They think they would collapse or turn to stone or despair and commit suicide. But they probably would do no such thing: they would adapt themselves to the reality, and laugh. (Persons and Places 156).

With these words it is apparent that Santayana recognised no necessary connection between his philosophy and nihilism.

Does the fact that moral essences have only a specious

reality lead one to nihilism? Here we are again reminded of the presuppositions of realism. But, as we have seen, we need not accept them. In the previous section we saw that, for Santayana, the value in consciousness is derived from the fact that it is only because of consciousness that moral and aesthetic essences are ever realized. Beauty and Goodness are given only in intuition. However, given that we are sentient creatures, it is difficult to see why this fact should not be a source of joy rather than despair. For example, take the following passage from Realms of Being in which Santayana describes the act of momentarily dropping our preoccupation with facts and having the intuition of beauty:

> As I was jogging to market in my village cart, beauty has burst upon me and the reins have dropped from my hands. I am transported, in a certain measure, into a state of trance. I see with extraordinary clearness, yet what I see seems strange and wonderful, because I no longer look in order to understand, but only in order to see. I have lost my preoccupation with facts, and am contemplating an essence. (Essence 6-7).

This passage expresses the fact that our inner lives will not suffer if moral and aesthetic essence are given only in intuition; our experiences of 'goodness' or 'beauty' will not be of a lesser 'beauty' or 'goodness'. They are still the essences they are: eternal parts of the realm of essence and thus always potential objects of contemplation. Furthermore,

as Sprigge notes, one may think that ultimately it would make no qualitative difference to our inner lives if moral essences had material instantiation, for 'if there were a good somehow present in the intrinsic essence of objects it would be of no possible interest to us, who can only be attracted by a good which we intuit' (Sprigge, Santayana 192). With these considerations it would seem clear that, even though Santayana designates only a specious reality to moral and aesthetic essences, this does not empty our lives of value.

Finally, Santayana's philosophy is not nihilistic because it throws one into a state of all consuming pessimism. In other words, there is no reason to think that, upon taking Santayana's moral theory seriously, we would be forced to abandon all hope of leading happy or fulfilling lives. Indeed, contrary to this thought, Santayana offers explicit criteria of how to live rationally:

> What is requisite for living rationally? I think the conditions may be reduced to two: First, self-knowledge, the Socratic key to wisdom; and second, sufficient knowledge of the world to perceive what alternatives are open to you and which of them are favourable to your true interests. (Persons and Places 542)

Why does Santayana specify these two conditions? The answer by now may be obvious. First, as we saw in the previous chapter of this thesis, the psyche is the 'key to everything

moral' (Soliloquies 219); since the psyche represents the material organization of some animal life, it is the origin of all our natural preferences and embodies our constitutional interests. And, in order for us to be able to satisfy our constitutional interests, to seek out and achieve what we envision as good and so realise the 'specific direction' of our animal natures (219), we must first satisfy the precondition of self-knowledge. We must know our likes and dislikes; the difference between 'apparent' goods which would give us but fleeting satisfaction, satisfying only our most 'incidental desires' (Winds 146), and that which would satisfy our more comprehensive desires and long-range interests (Lach *Santayana's Moral Theory*).[14] In Short, Santayana's criteria of how to live rationally is, as Lach writes, 'identical with that of the Stoics. It is: "Act in accordance with nature," where by "nature" is meant the nature of the agent. Hence the first and ultimate commandment of morality becomes the Socratic dictum: "Know thyself." (340). Of course, we must not overlook the second criteria of knowledge of the external world. If we were ignorant of the environment in which we found ourselves, or if we had no control over nature, then it is unlikely we should be able to satisfy any of our desires or for very long. Thus, knowledge of the external world is Santayana's second criteria for living rationally. Fulfilling theses two criteria will take

---

[14] For an account of the role of *reason* in Santayana's moral philosophy, which Santayana conceives as an *impulse* toward harmonizing each of our desires and interests, see: Reason in Common Sense pp.267-268, Reason in Science pp. 248-249, Sprigge's Santayana p.198 and Lach's George Santayana p.96.

us toward happiness and leading the good life: the actualisation of our potential and the satisfaction of our nature (Lach, Santayana 93)

To add a measure of plausibility to Santayana's prescriptions, we can note that adopting Santayana's two criteria of rational ethics is not an impossible task. For instance, Santayana regarded the art of Socratic self-knowledge 'very simple'. While this type of knowledge is obviously a matter of degree, it consists simply in 'accepting any estimation which any man may sincerely make, and in applying dialectic to it, so as to let the man see what he really esteems' (Science 240). Of course, there are many methods by which an individual may seek to discover their true interests other than the Socratic method; and Santayana suggests others such as trial and error and introspective self-examination.[15] As for the second criterion, Santayana thought that one area we are not lacking in is knowledge about the external world. In this age of technology, the contemporary world, Santayana writes, has plenty of knowledge of nature for its purposes (Persons and Places 543).

I think these observations suffice to prove that Santayana's philosophy does not lead one to view life as a process bound for failure or otherwise meaningless. Indeed, far from drawing one into nihilism, Santayana makes clear the criteria of living rationally. Thus again we find that

---

[15] See - Dominations and Powers, Santayana, p.159 and *Santayana's Moral Philosophy* by John Lach in Animal Faith and The Spiritual Life, p.347-348.

Santayana's moral theory does not conclude in nihilism.

Conclusion

In this section we have seen that Santayana's moral theory is characterised by a number of metaethical positions. First, Santayana's position as to the nature of the quality good is non-naturalist. Intuitionism, Moore's naturalistic fallacy and a naturalistic ground for the good, all find a place in Santayana's moral philosophy. Second, while some critics have attempted to label Santayana a moral realist, this is an implausible view if we take Santayana's ontology seriously. While the occurrence of 'good' has a natural ground, its only realisation is in the epiphenomena of consciousness - not in the realm of matter. Third, lending support to his anti-realism is Santayana's non-cognitivism. Santayana leaves little room for ambiguity on this matter. His position is simply that moral judgments are expressive and not cognitive: they are not referential. Santayana's non-cognitivism, and his subsequent affinity with such philosophers as A.J.Ayer and C.L.Stevenson, drives home the point that Santayana is not a moral realist. Lastly, I examined the charge that Santayana's moral theory and underlying ontology cash out in moral nihilism. After presenting three definitions of nihilism, I have tried to show that Santayana's philosophy is only nihilistic in the sense that it is anti-realist and allows for the possibility of unresolvable moral disagreement. However, I have also suggested that this definition of nihilism carries with it

the unwarranted assumption that a moral theory is unjustified unless it rests upon a foundation of absolute moral truth and not human nature. If we reject this assumption, which Santayana would have us do, then Santayana's philosophy avoids the charge of 'nihilism' in this loaded sense. Santayana's philosophy is also not 'nihilistic' in the sense that it leads to either moral anarchy or despair. In response to the charge of moral anarchy, while Santayana admits there will always be that margin of individuals who are unfit for society, there exists a general human nature which is gregarious, cooperative and non-violent. As for Santayana's moral theory leading directly to despair, there would seem to be no necessary connection. Even though the essence good has no instantiation in the realm of matter - and one may wonder what qualitative difference this could make in our lives - our conscious moments will continue be coloured by the intuition of moral and aesthetic essences. And finally, Santayana's two criteria for living rationally, self-knowledge and knowledge of the external world, are obvious evidence that he did not regard his moral theory as leading directly to pessimism or a sense of helplessness. Indeed, taking seriously Santayana's two criteria, having achieved great control over nature, we need only learn to recognise our true interests.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

For the interpreter, Santayana's philosophy presents a special challenge. It has been said of Santayana's work that it is 'many coloured, like a drop of water in the sun, and shifts without undue notice from one aspect or interest to another' (Brownell, *The Man and the Philosopher* 34). While this may be our impression of Santayana's thought, we must keep in mind that the drop of water is *one* drop, and that Santayana's system of thought is unified and interconnected. Perhaps a better overall description of Santayana's philosophy comes from John Lach who writes that Santayana's system is like one of Santayana's own essences: 'it invites contemplation and enjoyment, not probing dismemberment and piecemeal use' (Lach, Santayana 125).

It is with these thoughts in mind that I have sought to trace out the connection between Santayana's ontological dichotomy between existence, essence and his moral theory. As I have endeavoured to show, in order to understand Santayana's moral philosophy we must never lose sight of his ontological dichotomy. On the one hand, the category of existence frames Santayana's understanding of material reality. This existential realm, generative and in flux, gives rise to animal lives. These animal lives with there internal psyches signal the origin of morality. On the other hand, the category of essence provides the conceptual

framework for Santayana's ideal reality. This realm, made up of all real possible characteristics and qualities, contains in it the moral essences which bring value into our lives. It is only our ability to contemplate moral essences that hides an otherwise mechanical reality. We have also seen the effects of Santayana's ontology in shaping the various aspect of his moral theory. The fact that the essence good has no instantiation in material reality forms, in large part, the basis of Santayana's metaethical non-naturalism, moral anti-realism and moral non-cognitivism. As for the charge that Santayana's philosophy leads to nihilism, any such objection is clearly obviated by the fact that a general human nature, non-violent and social, is a determinate part of material reality, and by the fact that moral essences will continue color our inner lives, even if they are not embodied in the physical world.

While I have not sought to dissect Santayana's philosophy and break it down, as Lach would say, for 'piecemeal use', I do hope to have accurately described Santayana's ontological dichotomy and its influence on his moral theory. The conclusion I offer to the reader is that in order to understand Santayana's moral theory, we must first understand its origin, and so find its beginnings in the distinction between existence and essence.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ayer, Alfred Jules.

Language, Truth and Logic. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1952.

Baldwin, Thomas.

'Ethical Non-Naturalism.' Exercises In Analysis. Ed. Ian Hacking. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.

Boyd, Richard N.

'How to Be a Moral Realist.' Essays on Moral Realism. Ed. Geoffrey Sayre-McCord. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988.

Brownell, Baker.

'Santayana, The Man and the Philosopher.' The Philosophy of George Santayana. Ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp. 2nd. ed. LaSalle, Illinois: Open Court, 1971,

David, Anthony.

'The Ethical Relativism of George Santayana.' M.A thesis, Texas A&M University, 1991.

Hume, David.

An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals. Illinois: Open Court Publishing Company, 1966

A Treatise of Human Nature. Ed.L.A. Selby-Bigge, Oxford: Claredon Press, 1896.

Kant, Immanuel.

Critique of Pure Reason. London: Macmillan

Education Ltd., 1989.

Kerr-Lawson, Angus.
'Santayana's Ontology and the Nicene Creed.' Overheard In Seville - Bulletin of the Santayana Society. No.7 (Fall 1989).

Lach, John.
George Santayana. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1988.

'Moral Truth or Empirical Truth about Morality.' Overheard In Seville - Bulletin of the Santayana Society. No.12 (Fall 1994).

'Santayana's Moral Philosophy.' Animal Faith and the Spiritual Life. Ed. John Lach. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1976.

Levinson, Henry Samuel.
'Santayana and Making Claims on the Spiritual Truth about Matters of Fact.' Overhears In Seville - Bulletin of the Santayana Society. No.12 (Fall 1994).

Santayana, Praqmatism, and the Spiritual Life. North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1992.

Mackie, J.L.
Ethics - Inventing Right and Wrong. London: Penguin Books, 1977.

MacIntyre, Alasdair.
A Short History of Ethics. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1966.

McCormick, John.
George Santayana: A Biography. New York: Paragon House, 1988.

McKeon, Richard.
The Basic Works of Aristotle. New York: Random House, 1941.

Menzel, Paul T.
'Epiphenomenalism and Metaethical Non-Naturalism.' Journal of Value Inquiry No.4 (1970):43-55

Moore, G.E.
Principia Ethica. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959.

Munitz, Milton K.
Existence and Logic. New York: New York University Press, 1974.

Munson, Thomas N.
The Essential Wisdom of George Santayana. New York: Columbia University Press, 1983.

Olson, Robert G.
'Nihilism.' The Encyclopaedia of Philosophy. Vol.V. Ed. Paul Edwards. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc.& The Free Press, 1967.

O'Sullivan, Noel.
Thinkers of Our Time: Santayana. St.Albans: The Claridge Press, 1992.

Quine, Willard Van Orman.
From A Logical Point of View. Cambridge Ma: Harvard University Press, 1980.

Russell, Bertrand.

The Philosophy of Logical Atomism. Illinois: Open Court, 1985.

'Descriptions.' 20th- Century Philosophy: The Analytic Tradition. Ed. Morris Weitz. New York: The Free Press, 1966..

Santayana, George.

'Apologia Pro Mente Sua'. The Philosophy of George Santayana. Ed. Paul Arthur Shilpp. 2nd. ed. LaSalle, Illinois: Open Court, 1951.

'Appearance and Reality'. The Birth of Reason and Other Essays.Ed. Daniel Cory, New York: Columbia University Press, 1968.

Dominations and Powers. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951.

'Mind Liberating and Deceptive'. The Birth of Reason and Other Essays. Ed. Daniel Cory, New York: Columbia University Press, 1968.

'On the False Steps of Philosophy'. The Birth of Reason and Other Essays. Ed. Daniel Cory, New York: Columbia University Press, 1968.

Persons and Places. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1987.

'The Projection of Values'. Animal Faith and the Spiritual Life.Ed. John Lach. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1976.

'Proust on Essences'. Obiter Scripta. New

York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936.

'The Psyche'. Soliloquies in England and Later Soliloquies.Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1967.

Physical Order and Moral Liberty. Ed. John and Shirley Lachs,Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1969.

The Realm of Essence. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1927.

The Realm of Matter. London: Constable & Company, 1930.

The Realm of Spirit. London: Constable & Company, 1940.

Realm of Truth. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1938.

Reason In Common Sense. New York: Dover Publications, 1980.

Reason In Science. New York: Dover Publications, 1983.

Scepticism and Animal Faith. New York: Dover Publications, 1955.

The Sense of Beauty. New York: Dover Publications, 1955.

'Some Meanings of the Word 'Is'.' Obiter Scripta. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936.

Sayre-McCord, Geoffrey.
'The Many Moral Realisms.' Essays in Moral Realism. Ed. Geoffrey Sayre-McCord. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988.

Sprigge, Timothy L.S.
Santayana: An Examination of His Philosophy. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974.

Stevenson, C.L.
'The Emotive Meaning of Ethical Terms.' Contemporary Ethical Theory: A Book of Readings. Ed. Joseph Margolis. New York: Random House, 1966.

Williams, C.J.F.
What is Existence?. Oxford: Claredon Press, 1981.