Spirit's Primary Nature

is to be Secondary

Timothy Sprigge finds a kinship between moments of spirit and natural moments in Santayana's philosophy. He argues that this kinship is one of sentience or consciousness, and that here Santayana comes close to a panpsychist position. That there is a kinship, I entirely agree, and shall try to explain the nature of the link in the later part of this paper. However it is quite mistaken to infer that sentience forms a part of this link.

There is a distressing tendency for readers of Santayana to question the resoluteness of his materialism and anti-metaphysical stance, perhaps because he introduces such ideas as essence and spirit, platonism and transcendental centres. Sprigge does not give this reading to Santayana; in the above, as in his book on Santayana,[1] he acknowledges Santayana's epiphenomenal version of materialism and rejection of panpsychism. Yet it appears that Sprigge shows some "tendencies" towards the reading, and at times "hovers on the brink of it," to appeal to some of his own phrases. These tendencies of Sprigge, I should like to show, do not reflect similar tendencies on the part of Santayana himself.

The ontological categories of Santayana's mature philosophy come to dominate all phases of his thinking, and give rise to a remarkably self-consistent system, as Sprigge affirms.[2] In terms of these systematic categories, I argue that a panpsychist position is not merely false, but comes close to being self-contradictory. While it is impossible to be sure what tendencies lurk at the back of Santayana's mind, the validity of such an argument indicates that tendencies to panpsychism do not figure in the system he finally enunciates. The argument rests on Santayana's account of spirit; for sentience belongs to the realm of spirit, and Sprigge offers a definition of panpsychism in terms of sentience.

Whatever constitutes existence must be substantial - it must be the source of that movement and change which is characteristic of existence. On the other hand, spirit is by its very nature inert and cosmologically superficial. "The inefficacy of spirit [is] inherent in its nature."[3] It is secondary in respect to movement and existence (although not in its moral significance), at whatever level it may appear.

> .. the nature of spirit is not, like that of matter, to be a principle of existence and movement, but on the contrary a principle of enjoyment,

[1] Timothy L. S. Sprigge, *Santayana, An Examination of His Philosophy,* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1974).

[2] See for example page 3 of Sprigge, op. cit.

[3] See page 835 of George Santayana, *Realms of Being,* One-volume edition, (Scribner's, New York, 1942). Subsequent page numbers will refer to this text.

> contemplation, description, and belief; so that while spirit manifests its own nature no less freely than matter does, it does so by freely regarding and commenting on something else, either matter or essence: its primary nature is to be secondary .. [355]

These, and a host of similar statements, are intended to show that spirit in humans is inefficacious and epiphenomenal. Because Santayana claims to espouse common sense, and because he knows that his account of mind runs counter to common sense, he frequently returns to this theme. His dominant argument, especially in the later works, appeals to the nature of spirit, where spirit is taken quite generally; spirit at whatever level is inefficacious. Of course this also entails that it cannot provide the basic units of existence. Thus his argument that the human spirit must be epiphenomenal is at the same time an argument that spirit in general cannot be substantial; it is an argument against panpsychism. Santayana's opposition to panpsychism has the same foundation as his well-known support for epiphenomenalism.

I find this foundation more secure and deeply rooted than does Sprigge, who sees clearly the connections of epiphenomenalism to other aspects of Santayana's thought, but who does not trace its roots to the radical importance of the realms of being. For epiphenomenalism follows immediately from Santayana's analysis of what spirit is, and of what a substance must be.

Santayana gives a more explicit rejection of panpsychism in his discussion of the Realm of Matter. [375-377] There he considers the "logical possibility" of an entirely panpsychist universe made up of "psychic mortar no less than psychic stones." His finding is that, by virtue of the static and isolated nature of each moment of consciousness, there has to be a physical matter beneath these moments in order to generate change and continuity. Once again, the very nature of spirit renders it unfit as a foundation for the cosmos.

In the above, I am considering panpsychism in the version offered by Sprigge, with the basic units of the world not merely sentient, but having sentience as their real essence. However Santayana also rejects weaker versions, in which the sentience merely accompanies basic units which are otherwise constituted; spirit can *only* arise at the level of organisms. "For it is contrary to the nature of spirit to arise in dead or inorganic things:" [134] "It can arise only in an animal psyche." [596] " .. it crowns some inpulse, raises it to actual unity and totality, and being that fruition of it, could not arise until that organ had matured." [562]

Santayana did not lack exposure to panpsychist thought: a student of Royce, he took lectures from Paulsen, and wrote a dissertation on Lotze. One of the driving forces behind panpsychism is the conviction that matter, as interpreted by materialist science, is not adequate to explain mind or spirit. Whitehead, for instance, could not believe that the particles posited by physicists were ultimate units of being. This kind of motivation is largely absent from Santayana, who never questions the

capacity of matter to generate the complexities of mind. He does not identify matter with the latest posit of the physicists, however, and is critical of anti-materialist arguments which rely on such identifications. [186] By being less eager to hypostasize our present notion of matter, we are more able to appreciate the true fertility of nature.

He does introduce the notion of Will into his philosophy, meaning "the observable endeavour in things of any sort to develop a specific form and to preserve it." [607] No doubt this was in part a response to the same considerations which motivated Whitehead. More important to Santayana, however, was his treatment of freedom, the psyche, and spirit. There Will plays a part similar to the *conatus* or endeavour of Spinoza. In the psyche of every animal, a part of universal Will is manifested. The term is used metaphorically, (although it is "less metaphorical than it may seem" [607]), and he introduces it in *The Realm of Spirit,* not in the earlier *The Realm of Matter.* The passages which suggest panpsychism to Sprigge are, I believe, references to Will. We should note, therefore, that Will is not conscious; Santayana "scrupulously" uses a lower case "w" to refer to conscious will.

Sprigge is mainly concerned with Santayana's later works, and my criticism will not consider the earlier and less precise *System in Lectures.* I question Sprigge's contention there also; but different arguments would be required. Santayana's use of the term "sensible" there is highly ambiguous, as Sprigge says. This is especially apparent when considered in the light of the final category of spirit, upon which my argument rests.

Principally it is the doctrine of natural moments [280ff] which suggests to Sprigge a leaning towards panpsychism. He believes that natural moments, which are Santayana's ultimate units of existence, are patterned on the intensive mental entities called moments of spirit; and to the extent that this is correct, the resulting cosmology must take on features of panpsychism. It is especially the "forward thrust" and "lateral tensions" of natural moments which, for Sprigge, suggest "pulses of experience or feelings." I shall turn to these shortly. However the genesis of the basic notion of a natural moment itself is well enough explained as Santayana's solution to the classical problem of change. How can real change be represented in terms of static essences? - for nothing other than the intuition of eternal essences is available. Two fairly obvious and widely accepted approaches to this problem are rejected. He first dismisses any single representation which incorporates essences realized at two different times, and synthesizes the flow from earlier to later. Any such synthesis, he alleges, must fail as a description of the real flux. "Actual succession is a substitution, not a perspective." [272] A second popular approach is merely to consider the different essences realized at different instants distributed in a mathematical time. Certainly this appeals only to fixed essences. However once again he finds that the reality of change is lost; a pure time, through which flux moves, has to be seen as a prior medium, a substance, quite detached from the flux itself:

> Existence can have no general or stable medium deeper than itself, such as an absolute space or time through which it should flow and which in some respects would control its formation. The flux is itself absolute and the seat of existence. [276-277]

Thus natural moments are meant in part to replace such abstractions as mathematical instants, which he considers to be artificial: "I do not think points or instants are *natural* units."[4]

A natural moment, for Santayana, is any portion of matter realizing some essence, for just that interval of time (moment) during which the essence is realized. With this notion, one need not detach a substantial time from the existential flux; indeed the term "natural moment" itself assigns a temporal name to a material entity. In a sense, however, any representation of change must remain impossible. [282] There is no radical solution to this problem, for the flux of existence is at bottom incomprehensible.

The guiding motive in the formulation of natural moments, then, is not an analogy with moments of spirit, but rather it is an effort to deal in the best possible way with an intractable problem, that of representating physical change. This motivation is clearly present in the pages immediately before natural moments are introduced. [267-280] Now I believe that this explanation extends to the forward and lateral tensions. The tendency of idealists and empiricists to treat laws and generalizations as causes is anathema to Santayana. The flux is self-determined, and he insists that there be some explicit indication of this. The forward tension, "a synthetic symbol and counterpart of transition," [282] resides within that moment, and with lateral tension, firmly establishes the seat of nature's instability within nature itself. "The flux is spontaneous in the part no less than in the whole;" [291] the tensions of natural moments

[4] This is taken from a passage, which John McCormick has kindly sent me, found in a letter from Naples, October 7, 1931. [Butler Library, Columbia University] I give the passage in its entirety, since Santayana's discussion of natural moments is so brief.

> When I say [natural moments] are elements of description, I mean that I don't conceive the flux to be composed of solid temporal blocks, with a click in passing from one to the next. That may be Strong's conception, but although I should say that points and instants are necessary elements of description (geometry is an excellent method of description in regard to the realm of matter) I don't think points or instants are *natural* units. Natural moments, on the other hand, though there need be no click between them (sometimes there *is* a click, as when a man dies, a man's life being a natural moment) yet supply the only possible, and the most intimate, units composing the flux. For how describe the flux except by specifying some essence that comes into it or drops out of it? And the interval between the coming and going of any essence from the flux of existence is, by definition, a natural moment. Be it observed also that these moments are not cosmic in lateral extension; they are not moments of everything at once: so that when one comes to an end, almost everything in the universe will run on as if nothing had happened. Spring every year and youth in every man are natural moments, so is the passage of any idea or image in a mind: but the change (so momentous in that private transformation) is far from jarring the whole universe, but passes silently and smoothly, removing nothing ponderable and adding nothing in the way of force to the steady transformation of things.

are meant to signal this inherent instability, and to locate it properly.

Even if natural moments are not *patterned* on moments of spirit, Sprigge is correct to observe a kinship between the two; he also notes Santayana's account of where the analogy lies. The forward tension of a natural moment symbolizes an unrest, and the feeling of unrest found in spirit, because it is generated by such a tension in matter, must bear a real analogy to the unfelt unrest of that tension. To Sprigge, this account is somewhat odd, in that the felt unrest in the spirit is ineffectual, and to that extent, the analogy with natural moments is faulty. However for Santayana all knowledge depends on non-literal analogies, which is to say analogies that are useful in some ways, and hopelessly misleading in others. Perhaps the oddness noted here is a general feature of Santayana's epiphenomenalism (as Sprigge seems to suggest), and indeed permeates his whole epistemology.

Assume, then, that there is "some kinship to mental events" on the part of natural moments. Having questioned Santayana's own account of the kinship, Sprigge offers an argument leading from this assumption to a panpsychist position. [see page 5 above] This very general argument turns on generic universals or essences, and the question which of these is shared by the two kinds of moments. At just this point, however, he might better appeal to his admirably clear definition of panpsychism, which hinges on sentience. The question would then become whether or not *sentience* is common to both natural moments and moments of spirit. But a claim that natural moments are sentient is one not supported by the text. The following passage vindicates Sprigge's finding of an analogy between moments of existence and moments of spirit; yet it also vindicates my claim that consciousness is not a part of the analogy:

> To assert that the substance of anything, much less of the whole world, was psychic, and to call it mind-stuff, would be inadmissible if we meant that minute but conscious spirits were the stuff of it: we have just seen the manifest impossibility of that. But the phrase becomes legitimate and significant if it serves only to remind us that physical, like spiritual, existence must be intensive, centred in each of its parts, and capable of inner change as well as of collateral reduplication.[5]

This last sentence is typical of the passages Sprigge is questioning. It seems to me that Santayana is here referring to Will, and I have not been able to find any passages which make me doubt this supposition. As noted earlier, Will is quite clearly non-sentient, non-conscious. I harp on this point because, as the above passage indicates, Santayana objects to the use of psychological terms in the description of nature if these involve consciousness; but if consciousness is excluded, he becomes more permissive. Such a result is to be expected from his ontology. He gives to spirit an extremely narrow interpretation, and rejects any panpsychist

[5] See page 379. The comma following "intensive" is missing in the one-volume edition of RB.

world containing spiritual units of existence, or so I have argued. However the narrow interpretation of spirit permits matter to fill a larger conceptual space. Accordingly, he displays a complementary indifference to those forms of panpsychism which use terms from psychology, but explicitly renounce consciousness as a part of them. So long as such theories provide for real change, they can be seen as viable, if misguided, accounts of the world; they are "vanishing" forms of panpsychism, and almost merit the designation "materialist."

> When the elements of the psychic universe are admitted to be unconscious, the distinction from materialism becomes verbal. [378]

There is no doubt that Santayana considers making comparisons between some aspects of our experience and the reality outside. The issue raised by Sprigge concerns the nature of this extrapolation; which aspects are genuinely comparable? Santayana is highly suspicious of analogies whose attraction rests on the clarity of some intuition of essence. The lucidity of a concept, for instance a mathematical time scale, can lure a mind (often a logical mind inclined to philosophy) to impose this structure on the world. Rather than the clear intuitions at the surface of experience, a better indication of the nature of things might be expected from deeper, less distinct stirrings in the soul (such as a sense of restlessness). These will be better signs of Will in us, or of animal faith, since they emanate from deeper levels of the psyche.

Thus we should "discount" many of the inferences we are tempted to make about the world experienced, by comparison with aspects of that experience. Our guide must be the common sense world given to us by animal faith, whose existence we can doubt only at times, if at all. That we are forced to this philosophically embarrassing position is the result of his sceptical analysis of knowledge; but his conclusion is that, on questions of knowledge, we must *start* by accepting the world of our animal faith. In seeking the relation between some aspect of experience and reality, then, the existing world is the starting point, and we ask how the experience best fits in with our beliefs about that world. In his critique of empiricism, Santayana attacks the opposite inclination to infer something about the world from an aspect of experience, and to permit the clarity of some intuition to lead us to question some deep or inevitable belief.

Accordingly to the question of what sort of consciousness might be expected to spring from animal activity, Santayana's answer is that something original and unique can be expected -- option 2 at the end of Sprigge's paper, without the option 3a. Santayana believes that the emergence of transcendental centres of experience in nature is a remarkable event which adds something wholly novel to a pre-existing, non-sentient realm of matter.

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