

## Chapter One

# Philosophical Religious Naturalism

The details of our story start with philosophers: George Santayana in the United States and Samuel Alexander in England followed by American pragmatists (Dewey, Mead), John Herman Randall, Roy Wood Sellars, and Jan Christiaan Smuts.

### George Santayana: Religion in the Life of Reason

George Santayana, who taught philosophy at Harvard from 1889 to 1912, was one of the most creative religious naturalists. He rejected the ontological validity of religious beliefs, but affirmed the importance of their role in human life. He developed a rich naturalistic hermeneutics of religion in Western civilization which remains an inspiration and resource for contemporary religious naturalism.

A good way to grasp Santayana is to note how he distinguished between facts and ideals. At their best both poetry and religion articulate human ideals. They do not describe facts. He writes in the Preface to *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion*, “The excellence of religion is due to an idealisation of experience which, while making religion noble if treated as poetry, makes it necessarily false if treated as science. Its function is rather to draw from reality materials for an image of that ideal to which reality ought to conform” (Santayana 1989, 3; for the distinction between poetry and religion, see the Preface, and chapters I and X of *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion*). In the last sentence of this book he

writes: "Poetry raised to its highest power is then identical with religion grasped in its inmost truth; . . . then poetry loses its frivolity and ceases to demoralise, while religion surrenders its illusions and ceases to deceive" (Santayana 1989, 172).

Religion differs from poetry and other products of the imagination in its pragmatic effect. Religion "differs from a mere play of the imagination in one important respect; it reacts directly upon life; it is a factor in conduct. Our religion is the poetry in which we believe" (Santayana 1989, 20). The imagination enforces duties powerfully when it pictures them "in oaths sworn before the gods, in commandments written by the finger of God upon stone tablets, in visions of hell and heaven, in chivalrous love and loyalty, and in the sense of family dignity and honour" (Santayana 1989, 11).

The error which Christianity committed, but paganism did not, was to confuse idealization with description of fact. This fallacy, the root of all superstition, is to think that for poetry to be religious, to be the inspiration of life, it must conceal that it is poetry and deceive us about the facts. What makes superstition is the failure to distinguish between objects of imagination and facts to be described and understood. "Men became superstitious not because they had too much imagination, but because they were not aware that they had any." There is a further distinction which Santayana immediately makes, religion differs from superstition in its moral worth. "For religion differs from superstition not psychologically but morally, not in its origin but in its worth" (Santayana 1989, 68).

Santayana's criticism of liberal trends in religion is that they collapse description and imagination. The liberal school is "merely impoverishing religious symbols and vulgarising religious aims; it subtracts from faith that imagination by which faith becomes an interpretation and idealisation of human life, and retains only a stark and superfluous principle of superstition. For meagre and abstract as such a religion may be, it contains all the venom of absolute pretensions. . . . Mythology cannot become science by being reduced in bulk, but it may cease, as a mythology, to be worth having" (Santayana 1989, 4; see "Modernism and Christianity," in *Winds of Doctrine*, Santayana 1913, 48–53).

Santayana's main treatment of religion is in *Reason in Religion*, Volume III of the five volume *Life of Reason*. Here we find rich insights and hermeneutics mixed with overgeneralizations and rank anti-Semitism (Henry S. Levinson's *Santayana: Pragmatism and the Spiritual Life* and Marvin Shaw's dissertation are helpful. See Levinson 1992 and Shaw 1968).

His starting point is superstition, the most primitive element in religion. (He sees superstition as having never been totally overcome in

the history of religion. His term is the “life” of religion, not its evolution.) Finding an aspect of superstition to appreciate rationally will be difficult. It is not difficult to find an aspect of superstition to criticize. Superstition is an attempted science, motivated by the desire to understand, to foresee, or to control the world. However, its claims are arbitrary chimeras, founded on a confusion of efficient causes and ideal results.

The critical aspect of Santayana’s naturalistic hermeneutics is clear at the beginning. To appeal to the supernatural is to remain in the obvious, in what is plausible and easy to conceive. Moral and particular forces are easier to imagine than universal natural laws.

For example, the key to appreciating miracles is the obviousness of its supposed connection between the physical event and its “spiritual” or psychological cause. “If the water of Lourdes, bottled and sold by chemists, cured all diseases, there would be no miracle. . . . But if each believer in taking the water thinks the effect morally conditioned, if he interprets the result, should it be favorable, as an answer to his faith and prayers, then the cure becomes miraculous because it becomes intelligible and manifests the obedience of nature to the exigencies of spirit” (23/190 The first page reference is to *Reason in Religion*, Santayana 1905; the second reference is to the one volume abridgement of *The Life of Reason*, Santayana 1953). He next deals with sacrifice and prayer. Sacrifice starts off as propitiation of an envious god, but soon suggests that what was once a bribe easily becomes a friendly distribution, giving to each participant what is due by convention, however little it may be deserved. In religious ritual people find satisfaction in fulfilling in a seemly manner what has been prescribed.

Then new religious sentiments appear. In agricultural contexts, for example, sacrifice becomes a ritual of thanksgiving. So in Christian devotion, which often follows primitive impulses in a more speculative fashion, the cross is not merely the payment of a debt or an amount of suffering to be endured, but rather an act of affection and an affirmation that God wished to assimilate himself to humans, instead of declaring forgiveness from on high.

If sacrifice can become thanksgiving, it can undergo an even nobler change, pointing out the wisdom of renunciation. We are invited to give up the inordinate and foolish part of our will. When religion achieves this stage it stops misrepresenting material conditions, and learns to express spiritual goods. Of course, the pathology of this is that sacrifice may merely achieve an emotional catharsis instead of a moral improvement.

His discussion of prayer continues the distinction between the physical effects of religion and its spiritual value. “Prayer, in fine, though it accomplishes nothing material, constitutes something spiritual. It will

not bring rain, but until rain comes it may cultivate hope and resignation and may prepare the heart for any issue. . . . A candle wasting itself before an image will prevent no misfortune, but it may bear witness to some silent hope or relieve some sorrow by expressing it." Both physical dependence and spiritual dominion can be expressed in worship and supplication to God for aid. "Physical impotence is expressed by man's appeal for help; moral dominion by belief in God's omnipotence." This belief could easily be contradicted by events, "if God's omnipotence stood for a material magical control of events." However, faith can survive any outward disappointment, because it does "not become truly religious until it ceases to be a foolish expectation of improbable things and rises on stepping-stones of its material disappointments into a spiritual peace. What would sacrifice be but a risky investment if it did not redeem us from love of those things which it asks us to surrender?" (47-48/201).

Here we begin to glimpse the rational development of religion. "In rational prayer the soul may be said to accomplish three things important to its welfare: it withdraws within itself and defines its good, it accommodates itself to destiny, and it grows like the ideal which it conceives" (43/198). The functional approach to religion manifests itself in the ideal of deity, which is the ideal of humanity freed from those limitations that a wise person accepts, but a spiritual person feels as limitations. Humans are mortal. Therefore the gods must be immortal. The religiously advanced person tries to see everything as they do, under the form of eternity. This is the goal of reason. The gods are just. They are no respecters of persons. It is our ideal to become like this. It would be embarrassing to indulge in selfish prayer. The impartial majesty of the divine mind will be imagined and thus will tend to pass into the human mind.

Santayana now moves to a discussion of mythology. He has already asserted that the first function of religion is propitiation, which comes before the construction of a mythology. Cult comes before fable and worship precedes dogma.

As with his discussion of prayer, Santayana rejects a simple identification of myth with empirical truth. Even when people acknowledge a Providence, they still have natural aversions and fears. Among sane people, prayer has never stopped practical efforts to secure the desired results.

The function of prayer is not simply magic or compensation, but transformation. If a myth was originally accepted it was not for its obvious falsehood; it was accepted because it was understood to express reality metaphorically. Its function was to exhibit some piece of experience in its totality and moral outcome, just as in a map we reduce everything in order to examine it in its relationships. Put another way, the function of myth is to present events in terms relative to spirit.

The two factors in mythology are “a moral consciousness and a corresponding poetic conception of things.” Thus the role of reason in religion again becomes clear. Had fable started with an adequate explanation of human values, its pictures, even if the external notions they built upon were wrong, would have shown that a world so conceived would have contained the ideals and prizes of life. “Thus Dante’s bad cosmography and worse history do not detract from the spiritual penetration of his thought.” *The Divine Comedy*, in other words, “describes the Life of Reason in a fantastic world” (55–56/204). One function of mythology has been to change religion from superstition into wisdom, from a justification for magic into an ideal representation of moral goods. Gods are representations of our ideals. The function of the gods is to interpret the human heart to us and to help us discover our ambitions and, as we emulate the gods, to pursue these ambitions.

Among the common folk the poetic factor usually predominates. Historians and theologians tend to concentrate on the hypostasized forms of mythology, instead of the moral factor. Apollo was not only a sun god. He became the patron of culture and thus had moral functions. Alongside of Apollo there were the poetic figures of Helios and Phaëton, minor deities who could also express the physical operation of the sun, but did not express the moral factor.

Sometimes a religious mind will outgrow its traditional faith without being able to reformulate the natural grounds and moral values of the precious system in which he or she can no longer believe. In such cases the dead gods leave ghosts behind them, because the moral forces which the gods once expressed remain inarticulate. To regain moral freedom and put knowledge to rational use in the government of life, we must rediscover the origin of the gods. We must reduce them analytically to their natural and moral constituents, and then rearrange this material in forms appropriate to a mature reflection.

In tracing the natural history of the mythologies, Santayana restricts himself to the classical Greek and Roman and the Christian, the only two likely to have any continued effect on the Western mind, since they are the best articulated and the best known to us.

The Vedic hymns constitute a sort of prehistory of Greek mythology for him, much like the Greek in spirit but less articulate. (This is a continuation into the history of myth of the old idea of Sanskrit being closest to the primitive Indo-European language. A knowledge of the Puranas and Epics would have disabused him of this idea.) Likewise one studies the religion of the Hebrews to discover the roots of the Christian tradition.

For Santayana an overview of the history of Christian dogma moves from this prehistory to the story of two transformations: first the

Patristic adaptation of Hebrew religion to the Greco-Roman world and then the adaptation to the Teutonic spirit in Protestantism. In the first metamorphosis the mythology of the Hebrews was refined, changed into a religion of redemption, and equipped “with a semi-pagan mythology, a pseudo-Platonic metaphysics, and a quasi-Roman organisation” (69/210). In the second transformation, Christianity received a new foundation in the faith of the individual; and, as the traditions thus undermined gradually became attenuated, it was transformed by the German mind into a romantic, mystical pantheism. Throughout all these changes Christianity retained an indebtedness to the Jewish religion for the core of its dogma, cult, and ethics.

The religion of the Hebrew prophets was basically superstitious, for it had a material and political ideal and virtue was recommended as a magical way to propitiate the deity and ensure public prosperity. The idea that “virtue is a natural excellence, the ideal expression of human life,” was not possible to those “vehement barbarians” [*sic*] or their “descendants and disciples, Jewish, Christian, or Moslem.” Yet the rational element could grow from this crude religion because “by assigning a magic value to morality they gave a moral value to religion” (73–74; the abridged edition has a slightly different wording, 212–213). The imaginary aim of restoring the kingdom of Israel by propitiating Jehovah was a myth which covered a genuine dedication to the ideal.

At the same time that the prophets were changing the tradition, it was being crystallized. Scripture was codified, written, and proclaimed to be divinely inspired through Moses. (Santayana conflates Scripture with the Pentateuch here.) Santayana unleashes his invective here. “What was condemnable in the Jews was not that they asserted the divinity of their law. . . . Their crime is to have denied the equal prerogative of other nations’ laws and deities.” The Jews “rendered themselves odious to mankind by this arrogance, and taught Christians and Moslems the same fanaticism” (76–77/214–215). Many of us share his abhorrence against fanaticism, but one suspects that the sharpness of his pen here is driven by anti-Semitism.

However, the calamities that befell Israel produced a significant spiritualization in its religion. Sorrow endured for the Lord became blessedness and a token of mystical election. While the prophets and psalmists showed the beginning of asceticism or “inverted worldliness,” the early Christians (and Essenes) made this reversal explicit. True, the old mythology remained in the background. The kingdom of God would be established soon. Yet gradually the idea of a theocracy, the kingdom of God, receded or else became spiritualized. Its joys were eventually conceived as immaterial, contemplative, and reserved for life after death.

Salvation consisted in surrendering all desire for worldly things. Thus the prophet's idea of prosperity merited by virtue changed to the belief that prosperity was alien to virtue.

Santayana sees the history of Jewish and Christian ethics as a series of pendulum swings between irrational extremes. In between the extremes is a point of equilibrium from which a sketch of rational religion can be drawn. For example, this point was touched when the prophets realized that right and wrong are determined by human interests, not the arbitrary will of Jehovah, and that conduct creates destiny. But the rational elements in this insight were presented in a mythical form mixed with superstition and chauvinism. Likewise Christianity failed to establish an authentic moral education. Thus a worthy conception of prosperity and the good could not be substituted for the crude ideas of the heathen and Hebrews. Neither were the natural goals of human endeavor recognized and formulated, but everything was left to impulse or contingent tradition. Reason in religion did not triumph.

Then a new form of materialism arose to distort what was rational in the ideas of the prophets. Claims to a supernatural knowledge based on revelation arose. Mythology took on a new shape. The religion of Israel was changed into two formidable engines, the Bible and the Church.

Santayana finds the distinguishing characteristic of Christianity to be the worship of Christ. In a move used by many liberal scholars, he differentiates between the teachings of Jesus, which is Hebraic religion reduced to its essential spiritual core, and the worship of Christ, which is something Greek instead. Like Harnack, he finds the key to early Christianity to be "the Hellenization of Christianity" (Harnack 1902, 215–224).

Unlike Harnack, he finds value in this. Christianity would have continued as a Jewish sect were it not that an infusion of Greek thought made it speculative, universal, and ideal, and simultaneously malleable and helpful in devotions by the adoption of pagan habits. The incarnation of God in humanity, and the making of humanity divine in God are pagan conceptions. Without them Christianity would have lost its theology, which would be no great loss, but also "its spiritual aspiration, its artistic affinities, and the secret of its metaphysical charity and joy" (85/219, Santayana's treatment of Christianity may be seen in a brief form in chapter IV of *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion*).

Not only do Santayana's sympathies with the Apollonian strand of Greek culture come into play here, but also his anti-Semitic sympathies, for he says clearly: "Among the Jews there were no liberal interests for the ideal to express" (85/219). He has completely ignored the Wisdom literature, not to mention the place of the Gentiles in Jewish eschatological imagery.

On this view there were two things which made early Christianity able to spread rapidly. One was the morality and mysticism, beautifully expressed in Christ's parables and maxims, and illustrated by his miracles. This democratic charity could powerfully appeal to an age disenchanted with the world, and especially to the lower classes. The other point of contact early Christianity had with public need was its tapestry of history and the unfathomable mysteries that it held before the fancy. The figure of Christ, with its lowliness, simplicity, and humanity, was at first an obstacle to the metaphysical interpretation that was required for acceptance. But even Greek fable told of Apollo tending flocks and Demeter mourning her lost child. The time was ripe for a mythology filled with pathos. The humble life and sufferings of Jesus were felt in all their beauty while the tragic gloom was relieved by his miraculous birth, his resurrection, and his restoration into divinity.

What overcame the world was not moral reform, which was commonplace, not asceticism, which was urged by gymnosophists and philosophers, nor brotherly love within the community, for the Jews did that. What overcame the world was a new poetry, a new ideal, the crucified Christ. This fable carried the imagination into a new realm. This fable "sanctified the poverty and sorrow at which Paganism had shuddered; it awakened tenderer emotions, revealed more humane objects of adoration, and furnished subtler means of grace" (Santayana 1989, 56).

A further important piece of the Christian poetic fable was the notion of a final judgment. Each person was declared to have an immortal soul, that is, "each life has the potentiality of an eternal meaning, and as this potentiality is or is not actualised, as this meaning is or is not expressed in the phenomena of this life, the soul is eternally saved or lost." The symbolic truth of the Christian fictions helped people understand, "as never before or since, the pathos and nobility of his life, the necessity of discipline, the possibility of sanctity, the transcendence and the humanity of the divine. . . . The supernatural was an allegory of the natural, and rendered the values of transitory things under the image of eternal existences" (Santayana 1989, 62–63).

A related moral truth declared in the Christian poetry is the absoluteness of moral distinctions. While good and evil normally are mixed together, the distinction between them is clear. Some things really are better than others.

The complexities of life, struggling as it does amidst irrational forces, may make the attainment of one good the cause of the unattainableness of another; they cannot destroy the essential desirability of both. . . . Now how utter this moral truth



imaginatively, how clothe it in an image that might render its absoluteness and its force? . . . In place of the confused vistas of the empirical world, in which the threads of benefit and injury might seem to be mingled and lost, the imagination substituted the clear vision of Hell and Heaven. . . . The doctrine of eternal rewards and punishments is, as we have tried to show, an expression of moral truth, a poetic rendering of the fact that rational values are ideal, momentous, and irreversible. (Santayana 1989, 64, 66)

One interesting insight is Santayana's distinction between metaphor and transformation. Like other Orientals, the poetry and religion of the Jews was filled with violent metaphors, which were abhorrent to the classic mind. "Uniting, as it did, clear reason with lively fancy, it could not conceive one thing to *be* another. . . . But the classic mind could well conceive transformation, of which indeed nature is full; and in Greek fables anything might change its form, become something else. . . . While metaphor was thus unintelligible and confusing to the Greek, metamorphosis was perfectly familiar to him. . . . For instance, the metaphors of the Last Supper, so harmless and vaguely satisfying to an Oriental audience, became the doctrine of transubstantiation" (87–88/220). Now all language may indeed have a metaphorical aspect, but Santayana's distinction between Hebraic and Greek cultures here is worth considering.

The eclectic Christian philosophy, composed of this Christ figure and classical philosophy in a language of metamorphosis, is one of the most elaborate and impressive products of the human imagination. Although the narrow time and space into which the Christian imagination squeezed the world may seem childish and poverty-stricken, this reduction of things to a human measure, this half-arrogant assumption that what is important for man must control the whole universe, made Christian philosophy originally appealing and still arouses enthusiastic belief. Humans are still immature. We are afraid of freedom. We are not satisfied by a good created by our own action. We are afraid to be left alone in the universe. The moral life of man must appear in fantastic symbols. The history of these symbols is the history of the human soul.

When he uses reason to evaluate this Christian dream, Santayana is quite clear that this is not a matter of proof or disproof. "Do we marshal arguments against the miraculous birth of Buddha, or the story of Cronos devouring his children? We seek rather to honour the piety and to understand the poetry embodied in these fables." Note that Santayana has already relegated Christ to the realm of fable and we are left to retrieve something. Note also that this is said within the context of

a very controversial dismissal of the literal truth of the poetic element. "Matters of religion should never be matters of controversy. We neither argue with a lover about his taste nor condemn him, if we are just, for knowing so human a passion. That he harbours it is no indication of a want of sanity on his part in other matters." This is as much as to say that the lover and, hence, the religious devotee, lacks sanity in this most crucial matter. "But while we acquiesce in his experience ["satisfaction" in the abridged edition], and are glad he has it, we need no arguments to dissuade us from sharing it. Each man may have his own loves, but the object in each case is different. And so it is, or should be, in religion. Before the rise of those strange and fraudulent Hebraic pretensions . . . [it] could never have been a duty to adopt a religion not one's own any more than a language, a coinage, or a costume not current in one's own country. The idea that religion contains a literal, not a symbolic, representation of truth and life is simply an impossible idea." None of this is subject to proof or refutation. "Philosophy may describe unreason, as it may describe force; it cannot hope to refute them" (97–98/ 226–227).

Santayana sees Christianity as intertwined with pagan elements in its early days, elements which remain to this day among popular Christianity, particularly in the Mediterranean area. This paganization is an improvement for him, because it expressed and inspired spiritual sentiment more generously, whereas without it Christianity would have retained the hostility to human genius so characteristic of Hebraism. Christianity was rendered more congenial and adequate by this infusion of pagan sentiment. "Paganism was nearer than Hebraism to the Life of Reason because its myths were more transparent and its temper less fanatical" (107/232).

In describing this element of paganism Santayana refers to the daily practices of Catholic people, not official theology or ritual. These practices are a particularization of religion, a focus of devotion to particular saints, special festivals, supplications to the Virgin under specific titles. This particularization serves a purpose. A universal power has no specific purpose. It cannot be friendly nor take cognizance of your personal needs.

Religion and philosophy were originally pre-rational, crudely experimental, unconscious of the limits of excellence and life. The Christianity of the gospels was post-rational, it had turned its back on the world. If rational ethics is the ideal rational life of compromise and harmony among all human interests and impulses, post-rational morality arises at times of social dissolution when the support for the rational life has gone. It focuses on one natural interest to fulfill. A partial good is offered as consolation for the loss of the rational ideal. Such partial goods may be

a flight above the world, momentary pleasure, mortification of the passions, patience in suffering, conformity to events, etc.

Even more clearly, the Christianity of the later centuries, with its pagan elements, was a post-rational religion. It was acquainted with sorrow and calamity. It became a religion that had passed through both civilization and despair, and finally been reduced to translating the values of life into supernatural symbols. The experience of disillusion forced the imagination to flee the earth and to shape a realm of spirit beyond time and nature, in a posthumous, metaphysical realm.

After pagan custom, the next thing to be intermixed with Christianity was barbarian genius. The conversion of the barbarians was superficial. "A non-Christian ethics of valour and honour, a non-Christian fund of superstition, legend, and sentiment, subsisted always among mediaeval peoples." Pagan Christianity was and always remained an alien religion to the medieval people. "It was thus that the Roman Church hatched the duck's egg of Protestantism." Among these barbarians a religious restlessness brought several gifts, beautiful but insidious and incongruous, including Gothic art, the sentiment of chivalry, and scholastic philosophy. The Christianity infused with barbarianism in the medieval north of Europe was quite different from the pagan Christianity of the south and east. People did not value the renunciation of the things of the earth and the metaphysical glory of its transfigured life. Intricacy took the place of dignity and poetry the place of rhetoric; the basilica turned into an abbey and the hermitage became a school. "Something jocund and mischievous peeped out even in the cloister; gargoyles leered from the belfry, while ivy and holly grew about the cross" (109–110, 112/234–235). Christianity was the occasion and even the excuse for art, jollity, curiosity and tenderness.

This barbarianized Christianity eventuated in Protestantism, the natural religion of the Teutonic peoples, a religion of spontaneity and emotional freedom. It confused vitality with spiritual life. It was convinced of the significance of worldly success and prosperity. Protestantism is austere and energetic. The only evils it recognizes are seen as challenges to action. Thus Protestantism was attached to the Old Testament, in which the fervor of the Hebrews appeared in its pre-rational and worldly form. It is not democratic like post-rational religions which think of the soul as an exile from another real, a pilgrim toward a distant city.

The Renaissance humanists, if they had not been overwhelmed by the fanatical Reformation and Counter-Reformation, would have been able to reform Christianity, retaining it as a poetic expression of human life, in short, as a form of paganism. Had humanism been allowed to fight for reason with the weapons of reason, it would eventually have

led to a widespread enlightenment without dividing Christendom, inflaming venomous religious and national passions, or weakening the life of philosophy.

Eventually, after the final disappearance of the Christian tradition, Absolute Egotism appeared in German philosophy. This final expression of Protestantism marked the definite separation of the Teutonic spirit from Christianity.

Having given an interpretation of the history of religion in the West, Santayana returns to some general themes of his hermeneutic of religion. He first focuses on the conflict of mythology and moral truth. His leading idea is that if mythology were taken as a poetic substitute for science, the advance of science would be eliminated. But that has not happened. Myth originally was a symbol for facts. But eventually it became a substitute for ideal values and in that substitution became idolatrous.

Twice in European history mythologies have dissolved: first with the Stoics and then with Protestantism. In both cases mythology, Greek and Christian respectively, ended in pantheism.

It took a thousand years for Greek paganism to disappear. That is because religions do not disappear immediately on being discredited. They need to be replaced. During this millennium, paganism lived on, in part by influx from the east and in part by reinterpretations. Of these reinterpretations, the first was developed by Plato and further pursued by neo-Platonists and Christians in the direction of a supernatural spiritual hierarchy, a deity and lower levels of angels and demons, and so forth. Eventually the enthusiasm for ideals degenerated into a supernumerary physics. At about the same time the Stoics attempted a second reinterpretation of mythology. They explained the popular myths as didactic fables and identified Zeus with the order of nature. This was a form of pantheism, which did not provide a solution to the religious problem. Nature is not and cannot be man's ideal. Since life and death, good and ill fortune, happiness and misery flow equally from the universal order, they are declared, in spite of reason, to be equally good. The morals of pantheism, though post-rational, are not ascetic. The wise man will lend himself to the labors of nature. In place of the natural ideal are put, not its supernatural exaggeration but a curtailment of this ideal suggested by despair. This pantheistic strain entered the Church. As soon as the dramatic omnipotence of the Hebraic deity was systematized and the doctrines of creation and providence were pushed to the extreme, ecclesiastical pantheism emerged. The consequences of this for moral philosophy were appalling, for the sins which God punished were really due to God.

Recent idealism continues this process. It is the final stage of a mythical philosophy which has been criticizing its metaphors, assum-

ing that they were not metaphorical. Thereby it has stripped them of all meaning and importance. The good, which was once understood as spiritual, was transformed into a natural power. This amounted initially to a misrepresentation of natural things. "The gods inhabit Mount Olympus and the Elysian Fields are not far west of Cadiz" (141/246). However, with the advance of geography these alleged facts, the remnants of former myths, disappear.

From this we may learn that in order to maintain the idea of reason we must distinguish between the real and the rational, for reason involves "action addressed to the good and thought envisaging the ideal." Reason is in the world only insofar as the world supports the excellence and value of each creature and its ultimate desires. But that is a limited support. There is in the world a nonrational principle, which may be conceived as "inertia in matter, accidental perversity in the will, or ultimate conflict of interests" (143–144/247).

In Santayana's view Christianity formed a compromise. It was heir to two dualisms, the contrast in the Gospel between this world and the kingdom of heaven and the Platonic contrast between sense and spirit, between time and eternity. Christianity thus blended the notion of the goodness of this world as created and governed by God and its misery as in need of redemption. Thus it could preach renunciation and asceticism on the one hand and action and hope on the other. Thus the classic naturalistic attitude, the positive valuation of intellect, art, and action, never died out in the West.

For those whose religion is spontaneous and inward, God speaks within the heart. For those for whom religion is a matter of imitation, theology is a matter of physics and history, soon discredited by events. They lack the key to the moral symbolism and poetic validity of theology. Augustine was in both camps. He combined the immediate sense of the presence of God with notions of arbitrary grace and predestination. God as the ideal object of thought and love was combined with God as the ultimate source of sin who could eternally damn innocent babies.

As the centuries passed these ambiguities persisted in Luther and Calvin. Lesser minds repeated these platitudes, not so the ones who thought these issues through. Santayana names Lessing, Goethe, and the German idealists and Emerson and Carlyle. They drew directly from nature and history and the survivals of Christianity became illustrations of universal spiritual truths. This idealistic camp sanctified the world, giving a divine warrant to all facts and impulses. They became apologists for the social conventions of their day. The first idealists were relatively blameless, but the immoral potentialities of this subordination of conscience to whatever exists became evident as this pantheism moved from

the seminary into the world. Poets justified their passions, practical men justified their chosen activities, however sordid or inane, and politicians invoked destiny to avoid having to discern rational ends. Pantheism turns the natural world into a self-justifying and sacred system. To worship nature as it is, with all its innocent crimes turned into intentional actions in our mythologies and her unsearchable depths changed into a caricature of barbarian passions, is to subvert all values and to falsify science. Such a disruption of reason is the outcome of mythical thinking. A myth speaks of phenomena as expressions of thought and passion, thus teaching people to look for models and goals of action in the external world where reason finds only instruments and materials.

The next major move made by Santayana in *Reason in Religion* is to turn from religious ideas to religious emotions. Religion is an imaginative symbol for the Life of Reason. Thus it contains symbolic sentiments and duties as well as symbolic ideas and rites. Hence he moves from ideas to emotions, from imaginative history and science to imaginative morals. These sentiments are piety, spirituality, and charity.

Piety for Santayana is a reverent attachment to the sources of our existence and a steadying of our life by that reverence. It is the rational meaning of the mythic representation of our natural conditions. Our awareness that our being is derived, that our spiritual life is a heritage entrusted to us, requires gratitude and a feeling of duty. In another of his pithy phrases he writes, "Piety is the spirit's acknowledgment of its incarnation" (184/260).

We depend on parents, family, ancestors, country, humanity in general, and finally the whole cosmos. None of these are worth venerating as such. After all, piety to humans should be mostly pity. When we turn to the widest object of piety we grant that there is a philosophic or cosmic piety whose object is the entire universe. But we should not personify it and give it the name of God. It is filled with beauty and dullness, cruelty, fire, and mud. We may have society with it. It is our own substance. All our possibilities are hidden in its bosom from the beginning. But our communings with it should be without superstition and terror. It is not wicked, for it has no intention. It is not to blame, for it knows not what it does. Just as we should abstain from judging a parent's errors or foibles, so we should not judge the ignorant crimes of the universe.

Besides piety, which is retrospective, there is spirituality, which is prospective. This is the higher side of religion, which imposes a direction and ideal on the forces of human life, in short, an aspiration. We are spiritual when we live in the presence of an ideal. Spirituality is the rational meaning of the mythic expression of ideals.

The spiritual person does not abandon the world. She is quite ready to use its gifts. The spiritual person recognizes what wealth can do and what it cannot. His unworldliness is really a true knowledge of the world. It is not so much a busy acquaintance as a quiet comprehension and estimation which, while it cannot come without engagement with the world, can very well set such engagement aside.

However, spirituality has a pathology. It is subject to corruption. Its foe is sophistication. Means are pursued as if they are ends and ends are pursued as if they were means to a further end, itself unexamined. So pedantry often displaces wisdom, tyranny government, and superstition substitutes for piety and rhetoric for reason. Further difficulties come with attempts to escape these problems by fanaticism or mysticism. Fanaticism aggressively narrows down concern to only one interest. The mystic passively either accepts all passions or rejects them all. Both represent arrested development of common sense. The Life of Reason is to discover a rational advance over the world as it is, rather than to take the blind alleys of fanaticism or mysticism.

We can find oases of rational episodes in life, patches of science, logic, and affection; but curiosity can lead to illusion, argument can foster hatred of the truth, and love can end in bitterness and even crime and death. The spiritual person therefore cannot be content with a harvest of the accidental fruits of the occasional intrinsic successes of life. Hence for the Life of Reason we may turn to the traditional religions for assistance, once we purge them of their fanciful, dogmatic and fanatic matters. For these faiths present us with a variety of images of excellence with clarity and power. The spiritual person may take one of these as his standard. The rational person goes a step further and relates this standard to the scrutiny of reason.

In addition to piety and spirituality, Santayana speaks of charity. The need for charity is based on the fact that we often assume that our interests are the most important thing in the world, that our ideal should be chosen by everyone. Thus, we need to acknowledge the relativity of our chosen values. This is difficult, because it is easier to become a fanatic, insisting on one ideal, no matter what instincts or interests are stifled, or to become a mystic, sensing the rights of everything so much that we give allegiance to nothing.

In principle we should take all interests into consideration. We should look upon each impulse as something which ought to be satisfied if possible, provided that rival interests permit. It is fanaticism to deny the initial right of any impulse. Reason may have to suppress some impulses, but it should never be inconsiderate in so doing. It should suppress them unwillingly and with pity. There is a conflict of interests in our soul and

in society, calling for compromise and restriction, but all parties in the negotiation should be heard with sympathy. This is charity, which is identical with justice. This charity will treat all interests with courtesy, all forms of life with admiration and solicitude.

In religious traditions charity is often motivated and justified by fables, such as Christ's suffering for all sinners. He is said to have loved publicans and sinners. "He understood the bright good that each sinner was following when he stumbled into the pit. For this insight he was loved. . . . The Magdalene was forgiven because she had loved much" (223/274). Her longing was comprehended, not insulted, in her absolution. Charity involves the art of helping people give up their errors without giving up their ideals.

Santayana ends his treatment in *Reason in Religion* by differentiating between a future life and ideal immortality. A future life is an hypothesis about an occult existence with little evidence. Ideal immortality concerns the eternal quality of ideas and validities and reason's affinity to this. As for the evidence for a future life, most of the evidence plays to gullibility and is not worth consideration. Any significant evidence from clairvoyance and telepathy is tenuous at best. Any shred of validity to it points to further natural processes and should not be used to buttress religious doctrines.

Ideal immortality involves the eternal quality of ideas and validities. Immortality also involves the fact that it is eternally true that any sensation or experience in time has occurred. Further one of the pleasures of reflection is its sense of the permanence of truths. Just as Archimedes, studying the laws of the hypotenuse, was engaged in a transcendence over events, so also may we in art and science attain a sense of the unchanging. Further still, every attainment of perfection is an avenue to the eternal. Whoever lives in the ideal and expresses it in society or an art has a double immortality. While alive the eternal has absorbed him. After his death his influence brings others to the same absorption. Reflecting on this he may feel and know that he is eternal.

A fitting way to end our treatment of Santayana is with his reflections on Spinoza in "Ultimate Religion." (Space precludes treating his *The Idea of Christ in the Gospels*. See Santayana 1946.) In "Ultimate Religion" he refers to "the crown of Spinoza's philosophy, that intellectual love of God in which the spirit was to be ultimately reconciled with universal power and universal truth. . . . We stand as on a mountaintop, and the spectacle, so out of scale with all our petty troubles, silences and overpowers the heart, expanding it for a moment into boundless sympathy with the universe" (Ryder 1994, 471–472; see Santayana 1936). Santayana urges us to worship, but not merely the universe as it is, but for what it could become. "If we wish to make a religion of love . . . we



must take universal good, not universal power, for the object of our religion. . . . [T]he word God, if we still used it, would have to mean for us not the universe, but the good of the universe. . . . [W]hen power takes on the form of life, and begins to circle about and pursue some type of perfection, spirit in us necessarily loves these perfections, since spirit is aspiration become conscious, and they are the goals of life: and insofar as any of these goals can be defined or attained anywhere, even if only in prophetic fancy, they become glory, or become beauty, and spirit in us necessarily worships them” (Ryder 1994, 474, 476).

Samuel Alexander:  
God as the Universe Growing Toward the Ideal

Samuel Alexander was a British philosopher who taught at the University of Manchester from 1893 to 1924. To get a sense of Alexander’s time, he was the first Jew to be elected a fellow of Oxford or Cambridge (see John Laird’s “Memoir,” Alexander 1939, 12) and he was made an honorary member of Ashburton Hall, the women’s residence at Manchester where he taught, because he marched in the suffragette parade, a matter of some personal courage given the times (Emmet 1966, vii; for Alexander’s role in the suffragette struggle and the movement for women’s education, see Laird’s “Memoir,” Alexander 1939, 48–50).

Best known for his Gifford Lectures published as *Space, Time, and Deity*, the main source for his religious naturalism is the second volume of this work. His motive was to develop an overall view of the evolving universe as depicted by science and to find in it the place of mind, values, and God, that is, to avoid dualism by rooting them within the evolving universe without dissolving them in reductionism. The guiding thread in Alexander is that the universe evolves in emergent levels from space-time, to matter, then life, mind and finally the next emergent level. Mind, for example, is physiological, but not merely such. It is also psychological. This may seem obvious to an educated person of the twenty-first century, but Alexander was one of the first major philosophers to take what we now call the epic of evolution as central to his outlook. Further he was one of the first philosophers, along with John Dewey, C. Lloyd Morgan, Roy Wood Sellars, and Jan Christiaan Smuts to take seriously the concept of emergence as an alternative to the dualisms or idealisms which tried to save a place for mind, values and religion in an increasingly materialistic *Zeitgeist*.

For Alexander the relationship of mind and body is taken as paradigmatic for the relationship between all levels.

Without the specific physiological or vital constellation there is no mind. . . . But while mental process is *also* neural, it is not *merely* neural, and therefore not merely vital. For, that mind should emerge, there is required a constellation of neural or other vital conditions not found in vital actions that are not mental. . . . It would follow that mental process may be expressible completely in physiological terms but is not *merely* physiological but *also* mental. . . . Mental process is therefore something new, a fresh creation, which, despite the possibility of resolving it into physiological terms, means the presence of so specific a physiological constitution as to separate it from simpler vital processes. . . . But at the same time, being thus new, mind is through its physiological character continuous with the neural processes which are not mental. It is not something distinct and broken off from them, but it has roots or foundations in all the rest of the nervous system. It is in this sense that mind and mental process are vital but not merely vital. (Alexander 1920, II, 6–8)

This relationship of “also but not merely” applies to all levels of emergence.

The emergence of a new quality from any level of existence means that at that level there comes into being a certain constellation or collocation of the motions belonging to that level, and possessing the quality appropriate to it, and this collocation possesses a new quality distinctive of the higher complex. The quality and the constellation to which it belongs are at once new and expressible without residue in terms of the processes proper to the level from which they emerge. (Alexander 1920, II, 45)

He carried this view through his theory of value. “The highest values satisfy impulses derived from natural instincts: the search for truth from curiosity, beauty and goodness from the constructive and social impulses (instincts). . . . There are parallels to values among animals and even physical things, although the three highest values [truth, beauty, goodness] are exclusively human. Thus Alexander sharpened his vision of continuity with difference in the universal process of emergence” by extending it to values (Stone 1983, 13).

What is surprising is that Alexander makes a distinction between God and deity. Deity is the next higher level beyond the present toward

which the universe is evolving, while God is the totality of the present universe insofar as it is evolving toward deity. In his words, God is the world with a *nisus* toward, big with or pregnant with, deity. God and deity are not two beings, rather there is one actual being, God, or the universe as a whole insofar as it is moving toward a qualitatively new being, namely deity. God is not an already perfect being, but is rather in the making.

On the surface it is not clear whether “*nisus*” refers to the universe as a whole insofar as it is advancing or whether it refers to a process within the universe, a leaven driving the rest toward deity. Alexander parallels “*nisus*” with “tendency” and the metaphor is the world as “pregnant with deity.” Thus “*nisus*” seems to refer to the movement of the whole world toward deity. To speak of the “*nisus* in the world” would be a loose way of referring to the *nisus* of the whole (Alexander 1920, II, 346, 367, 418; Alexander 1939, 381).

My contention is that, because of his notion of God as the universe in evolution, Samuel Alexander is one of the first explicit religious naturalists of the recent era. Regardless of whether we feel comfortable with his use of the word “deity” as the next level in evolution, he stands within the stream of those religious naturalists who use theistic language to refer to the universe-as-a-whole in a certain respect, in Alexander’s case, as moving towards a new level.

I do not say, as has been thought, that God never is, but is always yet to be. “What I say is that God as actually possessing deity does not exist, but is an ideal, is always becoming; but God as the whole universe tending toward deity does exist. Deity is a quality, and God a being. Actual God is the forecast and, as it were, divining of ideal God.” (Alexander 1920, I, xxxix)

Alexander supplements the idea of God derived from his descriptive metaphysical overview of evolution with the idea of God derived from religious feeling. The metaphysical and the religious approaches are complementary. “The religious description wants authentic coherence with the system of things. The metaphysical one wants the touch of feeling which brings it within the circle of human interests” (Alexander 1920, II, 342).

The world as a whole in its forward tendency acts on our bodily organism and the religious sentiment is the feeling for this whole, the feeling of going out of ourselves toward something greater. “Various emotions enter into the full constitution of the religious sentiment—fear,

admiration, self-abasement—but its distinctive constituent is the feeling of our going out towards something not ourselves and greater and higher than ourselves, with which we are in communion” (Alexander 1920, II, 373). Again he writes, “The world as a whole in its forward tendency acts upon our bodily organism and . . . the religious sentiment is the feeling for this whole” (Alexander 1920, II, 376). Alexander can also speak of the *nisus* of the world toward deity as the object of religious sentiment. “Religion is the reaction which we make to God as the whole universe with its *nisus* towards the new quality of deity” (Alexander 1939, 383).

We shall see that for Alexander the trouble with pantheism is that good and bad are indiscriminately included in the object of worship. However, the world as a whole, which seems to be the object of worship for Alexander, includes both good and evil indiscriminately. Perhaps the solution is that the focus of religious sentiment for Alexander is not on the world as a whole, but only on the world insofar as it is growing toward deity. Goodness “is directly utilisable for the life of deity, while evil appears as that which deity discards, which accordingly needs transformation before it can be utilised” (Alexander 1920, II, 416).

Alexander refers to the universe as the body of God. Any level can be called, by analogy, the “body” of the level above it. Thus matter is the body of life and life is the body of mind. Indeed all things in the world are “organic *sensa*” of God. Finally we contribute to God. Since deity is the outcome of the forward movement of the universe, the character of God-in-process partly depends on our actions. We do not merely serve God but help him and, in the measure of our smallness, create deity. “There is not merely reliance upon God but co-operation between the two parties to the religious transaction. We do not merely resign ourselves to something greater, but that something is a partner with us” (Alexander 1920, II, 387).

With Alexander’s tendency to find analogies of the human at all levels of evolutionary development, he finds something akin to religion at subhuman levels. “Within the ‘minds’ of these material or living things themselves the *nisus* is felt as a *nisus* towards something unattained, and they have the analogue of what religion is for us. The ‘mind’ of the stone is a dim striving towards life, which for the stone is an unattained level” (Alexander 1939, 381).

Alexander gives extended treatment to pantheism and theism. For theism, in his view, God is an individual being distinct from and transcending the finite beings of the world. For pantheism God is immanent in the universe. In terms of religious feeling theism appeals to “the personal or egoistic side of the religious consciousness, the feeling that in surrender the worshipper still retains his identity and achieves it