epistemology, it is worth taking another look at James and Dewey to see where their work might lead.

Readers already convinced of the ideas sketched here will nevertheless find McDermid’s book an interesting read. He doesn’t duck the tough issues and he presents his arguments lucidly and with precision. He forces the historian to track the inferences closely and he forces the analyst to pay attention to what James (and Rorty) actually said. These are both virtues. As we move into the 21st century, conversation between old school pragmatists and new school pragmatists, and between historicist philosophers and analytic philosophers, become inevitable. Indeed, these categories are fluid and are in transition as the next generation of scholars comes on the scene. McDermid’s book is a nice place to begin to consider how those conversations might be successfully launched.

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The present volume concludes the eight volumes of The Letters of George Santayana. These Letters lie within the more encompassing series of The Works of George Santayana. Special recognition is due to Daniel Cory, first publisher of Santayana’s letters, and especially to the editors mentioned above.

As a “critical edition,” the present volume is a precious gem. Holzberger offers a masterful Introduction of 26 pages. I find the text factual and flawless. Its footnotes are richly informative—actually, a survey of the history of culture and philosophy. The nine Sections of its Editorial Appendix include a detailed chronology of GS’s life and a full, well-planned Index.

The interesting and lengthy Section of 13 pages, listing GS’s “Addresses,” might mislead a beginner to think of GS as an Euro-American traveler or even a bon vivant. One finds that even during his 20 years at Harvard GS quit Cambridge as soon as possible for a “summer away,” that overall he crossed the Atlantic 38 times, that he often lived in hotels, and that he rarely “settled down.” Yet the more careful reader will notice that at the end of 1893, amid “disconcerting events,” GS underwent “a fundamental change of heart, resulting in a renunciation of the world” (562). This metanoia expressed itself in GS’s art of philosophizing acutely, creating enduring poetry, exercising a refined courtesy, and becoming a significant literary critic. After 1891, GS grew continually in literary and philosophical productivity. After his Harvard period that ended in 1912, his career spanned both World Wars. His writing did not end in 1941 when he retired in a nursing home operated by nuns of the Little Company of Mary in Rome. For there he completed his Domination and Powers, created a one volume compendium of his Life of Reason, and lived in one room, an atheist among nuns, visited by his selected friends, until he died in 1952.
The reader of this volume can “meet Santayana personally” in his final years--1948-1952--living, suffering, working, and receiving guests--usually affably--in that one room of his in the nursing home. Through his letters, the real person, Santayana, shares himself and his ideas to more than his addressed recipients, since now we, as “eaves-droppers” listening in, can also be enriched by his self-communication. He “comes across” as consistently courteous and grateful. He points out how his philosophy arises out of “animal faith” from the primal will of nature (276). He espouses nature’s variations but avoids any dualism like that of Plato. In these his final years, GS prefers to live as a literary critic, poet, and historian, “rather than as a philosopher talking about essences”(430). Yet he still communicates his philosophy and its insights, using phrases that strive to be yet clearer and precise (176-77). For instance, he defines himself as a “hard,” non-modern naturalist, akin to Democritus, Epicurus, and Lucretius (233).

Writing in self-descriptive, general terms, GS acknowledges “I have never made efforts” (32), have had “nothing to be anxious about” (179), am “not militant,” and “have a good deal of what is Greek, Catholic, English, and American but without fighting for or against it” (264). GS recognized that some of his published expressions stemmed from too much “youthful emotion” and lacked an adequate sympathy with the whole of nature. In this volume he suggests still more accurate ways of stating his philosophy—a practice that may remind the reader of the aged Augustine writing his Retractationes.

After acknowledging that he himself loves and admires Socrates, GS offers his block-busting attack on him and his followers. SG judges that Socrates “was the first to deflect criticism and educated opinion from the natural path of experience and reasoning, which we call science, or common sense; [while] Plato and even Aristotle immediately recast all knowledge for posterity by making it stand on its head. or be planted in the head and not in the world” (357).

GS concurred with those ancient and modern philosophers who engage with nature—e.g., with Spinoza, and, to some extent, with Schopenhauer. GS sees subjectivism as enmeshing both English thought (starting from Locke onwards and including its American derivatives) in “the psychological net” of “the Will of the Self asserting its right to autonomy”(146-47). For GS most German Idealists suffer the same weakness. For him English philosophy deviates like some stray vine from philosophy’s genuine life of commitment to matter. GS dissents from William James’s unqualified acceptance of Protagoras’s view that “man is the measure of all things.” For that view places humankind in too central a position in nature, whereas a universal natural view of “essences” is needed. Since Santayana felt John Dewey’s thought “... not the sort of thing to which I am naturally drawn” (206-207, 182), GS chose “not to figure among the many admirers” [of Dewey].

GS was baptized a Roman Catholic, reared in a Spanish-style, cultural Catholicism, and appreciated Catholicism for its artistic treasures and esthetic feelings. Yet GS confessed himself “an unbeliever”(321, 286). To such a conclusion his premises led him who kept respecting persons of different faiths. In this he concurred with Sartre’s self-distancing response to Christian believers, “You have made your choice, and I my own.”

This concluding volume of the letters of GS is more than an interesting treat. It offers genuine apercus into the elderly Santayana.

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