

Equable Relational Pragma

– Part Two

Lindsay Mell

**Perspectives in the Context of the Work and Legacy of
George Santayana:**

Original Commentary on a Santayanan Review:

***Lives of the Mind – The Use and Abuse of Intelligence from Hegel
to Wodehouse: George Santayana – pages 178-200***

by Roger Kimball

Sydney, Australia, May 2022

CONTINENTAL PHILOSOPHY GROUP

PRIMARY REFERENCE

Throughout the following commentary and textual analysis, my primary reference is:

Roger Kimball 2002:

Lives of the Mind – The Use and Abuse of Intelligence from Hegel to Wodehouse

Ivan R. Dee, Chicago, USA.

Quoted as cited substantively through single quotation marks, with page reference numbers thus (), throughout each of the textual analysis selections presented for the seminar paper.

Page numbers in brackets refer to the preceding quotation in each case.

NB: Quotations within quotations follow my customary process of also using single quotation marks.

Equable Relational Pragma

– Lindsay Mell

Part Two

‘Aplomb in the midst of irrational things – that’s my motto !’ – Santayana to William Morton Fullerton, 1887 (178) ...

‘When John McCormick published *George Santayana – A Biography* in 1987, he began the introduction by registering his ‘bewilderment that so moving and powerful a figure, justifiably famous in his own day, should have been so unjustifiably neglected in ours’. McCormick noted with disgust that even *The Last Puritan* (1935) – Santayana’s one novel and probably his most famous work – had been ‘unavailable ... for years’ (178-179).

‘McCormick’s lament was understandable (179).

‘There was a time when Santayana’s work was part of the normal furniture of educated discourse ... At Harvard, Santayana’s official and unofficial students included Conrad Aiken, Robert Frost, T S Eliot, Witter Bynner, Walter Lippman, Wallace Stevens, Scofield Thayer, Max Eastman, Van Wyck Brooks, Felix Frankfurter, and James B. Conant, many of whom (conspicuously excepting Eliot) registered their profound debt to his teaching. Until yesterday, it seems, Santayana’s urbane influence was woven into the living tapestry of intellectual life. In our amnesiac day, Santayana’s influence seems to have been reduced to the literary equivalent of a geometric point: a single epigram, to wit:

‘ ‘Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it’ (179)’.

If it is difficult and tedious to track down what it actually is, or means, to be **‘rational’ – as ‘metaphorical’ and meta-textual, as is all of our ‘language’** – then it might prove more worthwhile to distil how it is we may seek to be in the context of all this metaphor, which could culminate in a provisionally metaphysical denouement.

Remember, through some previous recent contributions of m seminar work for our Continental Philosophy Group sessions, while reviewing **John Ralston Saul’s** seminal work *On Equilibrium*, (2001,Penguin Books, Canada) I referred to his salient perspective that **it may be better for us to consider ‘reason’ as only ‘thought and argument’**, with no further remit for it, which would serve to constrain the contemporary substantial widespread presumption that ‘reason’ is only what can be considered as ‘rational’ – with rational inferring a preponderance to accept certain specific structural overtones in the contemporary sense.

Amid such actual ‘*ir* – rationality’, why not adopt a disposition of ‘aplomb’ ?!

Santayana seems to have intuited such a beautiful distillation of relative equanimity in action, as the epitome of a spirit of relational *pragma*, and as this may be considered a worthy worthwhile wholehearted disposition in the fraught context of all our contemporary fragility.

‘Although he was in many ways a retiring personality, Santayana seemed to know everyone worth knowing, and so *Persons and Places* [for instance] ... contains any number of vivid character sketches: of Bertrand Russell and his brother John Francis, of Lady Ottoline Morrell and Siegfried Sassoon, of Logan Pearsall Smith, Bernard Berenson, and Robert Bridges. Santayana’s splendid accuracy as a judge of character may be gleaned from his description of Lytton Strachey, whom he met in 1915: ‘a limp cadaverous creature’, ‘like a caricature of Christ’ ... That is Strachey to a ‘T’ (180) ...

‘During his life and after, Santayana was sometimes criticised for overwriting (181).

‘He commanded immense fluency and could be tempted into gorgeous elaborateness. (‘To some people,’ he complained, ‘my whole philosophy seems to be but rhetoric or prose poetry.’) Although trained as a philosopher, Santayana was an intensely literary man; occasionally, he descended into literariness ... Even in his philosophical works – the bulk of his output – Santayana tended to prefer nimble metaphor to patient exposition or argument. This preference is not, I hasten to add, necessarily a liability, even philosophically (181).

‘As the philosopher David Stove observed, ‘some of the best philosophers never argue at all ... Santayana, for example. He simply tells you how he thinks the world is, and delicately makes fun of some other philosophers ... who think there is more to the world, or less, than he does’ (181).

‘Besides, at his best ... Santayana wrote with beguiling grace’ (181).

Much of what Roger Kimball has confessed here in regard to Santayana’s literary style and exposition are forms to which I can readily relate in the context of my seminar presentation efforts.

Sure, I *know* I can be ‘tempted into gorgeous [hopefully!] elaborateness, and just *perhaps* I ‘occasionally ... descend into literariness’, of this I feel assured !

Moreover, I feel warm to **the idea of ‘nimble metaphor’**, which seems an exceedingly polite characterisation.

Perhaps all of these stylistic elements remain complementary to the abundant reality that I feel warmly engaged through Santayana's literary and philosophical style of presentation.

Clearly, I feel greatly exhilarated to realise there is someone out there who, in the context of these elements, shares, or has shared, a characteristic literary style which my efforts at least may resemble, in some respects as hereby shared, of Santayana's legacy.

Nevertheless, as I can recall, I'm not in the habit of consciously 'mak[ing] fun of some other philosophers', although I'm sure to have indulged in touches of literary and/or theoretical irony, occasionally !

Santayana '... begins *Scepticism and Animal Faith* ... with the admission that he comes bearing 'one more system of philosophy': 'If the reader is tempted to smile, I can assure him that I smile with him, and that my system ... differs widely in spirit and pretensions from what usually goes by that name. In the first place, *my system is not mine, or new*. I am merely attempting to express for the reader the principles to which he appeals when he smiles' (182).

'Santayana is every bit as clever as any German metaphysician, only he is light-years less ponderous. It is important to stress that Santayana is accessible not merely stylistically – in the singing clarity of his prose – but also in terms of content. His philosophy dealt not with difficult abstractions but with matters of patent human exigency. 'It was happiness or deliverance,' he wrote in *A General Confession*, an intellectual self-precis written in the 1930s 'that really concerned me (182).

' 'This alone was genuine philosophy: this alone was the life of reason' (182) ...

'Writing about 'The British Character', at a moment when England was still mistress of an empire, he noted that: 'What governs the Englishman is his inner atmosphere, the weather in his soul': (182)

' 'Instinctively the Englishman is no missionary, no conqueror (183).

' 'He prefers the country to the town, and home to foreign parts (183).

' 'He is rather glad and relieved if only natives will remain natives and strangers strangers, and at a comfortable distance from himself. Yet outwardly he is most hospitable and accepts almost anybody for the time being; he travels and conquers without a settled design, because he has the instinct of exploration (183).

‘His adventures are all external; they change him so little that he is not afraid of them. He carries his English weather in his heart wherever he goes, and it becomes a cool spot in the desert, and a steady and sane oracle amongst all the deliriums of mankind. Never since the heroic days of Greece has the world had such a sweet, just, boyish master (183).

‘It will be a black day for the human race when scientific blackguards, conspirators, churls, and fanatics manage to supplant him’ (183).

‘That is eloquently said, and the intervening decades have underscored its accuracy’ (183).

Where Santayana writes:

‘What governs the Englishman is his inner atmosphere, the weather in his soul’; and that: ‘He carries his English weather in his heart wherever he goes’; these remarks remind me resonantly of the **Crowded House/ Neil Finn** song ***Weather With You*** – ‘everywhere you go, you always take the weather with you’ as the song lyric explains.

However, even if the British ‘instinct’ is for ‘exploration’, the reality is that throughout decades past and thus previous to this contemporary time the British *have* been ‘conquerors’, as have the Americans who somewhat inherited the English legacy in this respect, although more so in the context of the global economy and trade – the capitalist legacy.

Ostensibly, whether or not this all amounts to conquest ‘without a settled design’, conquest is not proposition to be accepted as appropriate in the context of our former and contemporary reality.

‘Santayana enjoyed aspects of college life (185).

‘He liked the semi-cloistered existence, the intellectual intimacy with burgeoning young minds, the easy proximity to handsome young faces. But he always loathed the academic industry (185). Indeed, no sooner had he started teaching than he began plotting his escape. Being a teacher, he remarked in *Persons and Places*, was forced upon him by the necessity of earning a living, ‘but being a student was my vocation’. He lived frugally, saved diligently, and was finally able to announce his departure in 1912, just shy of fifty, when his mother died leaving him a legacy of \$10,000 (nearly \$200,000 today [1992]). He left for Europe and never set foot in the United States again. (Santayana was not without affection for America, but he liked to say that his love for it, like his love for Spain, was ‘manifested ... by living there as little as possible’.) (186) ...

'It wasn't just a matter of administrative expansionism that bothered Santayana, though. The very discipline of academic philosophy rubbed him the wrong way. 'That philosophers should be professors is an accident,' he wrote, 'and almost an anomaly. Free reflection about everything is a habit to be imitated, but not a subject to expound ...' (186) ...

' 'The great event in my life recently' [William] James wrote to a colleague in 1900: '... has been the reading of Santayana's book [*Interpretations of Poetry and Religion*]. Although I absolutely reject the Platonism of it, I have literally squealed with delight at the imperturbable perfection with which the position is laid down ...

' 'I now understand Santayana, the man. I never understood him before (187).

' 'But what a perfection of rottenness in a philosophy !

' 'I don't think I ever knew the anti-realistic view to be propounded with so impudently superior an air. It is refreshing to see a representative of moribund Latinity rise up and administer such reproof to us barbarians in the hour of our triumph' (187).

'James ends by asking that his letter be passed along to Santayana, adding: (187)

' 'He is certainly an *extraordinarily distingue* writer. Thank him for existing !' (187)'.

Presumably, the way through which Santayana 'loathed the academic industry', and by implication the 'very discipline of academic philosophy' may have been carried forth through his teaching to infuse the likes of **Walter Lippman, the later-to-become revered journalist who inaugurated the expression 'manufacturing consent' to discern how mass information was manipulated by structural agencies and institutions to serve privileged interests.**

Later, **Noam Chomsky**, in collaboration with, authored the work ***Manufacturing Consent***, the title of which Chomsky openly admits was garnered from Lippman's famous expression.

Obviously, **William James** seems to have become somewhat relatively enamoured with Santayana thenceforth from 1900, having read some of Santayana's work, although not substantially enough to consider reviewing his own theoretical philosophic position !

At this time, Santayana was 33, and would not leave the US to become permanently based in Europe until 12 years thereafter.

Meanwhile, James would have been situated on the cusp of inviting **Sigmund Freud** and **Carl Jung** to visit the US for their seminars there – perhaps even having such plans in the ether by then – an event which would begin to revolutionise and transform the esteem of **psychoanalysis** and broaden its reach beyond its European roots.

‘In many ways, Santayana was closer in spirit to William’s brother Henry (188).

‘They met only once, in England, toward the end of Henry’s life (188).

‘ ‘In that one interview,’ Santayana recalled – sadly, I think – he ‘made me feel more at home and better understood than his brother William ever had done in the long years of our acquaintance. Henry was calm, he liked to see things as they are, and be free afterwards to imagine how they might have been.’ High praise from that apostle of clarity animated by subjunctive dispensation. Despite their differences, however, there was no contemporary to whom Santayana owed more, intellectually, than William James, whose ‘sense for the immediate’, for the unadulterated, unexplained, instant fact of experience’ Santayana celebrated. The problem with Harvard was not William James but the increasing professional drift of the institution (188) ...

‘As John McCormick noted in his biography, Santayana ‘conveyed an attitude toward existence rather than a set of axioms, a totality of response rather than a geodetic survey of the world’. That attitude, that totality of response, is not necessarily aided by excessive scholarly integument’ (188) ...

‘Many people who knew Santayana only from anthologies are surprised to discover how thoroughly naturalistic a thinker he was. It somehow seems strange for a poet of his sometimes trembling fervency. But right from the start Santayana’s primary philosophical inspirations were radical materialists like Democritus and Lucretius, Schopenhauer and Spinoza. (Spinoza, he said, ‘in several respects laid the foundation of my philosophy.’) For Santayana, honest self-scrutiny presupposed materialism. ‘Those who are not materialists,’ he wrote, ‘cannot be good observers of themselves’ (189)’.

This ardent revelation of Santayana being blessed with the disposition to ‘convey ... an attitude toward existence rather than a set of axioms, a totality of response rather than a geodetic survey of the world’, affirms the veritable perspective for me of Santayana as a sensitive exponent of deep fine-grained

refined discernment of the intricate character and qualities of people *and* ‘existence’.

Because, ‘attitude[s]’ and ‘response’ comprise the substance and significance of mutual relational experience, and of however we evolve to weave attunement and resonance throughout this diversely situated perennial process.

Ultimately, Santayana’s predilection to embrace ‘materialism’ seems to adumbrate for me at least as much with the substance, significance, relevance, and resonance, of the reality of mutual relational experience, and thereby as much with its meaning.

‘Santayana’s attitude toward death is summed up with spare eloquence in the lines from *The Poet’s Testament*: (190)

‘ ‘I give back to earth what the earth gave,

‘ ‘All to the furrow, nothing to the grave.

‘ ‘The candle’s out, the spirit’s vigil spent;

‘ ‘Sight may not follow where the vision went.’ (190)

‘ ‘Biology cannot hinder vision’s flight, but it sets a definite limit to the life of sight (190).

‘If Santayana was a thoroughly naturalistic thinker, he came armed with a remarkable aesthetic sensibility and native appreciation of the imaginative resources that religions offered. Religions, he insisted, ‘are the great fairy-tales of conscience.’ Nevertheless he also believed that religions are indispensable, not least because they nurture the emotion of piety, ‘Man’s reverent attachment to the sources of his being and the steadying of his life by that attachment’ ... But he also saw in religion an irreplaceable friend of human yearning. Its disappearance, hailed by many as emancipation, actually brought forth new forms of bondage (190) ...

‘When he looked around at the increasing secularisation of the modern world, Santayana saw that the degradation of religion went hand-in-hand with the diminishment of culture. In *The Intellectual Temper of the Age* (1911), Santayana forlornly describes the dissolution of Christianity and the rise of ‘an emancipated atheistic, international democracy’ (191) ...

‘ ‘Those who speak most of progress,’ he wrote, ‘measure it by quantity and not by quality ...’ [my emphasis] (191)’.

Herein, the trajectory of Santayana's appreciation of spirit, and all this experiential quality can mean and signify in the existential context seems evident and inexorable, as realised from his perspective.

Since through his revelation of this perspective, as expressed through *The Poet's Testament*, Santayana anticipates 'the vigil spent' of 'spirit', yet only actually this particular 'vigil', not necessarily any other prospective dimension of spirit, ostensibly because this is the *only* dimension we can feasibly apprehend.

Yet, although our 'life of sight' ultimately fails us, given the incursion of 'biology' it seems; nevertheless – 'Biology cannot hinder vision's flight' – which seems to presuppose 'vision' still has a way to go – beyond 'the life of sight' !

Moreover, Santayana clearly appreciated the reality of 'the sources of [our] being', and indeed what would seem to be actually our perennial human 'attachment' to these as 'steadying' qualities – and thereby the epitome of balance, equipoise, relative equanimity, and equilibrium – prospectively as dynamic in nature.

Thence to the truly definitive realisation: the optimal 'measurement' of collective human endeavour to proceed through 'quality ... not ... quantity', and thus through 'process', rather than 'progress', as the optimal relevant resonant criterion.

Indeed, '*The Intellectual Temper of the Age*' could be cited as its '*zeitgeist*' !

'In his wry, understated manner, Santayana was a far more independent thinker than many who loudly proclaim their independence (191-192). He understood that tradition – that great storehouse of accumulated wisdom – was mankind's most lavish dower, to dispense with which was madness. 'The life of reason,' he wrote, 'is our heritage and exists only through tradition. Now the misfortune of revolutionaries is that they are disinherited, and their folly is that they wish to be disinherited even more than they are' ... In *The Sense of Beauty* (1896), in a section called 'Effects of Indeterminate Organisation', Santayana admits that 'the greatest mastery of technique' is not good enough for success in art: (192)

'When there is real profundity ... there will accordingly be a felt inadequacy of expression, and an appeal to the observer to piece out our imperfections with his thoughts. But this should come only after the resources of a patient and well learned art have been exhausted; else what is felt as depth is really confusion and incompetence ... And a habitual indulgence in the inarticulate is a sure sign of the philosopher who has not learned to think, the poet who has not learned to write, the painter who has not learned to paint ...' (192)

‘Santayana’s loftiness was also evident in his political opinions (193).

‘Frederick Olafson noted that there exists in Santayana’s thinking ‘a pervasive animus against democracy and liberalism’. This is true. About democracy in general, Santayana harboured the distaste of someone committed to an aristocracy of talent ... His affection for America, though genuine, was tempered by a patronising astonishment at its optimistic faith in the benevolence of equality and the marketplace of ideas’ (193).

Even given the realisation of ‘real profundity’ in the context of ‘technique’ as applied in any artistic enterprise, there will ever tend to be ‘a felt inadequacy of expression’, because there is always more to be derived and applied in the course of purveying what has accrued from such creative imaginative, indeed intuitive, endeavour.

How ameliorative this thence would become for the provenance of such artistic endeavour to be shared would imply that **respective distinctive contributions thereby to emanate would be blended into this whole process**, such as through and with the engagement of those for whom this heritage was intended, thus to include each and all of those concerned in this whole propensively collaborative endeavour.

Thus this would reveal the quality facets of their character attributes and dispositions generally – effectively palpable as democratic resonance, despite Santayana’s presumed ‘animus against democracy’.

Whatever may be construed about **‘the marketplace of ideas’**, in general ‘the benevolence’ of what could be more aptly revealed as **equity, rather than insistence on the bedrock ‘equality’, seems for me a more relevant resonant prospect in the context of optimal relative equanimity and dynamic equilibrium.**

‘Santayana was never less than provocative (194).

‘But about some political matters, he was naïve if not obtuse (194).

‘In a letter of 1920, for example, he wrote to a former Harvard colleague that: (194)

‘ ‘I think to be born under Bolshevism would not be worse than to be born in Boston’ ... Santayana never really came to terms with the enormity of Communism, or indeed of Nazism ... But in many other respects, Santayana’s traditionalist temperament and passion for individual liberty made him an astute social critic (194).

'He was especially penetrating about the contradictions of liberalism (194).

'In *The Intellectual Temper of the Age*, he wrote that: (194)

' 'Liberalism had been supposed to advocate liberty; but what the advanced parties that still call themselves liberal now advocate is control, control over property, trade, wages, hours of work, meat and drink, amusements, and in a truly advanced country like France control over education and religion; and it is only on the subject of marriage ... that liberalism is growing more and more liberal' (194) ...

'Liberalism in the modern sense is deeply hostile not only to tradition – tradition is by definition an impediment to 'progress' – but also to 'the wilder instincts of man': 'the love of foraging, of hunting, of fighting, of plotting, of carousing, or of doing penance. ... The perfect liberal society, extolling freedom in theory, is actually one that excludes initiative (195) ...

'The homogenising imperative of liberalism has a psychological correlative in abstract moralism' (195).

While mentioned here by Santayana in 1920, his reference to 'Bolshevism' would surely need to be tempered by the reality of where this ideology was then situated – the Russian Revolution having been effected only three years earlier, with the relatively stable initial incursion of Vladimir Lenin into the insurgent power struggle, and the horror years of the Stalin ascendancy yet to proceed.

Clearly, also, it would have been the previous Czarist regime which would have seemed the more 'traditional' emanation, especially just then, so it's actually difficult to figure such comments here by Santayana as revelatory of any 'traditionalist temperament and passion'.

At least we surely can confirm that, in relative terms to our contemporary times, Santayana elicited pertinently what 'liberalism' in the political, social, and structural (corporate) sense has become – 'control, control over property, trade, wages, hours of work, meat and drink, amusements' – even 'over education', and to some extent 'religion'.

All this seems so familiar, even the 'homogenising imperative of ... abstract moralism', and all of which tends to render the 'liberal society' as one through which 'freedom' is really only 'extol[ed] ... in theory'.

'Santayana was a curious hybrid (196).

'In one way, he was every bit as radical a thinker as Schopenhauer (whom he greatly admired) or Nietzsche (whom he did not). Ultimately, though, he was the cheerful, affirmative figure that Nietzsche pretended to be but wasn't. (No one, I think, ever accused Schopenhauer of being cheerful.) What Santayana described as his 'scepticism' ran very deep indeed. 'The truth is a terrible thing,' he has the vicar of Iffley say in *The Last Puritan*. 'It was much darker, much sadder, much more ignoble, much more inhuman and ironical than most of us are willing to admit, or even able to suspect.' That is just the sort of thing one might expect to find in Nietzsche ... But where Nietzsche engaged in unending histrionics ... Santayana behaved like a gentleman (196) ...

'Out of scepticism came faith, but it was an *animal* faith, modest, grateful, thoroughly materialistic: disillusioned but also at peace (196) ...

'There were two interrelated sources of Santayana's calm (196).

'One was his aestheticism (197).

'Santayana strove to regard the whole world as a thing of beauty, which is to say a source of pleasure. (In *The Sense of Beauty* he defined beauty as 'pleasure objectified': inadequate as a definition, no doubt, but useful as a barometer of temperament.) 'I can draw no distinction,' he wrote in a mature summing-up, ' – save for academic programs – between moral and aesthetic values: beauty being a good, is a moral good; and the practice and enjoyment of art, like all practice and all enjoyment, falls within the sphere of morals – at least if by morals we understand moral economy and not moral superstition.' Santayana attempted to provide a philosophical justification for this thoroughgoing aestheticism with what he called his doctrine of 'essences'. How do we know that what we believe is true is true; what we find beautiful is in fact beautiful? Are we not everywhere besieged by error and illusion? **Yes, but Santayana proposes:** (197)

'... to entertain the illusion without succumbing to it, accepting it openly as an illusion, and forbidding it to claim any sort of being but that which it obviously has; and then ... it will not deceive me. What will remain of this non-deceptive illusion will then be a truth, and a truth the being of which requires no explanation, since it is utterly impossible that it should be otherwise' [my emphasis] (197)'

Ultimately, Santayana guides us to his perspective of the consummate character and quality of 'the truth' for him through the vicar of Iffley's profound testimony of truth as 'a terrible thing' – 'darker ... sadder ... more ignoble ... inhuman and ironical than ... [we] are willing to admit' for 'most of us'.

Because the truth is thus so paradoxical and ambiguous in its depth and reach it requires ultra-sensitive attuned refinement for us to discern its intricate multi-faceted character and trajectory.

Nevertheless, if we are able to stay with the tempestuous struggle of this journey, we seem likely to emerge at a juncture which likely will be reminiscent of the truth, enough for us to resonate with, and remain finely attuned to, this inexorable trajectory.

Thus 'faith' is able to be nurtured and nourished through such 'modest, grateful', indeed graceful, character and quality to become what would epitomise equable relational *pragma* – 'at peace', even if perhaps 'disillusioned'.

Reality in and of any form could then be accepted as having the 'sort of being ... which it obviously has' as a form of 'truth' – palpable as a provisional truth – 'which requires no explanation'.

This truth may then be explored to reveal all it can seem to mean and signify for us as mutual relational experience.

– Lindsay Mell, 20 May 2022.

PRIMARY REFERENCE

Throughout the foregoing commentary and textual analysis, my primary reference is:

Roger Kimball 2002:

Lives of the Mind – The Use and Abuse of Intelligence from Hegel to Wodehouse

Ivan R. Dee, Chicago, USA.

Quoted as cited substantively through single quotation marks, with page reference numbers thus (), throughout each of the textual analysis selections presented for the seminar paper.

Page numbers in brackets refer to the preceding quotation in each case.

NB: Quotations within quotations follow my customary process of also using single quotation marks.