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## It Is All in the Moment: Solipsism and Happiness in the Present

CHARLES PADRÓN

### ABSTRACT

Santayana's *Scepticism and Animal Faith* is a protean work, a philosophical treatise that still today in 2023 inspires thought and criticism. In this paper I extract one concept from the text, *solipsism of the present moment*, and both discuss it and contrast it with Pierre Hadot's *the present alone is our happiness*. Leading up to that comparison, I discuss Santayana and skepticism and Santayana and the ancient skeptical way of life.

*Key Words:* Santayana, Eclecticism, Skepticism, Solipsism, Happiness, Pierre Hadot, Philosophy as a Way of Life

### RESUMEN

*Escepticismo y fe animal* de Santayana es una obra extensa, un tratado filosófico que aún hoy inspira pensamiento y criticismo. En este artículo extraigo una idea del texto, *solipsismo del momento presente*, y la discuto y la contrasto con la idea de Pierre Hadot de *el presente solo es nuestra felicidad*. Esa comparación va precedida por la discusión sobre Santayana y el escepticismo, y sobre Santayana y el antiguo escepticismo como forma de vida.

*Palabras clave:* Santayana, eclecticismo, escepticismo, solipsismo, la felicidad, Pierre Hadot, la filosofía como forma de vida

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There is an evident and deliberate eclectic thread running through the entirety of Santayana's entire philosophical oeuvre, from the early work and essays to his mature accomplishments, namely *Scepticism and Animal Faith* and *Realms of Being*. In fact, a very strong argument could be made for the adjective *eclectic* as the most accurate one to describe a philosopher whose principle influences were both numerous and varying to the extent that his were.<sup>1</sup> And given this, it could very well be quite natural to include him among the historically recognized thinkers (including Plato!) whom Pierluigi Donini has brought together in his "The History of the Concept of Eclecticism" [cf. Dillon and Long (1988), pp. 15-33].

I myself am prone to be of this tendency, for I am convinced that understanding Santayana as an *eclectic* cuts through many of partial and incomplete assignments that historically have arisen in analyzing his thought: *festive naturalist* (Herman Saatkamp), *pragmatic naturalist* (Henry Samuel Levinson), *non-reductive naturalist* and "*Abulensean pragmatist*" (Angus Kerr-Lawson), *narrative naturalist* (Jessica Wahman), *neo-Platonic naturalist* (Paul Kuntz), "*nomadic thought*" (José Beltrán), *Parmenidean Platonist* (C.A. Strong), *Democritean and Mediterranean aesthetician and Epicurean materialist* (David Dilworth) *Epicurean* (Daniel Pinkas), *Platonistic "literary philosopher"* (Irving Singer), *hermeneutist* (Katarzyna Krempleska), "*Pyrrhonian sceptic*" (John Michelson), "*natural Idealist*" (Frederick Woodbridge), *materialist Idealist* (John Herman Randall), *humanist* (Irwin Edman), "*ironic nihilist*" and "*Platonic materialist and "spiritual" atheist*" (Daniel Moreno), in his later years "*a contextualist and relativist*" (John Anton), and by John Lachs, a *Stoic pragmatist* [cf. Lachs (2012), pp. 143-81]. Santayana calls himself in the "Preface" to *SAF* a "Platonist in logic and morals, and a transcendentalist in romantic soliloquy, when I choose to indulge in it" [*SAF* viii].

Santayana confronts and comes to grip with the threat of *skepticism* in his own development as a thinker in *SAF*. He does not embrace skepticism, nor does he place himself into its tradition as

a serious votary of its working principles and interests. He purges himself of it in a therapeutic intellectual process, a deliberate pruning of one's epistemological assumptions. Interestingly enough, we do need to appreciate, however, that in his *Apologia Pro Mente Sua* (1940) he does decidedly affirm that he was a *materialist*: "My personal philosophy, so severely blamed for turning its eyes away from human society, is a strict materialism; and this materialism about the universe makes it easier for me to endure and even to enjoy the materialism of the world" [Santayana (1940), p. 566]. He also claims straightforwardly that despite skeptical deliberations he is the opposite of a skeptic:

I am a dogmatist, yet I have raised my system on a skeptical foundation... My dogmatism asserts that, in an observable biological sense, knowledge is possible, and, on the same biological grounds, that knowledge is relative. My skepticism confirms this dogma, from the inside and analytically, by pointing out that knowledge, for the spirit, involves a claim that the spirit may always challenge... Thus my dogmatism and skepticism are complementary views of the same fact of natural history, namely: that organisms are affected and react as wholes according to the total customary operation of the object, as in hunting, fighting, and fleeing [Santayana (1940), p. 515].

The argument could be made that one could easily substitute *naturalism* for *materialism*. But the philosophical debate as to which *ism* most adequately envelops Santayana's thought is not, ultimately, that fulfilling or important. I am confident that each of the above designations could be considered as having certain elements of truth in aiding to comprehend Santayana's thought in some way, and even in compelling ways. What we are left with, nevertheless, at bottom, is an eventual tangible and *bodily* (call it natural or material for it boils down to the same) antidote to the self-defeating morass of dead-end skepticism that he tackles in the first part of *SAF*, where nothing is believed, everything questioned, and nothing gets done. Santayana

will designate this *animal faith* in *SAF*. It is the second half to the book's title. But as for skepticism strictly, like the hindsight afforded in the previous quote, a clarifying passage is found in *Apologia Pro Mente Sua* (some seventeen years later) that affords us an even older and mature Santayana reflecting, even more discriminative:

The true sceptic merely analyses belief, discovering the risk and the logical uncertainty inherent in it. He finds that alleged knowledge is always faith; he would not be a sceptic if he pretended to have proved that any belief, much less all belief, was *wrong*... Extraordinary heroism would be required to turn skepticism into a final philosophy, as some of the ancients tried to do... my skepticism remains merely the confession that faith is faith, without any rebellion against the physical necessity of believing. It enables me to believe in common-sense and in materialism, and, like Landor, to warm both hands before the fire of life...[Santayana (1940), p. 516].<sup>2</sup>

In this piece I am primarily interested in discussing dogmatism and skepticism as they relate to *ancient skepticism* and Santayana's *SAF*, and then moving on to compare two dimensions of *living out* the present moment in an individual life, as they are found in *SAF* and Pierre Hadot. And these two dimensions are tenaciously grounded in both thinkers' comprehension of *philosophy as a way of life*. Skepticism is not a *natural* disposition for most humans. Why should we complicate matters, seek out difficult possibilities arising from curiosity and wonder and doubt, when, having no certainty, we become vulnerable to falling short, disappointment, and quite possibly sadness and despair? There is not, nor ever has been, a simple response as to why we would. Perhaps the Socratic claim in the *Theaetetus* (155d. trans. Cornford) that "this sense of wonder is the mark of the philosopher. Philosophy indeed has no other origin..." [Hamilton and Cairns (1961), p. 860] or Aristotle's in *The Metaphysics* (980.22, trans. Tredennick) that "all men naturally desire knowledge" [Goold (1933), p. 3] are as legitimate as

any other. Curiosity in-itself and curiosity to learn both are human potentialities. Santayana offers the explanation that “it was the fear of illusion that originally disquieted the honest mind, congenitally dogmatic, and drove it in the direction of skepticism” [SAF 72]. Yet the fact remains that “people are not naturally sceptics, wondering if a single one of their intellectual habits can be reasonably preserved; they are dogmatists angrily confident of maintaining them all” [SAF 12-13].

Santayana’s *SAF* is, in my view, a philosophical treatise open to a plurality of interpretations. It is an *open text*, and has provoked many different readings. Traditionally understood, and even self-admittedly stated by Santayana himself as the precursor volume to something more (“It is the first volume of my system of philosophy, which I have had in hand for many years” he wrote in September 1922 [Santayana (2002), p. 86], and two months later in November, “I inclose the agreement, duly signed for the publication of *Scepticism and Animal Faith*... This book is only the introduction to the system. Perhaps the words ‘Introduction to a System of Philosophy’ would sound better than ‘The first part of.’ They might convey the impression of a separate introductory work, complete in itself, which is just what this book is” [Santayana (2002), pp. 91-2]. This is exactly how the subtitle came to be included as we know it today.<sup>3</sup> Whether we accept *SAF* as an introductory work, or as a self-contained work within itself, seems a knotty, academic question, for to see it as Santayana did demands that it be considered as an integral part of the subsequent volumes of *RB*. If we side with George Howgate, Santayana’s first biographer, then this is indeed the case: “Of the five volumes dealing with the realms of being, *Scepticism and Animal Faith* is the most technical and controversial” [Howgate (1938), p. 238]. Santayana’s most recent biographer John McCormick, in the same line, links *SAF* to the first volume of *RB*, *Realm of Essence* (1927), and has claimed that the notion of *essences* (in Santayana’s own words the “infinite multitude of distinguishable ideal terms” [Santayana (1927), p. viii] is the most significant philosophical

contribution made by Santayana in *SAF*: “At the center of *Scepticism of Animal Faith* is Santayana’s all-important doctrine of essence, which he enunciates for the first time. His exploration is preliminary and subject to the modifications which compose *The Realm of Essence*, the necessary first volume in the four realms” [McCormick (1987), p. 258]. On the other hand, in between these positions and that of Lachs (see note #2), is that of Timothy Sprigge, who thinks that *SAF* “presents the epistemological background to that ontology, in part it adumbrates that ontology itself” [Sprigge (1995), p. 30]. Whatever the case, *SAF* is fertile ground for epistemological and ontological assertions. In the epistemological sphere it is the phenomenon of *skepticism*, to which I now turn.

#### THE ANCIENT SKEPTICAL WAY OF LIFE

Skepticism reaches back deep into the history of Western thought, however it is only relatively recent that it has become the force in philosophy as we know it today.<sup>4</sup> Pyrrho of Elis is the recognized authority and prototypical figure, as it is mentioned at the very outset of Book 1 of Sextus Empiricus’s *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, for “Pyrrho applied himself to Skepticism more vigorously and conspicuously than his predecessors did” [Bates (1996), p. 89]. Both of these individuals together, Pyrrho and Sextus Empiricus, constitute the central core of *ancient* skepticism, as distinct from what we could label *modern skepticism*, which began in earnest with the Cartesian *Meditations* of 1641. If one were forced to do so, one would have to place Santayana in the former. There are profound differences between them. Benson Mates has identified the primary, critical one: “First, Pyrrhonism is presented by Sextus as a *good* thing: above all, it is not a doctrine, which we might accept or try to refute, but rather a way of life (*agoge*) or disposition (*dunamis*) that is supposed to lead its practitioners through suspension of judgment (*epoche*) to a state of inner imperturbability or peace of mind (*ataraxia*). In modern times, on the other hand, the so-

called skeptic is not much more than an imaginary participant in philosophers' debates, a participant who represents a doctrine that nobody takes seriously but that nevertheless is notoriously difficult to refute" [Bates (1996), p. 5]. Two scholars of ancient thought, Julia Annas and Jonathan Barnes, put it like this, supporting Bates' insight with strong claims:

The Greeks took their scepticism seriously: the moderns do not. Modern scepticism frequently represents itself as issuing a challenge to *knowledge*... For the sceptical challenge leaves all our *beliefs* intact: provided only that we do not claim to *know* anything, we may continue with our usual assertions and persist in our usual beliefs... A scepticism of that sort may actually seem a charade... It will certainly seem idle. It does not affect our behavior or our mode of life, and is to that extent unserious [Annas and Barnes (1985), p. 7-8].

There are numerous confirmations of this strain of thinking in Santayana's *SAF*. For one, Santayana took the threat of skepticism quite seriously, and equally the need to be able to *live one's skepticism* authentically but within control, even as a life and death issue (for the mind), similar to what Pyrrho himself worked out in his quest for *ataraxia*: "To be dead and have no opinions would certainly not be to discover the truth; but if all opinions are equally false, it would at least be not to sin against intellectual honour. Let me then push scepticism as far as I logically can, and endeavour to clear my mind of illusion, even at the price of intellectual suicide" [*SAF* 10]. Does this come off as a statement from someone *not* serious? Having established in the "Preface" of *SAF* that there are no given or established "first principles of criticism" [*SAF* 2], that is to say, a collection or agreed upon assortment of basic, fundamental to all humans "axioms and postulates," along with any conclusive "living discourse" that is embedded in our minds or in social linguistic discourse, Santayana then progresses to dismiss all manner of convention, all discernable dogma: "To me the opinions of

mankind, taken without any contrary prejudice (since I have no rival opinions to propose) but simply contrasted with the course of nature, seem surprising fictions; and the marvel is how they are maintained" [SAF 7]. A plurality of dogmas that seem to expand among humans and extend themselves more and more as influences, whether sought out or not, run up against other dogmas, and the result is an *educated* give and take, even competition, known to us as the discourse of *criticism*. This last term, in the Santayanan lexicon, enculturates our collective efforts to fathom and rationalize the *phenomenal* world, and our dealings with it. In the second chapter of *SAF*, "Dogma and Doubt," Santayana secerns between *empirical criticism* and *transcendental criticism*. The former is the grab bag of human beliefs corresponding to the factual domain, while the latter is exertion, with a specific aspiration in mind, to "disentangle and formulate... subjective principles of interpretation" [SAF 8].

Santayana shares with Pyrrho, as articulated in Sextus' *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, a steadfast adherence to a unity of philosophy and life. Both insist that abstract philosophical meanderings and idle reflections, isolated from the facticity of *existent* life, human life, the body and the mind and the heart, with all the contingency and suffering, are otiose. Though we cannot help but *know* certain actualities and impressions (*phantasiai*, a key word in Sextus) gained just by the mere experience of being alive, in this world and not in another alternative one. We cannot prevent ourselves from *knowing* things, despite any argument or inquisitive barrage that a modern skeptic might throw at us to force us to doubt them, or even deny them. Explanations end somewhere, and the *shocks* (a favorite Santayanan word) of everyday life are unavoidable. Sextus writes that the skeptic, adhering to the *criterion* to skepticism, or the "Skeptic Way," as Bates has translated it, does not wrangle as to "whether the external object appears this way or that, but rather about whether it is such as it appears to be" [Bates (1996), p. 92]. In other words, I do not doubt the actual scratch that my cat just gave me, even bringing forth some drops of blood, but I might entertain

a string of doubts and beliefs as to how serious a wound it is. There is nothing to be doubted about the scratch in-itself; it is a scratch, it looks and hurts like a scratch, and all I have to do is touch the blood and taste it to know that I am bleeding real blood. We still live out life amidst all our skeptical considerations—*we live our skepticism*, even while remaining conciliatory to our overarching end of *ataraxia*, and incorporating into our everydayness the events and encounters that come our way. For, Sextus continues, though we live out our days without settled, preconceived *beliefs* about anything specifically, we live

in accord with the ordinary regimen of life, since we cannot be wholly inactive. And this ordinary regimen of life seems to be fourfold: one part has to do with the guidance of nature, another with the compulsion of the *path* [feelings, states of the soul], another with the handing down of laws and customs, and the fourth with instruction in arts and crafts. Nature's guidance is that by which we are naturally capable of sensation and thought; compulsion of the *path* is that by which hunger drives us to food and thirst makes us drink; the handing down of customs and laws is that by which we accept that piety in the conduct of life is good and impiety bad; and instruction in arts and crafts is that by which we are not inactive in whichever of these we acquire. And we say all these things without belief [Bates (1996), p. 92].

These beliefs, as I understand it, are fixtures in our minds that hue our thoughts and influence our actions, determining in some manner, what we think or do. I think this is what Sextus is intimating. We have come to assume them by rational processes. They are a part of the *ta adla*, the “nonevident,” which are an adherence to some idea or creed that cannot be perceived and verified in the present. In Sextus' understanding, this is comparable to *dogma*. Belief and dogma are equivalents. On the other hand, everyday beliefs aid us in navigating our lives and their vicissitudes and encounters. For even

if I were to carry myself throughout an average day not adhering to any specific belief or beliefs, steadfastly ready to give voice to and live by my doubts about any and everything, I still believe in those doubts. We always have some belief, so though Sextus writes “without belief,” we need to be cautious about that claim, and realize that belief specifically is referring to the “nonevident.” For, as Santayana writes, “scepticism is accordingly a form of belief. Dogma cannot be abandoned; it can only be revised in view of some more elementary dogma which it has not yet occurred to the sceptic to doubt; and he may be right in every point of his criticism, except in fancying that his criticism is radical and that he is altogether a sceptic” [*SAF* 8-9]. Sextus adds: “We always say that as regards belief the Skeptic’s goal is *ataraxia*, and that as regards things that are unavoidable it is having moderate *pathé* [Bates (1996), p. 92]. Though not a firm (‘dogmatic’) blueprint for a meaningful everyday life, it is one with solid practical preferences and suggestions, and aims for a noncommittal serenity that affords one a lack of excessive hassles and entanglements, and a comprehensive sereneness. It is suggestive, not *dogmatic*, like Santayana’s thought expressed in the “Preface” of *SAF*: “... but I do not ask any one to think in my terms if he prefers others. Let him clean better, if he can, the windows of his soul...” [*SAF* vi], with the eventuality being a modest human being embodying “a rational instinct or instinctive reason, the waxing faith of an animal in a world which he can observe and sometimes remodel” [*SAF* 309].

I place to some extent Santayana in the camp of that august lineage of thinkers that began with Pyrrho, the *ancient skeptics*, though there were factions and ruptures of continuity among them, and even though ultimately I think he is an *eclectic* more than anything else. Some nineteen years after the publication of *SAF*, in a 1942 “Preface” to the one-volume edition of *RB*, wrote something of a confirmation of this:

This philosophy that I have unearthed within me is ancient philosophy, very ancient philosophy... In saying, then, that my philosophy is ancient I do not mean that it is traditional or reactionary. On the contrary, it is as personally sceptical and independent as I am able to make it; although I think it reasonable to suppose that the beliefs that prove inevitable for me, after absolutely disinterested criticism, would prove inevitable also to most human beings [Santayana (1942), p. xxix].

*Academic skepticism* with Arcesilaus as head of the Academy, the school originally established by Plato, was a distinct strain of skepticism and was independent of the Pyrrhonian strain. Arcesilaus was a strong critic of the Stoics and their doctrines. Then came Carneades who flourished roughly one century later (214-129/8 BCE) and who took over the Academy. He has come to be known to posterity only due to Cicero and his *Academica* (*On Academic Skepticism*, 45 BCE) and *De fato* (*On Fate*, c. 44 BCE). Finally, it was one Aenesidemus (mid-first century BCE), who flourished in Athens and later in Alexandria, who championed Pyrrho as the prototypical skeptic, and maintained alive his ideas. Sextus Empiricus would then come to assess Pyrrho as the figure who truly embodied a distinct line of philosophical questioning and accompanying way of life. Why is it so significant that we know the early skeptics primarily from later written sources? Because, like Socrates, they wrote nothing—they *lived* their philosophy. Philosophy was a way of life, the philosophical life, for them. Santayana's own confirmation of his conviction that one's philosophy needs to be wedded to one's ordinary, everyday existence, is found at the outset of *SAF*: "I stand in philosophy exactly where I stand in daily life; I should not be honest otherwise. I accept the same miscellaneous witnesses, bow to the same obvious facts, make conjectures no less instinctively, and admit the same encircling ignorance" [*SAF* vi]. There is a broad meeting ground here where Santayana's thought in *SAF* runs up against the ancient skeptics.

## WHAT IS IN THE MOMENT? SOLIPSISM OR HAPPINESS

I have always undergone an intermission of disappointment and perturbation when I think about how Santayana's "solipsism of the present moment" is discussed in the manner that it is in *SAF*. Not only is it addressed in rather technical, unfavorable terms, it is what can be understood as an *epistemological solipsism*, and there somehow remains a vague dissatisfaction as to what it actually means and why Santayana employed it the third chapter, "Wayward Scepticism," in the book. But now I understand it in a new light, and it has become something quite the contrary to anything negative. All in all, *solipsism* or *solipsist* appears on nine pages in *SAF*. It enters as a negative counterpoise in what Santayana will claim is *romantic solipsism*, which is basically the case of an individual who with a plentiful history is disqualified as an authentic skeptic because the lack of objectivity and inability to be free of a colorful past and be able to withstand criticism. The romantic solipsist *cannot* be an honest skeptic, for such a being is "a moral person endowed with memory and vanity" [*SAF* 13], and also a past, and having a past would inevitably entail having a notion of the future as well. A would-be skeptic who needs to jettison all *beliefs*, needs to discard also the notions of past and future that structure those beliefs. What is required is that the solipsist take on a "solipsism of the present moment," [*SAF* 14] the only kind worthy of a skeptical quester, and one which grants entrance to an *epistemological solipsism* of present, unadulterated immediacy, but it is one, which John Lachs also like myself, is a bit uneasy with:

By this he means that there is no certainty except in speechless absorption in whatever object may float before the mind... Santayana's designation of the outcome of skepticism as solipsism of the present moment is doubly inappropriate. First, certainty for him is emphatically not about self, but about impersonal objects given in consciousness. Since *ipse* means "self" and *datum* means "given" in Latin, Santayana's

view should be called sol-datism of the present moment. Second, solipsism maintains that there is at least something that exists, namely a self. Santayana, on the other hand, thinks that he is not in a position at this stage to assert the existence of anything [Lachs (1988), p. 36].

So why Santayana's use of "solipsism"? We know that Santayana, expressed in a letter to Harvard classmate Henry Ward Abbot of 5 February 1887, thirty-six years before the publication of *SAF* and when he was only twenty-three years old, was already aware of the problematic nature of solipsism. He enjoins his friend to liberate himself from its lure "by action" [Santayana (2001), p. 47]. He adds:

You say, or hint, that you are resigned to being an egotist and egoist, but not to be a solipsist. The things are not but two sides of the same; it is harder to deny the existence of other men in thinking than in willing, be cause [*sic*] in thinking we depend so much on words, and books, and education—all social things, while in will we are more independent, at least we feel more independent, for in reality we are perhaps less so. The more fundamental part of us is where we have more in common, and where influences are more easily exercised. It is more easy to influence than to persuade [Santayana (2001), p. 49].

We also know that his teacher and eventual colleague, and also a formidable influence on his thinking, William James, employed it, and I discuss this shortly. But first, I would like to grind down on the very term *solipsism*, and tease out what precisely it could mean, and what are the variations possible. This is important, I think, for although most educated adults know it has something to do with the *self* being the center of things, or the self as being the ultimate or even *only* reality, it calls out for more precision. First, I provide four definitions from four authoritative reference works:

*The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*: "The view that only oneself exists... A more radical version is that one's own immediate experience has a fundamental, self-certifying reality and that

comparable knowledge of 'physical' or 'public' items is unobtainable" [Honderich (1995), p. 838].

*The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*: "The doctrine that there exists a first-person perspective possessing privileged and irreducible characteristics, in virtue of which we stand in various kinds of isolation from any other persons or external things that may exist" [Audi (1995), p. 751].

*The Oxford English Dictionary*: "The view or theory that the self is the only object of real knowledge or only thing really existent" [(1991), p. 975].

*Webster's Third New International Dictionary*: "1: any of various versions of subjective idealism: as (1): an epistemological theory that the self can know nothing but its own modifications and states (2) *or solipsism of the present moment*: an epistemological theory that the self knows or can know only its present modifications and states to the exclusion of future and past states..." [(1986), p. 2170].

This last one, the fourth, though it goes on for some twelve lines or so further and I do not want to include all of it, strikes one as very relevant to what is under discussion here. All four capture meaningful ideas, and are even complementary on some points. I am not aware of any formulation by any other individual of "solipsism of the present moment," philosophically, poetically, or psychologically, apart from Santayana's coinage of the phrase. Given this, one can only infer that Santayana's five-word locution has officially entered into *Webster's International* as is, without due credit being given to him! The combined *Webster's International* of 1864, 1879, and 1884, has only one word for the definition of *solipsism*: "Egotism."

William James entitled a short little piece published in *The Journal of Philosophy* in April 1905 "Is Radical Empiricism Solipsistic?", in which he defended his *radical empiricism* against the criticisms of one "Mr. Bode" of a month earlier. James defends his account of objective knowledge via "experience's living flow" [James (1987), p. 1204] in the face of Mr. Bode's criticisms of it being merely

self-referential perspective and subjective account, “playing fast and loose with the concept of objective reference” [*idem.* p. 1203] and not at all establishing objective validity. Essentially, in James’ appreciation of things, *solipsism* is nothing positive (some have called it a theory) or a desired outlook to entertain, or to be known for. It is highly limited and centers its entire range of immediate activity on a presentness with no aspiration for registering consented-to knowledge or transferable facts. In the academic year 1895-96 during which James taught a seminar in Psychology on “Discussion of Theoretic Problems, as Consciousness, Knowledge” he made extensive notes. In one of them, dated “Sunday, May 1” he wrote: “... My point must be to show that *the beyond is part of the same continuum*, whereas for common sense dualism it is discontinuous, and separated by the epistemological chasm... If asked, we reply that... contemporaneous things do exist in the part of the room from which our faces are turned... What does it mean now to say that he answers “truly” who answers “yes” to the question...” *do they now exist?*... Isn’t the difficulty this?—*to get out of the solipsism without jumping a chasm?*...” [Perry (1935), p. 370]. What the intent is in this case (an effort to rid oneself of, of evading, in a sense, solipsism) was a persistent problem for James, as Ralph Barton Perry, one of his former students and scholar of his thought, would later write was still an unresolved issue ten years later. In an academic year course of 1905-06, what was called at Harvard “Philosophy 9,” James was at work in moving from his *radical empiricism* positions to that of the ideas in his *Pragmatism* (1907) and *A Pluralistic Universe* (1909). After some introductory lectures on “materialistic empiricism,” and “rationalistic spiritualism,” James moved on to “an examination of the problem of knowledge with a view to escaping solipsism. A solution is sought in the pragmatic identity of your object and mine” [*idem.* p. 443].

In mentioning James and solipsism, I am in no way claiming a direct causal influence of James’ interest in the notion and Santayana’s using it in *SAF*, or even having exposed Santayana

directly to the notion as his teacher when Santayana was an undergraduate. Yet James is one of the few philosophers in the latter half of the nineteenth century (and first decade of the twentieth) who even employs the word. And James was Santayana's teacher, then colleague, at Harvard. Santayana was present during all those years at Harvard, sharing ideas and buildings and lecture halls with James. It is not inconceivable that *solipsism* entered Santayana's mental and verbal universe during these years via James. James aimed at resolving the problem of *epistemological solipsism* through a social understanding of something taking place within a mediated experience that can be described. Santayana would opt for his *animal faith* that is elaborated on in *SAF*. Both, each in their manner, confront solipsism, at different times and in different ways. Again, seventeen years later with plentiful hindsight, Santayana could frame it like this:

Because I have animal faith, and believe there is something to discover or to obtain, I can regard my perceptions as knowledge, and can frame hypotheses. Without such faith, all would be intuition of data and there would be no such thing as signification, indication, or experiment. Experience would all be idealistic experience, experience of experience, and never experience of a world [Santayana (1940), p. 587].

But *solipsism of the present moment* has another facet, one that I would like to bring into consideration. As I have argued in the first part of this piece, Santayana's *solipsism of the present moment* as it is discussed in *SAF* is an *epistemological solipsism*. Though discarded by Santayana as inadequate as a perspective in the search for certainty and accuracy in understanding the physical world and our working, relational knowledge we have of it, it still is an attractive, even luring, philosophical frame of mind. Just because it falls short epistemologically does not amount to being without value philosophically. Even *romantic solipsism*, as mentioned earlier as “not a position capable of defence” [*SAF* 14], is interesting in

itself, and for Santayana, “an honest position” [*SAF* 15]. If we do away with the epistemological enterprise and intention, what do we have left in the living state of *solipsism of the present moment*? We have the human being expansively open to the external, all five senses alive to the impressions and to the unrestrained being (call it a self if you like) that interacts, receives, and even initiates. It is an *ontological solipsism*. Santayana argues that the solipsist is not intent on remembering or recording anything, and most definitely not justifying or advocating anything. Imagine a passenger on scenic deck of a ferry moving between islands, so that there is more in view than endless stretches of water, seated in a comfortable chair spending the hour-long trip becoming timelessly immersed in the unified experience of the sky, the sea, the topography of what can be seen from the islands, the sounds of birds, wind, and the enveloping smells. In such a situation, why would one *need* or *desire* to *know* what one was undergoing? It is an unrepeatably *present*, never to be recaptured. It has meaning and value just for what it is—an hour of being alive.<sup>5</sup> But was this present a value for Santayana, does it constitute moments of *happiness*, or if one would like to stress the hedonistic angle, is it *pleasure*, and for that reason or not, a value in his life? Or perhaps it gave birth to an *aesthetic* sense, to *aesthetic value*? Was this a *moment* of importance for Santayana in *SAF*? And, apart from *SAF*, does it have lasting significance in his thought on the whole?

One thinker who did see great value in this *moment* was Pierre Hadot. In his comprehensive *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie antique?* (1995) [*What is Ancient Philosophy?* (2002)], he details the dynamic that went on in ancient philosophical schools, and also the general societal dynamic that played out in Hellenistic societies among individual philosophers and their associates and students. But in a slight distinction to what he designates “the four schools,” which were headed by Plato (Academy), Aristotle (Lyceum), Epicurus (the Garden), and Zeno (the Stoa), he separates Pyrrhonism (later to be baptized *skepticism*) and Cynicism. I write “slight” because these

four schools were laboratories for *both* dogmatic rational ideas and principles *and* particular ways of life. Pyrrhonism and Cynicism eschewed philosophical discourse that gave off the appearance of unquestionable authority and probity. They stressed the enactment of life with no (at least officially) discourse and doctrine. Like Santayana, who both confesses that he is philosophically where he is in everyday life, and that very state in which lives and thinks is accessible to the ordinary human being, the *skeptic*, as Hadot understands it, possesses “only a way of life. Life itself, everyday life as everyone leads it. This is to be the Skeptic’s rule of life: simply to utilize his natural resources—his senses and intelligence—just as lay people do” [Hadot (2002), p. 145]. This noted, there is another (and for my purposes in this piece the concluding one) idea of Hadot’s that I figuratively place as a counterpoise to Santayana’s *solipsism of the present moment*: “le présent seul est notre bonheur,” [Hadot (2021), p. 13]. Michael Chase, who has translated a large amount of Hadot’s work into English, has translated it as “only the present is our happiness” [Hadot (1995), p. 217]. However, in a separate volume to which it was given the very title of the book, “the present alone is our happiness” [Hadot (2011), p. 162] is the translation. There is a subtle difference between the two. It is this latter one that I will use presently.

The line has been lifted from Goethe’s *Faust*. Though the literary context is fascinating to know, I will forego offering a discussion of this for reasons of space. Suffice it to say, the dramatic backdrop and the poetry moved Hadot to such a degree that he devoted two early essays to it, and subsequently added more writing to form a book that was first published in 2008, *N’oublie pas de vivre: Goethe et la tradition des exercices spirituels*. What I am focusing on here however, are two distinct pieces: “‘Only the Present is Our Happiness’: The Value of the Present Instant in Goethe and in Ancient Philosophy” [Hadot (1995), pp. 217-37], and an interview given by Hadot to Jeannie Carlier and titled “The Present Alone is Our Happiness” [Hadot (2011), pp. 162-74].

The inspiration behind these lines in Goethe's *Faust* embody, for Hadot, an ancient classical predication. And this for three reasons. The first is Goethe's orientation towards the world, his general outlook, soaked as is was in the ancient Greek and Roman worlds. The second is the figure of Helen, the beautiful figure of the Trojan War, a figure of personified classical beauty, who is a protagonist in the scene with Faust when this line (actually two lines, and with each of them saying part of it) is voiced. And third, the philosophies of Epicureanism and Stoicism, specifically for their notions of momentary time, of packing into every moment of our lives all that we have, to the point of experiencing every second as if it were eternity crystallized into the instant. And this when natural and appropriate, for a human life cannot be lived out in its entirety always in this state. Just as Santayana's *solipsism of the present moment* cannot be a continual state (for hunger and thirst and nature arises, and we must rest and sleep), so too Hadot's "the present alone is our happiness" occurs when it does, sometimes haphazardly, and other times through concentrated effort, of opening up to its possibility. Though Hadot does not include Pyrrhonian skepticism, he does bring into the account two other Hellenistic schools of thought, and with a little empathetic imagination one can also conceive of the *skeptic* as entertaining something similar, but without the value of "living in agreement" (*homologoumenôs*) of the Stoic, or *ataraxia* in the Epicurean sense, but *ataraxia* in the Pyrrhonian sense. He writes:

Despite the profound differences between Epicurean and Stoic doctrine, we find an extraordinary structural analogy between the experiences of time as it was lived in both schools. This analogy will perhaps allow us to glimpse a certain common experience of the present underlying their doctrinal divergences... both... privilege the present, to the detriment of the past and above all the future. They posit as an axiom that happiness can only be found in the present, that one instant of happiness is equivalent to an eternity of happiness

and that happiness can and must be found immediately, here and now. Both... invite us to resituate the present instant within the perspective of the cosmos, and to accord infinite value to the slightest moment of existence [Hadot (1995), p. 222].

Yet it is more sophisticated than that. Anyone who lives without the felt knowledge that the past and the future are just as vivacious as parts of the human constitution as the present is, are either naïve, hopelessly ignorant, or willfully stubborn. The past or the future can intrude at any time, willy-nilly, and infuse the present moment. In that, they do not spoil or envenomate the present, just simply paint it in slightly different colors, or cast different lights and shadows on it. Hadot adds: “Enjoying the present, without thinking about the past or the future, does not mean living in total instantaneousness... When we do concentrate our attention on the future, however, we discover that the present itself contains the past and the future, insofar as it the genuine passage within which the action and movement of reality are carried out” [Hadot (1995), p. 232]. Let us recall here that imaginary situation that I mentioned before of an individual on the deck of a ferry sailing between islands. That individual is immersed in the present, treasuring the solipsist moment, but should a thought of the past or future intrude on that present, the present can absorb it and continue being in the present. Neither the present moment, nor the happiness, nor the pleasure, need be altered for the worst.

Santayana’s *solipsism of the present moment* is also a privileging of the present, but he abandons it as an epistemological accessory. What does eventually develop in *SAF* are *ontological solipsisms* whereby Santayana engenders the beginnings of a mature philosophical system in his *animal faith*, the “discovery of essence,” and the “discernment of spirit,” all present-oriented movements. Non-human animals *live* in the present more than human animals do. Why did he call it *animal faith*, as opposed to something more clinical or technical? Among the many components of a knowledgeable response to this

question, is the conviction that it helps understand the *philosophical* present. Santayana did not sense a philosophical need to spell out explicitly that these ontological states also generated *happiness* and *pleasure*. But then *SAF* is fundamentally an epistemological book. And in the concluding chapter “Comparisons with Other Criticisms of Knowledge,” he tells us that he has “imitated the Greek sceptics in calling doubtful everything that, in spite of common sense, any one can possibly doubt. But since life and even discussion forces me to break away from a complete skepticism... I have frankly taken nature by the hand, accepting as a rule in my farthest speculations the animal faith I live by from day to day” [*SAF* 308]. One can only imagine Santayana as happy and experiencing pleasure as he *lived out his skepticism*, and like Hadot’s Goethe, Epicureans, and Stoics, draining the present of all possibility and significance.

*Independent Scholar*

*padron.charles@yahoo.com*

#### ABBREVIATIONS

*Scepticism and Animal Faith (SAF)*

*Realms of Being (RB)*

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Richard Lyon, who had met Santayana as a young man in August 1948, and who wrote the “Introduction” to *Persons and Places* in the MIT Critical Edition of Santayana’s works, has an interesting passage as to whom had an impact on Santayana: “Among the philosophers whose thought most influenced his own one might name Plato and Aristotle, Democritus and Lucretius, Aquinas, Leibniz, Hume, Hegel, Schopenhauer. I cite these names in particular for the reason that various critics at various times have suggested that Santayana’s own philosophy may be found entire in one or more of them. But if in our time his genius is coming to be recognized anew, it is a recognition of his power

to assimilate and appropriate for his own reflection the work of these and many other thinkers—not only philosophers but historians, critics, poets, and dramatists” [Lyon (1986), p. xvii.]

<sup>2</sup> We have a clear connection here between Santayana and classical *ancient skepticism*. The everyday, the ordinary and an accompanying degree of *common sense*, are in abundance in both cases. Jonathan Barnes has reasoned thus: “Sextus’ causal utterances are not embarrassing flaws on the smooth body of his philosophical system; on the contrary, they form part of the texture of that body itself. For Sextus presents himself as the champion of what he calls Life, *bios*. Life is contrasted with Philosophy and with Belief; it represents the wisdom of the plain man who is uncorrupted by esoteric and presumptuous speculation; Life, in short, is what later generations of philosophers came to call Common Sense” [Burnyeat (1983), p. 156.]

<sup>3</sup> The question of whether Santayana’s own consideration of *SAF* being a self-contained propaedeutic to his subsequent four volumes of *RB* is not that clear-cut. John Lachs has argued in a 2009 essay “Animal Faith and Ontology” that Santayana’s *SAF* was not any kind of preparatory introduction to his mature ontology in *RB*, but an entirely separate philosophical work. He writes: “We must credit Santayana’s brilliant mind with inventing not one but two novel philosophies... As it is, unfortunately, mixing the philosophy of animal faith with the ontology has contributed to sinking both. Although there are traces of the idea of animal faith in all four volumes of *Realms of Being*, the emphasis on the ontology greatly outweighs that attention given to it... The hypothesis is that there are two tendencies in Santayana’s philosophy: he wants to develop both a system of animal faith and a complete ontology. The two philosophical drives present the same objects in significantly different light” [Lachs (2009), pp. 486-89.]

<sup>4</sup> Let us be clear about this. After the ancient Greeks, knowledge of and scholarship on skepticism as a serious philosophy went dormant for roughly 1300 years. Then “in 1562 the French scholar and publisher Henri Etienne brought out the first modern edition of Sextus Empiricus’ *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*... Sextus’ hitherto obscure book rapidly rose to become the dominant text of the age. It was the rediscovery of Sextus and of Greek skepticism which shaped the course of philosophy for the next three hundred years... Scepticism was the philosophical disease of the age, and the disease had been transmitted by Sextus Empiricus’ *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*” [Annas and Barnes (1985), pp. 5-7.]

<sup>5</sup> It is only fair to allow Santayana to express himself in his own words. He writes about this state of being: “A creature whose existence was passed under a hard shell, or was spent in a free flight, might find nothing paradoxical or acrobatic in solipsism; nor would he feel the anguish which men feel in

doubt, because doubt leaves them defenceless and undecided in the presence of oncoming events... He might keenly enjoy the momentary scene, never conceiving himself as a separate body or as anything but the unity of that scene, nor his enjoyment as anything but its beauty: nor would he harbour the least suspicion that it would change or perish, not any objection to its doing so if it chose." [SAF 17].

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