Hegel as Alienist: Santayana, Absolute Idealism, and the Normal Madness of Materialism

I draw my title from suggestive remarks Santayana makes about Kant towards the end of Scepticism and Animal Faith, which closely parallel his assessments of Hegel and, more generally, modern philosophy. He characterizes Kant as “an alienist discovering the logic of madness.” In this Santayana pays Kant the dubious compliment of being a more devout subjectivist than other modern’s. He characterizes Kant’s “recondite categories” and forms of intuition as “pompous titles for what Hume had satirically called tendencies to feign.” Even if presented carefully and discriminating enough to convince others of their plausibility as solid foundations for the sciences, Kant’s categories ultimately amount to what Santayana calls a “gratuitous uniformity in error.” More specifically, he charges that at their heart Kant’s categories issue in an unacknowledged negation of living existence, and, once purified of its “personal alloy,” it is evident that his philosophy denies the possibility of knowledge (SAF 301).

This astonishing set of charges against Kant is applied by Santayana with equal force to the case of Hegel, and taking these two as decisive for the development of later philosophy, he sweepingly maintains that all philosophy after modernity — charmingly self-conscious and critical as it is — follows a trajectory patterned on several colossal missteps in reasoning. These assessments may not carry much force of persuasion for contemporary philosophic sensibilities, but they are of deep consequence for a sufficient understanding of Santayana’s thinking. As he writes towards the end of Scepticism and Animal Faith:

I hope I have taken to heart what the [schools of transcendental criticism] have to offer by way of disintegrating criticism of knowledge, and that in positing afresh the notions of substance, soul, nature, and discourse, I have done so with my eyes open (SAF 301).

The point of Santayana’s mature thinking is to recover for philosophy a sense of confidence in common sense understanding—of life observed with “open eyes.” Such a recovery, Santayana believed, hinges on rescuing traditional notions of philosophy from the shameful position in which they were placed by transcendental criticism. But to do this, Santayana also knew, one must be capable of taking to heart the offerings of transcendental critique.

I shall argue here that Santayana takes to heart transcendental critique in his view that all consciousness is a form of delusion, a view that develops out of his own deployment of transcendental method, which realizes itself in the discovery of essence.

1 See SAF 300. This paper was presented to the George Santayana Society during its annual meeting at the American Philosophical Association in Washington D.C., December 29, 2006.

2 Cf. Bertrand Russell on Hegel, who after identifying the latter’s central confusion as conflating the “is” of predication with the “is” of identity, asserts: “This is an example of how, for want of care at the start, vast and imposing systems of philosophy are built upon stupid and trivial confusions, which, but for the almost incredible fact that they are unintentional, one would be tempted to characterize as puns.” (Bertrand Russell. Our Knowledge of the External World as a Field for Scientific Method in Philosophy. London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1914, 1961: 49) For a persuasive defense of Hegel against Russell’s criticism see “Hegel’s Revenge on Russell...” by Katharina Duleke in Hegel and His Critics. (New York: State University of New York Press, 1989: 111-131.)
The recovery of discredited notions of traditional philosophy is subsequently recommended in his distinction between “normal” and “abnormal” forms of consciousness, the latter of which have as their preeminent philosophic representative the philosophy of Hegel, and the former of which is found in a reconstructed form of naturalistic materialism.

Kant’s and Hegel’s Transcendentalism

To begin, Santayana’s claim that Kant’s philosophy denies the possibility of knowledge needs much explaining given that most of his defenders see Kant’s constructivist epistemology as an historically unprecedented means of legitimating knowledge. What can Santayana mean by this charge? The complete answer requires acknowledgement of the unique conceptions of reason found in the philosophies of Kant and Hegel, and the differences those conceptions make for each thinker’s version of transcendental philosophy.

The enlightenment motto — dare to be wise — was in urgent need of clarification by the time Kant took it under consideration in his famous 1785 essay. Kant knew that while enlightenment ideals could be credited for having enticed human reason beyond its prolonged adolescence, its full maturation was being stunted by an increasingly inadequate understanding of the status of its own achievements. This was Kant’s meaning in saying that while humans can not yet be said to live in an “enlightened age,” they nevertheless find themselves living in an “age of enlightenment.” In the meantime, Kant argued, humans’ intellectual immaturity was a self-imposed exile whose cure depended upon the emergence of a truly autonomous capacity to reason.

In his enlightenment essay Kant focused on the social-political dimensions of such an emergence, but his three critiques addressed the problem from the vantage of a tribunal of reason with respect three main areas of philosophic inquiry: metaphysics, morality, and aesthetics. The point of putting reason on trial was, in large part, to free it from the charge of overreaching into metaphysical regions, where David Hume had persuasively shown it to be incapable of rational purchase. Kant’s ingenious solution in the first Critique was, in effect, to show that Hume’s criticisms were neither a problem for, or with metaphysics as such, but rather for a form of common-sense realism that presumed the objects of such to reside on the side of phenomenal understanding.

The realism Kant exposed and discredited had privileged the idea of an empirical external reality as a means of grounding knowledge, and by unreasonable extension, grounding metaphysical claims. Kant’s recommendation in the first Critique was to insist upon a distinction between “empirically” and “transcendently” external objects, the former designated as “things found in space” (space being a mere subjective representation) and the latter as objects incapable of external epistemological grounding. This distinction enabled Kant to free metaphysical

5 For Kant’s elaboration of these points, see Book II, Chapter One of the “Transcendental Dialectic” in the Critique of Pure Reason (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1965, transl. by Norman Kemp Smith: 328-383). A particularly relevant passage from this section: “If we treat outer objects as things in themselves, it is quite impossible to understand how we could arrive at a knowledge of their reality outside us, since we have to rely merely on the representation which is in us.” (pg. 351)
assertions from the pins of Hume’s celebrated fork, which established that such assertions neither qualify as matters of fact nor as relations of ideas, and therefore lack both an external and internal means of legitimacy. Kant’s brilliant move was to show that the failing of metaphysicians was their inability to establish the epistemological uniqueness of claims falling under the metaphysical heading. From Kant’s perspective, while Hume was correct to say that metaphysical claims qualify neither as matters of fact nor as relations of ideas, he nevertheless suffered from the same error of previous metaphysicians, which was to overlook the transcendental capacity of reason, the product of which mathematics provides a vivid example.\(^6\)

Enough suffices as a remedial sketch of Kant’s transcendentalism, a main feature of which was to extend the conception of reason to overcome the epistemological checkmate of Hume’s fork. And enough has also been said to clarify the meaning of Santayana’s charge that Kant denies the possibility of knowledge. Santayana argues that Kant’s mistake consists in having overestimated the extent of Hume’s criticism of knowledge, and, rather than seeing it for the “plausible literary psychology” that it was, took it to have really discredited reason and the objects of which it purports to claim knowledge (SAF 295). In truth, Santayana contends, Hume’s penetrating critiques only serve to clarify the origins of common sense, that is, to give a more meticulous account of the basis on which reasoning concerning matters of fact unfolds. In Santayana’s words: “Having explained how, perhaps, early man, or a hypothetical infant, might have reached his first glimmerings of knowledge that material things exist, or souls, or causes, we are supposed to have proved that no [such things] can exist at all.” (Ibid) Santayana specifically claims that “Hume and the whole modern school of idealists” is guilty of this absurd conclusion.

Now I believe that however guilty Hume and his successors are of the kind of over-exaggerated transcendentalism Santayana describes here, he ought to have been more careful with Kant; Kant does not naively glean from Hume’s philosophy the inability of reason to establish the existence of common-sense objects. One need only consult the characterization given in the *Prolegomena*, where Kant clearly states the legacy of Hume’s philosophy to be the question “concerning the origin of the concept [of cause and effect], not concerning its indispensability in use.”\(^7\) At any rate Kant viewed the matter as one of deploying Hume’s philosophy for a “complete reform of science,” and he would have agreed with Santayana’s point about not over-exaggerating the existential reach of his criticisms of knowledge.\(^8\) Having said this however, I do think that Santayana’s point is sound with regard to Hegel’s transformations of Kant. I thus turn to Hegel’s transcendentalism.

A mistake that interpreters continually make in their characterizations of Hegel is to conflate his version of transcendental philosophy with Kant’s.\(^9\) Hegel was in fact

\(^6\) A fuller exposition of this complex aspect of Kant’s philosophy is not possible here, but in this context one should also take note of his crucial distinction between reason (Vernunft, which is responsible for establishing principles) and understanding (Verstand—responsible for establishing rules)—a distinction Hegel praises, but reconstructs.


\(^8\) In the section of the *Prolegomena* from which the previous quote was taken Kant himself identifies Reid, Oswald, Beattie, and Priestley as Humean contemporaries who were guilty of such overestimating.

\(^9\) One such mistaken interpreter was Heidegger, according to Robert R. Williams in the essay cited in the next footnote.
avowedly opposed to Kant’s version of transcendental philosophy. Robert R. Williams makes this point concisely:

Kant’s version of transcendental philosophy stands in the tradition of legislating the a priori structure to which the world must conform in order to be experienced. But Hegel is an anti-transcendental philosopher in the Kantian sense of transcendental, in which transcendental subjectivity is conceived as legislating and imposing a priori the conditions of being and knowledge on unformed materials ... neither Hegel’s Phenomenology nor his Logic are transcendental philosophy in the Kantian sense.10

It is important to note that the characterization of Kantian transcendentalism offered by Williams here — of conceiving subjectivity as a privileged legislator of unformed ontological and epistemological materials — is precisely the characterization Santayana consistently provides, and holds against the German idealist tradition. This being the case, one might suppose that Williams’ ensuing characterization of Hegel’s main works as opposed to this Kantian subjectivism places Santayana in league with Hegel. Yet nothing is further from the truth. As we know, Santayana identifies Hegel as one of the preeminent “egotists” of the German idealist tradition.

To sort this out one must tend to Santayana’s clarification that, while “All transcendentalists are preoccupied with the self...not all are egotists.” (EGP 32) Santayana is referring in this passage to Goethe, but elaborates a little further along in the same context by contrasting Goethe with Hegel:

...[Goethe] was many-sided, not encyclopedic. ... He did not ... arrange the phases of his experience ... in an order supposed to be a progress. ... Hegel [on the other hand] might have understood all [the] moral attitudes [that Goethe’s work presents], and described them in a way not meant to appear satirical; but he would have criticized them and demolished them, and declared them obsolete — all but the one at which he happened to stop. (EGP 34. Emphasis is Santayana’s)

Santayana thus discerns a voracious progressivism in Hegel’s transcendentalism which lends to it an egotistical character not attributable to Goethe. So even if, as Williams clarifies, Hegel’s transcendentalism is anti-Kantian, in Santayana’s eyes it is no less guilty than its opposition of setting out to destroy the credibility of the objects under its scrutiny. This condemnation makes more sense when one attends to Santayana’s broader understanding of Hegel’s affiliations with the idealistic tradition, a fair evaluation of which requires analysis of Hegel’s attempts to break from Kant’s idealism.

Hegel’s Critique of Kant’s Idealism

As John Hund observes, Hegel objected to Kant’s idealism on the (somewhat ironic) grounds that it was “subjective.”11 By this Hegel was not objecting to Kant’s privileging of the synthesizing subject but rather to Kant’s account of the subject, as such. Hegel’s specific denial, Hund clarifies, was “that the unity of consciousness is created by a synthesising subject and then projected against the world like a screen.”12

In conceiving subjectivity this way, Kant grouped both natural and social realities under the blanket category “phenomena,” as features beholden to the synthesizing subject. In effect Hegel interpreted Kant as holding that subjectivity must relate to

12 Ibid.
both nature and society as a spectator, straining its objects, as Hund puts it, through a synthesizing screen of understanding.

The alleged estrangement of subjectivity from reality that Hegel objects to in Kant's philosophy is a subject that interestingly recurs in recent scholarship in the form of a debate over whether and to what extent Kant can be said to be a "realist." This is of course an ironic trend given the aforementioned legacy of Kant as arch anti-realist. Recently Kenneth R. Westphal has argued that Kant and the later Wittgenstein share a commitment to a form of realism that steers clear of empiricism. He summarizes their shared non-empirical realism as the view that "physical objects and events exist and have at least some characteristics, regardless of what we think, say, or believe about them." Westphal goes further to argue that self-consciousness and the skepticism that is its privilege would be impossible were not humans inhabitants of such a realistic world and cognizant of that fact. In a similar though differently motivated vein, Lucy Allais has argued that recent attempts to establish kinships between Kant and contemporary forms of anti-realism are at best, superficial. While her aim is by no means to establish Kant as a straightforward realist, she finds Kant's views amenable to a substantive aspect of Michael Dummett's philosophy that leaves itself open the external existence of entities under skeptical scrutiny.

Westphal's and Allais' associations of Kant with realism are intriguing because they so run counter to the recent extensive work of Hegel scholar, Tom Rockmore. Kant's thinking is depicted by Rockmore to provide the foundation — and extending the characterization, Hegel's is said to provide the building material — of an epistemological subversion of metaphysical realism in mainstream Western philosophy. In sum, Rockmore's recent work on Hegel presupposes an anti-realist view of Kant that is opposed to that of other contemporary scholars. For the sake of present purposes I cannot elaborate as to why, but I believe that Rockmore's account of Kant and Hegel as thoroughgoing anti-realists is correct, and certainly more persuasive than the realist depictions of Kant provided by Westphal and Allais. My aim now is to argue this by favorable appeal to Santayana's critique, which I shall turn to directly after first briefly indicating the anti-realist features of Hegel's thought.

14 Ibid, 303.
16 An especially relevant book by Rockmore in this regard: Hegel, Idealism, and Analytic Philosophy. New Haven-London: Yale University Press, 2005. What is fascinating is that this perspective on the Kantian legacy is continually being rediscovered, and this sometimes without due credit to the Kantian tradition. To the undoubted surprise of many, in the book just cited Rockmore takes Richard Rorty to task for being a pre-Kantian "realist," yet Rorty, following Hilary Putnam, seems to avow a post-Kantian anti-realist without (at least in the one context I am about to highlight) recognizing its rootedness in Kant. In his Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature (Princeton University Press, 1979) Rorty chronicles the slow acknowledgment of a kind of Kantian anti-realism in Putnam's work, without seeing any parallels in Kant at all (see chapter VI; especially 294-311) — "[Putnam] says that what the metaphysical realist wanted, but could not have, is a view of 'truth as radically nonepistemic' " (294). If Rockmore is correct (and I believe he is), Kant denied metaphysical realists the possibility of nonepistemic truth over two-hundred years ago, which makes Putnam's identical recognition (contra Rorty's characterization) historically unremarkable.
Hegel as Anti-Realist

Hegel believed his conception of reason to be historically unprecedented, and he had good reason to so believe, because it signaled a revolt against an entrenched, existentially univalent conception of rational activity. Never before Hegel had reason been made so completely to serve both tendencies of the universal and the particular. When Hegel opined, contrary to popular belief, that philosophy deals in the concrete, he meant that this unique science seeks a “unity of distinct particulars,” a special knowledge whereby the idea is “something general that is in and by itself, the particular and the definite.”17 Such an idea arises, in Hegel’s understanding, through adherence to a developmental notion of truth, whereby absolute spirit is thinking itself towards greater and greater perfection. Getting to such a view of truth, from Hegel’s perspective, requires going beyond the standpoint of individuality, the standpoint from which there is an “abstract antithesis of truth and error.”18 According to Hegel, only from the partiality of the individual perspective is it a contradiction that there are many different philosophies, yet one single truth. In Hegel’s view traditional philosophy is structured around a logic that continually runs up against this contradiction: multiple philosophies, one truth. Why indeed, if truth is one, and philosophies aim at a single truth, is there not a single philosophy? Hegel argues that one’s understanding of the very nature of truth must be transformed in order to surpass this problem.

Traditional logic, Hegel extrapolates, presumes a separation between truth and certainty, respectively the “content and form of knowledge.”19 Cartesian philosophy is an exemplary form of this traditional logic. The problem with this logic, Hegel argues, is that it subordinates thought to object. Truth, as the supposed content of knowledge, is alleged to be attained only when thought agrees with its object. As such, the object is alleged to exist unto itself, complete and without need of alteration, whereas thought must adapt, and achieve its temporary completion by way of veridical consummation. Hegel views this entrenched philosophic rendering of truth to be both prejudicial and false.20

In order to complete the reversal of realist logic that Kant had only perhaps half-accomplished, Hegel redresses the shortcomings of traditional logic he identifies with his highly original dialectical notion of truth. Hegel’s dialectic is conceived in direct engagement with its Platonic and Kantian variants. He holds Plato’s and Kant’s versions of the dialectic to be importantly distinct, ultimately siding but also finding original problems with the latter. Plato’s Parmenides is charged by Hegel to enlist dialectic as a “mere idle subjective craving” that “at best leads to nothing except the futility of the dialectically treated matter.” By contrast, Kant’s is a “higher” version, one affirming “the objectivity of appearance and the necessity of contradiction which belong to the very nature of thought determinations (st. 193). Hegel elaborates that Kant’s reworked deployment of dialectic — departing from the null-gain Socratic elenchus — gave the operation a provisionally positive role, dictating for reason its options when it has surpassed its limits.

Kant’s antinomies of reason signaled for Hegel a contribution to our understanding of the necessary presence of contradictoriness in thought: “primarily

18 Ibid, 163.
20 Ibid.
indeed in so far as [its] determinations are applied by reason to *things in themselves*” (SL 193). But, as Hegel goes on to argue, Kant’s understanding of the dialectic was also insufficient due to its “abstract-negative aspect,” indicating its propensity to shrink at the door of the infinite. For Kant the noumenal realm was to be grappled with, its contradictions embraced, but not cognitively explained; this Hegel saw as his task: to stretch the cognitive reach of reason so that it could explain noumena. But to do so Hegel had to finally collapse the divide between subjectivity and the real before which Kant’s transcendentalism halted. The signature way in which Hegel surpasses Kant in this regard is his historical providentialism, a lavish, imaginative identification of the evolution of history with the movement of spirit towards absolute knowing.

**Santayana’s Critique**

Shifting directly to Santayana’s critique, Hegel’s decisive collapse of the divide between subjectivity and the real marks the general end of the kind of realism that commends philosophy to the living human, and the particular end of a naturalistic materialism that offers sane conclusions to the insane sallies of transcendental criticism. Santayana characterizes Hegel as a “solemn sophist” for making discourse the key to reality. The spirit in which Santayana makes the remark is one of trying to come to terms with an untenable contradiction in Hegel’s philosophy. Hegel, Santayana observes, purports at once to be a staunch realist, acridly insisting upon the providential march of history, and a fervent idealist, conceiving of the substance of history’s march to be conceptual rather than material. For Santayana the latter idealism makes Hegel’s realism a technical pose only, in the sense that while there exists in Hegel’s thought an abiding loyalty to an extra-personal reality, that reality is paradoxically reduced to the conceptual preoccupations of his own nationality and historical context. While from the standpoint of Hegel’s enthusiasts these fused contradictory features in his philosophy indicate its novelty and strength, Santayana understands them to issue in troubling equivocations, none of which are cleared up by his dialectical-historical method.

As Santayana observes, Hegel’s historicism *might* have been deployed as an expression of humility, seeming to indicate his rejection of any explanatory principle supervening upon the historical. Moreover, Hegel’s historically grounded approach could have been a means of achieving a greater understanding, by way of the sympathetic imagination, of the manifold trajectories of human endeavor. Unfortunately, Santayana charges, Hegel’s philosophy is neither humble nor sympathetic. Its malicious egotism occurs in several interpretive modes, each of which belies a transparent ascription of providential divinity to the historical trajectory of Hegel’s own Germany.

These characterizations, which Santayana provided in grand fashion in his infamous “monograph” *Egotism in German Philosophy*, prompted a ferocious critical response in Schilpp’s *Library of Living Philosopher’s Volume* from scholar and German translator, Edward L. Schaub. Besides taking exception to the presumption that there is something like a “German philosophy” or set of “German philosophers” who approximate Santayana’s evaluations, Schaub found fault with Santayana’s characterization of the transcendental method as a form of “unaided introspection.”

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21 EGP 70: “Hegel was a solemn sophist: he made discourse the key to reality.”

22 He succinctly refers to this presumption as nothing but a “fiction of the writer’s will.” “Santayana’s Contentions Respecting German Philosophy,” by Edward L. Schaub. See (PGS 409).

23 Ibid, 407 (and quotes from Schaub that follow).
This characterization of Santayana's was unjust according to Schaub, both because the "express purpose" of the method is to "establish" a "public world" and because Hegel's very objection to (and justification for his own departure from) Kant's use of the transcendental method was that it failed to establish that "public" world.

I find Schaub's reaction to Santayana's assessments of German idealism revealing for at least a couple of reasons. First (as I can attest from personal experience), the same reaction can be expected from contemporary scholars of the tradition, and second, it fails to honestly recognize its tacit commitment to transcendentalist principles that Santayana and like-minded philosophers have very good reasons to reject. One of those commitments involves the use of transcendental method to validate the existence of metaphysics, and the other to establish revealed history. I shall move now in conclusion to a consideration of Santayana's rejection of these commitments, and in the process perhaps reveal something important about Schaub's critique of Santayana that is of much assistance to understanding theirs and similar disagreements. ²⁴

Santayana's Rejection of Metaphysics

In one of his shades of limbo Santayana provides a characterization suitable for situating Hegel's absolute idealism within the larger mad play of modernity, as an exemplary instance of the abnormal madness of action. Santayana identifies the abnormal madness of action as that in which actions are performed that are not suited to the situation or disposition of those performing them; in his words, "as when an old man makes love." (DL 41) The irreverence of this remark aside, and apart from the questionable seriousness more generally with which Santayana presents such characterizations, there is little doubt that he believes modern philosophy to suffer from varying forms of abnormal madness. In Soliloquies Santayana compares the modern philosopher to a "...thoughtful dog [who] has dropped the substance he held in his mouth, to snatch at the reflection of it which his own mind gave to him." (SE 216) Contrast this remark with the one he makes about Pre-Socratic Greek philosophy in the same context: "Sanity, thy name is Greece." (Ibid, 212)

The key to understanding Santayana's preference for the Presocratic Greeks over the modern's is his rejection of metaphysics. The Pre-Socratic Greeks were comparatively sane, Santayana argues, for their naturalism, and in taking for granted the cosmically situated nature of humans. Whatever speculative extravagances the Greeks were guilty of, and however burdensome their missteps in physical and astronomical sciences to future generations, they at least founded an honest attempt to advance a physics, ethics, and politics with a "certain noble frankness in the presence of the infinite world, of which they begged no favors." (SE 214)

Enter then the sophists, and Plato. What these two introduced — a kind of farcical "habit of treating opinions about nature as rhetorical themes" — may have been harmlessly amusing in its context, but it "had disastrous consequences for philosophy" (SE 214). Platonism and its sophistic foils introduced, more specifically, what Santayana understands as "metaphysics," which far from being an imaginative extension of conceptions of the physical cosmos, departed altogether from such into theories "constructed by reasoning, in terms of logic, ethics, and a sort of poetic propriety" that turned nature into a mirror of humans. (Ibid) This charge is just with regard to Kant, whose fundamental metaphysical tenet that all intuitions are "extensive

²⁴ More broadly it is hoped that similar contemporary responses to Santayana's critique of German idealism can be more adequately anticipated.
magnitudes” enclosed in synthetic modes of space and time is accepted wholesale by Hegel. What Hegel adds to this metaphysics (whose systematic presentation, Santayana is right to object, disguises a poetic propriety), is a providential notion of history that alleges to establish once and for all the cosmic primacy of human will.

**Santayana’s Rejection of Providential History**

Taking cues from Santayana’s panoramic speculations, Hegel can be argued to be the paradigm modern philosopher of the abnormal madness in action. His phenomenology of spirit — understood as the progress from a mere “science of consciousness” to the more-than-individual consciousness that is “spirit” — is alleged to be generated by “the dissatisfaction experienced in the inadequacy of the successive forms consciousness has assumed [along its journey to absolute knowing].”\(^{25}\) Indeed, the primary standpoint that is to be surpassed in the Hegelian dialectic (as if such a standpoint was devoid of aesthetic, or existential depth), is that of “consciousness of a mere world of things.” According to Hegel, consciousness becomes increasingly dissatisfied with this standpoint as it becomes aware of the complexities behind its simplifying natal perceptions. Yearning toward an absolute perspective, consciousness progressively turns against its own natural predispositions.

This absolute idealism obviously stands starkly opposed to any recognizably naturalistic view; it certainly does so with respect to Santayana’s naturalism, which holds that one must accept and so make peace with natural predispositions. Hegel, and the critical phenomenology which is his philosophic legacy, would have one increasingly question these predispositions, encouraging a certain willful contrariety of action exemplary of Santayana’s abnormal madman. From this perspective it is easy to see why Marx became the most influential heir of Hegel: the “left”—Hegelian trajectory he initiated privileged that half of Hegel amenable to social revolution. Marx was exploiting that aspect of Hegel’s dialectic most crucial to the purported realization of the absolute; namely, it’s increasing dissatisfaction with present conditions.\(^{26}\)

This is how Santayana’s philosophy provides resources for understanding the revealed history of German idealism as the logical outcome of the abnormal madness of transcendental philosophy. Santayana’s reversal of this mad play comes in his doctrine of essence, which conduces to a naturalistic materialism that respects rather than undermines the living human standpoint. For Santayana, transcendental criticism serves as a speculative housecleaning tool — laudable in its yielding the discovery of a realm of being framing all human experience, but overreaching if/when it conceives that discovery in absolutist terms. When once the heights of transcendental critique

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26 The coming wave of socialism was true human history for Marx. The future rather than the present or past gave concretion to the abstract speculations of social-political historicists. As Rockmore puts it: “For Marx, Hegel, who is concerned with the concrete, remains on the abstract plane. His position is the abstract, logical, and speculative expression of the historical processes, which, since it remains tied to present day society, or capitalism, is not yet the true human history.” (Before and After Hegel: A Historical Introduction to Hegel’s Thought. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993: 157-158) However much interpreters deem Marxian philosophy to be a distortion of Hegelianism, it was at least loyal to the latter’s preordained sense of history. Marxism took hold in the early twentieth century because of this revelatory historical idealism—misleadingly called “materialism” by Marx for its so-called “world-historical” importance, rather than for any insight it provides into the nature of reality.
have been gained, instead of holding its discoveries against the distracting and preoccupying exigencies of natural experience, the wise course is to smile with whatever realm of being the latter power represents — called for convenience by Santayana, matter — and acquiesce in its allowances in contemplative appreciation of essences. Such is the only poetic propriety proper to human experience, affirming the normal madness of natural life over the abnormal madness of alien life.

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New Bulletin Website: Other Santayana Sites

Martin Coleman at the Santayana Edition has kindly agreed to take on the maintenance of the website devoted to the archives of Overheard in Seville: Bulletin of the Santayana Society. It becomes a part of the extensive Edition website, and will continue to contain the texts of current articles printed each year. As well, the earliest Bulletins have been scanned and will also be a part of the archive. The website was designed and posted by the IUPUI graduate intern, Christine McNulty. The site is:

<http://www.iupui.edu/~santedit/santayanatodaysociety.html>

Since all the archives will be verbatim scans of each Bulletin number, it is necessary to abandon the previous practice of occasionally posting papers that are somewhat longer than the original Bulletin version. There are two already posted papers of this type: David Dilworth’s 2005 “The Life of the Spirit in Santayana, Stevens, and Williams,” and Chris Skowronski’s 2006 paper “C. A. Strong and G. Santayana in Light of Archive Material.” These longer versions can still be found on the current webpage:


At a later time, these will be posted on the IUPUI site.

The website for the Santayana Edition, dealing with all aspects of the project is:

<http://www.iupui.edu/~santedit/).

Tom Davis maintains a site dedicated, among other things, to Santayana citations and exchanges of opinion on various issues:

<http://members.aol.com/santayana>

Herman Saatkamp has prepared a site in the Stanford University philosophy series:

<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/santayana/>

As mentioned again below, the Spanish journal LIMBO maintains the site:

<www.hiperlimbo.com>