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Santayana's Ontology

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## *Why Psyche Matters*

Psychological  
Implications of  
Santayana's Ontology

JESSICA WAHMAN



To look at psychology as it appears today, one would be hard-pressed to find anything like psyche being studied. Specialization within the field has produced an amalgamation of sub-disciplines, each with its specific subject matter. We have developmental, social, behavioral, and bio-psychology, but nowhere are these themes united to provide an overarching theory of an organizing principle of life. Furthermore, methods of therapeutic psychology vary widely in their foundational principles, not all explicitly utilize the prevailing scientific accounts of mind, and some deliberately ignore them.<sup>1</sup> Contemporary psychology has certainly diverged from the more holistic goal of a systematic and comprehensive accounting of the vital processes of living beings.<sup>2</sup> While there are, arguably, reasons to be concerned about this direction that psychology has taken as an experimental enterprise, I prefer here to inquire whether this apparent degeneration into narrow specializations is masking an important philosophical truism. Perhaps an understanding of psyche as a holistic life process is not something that can be completely or best accounted for scientifically. While we would do well to include empirical evidence as an aspect of the total picture, and without going so far as to argue that psyche is some sort of supernatural phenomenon, it is possible to see the benefit in augmenting scientific understanding with concepts of a more philosophical—specifically, ontological—nature.

One of the major concerns psychology has been forced to elide in its efforts to secure for itself regular and measurable objects is the nature of the connection between subjective awareness and the physical being that generates it. One can address organismic behavior at the micro or macro level (that is, by measuring

either neural activity or the actions of living beings), or one can compile reports by subjects as to what they claim to feel and think. From this data, useful information can be gleaned, including much about the correlations between physical behavior and life-as-felt, but the nature of the connection itself, far from being explained, must be assumed. I suggest that this elision implies that the ability to understand these two facets of reality through scientific means is necessarily limited and that philosophy still has something to say on the matter, specifically as to how and why the relationship between such distinct domains as subjective sensibilities and physiological existence resists being laid bare by solely empirical means. To this end, I offer for consideration American philosopher George Santayana's treatment of psyche and spirit (subjective awareness) as distinct elements of a single natural world. Santayana's recognition of the heterogeneity of these two aspects of life deserves to be restored to contemporary philosophical discourse, for his ontology provides a naturalistic topography that can both describe elements of reality not limited to the empirical and can similarly account for the possible resistance by reality to its being completely known through scientific means.

One of the more significant yet under-represented aspects of Santayana's ontology is his concept of psyche. Far from a tangential add-on to his four realms of being (essence, matter, spirit, and truth), the material psyche is fundamental to his understanding of what human existence entails. The concept lies at the root of both his epistemology and the aesthetic sensibility that is the heart of his philosophical approach. In addition (and where I ultimately choose to focus my discussion here), his concept of psyche as a material principle transcendent to spirit's direct intuition can offer an ontological background by which to interpret the general project of psychology as both an epistemological and a therapeutic practice.

In order to begin to address this issue, it is necessary to examine the discrimination Santayana makes between the two realms of being that are most appropriate to the problem at hand: spirit, or conscious awareness, and matter, within which psyche emerges as a principle of animation. Santayana views matter as a substrate, that is, as the both originary and ultimate ground of existence. As such, it is distinct from but generative of subjective awareness. Because of the heterogeneity of spirit and matter, consciousness cannot directly perceive, or intuit, the substrate itself. Rather, it illuminates only immediate objects, which he calls forms or essences. Santayana provides a sustained epistemological argument<sup>3</sup> that material reality is indirectly accessible to consciousness by interpretation of these essences, and, as a result of this, his designation of spirit as a separate realm from material psyche performs two important tasks: 1) it makes an ontological distinction between awareness and the unconscious natural forces that generate it; and 2) it achieves an epistemological recognition that our claims about the nature of psyche and its relation to consciousness are, at best, metaphorical inferences based on symbolic interpretation of subjective data. The immediate access we have to our own subjectivity is incongruent with the knowledge claims we

make based on belief, or “animal faith.” If essences are the sole objects of awareness, we have two choices as to how to relate to them: we can either note them as they are for their qualitative content or we can interpret them as empirical signs indicating something about the nature of material reality. But there is, in principle, due to the disparate nature of the two treatments of essence, no scientific way to bridge the gap, that is, there is no empirical means of discovering the connection between intuition of essences and the material substrate that makes such intuition possible. With the former, aesthetic, treatment the connection is ignored, and with the latter, epistemological, treatment it must be assumed.<sup>4</sup>

But what, more specifically, is psyche itself, and how can it clarify the relationship between spirit and matter as two separate realms of being? Santayana’s use of the term “spirit” to denote conscious awareness has the effect of differentiating it from the more commonly used concepts of “mind” or “soul,” which, since at least the modern era, have been used to connote both mental activity and moral will and are defined in opposition to the material body. Santayana wants to reorganize these connotations—teasing some apart and returning to their element those he feels wrongly extracted—by giving the name “spirit” to “the actual light of consciousness falling upon anything—the ultimate invisible emotional fruition of life in feeling and thought”<sup>5</sup> and restoring to the term “soul” the Aristotelian notion of psyche as an animating principle of matter, thereby returning “to the word . . . all its primitive earthliness, potency, and mystery” (RB, 329).<sup>6</sup> By defining psyche as the organizing principle of a living material being and distinguishing it from conscious awareness, Santayana effectively represents within the material substrate a specific kind of system, one both mechanistic (which nonetheless, as I will explain, cannot be wholly reduced to the principles of physics) and which serves as the source of nature’s spiritual expression.

What does it mean for psyche to be an animating material force productive of natural moments of spirit? Santayana refers to it as a “mode of matter . . . Matter makes a vortex which reproduces itself, and plays as a unit amongst the other vortices near it.”<sup>7</sup> Santayana characterizes matter as being in continual flux (in contradistinction to essences) and occasionally this flux forms vortices, that is, gathers itself into certain self-maintaining habitual patterns that are reproduced within an organism and passed on genetically to offspring. The material psyche is not specifically substance itself, but rather this collection of habitual repetitions within substance. It is a self-replicating system, considered from the material angle, that can be formally, though not infallibly, represented to subjective intuition as a trope or combination of tropes.

Any mode or principle that organizes matter into life—plant, animal, or human—is a psyche:

[B]y the psyche I understand a system of tropes, inherited or acquired, displayed by living bodies in their growth and behaviour. This psyche is

the specific form of physical life, present and potential, asserting itself in any plant or animal; it will bend to circumstances, but if bent too much it will suddenly snap. (RB, 331)

It is in this sense that Santayana's notion of psyche matches Aristotle's, for it gives both structure and animation to living bodies. There is a regulating system within some material beings that determines their habitual and self-maintaining behaviors—including everything from nutrition and locomotion to emotion and reason—and adapts these behaviors in response to external forces. This particular mode of matter, as the principle of life, differentiates psyches from other sorts of natural patterns, such as the physical forces that regulate a machine. These mechanics do, of course, regulate living bodies, and Santayana does often use the connotation of a mechanism to understand material structure, but he describes psyche in such a way that we may imagine it differently from, though analogous to, a mere machine. Like a machine, a living body is utterly material and abides by the regularities of nature. Unlike a machine, however, its vortex-forming operation is such that, when sufficient external force or internal disintegration causes it to disperse or “snap,” no supplanting of new parts for damaged ones will cause the same material organism to whirl anew. Life is a specific sort of system within matter; why each whirlwind or waterspout springs up when and where it does is as mysterious as when the soul dissolves just as incoherently—and more inevitably—back into the material flux.

Though the concept of an animating principle is reminiscent of the Aristotelean soul acting as the form of living things, Santayana sides with Plato in relegating the qualitative characteristics that define and describe that principle to a separate realm. These characteristics, given to intuition as essences, are incorporeal and, in terms of any power to structure substance, impotent; but the habits that those essences describe are entirely material and productive. Furthermore, because the psyche can only be known transitively via these immediate data of intuition, Santayana denies the notion that the organizing power within substance is in any way transparent to consciousness. This helps to explain why neither physics nor physiology can provide an absolute and total account of the fundamental principle of life. These sciences are highly systematic models for depicting material reality, and the translations these models provide are the most reliable, for practical purposes, at anticipating how living matter behaves. However, Santayana's epistemology of animal faith is geared toward asserting that any knowledge claim is not identical to the existence it describes, and so our more narrative and poetical descriptions of life have their contribution to make to our understanding as well.<sup>8</sup>

In recognition of the complexities of comprehending the human psyche as a trope within matter, Santayana offers two separate avenues by which it may be interpreted and understood. Because psyche is productive of consciousness, it is important to understand both the material mechanism and

its correlation to life as it is lived. Both scientific knowledge and literary imagination are helpful to us in achieving this end. However, it is important to note the differences in their objects and methods:

The two sorts of psychology, the scientific and the literary, are clearly distinguished by Aristotle where he says that anger is a name for two different things, anger being physically a boiling of the humours and dialectically a desire for revenge. Boiling of the humors . . . would be on the same plane as the whole object of biology, on the plane of behavior, and gives us a first glimpse of what anger is, substantially considered. On the other hand, "a desire for revenge" is a current verbal and dramatic expression for such a passion ellipsis. (RB, 345)

This discrimination between a biological operation and the descriptive account of what that operation amounts to in narrative terms allows us to recognize that, even though both practices enlighten us about a material principle, the perceptions of psyche from without and from within are very different sorts of enterprises and must utilize essences differently in their methods. Whereas the former treats them as signs to an external substance different from the datum itself, the latter formulates sympathetic "visualizations" of essences as they appear. When we hear that someone is angry, we imagine ourselves in that person's place and may be led to inquire whether they have been harmed or insulted. It is just as accurate to claim that anger is caused by a social snub as it is to say it is caused by activity in the limbic system of the brain. But we mean very different things by "cause" when we say this, and Santayana would rightly argue that the social snub alone cannot explain the biological event that is subjectively experienced as the emotion we call anger.

The subjective life is a drama, and in order to come to terms with that dramatic theme, the life of spirit is indispensable. The only way to appreciate the quality of a life is to examine that life qualitatively. This does not draw us away from the material self; rather, we approach it differently, more intimately: "Literature and literary philosophy are nevertheless the most natural and eloquent witnesses to the life of the psyche" (RB, 346). But accounts of what life is like should not be confused with descriptions of how they materially are. As far as understanding the source of that life, looking beneath the surface to the "self [that] slumbers and breathes below, a mysterious natural organism, full of dark yet definite potentialities. . .,"<sup>9</sup> one must rely on animal faith in its developed form of pragmatic, fallibilistic science. One can explain a surge of self-esteem in terms of serotonin release or of earning an "A" on a final exam. Both are meaningful, accurate, and helpful, and each approach may serve better at different moments. What must be remembered is that in each case essences are treated differently, either as intimate and familiar narrative themes or as signs to external substances that are fundamentally heterogeneous to those themes.

To further clarify this distinction between psyche and the essences of which we are actually aware, it is helpful to note how frequently these concepts are elided rather than retained. For example, in the latest appropriation of neuroanatomical discoveries by the medical profession, the general media, and especially by pharmaceutical companies lies evidence of scientific naturalism<sup>10</sup> as an increasingly dominant paradigm: the prevailing treatment for troubled souls comes in the form of medications. This widespread confrontation of psychic affliction at the neural level amounts in philosophical terms to a broad acceptance of a reductive materialism that takes the term “material” to mean “physiological” and the term “epiphenomenal,” when attributed to consciousness, to mean “insignificant.” As counterpoint to the reductionist scientific view of consciousness, there coexist movements toward the spiritual and the transcendental that either entirely negate or merely put aside materiality by construing the world and its objects to be either a product or construction of the mind or to be wholly determinable by relations among subjective criteria.<sup>11</sup> Finally, there are constructivist philosophies where the flow of ideas through history or within societies are viewed as themselves determining of human actions and material events.<sup>12</sup> Santayana’s alternative to all these approaches is to recognize a natural ground of consciousness while acknowledging and appreciating the irreducible distinction between the subjective and material aspects of human nature. This approach recognizes that the natural source of our thoughts transcends both the thoughts themselves and our explanations and accounts of them without in either case negating the value or the importance of understanding subjectively (that is, qualitatively) the subjective life that is naturally so dear to us.

One way to understand just what Santayana means by an irreducible relationship between psyche and spirit is to examine the distinction between the intelligent organ that does the thinking and our actual awareness of thoughts. Much like the psychologist who considers cognitive operations to be nonconscious brain functions,<sup>13</sup> Santayana refers to the activity of thinking as a psychic process and distinguishes it from the “inner patter of words” which is more properly “an object of perception” intuited by spirit.<sup>14</sup> The assessments and even associations that we tend to attribute to discursive thought itself are actually generated by unconscious activities; the speech or inner discourse that we do perceive is not itself the mechanism of thinking but its sometime result and fullest actualization. What we are aware of is the stimuli (linguistic or otherwise) that provoke and the responses that are the results of our assessments. In this sense, Santayana shares with the previously mentioned psychiatric (that is, neurological) model the notion that the source of consciousness is material, but unlike the reductive materialist accounts, he does not agree that grounding awareness in a natural substance renders the two identical, and so the relationship between psyche and intuition is not thereby laid bare:

It is very true . . . that the fountain of my thoughts, that is, the self who thinks them, is my psyche, and that movements there guide my thoughts and render them, as the case may be, intelligent, confused, rapid, or halting; also supply my language, dictate my feelings, and determine when my thinking shall begin and where it shall end. But the light of thought is wanting there, which is the very thinking; and no fine inspection of behavior nor interweaving of objects will ever transmute behavior into intuition nor objects into the attention which, falling upon them, turns them from substances or essences into objects of actual thought.<sup>15</sup>

Spirit performs a unique service by shedding light on the realm of essence, an otherwise merely potential reality: it becomes, in effect, psyche's eyes, for otherwise, "she" is just blind impulse. The psyche engages in all sorts of processing of both internal and external stimuli, makes judgments, and acts in response to their conclusions, often without there being any awareness at the conscious level of this problem-solving operation. But with awareness we arrive at something different, and what we commonly mean by thought, namely, the entirety of subjective life and the only possibility for essences to be perceived. The intuitions of essence that spirit attributes to either internal states or external things are heterogeneous with the state or thing itself and are irreconcilably different from the natural processes that generate these intuitions. To say that a perception is generated by a neural impulse is not to say that spirit and matter are one and the same, nor does this correlation help one understand why an exchange of potassium and sodium ions across the membrane of the axons of a multitude of neurons makes a person see the color red or remember a long-lost friend.<sup>16</sup> Still less does it explain why some neurological processing results in our awareness of thoughts and feelings while others do not. Instead, this reductionist move explains away the mystifying relationship between psyche and spirit by exchanging for these two ontological categories a scientific system of essences that formally describes but fails to fully capture the complexity of either realm of being. A psychology adequate to an ontological system as rich as Santayana's will require the capacity to distinguish these realms of being from one another and to recognize their unique roles in the complexity of human behavior and subjective life.

Finally, Santayana's understanding of the psyche as material and ordinary does not commit him to a sort of genetic determinism. That is, his Aristotelian account of an organizing principle of matter does not cause him to fall into either camp of the proverbial nature/nurture debate over the influence of instinct versus environment on human behavior. Santayana notes that the psychic system amounts to habits both inherited and acquired, that is, these habitual behaviors can be encoded patterns inherited at birth, as would be the case with instincts, or they can be learned associations. Matter is indeed influenced by experience: biological theories of learning behavior that contrast the "plasticity" of the human brain with the "hard-wiring" of heavily instinctive reptiles recognize and describe this pos-



sibility. This is not to say, however, that essence itself influences matter; here is another place where Santayana's ontology provides the means for helpful clarification. Santayana is not denying the fact that we are influenced and altered by our environments, but he is denying that we are constructed and determined by the essences themselves. Psyche engages with its environment and is changed to different degrees by this interaction, and spirit witnesses as meaning the formal results of psyche's interpretations and adaptations. It is in this sense that Santayana's argument differs from, for example, a socially, historically, or politically deterministic account of environmental influence. The cultural milieu we live in does influence how we adapt to our world, but contrary to these constructivist sorts of causal explanations of human thoughts and behaviors, we are not determined by history or society but by many factors, only some of which are environmental and fewer of which may be observed in formal terms by consciousness. Even those that do come to us this way—as words and images—change us, not directly, but because they are heard and seen by the material organism that is our self and processed in accordance with a host of its existing predispositions and habitual inclinations.

One factor critical to the relationship between psyche and spirit is that of agency. The distinction between an active psyche and an attentive spirit not only facilitates psychology's task as a study of the human condition, it can also clarify the benefits it has to offer as a therapeutic practice. In terms of scientific knowledge, for example, interpreting agency as a physical non-conscious phenomenon can better explain those choices we make that would appear strange if made through conscious deliberation alone. Perhaps even more interestingly, an understanding of psyche's causal power can help us understand how therapy draws on and manipulates the relationship between consciousness and the unconscious processes that drive and shape our desires, thoughts, and conclusions about ourselves and our situations.

In Santayana's naturalist ontology, spirit has no causal power: it witnesses, focuses attention on behalf of the psyche, and illuminates things that are of interest to it, but of itself it possesses no agency. By contrast, psyche is an active process within nature, interpreting and responding to environmental stimuli in the interests of its own preservation. The role of spirit is characterized as one of observation or attention, and Santayana suggests that this particular function<sup>17</sup> has emerged as a means for psyche to better adapt to its environment by "putting forth telepathic feelers, as it were, indefinitely far into space and time" (RB, 609). Spirit's focus and attention represents a unique psychic development that an unconscious organism would neither benefit from nor be hindered by. Its attentiveness can both assist the organism and also thwart it, as any self-conscious musician, athlete, or artist can attest. If consciousness does have a function, we see one that it is one very like the sort described by Santayana when he claims that "spirit seems to be allied to *messages*, even if these be internal to one organism . . . . To mark, to trace, or to share any and every movement going on in

the world is precisely the *function* of spirit” (RB, 609; second italics mine).<sup>18</sup> Spirit provides a focus, a unification of disparate information into an apparently coherent stream of thought, and this focus, when turned toward psyche itself, can be therapeutically beneficial.

Santayana claims that only more complex psyches can be said to produce consciousness (vegetative ones do not), and that the emergence of spirit can be viewed as an adaptive product:

The psyche needs to be prepared for all things that may chance in its life: it needs to be universally vigilant, universally retentive. In satisfying this need, it forms the spirit, which therefore initially tends to look, to remember, to understand.

. . . The spirit, therefore, is like Goethe’s Watchman, who was born to gaze, and possessed all the world in idea, yet was set on that watch-tower for an urgent purpose, with a specific duty to be vigilant. (RB, 567)

It would be incorrect, then, to view awareness as simply idle or an ineffective add-on to biological life. Spirit is not a stupefied cripple but an alert and watchful scout as well as a visionary. Of course, to say that spirit serves a purpose is not to claim that it is a physical being with physical efficacy: spirit “has no magic powers and its supposed effects are the effects of its causes” (RB, 635). Santayana speaks loosely, though not incorrectly, when he claims that spirit has a function. Technically, spirit is the awareness produced by specific highly complex psychic operations going on at the material level.<sup>19</sup> Psyche is the source of consciousness, and those roles that Santayana attributes to consciousness are, at bottom, symbols of psyche’s own activity. Nonetheless, these very activities, experienced as attention and understanding, Santayana claims serve an adaptive purpose. Therefore, it behooves us to inquire what this may mean when these activities are turned on psyche itself. An understanding of this role in relation to psyche, this recognition by spirit that it does not act or cause but, as witness, can paradoxically assist psyche’s own adaptive activities, will prove beneficial when adequately understood. Observation of essences, as our only access to our own psychic workings, has a sort of indirect power in that psyche turns these very adaptive operations on itself. For us, as we experience it, recognition of and attention to the psychic source of our motivations and actions can, in effect, help psyche bring about its own well-being.

One way to understand this odd dynamic is to note how Santayana characterizes the relationship between psyche and spirit as one of mother and child: “as she created him she knew not how, merely by smiling in her dreams, so in awaking and smiling back he somehow understands her; at least he is all the understanding she has of herself” (RB, xix). Consciousness is the awareness on the part of psyche of its own needs, desires, and concerns, but these material demands are actually witnessed only as essences, translations from the material psyche into ideal symbols. Because these are

the direct objects of intuition, it often seems to spirit that the will that it illuminates is self-generated (that is, has a spiritual rather than material origin). Spirit is, in effect, blinded by its own light. Fortunately, however, this myopia is not inevitable, for under the right conditions we can become aware that our consciousness is not the substance of our selfhood. Subjective life is a product of a material self that, as distinct from consciousness, seems somehow other but which makes us—as self-awareness—what we are.

Psychotherapy in its various forms can be viewed as drawing on and benefitting from these very ontological distinctions between a psychic seat of power and change and an observant but itself impotent spirit. There is an aspect of psychotherapy akin to animal training, whether or not we would like to admit it. The metaphor is helpful because it can illuminate the fact that the agency to be directed in therapy is not that of consciousness itself but of an independent organism with, as they say, a will of its own. Sigmund Freud, himself, actually utilized a similar metaphor, that of horseback riding, to discuss the relationship between the id's psychic drives and the conscious ego:

[The ego] is like a man on horseback, who has to hold in check the superior strength of the horse; with this difference, that the rider tries to do so with his own strength while the ego uses borrowed forces. The analogy may be carried a little further. Often a rider, if he is not to be parted from his horse, is obliged to guide it where it wants to go . . . .<sup>20</sup>

Freud's metaphor is wholly in concert with Santayana's naturalistic standpoint in that he notes that what we call "conscious control" is a bit of an oxymoron. Self-control is, in actuality, an act by one function of the psyche on another of its aspects. In the most general sense, the therapist recognizes and accommodates this phenomenon in her practice of psychic cultivation. There are specific methods that engage the psyche as a conglomerate of habitual thought patterns that can be trained, untrained, and retrained. A behavioral therapeutic approach (in curing phobias, for example), is the most clear example of this straightforward manipulation, but it also occurs to a great extent in cognitive therapy, for example. The very practice which ostensibly involves the conscious correction of faulty reasoning actually epitomizes this paradoxical treatment of agency. The task of the cognitive therapist is to first help illuminate to the client—to direct the client's consciousness to—the troubling "glitches" in thinking that psyche seems to be offering up. In this way, the therapist helps to draw the client's awareness to thought patterns that were, up to this point, happening automatically, and this very awareness can enable the client to modify existing habits of thinking (psychic cognitive associations) into more functionally adaptive ones. This is a not direct domination of the psyche by consciousness but a borrowing of one aspect of psyche to affect another. Once the inconsistency is revealed, the therapist helps the client put a new, more rewarding, habit of

thought in place. It is not that spirit forces psyche to “see the light”—patterns of thought do not automatically change once their logical inconsistency is exposed. Often, psyche doesn’t even want to accept the new pattern and fights to hang on to some benefit of its old ways, despite the collateral suffering. But the client practices the pattern (often grudgingly, with nothing but the hope that it will eventually pay off) until, with a dose of fortuity, it becomes as habitual as the previous one, and more behaviorally rewarding, as it relieves the psychic suffering or promotes behavior that relieves it in other ways.<sup>21</sup>

We can see here that spirit’s assistance in the amelioration of psyche’s suffering is not a physical action taken by spirit, but an illumination to psyche of an alternative habitual action. Psyche’s act of attention (which we experience as conscious intuition) is drawn to the problem at hand, and if the material flexibility is in place, psyche adapts in response to it. In this case, the problem at hand is some specific association made by psyche itself. Of course, these more adaptive thought patterns are not guaranteed; some psyches are too deeply entrenched in their habits. But more importantly, perhaps, therapeutic practice is as fallible an epistemological project as any other, more so in that it relies heavily on narrative interpretation and dramatic sympathy—that is, on literary psychology—than do scientific accounts of the psychic organism. Thought patterns, as revealed to intuition, are essences, in this case symbols that reflect something in “moral terms,” as Santayana puts it, about the structural habits at work in the client’s organism (RB, 570). A kind of literary psychology, psychotherapy is a case of spirit “feeling and knowing [psychic] life from the inside” (RB, 570), and intuition can only reveal in the most indirect way the material processes that produce that narrative imagination.<sup>22</sup>

Of course, it is important to remember, and as Freud notes, that even if psyche consents to be trained to some extent, it remains the case that it (psyche) is the actual source of power and agency, and spirit is just along for the ride. In general, the task for the client or patient in therapy is to learn that her role in healing is more indirect, more passive, than tends to be believed. Patients discover that, though they cannot force themselves to feel better, they may let themselves heal, or allow the psyche to repair itself. Santayana, too, recognizes psyche’s self-mending capabilities: “If crippled at first by some loss, she may ultimately heal the wound (healing being one of her primary functions) and may live on with her residual equipment all the more nimbly” (RB, 340). It is interesting to note that a person who is content to take to bed and wait for a flu to run its course often tortures himself because he cannot seem to just “get over” psychic pain. The patient compounds his suffering by failing to recognize that both kinds of illness originate from the same substantial source, and, in each case, the body needs time to rest and recover to the best of its ability. One task of self-understanding, then—as conceived within Santayana’s naturalistic framework and as exemplified in psychoanalytic therapy—is for spirit, or consciousness, to recognize its

epiphenomenal place and thereby learn to listen to the greater wisdom of its material being. Matter, along with the equally material principle that organizes it into life, is not wise in the sense of having a privileged knowledge of existence, but in the sense of being part and parcel of it. It produces an ideal language of essences, and spirit may learn something about its well-springs—its bounty as well as its limitations—if it learns to view the symbols, poignantly clear and immediate on their own terms, as signs to a distant and unfamiliar homeland:

Nothing could be more obscure, more physical, than the dynamics of our passions and dreams; yet, especially in moments of suspense or hesitation, nothing could be more intensely felt. There is the coursing of the blood, the waxing and waning of the affections, a thousand starts of smothered eloquence, the coming on of impatience, of invention, of conviction, of sleep. There are laughter and tears, ready to flow quite unbidden, and almost at random. (RB, 337)

Honest attention to our streams of consciousness attests to the fact that spirit is not the self but is an observer of our self. We watch feelings and thoughts rise and fall away, usually beyond our deliberate control, and we must admit something other than us (if “us” be equated with spirit) is the seat of power and the active force that makes us who we are. Psychotherapy, if it is working well, teaches us how to live best with that habit of matter. We can hope that it allows us to train it a little, and technically, since spirit itself cannot exert control, this training is itself intrapsychic. But ultimately, and if we are good trainers, we recognize that we are dealing with an independent and powerful force that demands a sense of its own agency. As in Homeric Greece, we must find livable ways to appease our gods or they will retaliate against us.

The epistemological consequence of Santayana’s recognition of psyche as a material principle obscured from conscious awareness is that psychological knowledge becomes a project of interpretation, a translation of the objects of awareness into explanatory metaphors. These metaphors may be the systematic models of physiology or the more openly mythological conceptions of psychotherapy, as with the id or the recently popularized concept of the inner child. What remains a mystery is how an animating mode in matter could produce something as immaterial as consciousness in the first place.<sup>23</sup> Santayana does not pretend to say how this is possible, but the reality of both material soul and immaterial spirit is, to him, a decidedly sensible conclusion to arrive at, and the only one that does not pretend to deny aspects of a reality that, he claims, even philosophers faithfully accept when not playing at being skeptical.<sup>24</sup> By placing the soul and the body in the same ontological realm and giving that psyche the power that, at the level of the human organism, “forms the human body and the human mind,”<sup>25</sup> Santayana, in one sense, repairs the modern mind/body dualism by placing

both elements on the side of matter. If this were the end of the story, however, Santayana would not be the insightful thinker that he is; he would simply be reversing idealism by reducing all of reality to the material realm, and we might align him with those reductionists who consider consciousness to be no more than a linguistic phantom. Of course, this is anything but the end of the story. On the one hand, the body and the formative structure of the mind are material, and this overcomes the traditional mind/body dualism. But the dualism between spirit and psyche remains intact. Santayana's ontology stands out in this manner as belonging to a perspective much neglected in contemporary thought, though rich in parentage. In distinguishing between spirit and psyche as different realms of being, he is able to acknowledge how wholly transcendent to our conscious mind much of what we call our "self" actually is. He uses this distinction to make better and more well-rounded sense of the complexities of human experience as well as the conflicting pushes and pulls among the various aspects of our being that participate in producing that experience.

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#### NOTES

1. I have in mind such wide-ranging foundational principles as those in psychiatric models based on neuroscience, Freudian psychodynamic models of the unconscious, Rogerian conceptions of ideal and actual selves, and explicitly mythological accounts of mind, such as the Jungian theory of archetypes and the collective unconscious. I will argue that, while Santayana's account of psyche does not specifically support any particular methodology, his holistic ontology can link these apparently incompatible models to one another as well as to the theoretical accounts found in scientific psychology.

2. Daniel Robinson identifies 1870–1920 as a period of movement "From Systems to Specialties" in which a transition is made from the broadly encompassing systems of earlier "scientific psychology" to the specialized "realities of contemporary psychology" (Daniel Robinson, *An Intellectual History of Psychology* [New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1981], 359–61). Furthermore, David Joravsky, who considers the historical development of psychological specializations to be based on a reduction of the human condition to physiology, claims that Wilhelm Wundt, the father of experimental psychology from this same transitional period:

was one of the last great offerings to the dream of creating a comprehensive science of humanity by aggregation of many disciplines and doctrines, not by reduction to a single basic discipline founded on a parsimonious set of consistent principles. That explains in part the embarrassment of the behaviorists who call Wundt father, yet are skimpy and condescending in their treatment of him. He started their professional enterprise, pointing to an enormous task and a wide range of methods that they have shrunk away from or explicitly rejected (Daniel Joravsky, *Russian Psychology* [Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, Inc., 1989], 20).

3. George Santayana, *Scepticism and Animal Faith* (New York: Dover Publications, 1955).

4. In denying the possibility of an adequate explanation of the relationship between consciousness and matter, Santayana's dualism is in line with the explanatory dualisms of such philosophers of mind as Colin McGinn, Thomas Nagel, and Frank Jackson, each of whom in his own way affirms naturalism while denying the possibility of explaining conscious experience in terms of natural (read "physical") kinds or, connected to this, of explaining how it is that matter can produce mind. See Colin McGinn, *The Mysterious Flame: Conscious Minds in a Material World* (New York: Basic Books, 1999); Thomas Nagel, "What Is It Like To Be A Bat?" *The Philosophical Review* 83 (1974): 435–50; Frank Jackson, "Epiphenomenal Qualia," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 32 (1982): 127–36.

5. George Santayana, *Realms of Being* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1942), 331. Hereafter this text will be parenthetically cited according to the standard abbreviation "RB."

6. The terms "soul" and "psyche" in Santayana's work merit careful analysis, but for the purposes of this paper, they can be generally equated. In the quote just referenced from "The Realm of Matter," Santayana affirms a material, as opposed to spiritual, notion of soul and likens it to his concept of psyche. Furthermore, in "The Realm of Spirit," while he makes a point of distinguishing the term "soul" from "psyche," Santayana does so by noting that they are two different approaches to the same entity, the one providing a moral and the other a biological perspective (RB, 570).

7. *Scepticism and Animal Faith*, 218–19.

8. One way these descriptions may serve our self-understanding is through therapeutic psychology. I briefly address the connection between literary psychology, which I define in the following paragraphs, and psychotherapy on page 17 of this paper. For my more detailed treatment of Santayana, narrative, and psychotherapy, see "Illusions and Disillusionment: Santayana, Narrative, and Self-Knowledge," *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 17.3 (2003): 164–75.

9. *Scepticism and Animal Faith*, 149.

10. Technically, this particular approach is reductive even within biology itself due to its reduction of biological phenomena to chemical and physical categories of explanation. Frank J. Sulloway, *Freud, Biologist of the Mind* (New York: Basic Books, Inc. 1979), 18fn.

11. For example, in his radically empiricist phase, William James explains knowledge as nothing more than a relationship between starting and terminal points of a stream of pure experience. William James, "A World of Pure Experience" (1904), in *Pragmatism and Classical American Philosophy*, ed., John J. Stuhr (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 183–93.

12. This point is developed and explained further down in this essay.

13. In both cognitive science and cognitive therapy this is the case: in the science, the interest is in, among other things, modeling patterns of association among neurons; and in the therapeutic practice, the aim is to train new habits of association indirectly via conscious awareness on the part of the client; still, both fields treat the process of association as something that happens at an organismic level.

14. *Scepticism and Animal Faith*, 244.

15. *Ibid.*, 245.

16. Another characterization of the relationship between spirit and matter is simply to deny it, as does eliminativist Patricia Churchland. She asserts her disapproval of

such notions as causation or correlation in terms of perception and neurological activity by claiming that consciousness simply *is* brain states the way that heat simply is moving electrons. Such an assertion merely begs the question of how it is that different brain states are experienced from “within” so differently as they are observed and recorded—by EEG and PET scans and the like—from “without” and fails to recognize that neither the subjective experience nor the symbolic representation by technology of “brain states” (a symbolic description in itself) is the same thing as the material activity that is in each case being experienced and described. Patricia Smith Churchland, “Can Neurobiology Teach Us Anything About Consciousness?” *Proceedings and Addresses of the APA* 67.4 (1994): 30f.

17. I here use the term function in a loose descriptive sense in which anything that plays a role can be said to perform a function, and I understand Santayana to be using this sense of the term in the citation further down in this paragraph. It is important to distinguish this sense from the notion of a material causal operation. Religion serves a function in society, parents in the upbringing of their children, and mathematical functions indicate the relationships among numbers in a given context. But in each case we do not necessarily mean that the function must itself have or be best explained in terms of a material cause. In this sense, then, spirit’s role, or “function” may be understood distinctly from the material behavior of psyche while, in effect, it is the result of a very complex aspect of psyche’s own functioning. I utilize the term to highlight Santayana’s assertion that spirit, despite its physical impotence, has a role to play and has emerged for a purpose.

18. Santayana refers here to the function of spirit, but this should not be misunderstood to claim that spirit possesses any machinery or power of its own (cf. note 17).

19. Gerald Edelman gives an provocative account of the mechanisms of consciousness, in which he discusses the likelihood that awareness is produced by “reentrant” loops or interactions among varieties of interneurons grouped into “neural systems.” Gerald Edelman, *Wider Than the Sky* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 48–59. This is one possible scientific account of the biological mechanisms that make up the sufficient conditions for conscious experience, but it is noteworthy that Edelman does not mean by “mechanisms of consciousness” that awareness itself is the ontological locus of this structure. In other words, consciousness, as we experience it, is assumed to be the product of specific and highly complex material processes.

20. Sigmund Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, trans. Joan Riviere, revised & ed. James Strachey (New York: WW Norton and Co., 1960), 19.

21. I am indebted to my friend William Jaffee, a practicing cognitive therapist, for his assistance and insight during our many discussions on this topic.

22. Cf. note 8.

23. Cf. note 4.

24. Santayana accuses of sophistry those philosophers who deny substance through “the weaving of verbal arguments in which their most familiar and massive convictions are ignored.” *Scepticism and Animal Faith*, 186.

25. George Santayana, “Cross-Lights,” *Soliloquies in England and Later Soliloquies* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1967), 221.