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Santayana on Fascism and English Liberty

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Abstract

This paper argues that, despite Santayana's own personal attraction, documented in his letters, to Italian and Spanish fascism, the distinction his political philosophy draws between generative and militant orders leads logically to both a defense of English liberty as an expression of the generative order and a critique of fascism as an expression of the militant order. Furthermore, one may properly extend Santayana's conception of the generative order to include F. H. Hayek's "spontaneous extended human order" of the marketplace. To thus employ Santayana's conceptions of generative and militant orders may be to take issue with Santayana's personal preferences but not with the principles of his political philosophy.

Resumen

En este artículo se sostiene que Santayana, a pesar del atractivo personal que sentía por el fascismo español e italiano, documentado en sus cartas, estableció en su filosofía política una distinción entre los órdenes militante y generativo que lleva lógicamente a la defensa de la libertad inglesa como expresión del orden generativo y a la crítica del fascismo como expresión del orden militante. Es posible, incluso, ampliar la concepción santayaniana del orden generativo de modo que incluya el "orden humano ampliado de modo espontáneo" del mercado del que habla F. H. Hayek. Utilizar así los conceptos santayanianos del orden militante y generativo puede ir

contra las preferencias personales de Santayana, pero no con los principios de su filosofía política.

There is more than one reason why the thought of George Santayana has not received the attention in the decades since his death in 1952 that it commanded in the first half of the twentieth century. Some of the key issues he discussed no longer seem urgent: the philosophical idealism that Santayana combated so vigorously has no defenders, and the "genteel tradition" that he famously identified and criticized no followers. Serious philosophers no longer attempt — or think it necessary to discuss — the kind of multivolume surveys of human life and thought that Santayana carried out twice, in *The Life of Reason* and again in *Realms of Being*. The very excellence of Santayana's prose counts against him in some quarters, for whom fluency and clarity in expression are indicators of superficiality in thought. Perhaps the major reason for the decline in Santayana's reputation in liberal democracies, however, is the suspicion that his thought provides philosophical support for fascism and intellectual ammunition for the enemies of liberal democracy.

Defenders of Santayana might argue that, at the very least, those who consider Martin Heidegger the greatest philosopher of the twentieth century should not reject Santayana's philosophy on the basis of its political implications, especially since Santayana never defended either Nazism or Hitler. Santayana considered Nazism "a sort of romanticism gone mad," as he put it in a June 1934 letter to Sidney Hook. One could even argue, as A. L. Rowse did in his introduction to *The German Mind*, a 1968 edition of Santayana's *Egotism in German Philosophy*, first published in 1915, that if Santayana's early warning about the dangers of political romanticism had been heeded "it would have been better for Germany, for Europe and America, for the world. Germany would not have been enabled to go farther along the path that led straight from Bismarck's policies to the full horror of Hitler's" [Rowse (1968), p. ix]. Such arguments,

however, are inconclusive at best. My own defense of Santayana's political thought begins with the premise that if a philosophy clearly endorses fascism over liberal democracy, that is indication enough that there is something seriously flawed about that philosophy. The key philosophical question is not about Santayana's (or Heidegger's) personal opinions but about the political implications of their philosophies. Santayana himself always distinguished between his private political sympathies and the principles of his philosophy, but the line between the two is not always clear.

In this paper I wish to consider the extent to which Santayana's judgments about contemporary politics, especially about fascism, should discredit his political and moral thought in the eyes of those who, like myself, assume that any worthwhile political philosophy would not contradict the commonsense judgment that liberal democracies, whatever their flaws, were and are preferable to fascist regimes like that of Mussolini in Italy and Franco in Spain. Santayana's personal observations on life and politics are now available in the eight books of his letters published by MIT Press as Volume V of the ongoing Santayana Edition. It is at least possible that in his letters Santayana made explicit some implications of his philosophy left unstated in his books and essays, or, on the other hand, revealed personal preferences themselves unrelated to his philosophy that may have nevertheless influenced his public writings. In any case, it seems worthwhile to examine the letters for any clues they might provide about the relationship between Santayana's philosophy and his judgments on contemporary events and regimes.

In his letters Santayana repeatedly expressed approval for Italian fascism. In a March 1923 letter he is hopeful that the Italian example might inspire the English: "Fascism is the most significant thing now: I wonder if in England the decent people will not eventually organize and arm against the politicians and restore the nation" [Santayana (2002b), p. 137]. In a January 1926 letter to B. A. G. Fuller, a professor of philosophy at Harvard and his former student, Santayana praises both Mussolini's and Spain under the dicta-

torial rule of Primo de Rivera: "Another true satisfaction for me is the new regime in Italy and in Spain, American in its futurism and confident hopes, but classical in its reliance on discipline and its love of a beautiful finitude and decision. That dreadful loose dream of liberalism seems to be fading away at last!" [Santayana (2002b), p. 270]. Santayana praised Mussolini's 1929 Concordat with the Vatican in a March 1935 letter and favorably compared Mussolini himself to the political leaders during the 1914-1918 world war: "There was no one in authority who had the least elevation of mind — I mean capacity to take long clear views of the forces at work. Now there is one man whom I should trust to make a fair settlement. He made one not long ago with the Pope — something which every other politician thought impossible. It hasn't abolished differences of opinion or theoretical programme, but it has been a practical settlement which nobody would desire to upset. That is all anyone can ask for in this world" [Santayana (2003b), p. 181-2].

Santayana even sympathized with the Italian invasion of Ethiopia despite an initial feeling "that it might be a disaster" [Santayana (2003b], p. 251]. Writing to his friend philosopher Charles Strong in an October 1935 letter, he argued that "once human life and human enterprise are condoned, I see the whole *élan vital* of the universe behind our friends here [the Italians]; whereas I loathe the League of Nations [Santayana (2003b), p. 251]. Writing to his protégé Daniel Cory in the same month, Santayana said he had no need to reread his novel *The Last Puritan* "for entertainment" since "The Abyssinian imbroglio is enough. The atmosphere here is very cheerful and exhilarating. It is so much more healthy to go in for an adventure, even a perilous one, than to sit up all night quarrelling and shaking with fear and devising ways of preventing other people from doing anything" [Santayana (2003b), p. 252]. A month later he wrote to another correspondent that "The atmosphere here is tense but exhilarating, and I was never more pleased at living in Italy than at this moment. It is a glorious experience..." [Santayana (2003b), p. 257]. In September 1936 Santayana wrote that "I like the

Italian solution: not for an ideal for ever or for every country: but for a regimen, a cure, for disorganized nations. In Italy, and apparently in Russia and Germany also, there is at least energy and enthusiasm. Things get done, everybody looks brisk and happy" [Santayana (2003b), p. 375].

After World War II Santayana qualified but did not radically alter his opinions about Italian fascism. In a June 1947 letter to Daniel Cory he writes that reading the diaries of Ciano, Mussolini's foreign minister from 1936 to 1943, showed him "the seamy side of Fascism from the Fascist point of view, which is a much better bit of information for a philosopher than declamations about the same from the enemy side" [Santayana (2006), p. 341]. In a letter to Corliss Lamont in December 1950 Santayana offered the fullest explanation in his letters of his attitude toward Italian fascism:

> Of course I was never a Fascist in the sense of belonging to that Italian party, or to any nationalistic or religious *party*. But considered, as it is for a naturalist, a product of the generative order of society, a nationalist or religious *institution* will probably have its good sides, and be better perhaps than the alternative that presents itself at some moment in some place. That is what I thought, and still think, Mussolini's dictatorship was for Italy in its home government. Compare with the disorderly socialism that preceded or the impotent party chaos that has followed it. If you had lived through it from beginning to end, as I have, you would admit this. But Mussolini was personally a bad man and Italy a half-baked political unit; and the *militant* foreign policy adopted by Fascism was ruinous in its artificiality and folly. But internally, Italy was until the foreign militancy and mad alliances were adopted, a stronger, happier, and more united country than it is or had ever been. Dictatorships are surgical operations, but some diseases require them, only the surgeon must be an expert, not an adventurer [Santayana (2008), p. 310].

Santayana had previously linked his approval of fascism to his philosophical naturalism in a May 1937 letter to David Page:

> As you probably know, I am (strange as it may be nowadays) a naturalist in natural philosophy. I cannot conceive the existence of moral life, or of anything good, not rooted in some definite material organism, animal or social. On this point I agree with the historical materialism of Marx. I also agree with the theory of Fascism, in so far as this coincides with the politics of Plato and of antiquity in general. Society is not based on ideas, but on the material conditions of existence, such as agriculture and defence; virtue is moral health, and when genuine rests on the same foundations [Santayana (2004), p. 30].

In retrospect, some of Santayana's contemporaneous judgments about Italian fascism seem recklessly superficial, apparently based on little more than personal impressions of the life around him. Living in Italy during the invasion of Ethiopia is a "glorious experience," with an atmosphere that is alternatively "very cheerful and exhilarating" or "tense but exhilarating." As far as he can observe "everybody looks brisk and happy," so what could be wrong? Santayana's description of Mussolini's dictatorship as "American in its futurism and confident hopes, but classical in its reliance on discipline and its love of a beautiful finitude and decision" seems based more on his own "confident hopes" than on any evidence. In 1935 Santayana considered Mussolini the "one man whom I should trust," but fifteen years later he was "personally a bad man." But despite changing his mind about Mussolini himself, Santayana still believed in 1950 that Mussolini had succeeded in the early years of his rule in making Italy "a stronger, happier, and more united country than it is or had ever been".

What conclusions can one draw about Santayana's political philosophy and his philosophical naturalism from the evidence supplied in the letters about his opinions on Italian fascism? On the one hand, the impressionistic basis of some of Santayana's opinions deprives them of any philosophical significance and thus absolves his philosophy from responsibility for his failures in judgment, unless, that is, Santayana's philosophy included — as it does not — a

defense of personal impressions as a basis for political opinions. In two letters, however — the May 1937 letter to David Page and the December 1950 letter to Corliss Lamont, Santayana did link his judgments about Italian fascism to his philosophical naturalism. As a naturalist, Santayana rejected any notion of a cosmic moral order that might provide the moral standards for judging human society. He regarded the American Declaration of Independence, with its assertion that human beings "are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights" as a "salad of illusions" [Santayana (1986), p. 404]. Political systems had to be judged on a case-by-case basis; none could be dismissed — as none could be approved — a priori. It all depended on what the alternatives might be in the particular circumstances to be considered. "In a word, *Circumstances* render one action rational and another irrational," Santayana declared in *Dominations and Powers* [Santayana (1995), p. 313].

Santayana's naturalism, it should be emphasized, by no means rules out moral judgment altogether in rejecting any appeal to a moral order built into the universe. *Dominations and Powers*, which, though published in 1950, brought together his reflections on politics from before World War I (in an April 1946 letter Santayana writes that the "proposed book on politics... has been on my hands for many years — since before the other war" [Santayana (2006), p. 239]), focuses on the distinction between "dominations" and "powers," which, Santayana emphasizes, "is moral, not physical". If the influence of a stronger "agent" is "benign" or "useful" in "relation to the spontaneous life of some being that it affects," then Santayana considers it a "Power"; if its influence is "fatal, frustrating, or inconvenient," then it is a "Domination" [Santayana (1995), p. 1]. For Santayana, in *Dominations and Powers* as elsewhere, "politics is a moral subject" [Santayana (1995), p. 55] and thus "the criterion in politics is moral" [Santayana (1995), p. 14]. His primary interest is not "merely descriptive or anthropological theory" but moral, "and the interest that guides the moral philosopher is less to trace the passage of mankind from one type of orga-

nization to another, than to distinguish in each type the good and the evil that it comports: in other words, to disentangle the Powers at work in that civilisation and mark the Domination that one or another of them may exercise over the rest" [Santayana (1995), p.26].

But what is the basis for judging one political action to be good and another evil, one agent a Power and another a Domination, if there is no universal standard? The variety of geographical, historical, and other circumstances guarantees that one society will follow a different path from another, so no one political system could be right for at all times and all places. In the preface to *Dominations and Powers*, his last book, Santayana admits that when he was younger, he was, "inspired by the ethics of Plato and Aristotle," ready to play the role of "a judicial moralist, distinguishing the rational uses of institutions and deciding which where the best" but adds that he has now "become aware that anyone's sense of what is good and beautiful must have a somewhat narrow foundation, namely, his circumstances and his particular brand of human nature" [Santayana (1995), p. xxi]. Already in August 1937 Santayana had written that he had come to realize that "even the life of reason is not a compulsory ideal" as he had once believed; he is "now much more impressed by the incidental, unforeseen, polyglot nature of the goods actually realized in life" now that he is no longer "under the spell of Plato & Aristotle" [Santayana (2004), p. 59].

The trouble for the moral philosopher as well as for ordinary observers is that it is often difficult to discern what moral standard is relevant once religious revelation, natural law and one's personal "sense of what is good and beautiful" are ruled out. For Santayana the only proper moral criterion that remains for judging one society's impact on another is the degree to which that impact helps or hurts the development of the weaker society. What that development involves is best determined by the affected society itself: "each society in proportion as it is self-justified, necessarily sets up its ideal to be the measure of all values for its own conscience" [Santayana (1995), p. 5]. But this raises more questions than it answers. It is ra-

rely the case that societies of any complexity have an unambiguous creed, religious or otherwise, that provides a clear "measure of all values" accepted by all or virtually all members of the group. And if members of a particular society have trouble deciding what "ideal" is properly authoritative for them, outsiders, even anthropologists and sociologists, are likely to have even more difficulty, since they must first make the effort to put aside their own preferences and see things from the perspective of the affected society before they are confronted by the uncertainties faced by the insider. Since the issue is moral standards and ideals, no value-free social science can provide answers, no matter how much data it might be able to quantify.

Santayana's philosophy offers some categories designed to provide some guidance in distinguishing political good from political evil, powers from dominations. In the two letters offering a philosophical justification of his views on Fascism, to David Page in 1937 and Corliss Lamont in 1950, Santayana linked his naturalism not only to a rejection of universal moral standards but to his conception of what he calls in the 1950 letter "the generative order of society" [Santayana (2008), p. 309], which he identifies in *Dominations and Powers* as "the order of growth, custom, and tradition" [Santayana (1995), p. 23]. The generative order is thus not the result of conscious decisions about society as a whole but rather the result of what Santayana calls in *Dominations and Powers* the "spontaneous life" [Santayana (1995), p. 1]. through which members of a society respond to the circumstances of their time and place. The generative order is thus in itself a natural product of human beings coping with the particular environment in which they find themselves. The ideals of any particular society are formed as an expression of this "spontaneous life" as it becomes conscious of itself. The circumstances and the response to those circumstances come first, and the ideal second. As Santayana wrote in his 1937 letter to David Page, "Society is not based on ideas, but on the material conditions of existence, such as agriculture and defence; virtue is moral health, and when genuine rests on the same foundations" [Santayana (2004), p. 30].

Because the generative order of each society will be different, since each represents a response to different circumstances, the ideals of each society will also be different.

The task of the political philosopher is to distinguish the ideals springing from a particular generative order and appropriate to it from other ideals that would be irrelevant or even pernicious for it, though perhaps suitable for other societies. Thus Santayana distinguishes the "militant order" from the generative order "to separate, in the sphere of politics and morals, the love of reforming the world from the total mutation that the world is always undergoing" [Santayana (1995), p. 177]. The generative order is a natural process and thus, despite the pain and suffering which life itself involves, the various forms of generative order are not a subject for moral judgment, since the form any generative order takes is dictated by circumstance rather than free choice. They themselves are each the cumulative result or the unintended consequence of many individual choices arising from what Santayana calls the "blind and involuntary war" of "existence itself" [Santayana (1995), p. 178]. Militancy, on the other hand, is properly the subject for moral judgments, since it involves a choice to impose one's own values on others. Santayana wrote to Robert Shaw Sturgis in October 1946 that "a militant as against a generative society" is "one intentionally chosen and imposed, rather than one that has grown up by an unintended concourse of circumstances and interests" [Santayana (2006), p. 289]. In the initial description of the militant order, *Dominations and Powers* emphasizes the element of conscious choice. There is change within the generative order as well, but what marks social change as part of the militant order "is that it is deliberate: not due to a variation in unconscious growth or to blind imitation, but prompted by a distinct desire or taste, and establishing express habits or obligations unknown to the traditional society and perhaps hostile to it" [Santayana (1995), p. 24]. Such changes may be wise or foolish; what distinguishes them as part of the militant order is the "principle of a fresh social order voluntarily imposed" [Santayana (1995), p. 24].

Although Santayana defines the militant order in neutral terms, it appears that the desire behind militancy is inherently flawed. For Santayana "the source of militancy" is not simply "the diversity of possible goods" that inevitably and naturally leads to differences of opinion in choosing among them but instead "the indecision or self-contradiction of animal Will in pursuing distractedly incompatible goods at the same time in the same place" [Santayana (1995), p. 183-4]. The passion behind militancy is therefore inherently irrational, even though the choices pursued by the "militants" might be at other times and other places rational in themselves. The desire to make changes beyond what the generative order might require is for Santayana "militancy, in which primal Will becomes factious and makes war upon itself" [Santayana (1995), p. 55]. Militancy occurs, he explains, when "the master passion, that would like to be absolute and to dominate the whole world, becomes hostility and hatred towards all dissenting forms of existence. Then war becomes intentional, self-righteous, and fanatical; and the spirit of such war is what I call militancy" [Santayana (1995), p. 179]. Santayana did not approve of militancy, whether it expressed itself in war or in a desire for change. He wrote to Daniel Cory in August 1946 "When the other, the 'Militant' order intervenes, through reformers and busybodies, there is trouble" [Santayana (2006), p. 275]. Santayana emphasized throughout his career that his own works were not written with the goal of converting readers to his way of thinking but rather for his own pleasure and for that of anybody who might be interested. In his December 1950 letter to Corliss Lamont, Santayana agrees with Lamont in finding the difference between Lamont's naturalism and his own in "your [Lamont's] militancy in ethics and politics and my lack of it" [Santayana (2008), p. 309]. This rejection of "militancy" in his own life and writings was by no means a pose but instead a fundamental aspect of Santayana's temperament and philosophical perspective. During World War I his sympathies were with the English while his sister's were with the Germans. In a June 1915 letter he apologizes for a previous letter

in language that demonstrates both his affection for his sister and his philosophical views on the folly of trying to change somebody's "settled convictions" by argument or otherwise:

> If I had known how you felt about the war I should never have written my previous letter or sent you those clippings. It is useless to irritate any one with things contrary to their settled convictions, especially when it makes no difference whether, in a matter so far beyond one's personal control, one's opinions happen to be right or wrong. I knew you were *inclined* to be pro-German, but supposed you might be agreeably interested in other views, especially those which prevail in the U.S. But in view of the intensity of your sympathies, I am very sorry to have expressed mine in so far as they are opposed to yours, which they are by no means in all respects. Of course I too am too old, and my feelings spring from too many deep and remote sources in the past, for me to change, or to be influenced by newspaper arguments… We must put up with other people's irrationalities, and with our own, which are far more troublesome [Santayana (2002a), p. 220].

To what extent do Santayana's conceptions of a generative order and a militant order provide defenses for Italian or Spanish fascism? Surely, despite Santayana's own statement in his 1950 letter to Corliss Lamont that Italian fascism should be considered "a product of the generative order of society," the historical record makes it clear that Mussolini's dictatorship was not the product of the "growth, custom, and tradition" Santayana identifies as the markers of the generative order. The 1922 *putsch* through which Mussolini seized power was anything but an example of growth through custom and tradition. In his 1950 letter Santayana criticizes the regime's militancy in foreign policy, but that same militancy was expressed as well in its domestic politics, though, as the Concordat with the Vatican demonstrates, Mussolini's dictatorship lacked the thoroughgoing totalitarianism of Hitler's Germany or Stalin's Soviet Union.

It is at least possible, on the other hand, to argue that Francisco Franco's regime saw itself and was seen by both its friends and enemies as a defender of Spanish custom and tradition, despite its coming to power through violent rebellion against the legal government. That is certainly the way Santayana saw it. In defending the Franco-led rebellion against the Spanish government in his letters he never praises the fascist program of the rebels but instead views them as the defenders of Spanish culture and tradition. In an August 1936 letter he warns his American relative George Sturgis "you mustn't suppose that in Spain now the government stands for peace and order and the insurgents for revolution. It is precisely the other way... It is they [the government] that are waging war on *Spain*, with the Catalonians and some Basques who have always hated to be Spanish" [Santayana (2003b), p. 376]. Writing to George Sturgis again in February 1937, he argues that it is the government that is "revolutionary," not the rebels: "The 'rebels' as you call them include all decent people except the syndicated workingmen of the large towns and the intellectuals of the Left. It is these who are revolutionary, not the military party" [Santayana (2004), p. 15]. Significantly, Santayana warned Sturgis in a November 1938 letter that his opinions about the war in Spain should not be taken as definitive expressions of his philosophical position: "I rather dislike to air my views about politics at present, especially in regard to Spain. I am not indifferent, and I am not well informed: whereas a philosopher should be well informed and dispassionate" [Santayana (2004), p. 176]. When the war ended in March 1939 with the triumph of the rebels, Santayana did not exult in their victory but wrote only "I am much relieved at the end of hostilities in Spain, and hardly think there will be anything serious elsewhere for the moment" in an April 1939 letter to Daniel Cory [Santayana (2004), p. 227]. Santayana's view that the rebels primarily stood for Spanish tradition was shared by some of those who opposed them most strongly, including George Orwell, who fought and was wounded fighting for the Loyalist government against the rebels. In *Homage to Catalonia* George Orwell reluctantly comes to

the conclusion that whichever side won the war "the general movement would be in the direction of some kind of Fascism." His last-ditch reason for believing nevertheless that Franco should be defeated is that a victorious Loyalist government "would at any rate be anti-clerical and anti-feudal," while Franco on the other hand "stood for a stuffy clerico-military reaction" [Orwell (1952), p. 181].

Just as the author of a novel may be mistaken about the implications of his fiction, so a philosopher may be mistaken about the implications of one of his conceptions. Santayana's conception of a "generative order," despite his own use of it in his letters to explain or justify fascism, could have been used instead to explain and justify the institutions associated with the "English liberty" Santayana celebrated in the last chapter of *Character and Opinion in the United States*. The Santayana of *Dominations and Powers* emphasized that change in the generative order is unplanned and involuntary, part of "the total mutation that the world is always undergoing" [Santayana (1995), p. 177], while the "militant order" is defined by the "principle of a fresh social order voluntarily imposed" [Santayana (1995), p. 23]. The Santayana of *Character and Opinion in the United States* describes the growth of the institutions that provided the basis for English liberty — "the English language, the English church, or English philosophy... the common law and parliamentary government" in terms that parallel his later description of the kind of character typifying the generative order:

> Institutions so jumbled and limping could never have been planned; they can never be transferred to another setting, or adopted bodily; but special circumstances and contrary currents have given them birth, and they are accepted and prized, where they are native, for keeping the door open to a great volume and variety of goods, at a moderate cost of danger and absurdity [Santayana (1991), p. 207].

English liberty, says Santayana, "is a broad-based, stupid, blind adventure, groping toward an unknown goal" [Santayana (1991), p.

216]. It must be entirely unsatisfactory to any one who "must be free to live absolutely according to his ideal" [Santayana (1991), p. 217], to all those who aim "at establishing society once for all on some eternally just principle, and at abolishing all traditions, interests, faiths and even words that did not belong to their system" [Santayana (1991), p. 218]. The efforts of these latter are classified in *Dominations and Powers* as part of the "militant order" whose central passion is "the love of reforming the world" [Santayana (1995), p. 177]. *Character and Opinion* contrasts "English liberty" with "absolute liberty" or "fierce liberty," the goal of those who are unsatisfied with anything less than total obedience to an "absolute system, political or religious" [Santayana (1991), p. 221]. In *Character and Opinion* Santayana suggested that the future of English liberty was unlimited: "because it is co-operative, because it calls only for a partial and shifting unanimity among living men," it "may last indefinitely, and can enlist every reasonable man and nation in its service" [Santayana (1991), p. 232]. He went even further, asserting in conclusion that English liberty should and even must ultimately become universal: "Absolute liberty and English liberty are incompatible, and mankind must make a painful and brave choice between them" [Santayana (1991), p. 233].

In the next few decades, however, Santayana had little good to say about the nations where English liberty had taken hold and much praise of regimes like those of Mussolini and Franco, where, as Santayana put it in *Character and Opinion*, every citizen had the choice to "become free in exactly their [the regime's] fashion or have his head cut off" [Santayana (1991), p. 218]. Santayana was referring in *Character and Opinion* to the regimes established by the French and Russian revolutions, but many citizens of Italy under Mussolini or Spain under Franco, not to mention Germany under Hitler or the Soviet Union under Stalin, were given the same alternatives. Santayana's disdain for England and the United States seems to have had more to do with aesthetics than politics, or rather with an unfortunate willingness to allow his aesthetic sensibility to affect

his political judgment. In 1951 Santayana, having lived through the rise and fall of Mussolini and of Nazi Germany and the consolidation of power by Stalin, was capable of writing in the preface to *Dominations and Powers* that over the years "if one political tendency kindled my wrath, it was precisely the tendency of industrial liberalism to level down all civilizations to a single cheap and dreary pattern" [Santayana (1995), p. xxi].

Santayana's letters make clear his lack of interest in the ability of "industrial liberalism" to make possible a higher standard of living for most of its citizens while preserving basic liberties. In 1923 he wrote that if only the "industrial situation' could remain always bad, and the population could diminish, especially in the manufacturing towns, I should think it a good thing. There are now too many people, too many things, and too many conferences and elections" [Santayana (2002b), p. 137]. This attitude was not merely the expression of an unusual mood but a considered opinion. A year earlier he had told the same correspondent that "the two great conditions for improving the lot of mankind are a much smaller population and a much larger proportion of people devoted to agriculture" [Santayana (2002b), p. 56-7]. Santayana had written to Bertrand Russell in 1917 that the massive loss of life and property caused by the war caused him no great concern: "As for deaths and loss of capital, I don't much care... I am willing, almost glad, that the world should be poorer: I only wish the population too could become more sparse ..." [Santayana (2002a), p. 303]. If his wishes could have been granted, Santayana would have preferred a world in which commerce did not exist, industry was minimized, and a central government directed the economy. Santayana seemed to think that there was something unfair about any kind of commerce beyond simple barter. In *Dominations and Powers* he commented approvingly that "In primitive barter, even when money begins to intervene, there is no dominance of any party over any other" [Santayana (1995), p. 249]. On the other hand, when merchants become active "that element of inequality in making exchanges, which was

an inevitable personal accident in primitive barter, now becomes the sole means of living for the middleman, be he pedlar, shopkeeper, merchant, or banker. Trade has become an art in itself… the art of 'making money.'" Santayana seems to regret this development, adding "this abstract form of industry or finance is a by-product of concrete commercial enterprise, and not necessary to it" [Santayana (1995), p. 250]. In a 1945 letter he commented that "my ideal would be a much simpler material and social life… my ideal would be a communistic public life, as in the Spartan upper class or as in a monastery." In Santayana's ideal world private wealth would be eliminated; he would "limit all the luxuries to public gardens, libraries, churches, theatres and clubs." Santayana would be happy in such a society, as long as control of the economy did not restrict "perfect liberty in thought and in the arts, like painting or writing" [Santayana (1995), p.151].

Santayana's personal tastes, then, go far to explain his qualified sympathy for Italian fascism under Mussolini, his support for Franco's Spanish fascism, and also his disdain for some of the dominant tendencies in English and American culture in the twentieth century. The principles of Santayana's political philosophy, however, point in a different direction. His *Dominations and Powers* depends on a distinction between the generative and militant orders that leads logically to both a defense of English liberty as an expression of the generative order and a critique of fascism as an expression of the militant order. Santayana identifies the generative order of custom and tradition with what he called at the beginning of *Dominations and Powers* "the spontaneous life" of a society or in a 1937 letter the "spontaneous organization of mankind" [Santayana (2004), p. 31]. It is true that for Santayana himself this "spontaneous life" is a response to "the material conditions of existence, such as agriculture and defence," as he explains in the same letter [Santayana (2004), p. 30]. The market, for Santayana, did not count as part of the generative order. One could argue, however, that Santayana's conception of the generative order as the "spontaneous organiza-

tion of mankind," based on custom and tradition rather than on rational decision-making, corresponds to F. A. Hayek's conception of the "spontaneous order" [Hayek (1989), p. 37] of the market, which, according to Hayek, derives its rules and procedures from "custom and tradition" [Hayek (1989), p. 23] rather than from "intelligence and calculating reason" [Hayek (1989), p. 29]. Santayana himself would have been unsympathetic, no doubt, to Hayek's notion of a "spontaneous extended human order created by a competitive market" [Hayek (1989), p. 7], but the implications of his philosophy leave room for just such a conception. Indeed, once one connects the idea of the "generative order" to Santayana's notion of "English liberty," a conception very much like Hayek's "spontaneous extended human order" seems to result.

It is a commonplace in Santayana criticism that the man and his philosophy are intertwined. Santayana wrote so well and with such literary art that it is difficult and usually unprofitable to separate the logic of his arguments from the attitudes and feelings he communicates with such elegance. But one of the central attitudes Santayana communicates in his prose is the key philosophic virtue of disinterestedness. The true philosopher must not allow egotism to distort his search for truth. Surely Santayana's acknowledgement of the superiority of English liberty to absolute liberty exemplifies his ability to transcend his own personal tastes or preferences in favor of what he found to be true. Throughout his life Santayana was attracted to "harmony in strength," as he puts in *Dominations and Powers* [Santayana (1995), p. xxii]. Thus, as he wrote to Sidney Hook in 1934, his affinities were with regimes aiming at a version of "absolute liberty" rather than the English liberty he had praised in *Character and Opinion in the United States*: "But I love order in the sense of organized, harmonious, consecrated living: and for this reason I sympathize with the Soviets and the Fascists and the Catholics, but not at all with the liberals" [Santayana (2003b), p. 116]. Despite this personal preference, however, Santayana never renounced his conclusion in *Character and Opinion in the United States* that English liberty, whate-

ver his own feelings might be, was "in harmony with the nature of things" [Santayana (1991), p. 227] and therefore "may last indefinitely, and can enlist every reasonable man in its service" [Santayana (1991), p. 287]. To argue that Santayana's' "generative order" can be taken to include Hayek's "spontaneous extended human order" of the marketplace and his "militant order" to include fascist regimes is to take issue with Santayana's personal preferences but not, I believe, with the principles of his political philosophy. It is reasonable, then, to conclude that Santayana's political philosophy, rightly understood, provides grounds for supporting those liberal democracies in which the generative order, including the free market, is allowed to thrive, and to criticize those regimes — fascist, communist, or theocratic — in which the generative order of society is suppressed by a militant attempt to enact some version of absolute liberty.

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