A CRITIQUE OF SANTAYANA'S RELIGIOUS THEORY

It is only logical that Santayana's religious view is naturalistic, for naturalism forms the basis of his whole philosophy. The source of human life with all its faculties is the universe, and religion as an important feature of human life must, therefore, be naturalistic. For example, naturalism forms the basis of his discussion of cosmic piety in his Reason in Religion.

I. God or the External World:

According to Santayana, all religion is a work of human imagination. Behind such a view his naturalistic temper works. He believes that matter or substance alone is potent or efficacious, and that all other experiences, as compared to matter, are ineffective. But here ineffectiveness is not his last word. We may have recourse to imagination in which we transfer our hopes and ideals from the realm of matter to that of spirit, and by such transfer we make them into essences which it is a joy to contemplate. We find here a good reason as to why, according to Santayana, the works of imagination alone are good.

Is there any place for God in Santayana's naturalistic religion? In his mind the ideas of God and the external world are interchangeable. If these ideas are laid bare of pictorial and emotional associations in human experience, we are left with the core of both ideas, viz., the conviction of a primordial power or "efficacious reality". The ideas of God and the external world are inter-
Santayana contends that we cannot have any insight into the nature of causal operations. But what we cannot at all ignore is the conviction that there is a primordial power or efficacious reality which interrupts as well as sustains the order of experience. It may be said that the order of experience is influenced by the idea, or rational construction, of the external world. But we must concede that our notion of a material thing is a logical construction and that this construction is in no sense a 'duplicate' of a 'thing' in the external world. The primordial power by which our lives are sustained cannot be taken as the idea, or rational construction, of the external world. What Santayana finally says is that matter is the only reality with an efficacious character, and such efficacious reality intrudes upon and controls the field of experience.

That matter is efficacious or potent is not disputed. What, however, is disputed is a clear understanding of how the field of experience is controlled by the blind movement of matter. To influence the order of experience what is essential is the presence of consciousness. But Santayana denies consciousness as the origin or ground of the order of experience, since consciousness itself, says he, springs from potent matter. Now, if consciousness or mind originates from, and is guided by, matter, its function consists only in expressing the movement of
irrational matter, and it is by no means possible for it to
influence the order of experience.

II. Place of Revelation in Santayana:

As we see, what occupies Santayana's thought
most is his conception of matter as the efficacious reality.
Naturally, the fact of revelation is not viewed by him from
a lofty standpoint. As we have already pointed out in course
of expounding his religious theory, religion, according to
him, should be rational. And it can be rational when it, by
denuding itself of all illusory objects, attempts to know
the real features of the external world, disclosed by science
and philosophical criticism. Here rational religion is re­
duced to the scientific level, and in that case the distinc­
tion between the two remains indistinct and blurred.

In religious doctrines we sometimes find the use
of the word 'revelation' made in the widest sense. In the
widest sense of the word, the order of nature is a revela­
tion, because it unfolds a meaning which has its ultimate
source in God. Now, this sense of the word revelation can be
applicable to Santayana's theory if the word God be taken as
potent matter, and we can think of God as matter, since, on
Santayana's theory, the ideas of God and matter are inter­
changeable in so far as they refer to the same efficacious
reality. But still a difficulty lurks here. The 'meaning'
that is unfolded by the order of nature cannot be accounted
for by the blind movement of irrational matter.

The possibility of revelation is generally
admitted by those who accept the theistic conception of the
universe. But Santayana is an atheist. If by 'revelation' is meant disclosure of something by supernatural means, in Santayana's theory we find an instance of 'revealed' knowledge. We have noticed after Santayana (p.322) how the spirit, being based on imagination, apprehends ideals intuitively. We have already referred to (p.324) what he means by "ideals". When essences appear to the spirit in a form of beauty, then they are called "ideals". Essences are disclosed to the spirit through supernatural means, i.e., through intuition. Such disclosure may be called, then, revelation.

In one place of his Reason in Religion Santayana says, "the very disappearance of intellect may be taken for a revelation." Here he wants to mean that revelation does not come through intellect, which is an instrument for having empirical knowledge of the world. From his statement it also follows that revealed knowledge is possible only through a means other than intellect. Then in the case of revealed knowledge he gives a latent reference to supernatural means which he calls intuition. And what are revealed through intuition are "ideals", devoid of existence and of anything found in the natural world. Thus Santayana accepts the possibility of knowledge of the supernatural. And the admission of such knowledge means the denial of his previous assertion of the existence of the natural only.

What appears to us as revealed knowledge from Santayana's theory may not do so after a close scrutiny.

Intuition, as Santayana says, is not supernatural but natural. Its organ is the psyche which is material (vide chapter III, p.72). Now, if such is the character of intuition, it is not understood how it is possible for it to know essences which constitute a separate realm other than the realm of matter (vide chapter III, p.78). Intuition, being itself material in its origin, cannot serve as the faculty of knowing the realm of essence.

III. Is Matter the only existent Reality?

The potent matter, says Santayana, is the only existential reality, and consciousness is the by-product of matter. The Indian materialists also, commonly known as the Carvakas, hold a similar view. But should we really call matter as the only existent and potent reality? And should we say that consciousness is an epiphenomenon?

Here we should seek answers from a study of four kinds of experience which cover the whole reality. If these experiences reveal matter as the only existential reality, then what Santayana believes can be taken as true.

The first kind of experience is the waking experience in which the knower and the known, the subject and the material object, stand in an intimate relation. In such experience both consciousness and matter are present independently. The second kind of experience is the dreaming state in which the external objects are not physically related to the mind or consciousness. As dream-objects are dependent upon a person's experience acquired in his waking life, they do not, therefore, maintain an independent status like the.
objects in the external world. In the dreaming state what seems to be independently real is the knowing mind or consciousness. But at the same time we should not say that dream-objects are unreal. What are called unreal cannot have appearances, as for example, the son of a barren woman or a winged horse. But dream-objects appear in consciousness, and hence unreality cannot be attributed to them.

In the third kind of experience which is a state of dreamless sleep what shines only is consciousness or knowledge. In such state the object of knowledge is not so manifest. After dreaming a dreamless sleep a man says, "Last night I enjoyed a good sleep, devoid of dreams." Such experience is a state of contentless knowledge which is also a state of pure joy. In such experience what alone remains as a shining star is consciousness only. This state of experience proves that consciousness can remain without objects. Such consciousness is also of the nature of bliss (ānanda). The nature of consciousness which is apprehended in dreamless sleep is fully manifested in meditation which is a fourth and last kind of experience.

Thus in all kinds of experience what invariably exists is not matter but consciousness. Practically speaking, without consciousness no knowledge or experience is possible. And it is also noticed from our brief study that experience is possible when no objects exist. Consciousness which is existent, or existence-consciousness is the only truth which is to be found in any religion worth the name. Existence-consciousness is the primal being which cannot be the
by-product of anything. It is called the Supreme Reality or, as the Advaitins in India say, Brahman.

IV. Santayana's View of Immortality

For Santayana, mind is dependent upon body, and psychical process is always associated with neural process. If that be so, then on the advent of death as a physiological fact all signs of psychical activity cease and the hope of a survival after death is excluded. Thus Santayana has abandoned the idea of 'existential immortality'. But a little before it has been observed by us that consciousness or self is the only existential reality which is different from matter and cannot be the by-product of the latter. Death is a fact in the material world, and consciousness, being itself not material, cannot cease on the advent of death. Thus existential immortality of consciousness or self is justified by our theory.

As a naturalist Santayana denies existential immortality of the self or spirit, but as an idealist he speaks of ideal immortality of the spirit. By upholding the theory of ideal immortality he distinguishes himself from those who adopt a naturalistic standpoint in religion. Santayana says that man's destiny is single in relation to matter, but still man can achieve ideal immortality or can escape death ideally. But how is it possible? When man is embedded in the natural, how can he transcend it? We have seen after Santayana that the spirit has a function of its own other than the material function which it has to perform to meet the need of the psyche. And the characteristic
function of the spirit lies in taking a flight, on the wings of Plato, to a transcendental realm where it envisages eternal essences. Though this experience of the spirit is transitory, though its detachment from the world of flux and from its personal destiny is for a short period, yet it gains an ideal immortality in the sense that it envisages the eternal.

"We have seen after Santayana that ideal immortality lies in the contemplation of eternal essences. He also observes that ideal immortality of the spirit lies in the knowledge of its own destiny. "The animals are mortal without knowing it, and doubtless presume, in their folly, that they will live for ever. Man alone knows that he must die; but that very knowledge raises him, in a sense, above mortality, by making him a sharer in the vision of eternal truth." Indeed, conscious determinism is freedom. And what Santayana says here has also been observed by Pascal and Spinoza. Pascal says that man is superior to the mountain which crushes him, in that he is aware of the fact. And Spinoza argues that by knowing the law of his fate man rises superior to it. We cannot forget that Santayana's conception of ideal immortality is the very pinnacle of his idealism.

V. Santayana's theory of Spirituality vs. our theory of the same:

Santayana's religious theory has an aspiring side which is called spirituality. His contention is that

spirituality is not the whole of the spiritual life. On the other hand, it is one of the two aspects of the latter, the other aspect being piety. Spirit springs from the material psyche when the latter intends to adapt itself to alien things (vide chapter IV, p.96). Naturally, the spirit has a piety to the psyche, i.e., it meets the demands of the latter. Through the spirit the psyche adapts itself to the world of objects, and thus empirical knowledge becomes possible. Though spirit is grounded in animal life, it does not restrict itself to the pragmatic function only. It has a reflective capacity by which it overleaps this function and associates itself with the moral and aesthetic function. In this latter function consists the spirituality of the spiritual life.

As already shown (p.323) Santayana means by spirituality 'life in the ideal'. It is a contemplative state in which essences appear to the spirit in a form of beauty. This state of contemplation can be compared to the Stoic indifference; it consists in freedom from disturbance of mind or passion. But the spirit cannot remain in the contemplative state for a long time; its piety to the psyche pulls it amidst the busy life in the world. The contemplative state is purely imaginary, and as such cannot have the truth which is claimed by the active life lived in the material world. Though the contemplative state is imaginary, Santayana asserts its necessity. It is a state which makes us oblivious of the tribulations of life, a state which can be compared to 'the equilibrium of a divine repose'.

From the above it is manifest that Santayana, in
his religious theory, has laid stress upon detachment of spirit, but at the same time does not speak of the renunciation of the world. Detachment of spirit and not renunciation of the world is what is demanded from us. Santayana has truly pointed to the core of the spiritual life. But the way in which he presents his view of spiritual life cannot be accepted from the viewpoint which we have taken of the spirit or consciousness. Our previous study of the varieties of experience shows how consciousness is the only existential reality. But to Santayana consciousness is the epiphenomenon, while the efficacious matter is the only existential reality. Renunciation of the world is not possible for the spirit, since it is embedded in the material psyche which is its organ. When the spirit belongs to 'the essence-directed stage', it looks at the things of the world with detachment or disinterestedness.

In contrast to Santayana's view, our theory holds that the non-conscious cannot be the cause of the conscious. "Our judgments of value, our convictions of truth, our appreciations of beauty are the proof that we are not products of merely physical forces." The fundamental consciousness which is the basis of all reality is not the finite consciousness but the ultimate one. It is of the nature of non-objective consciousness. "The Atman is throughout nothing but intelligence; intelligence

is its exclusive nature, as the salt taste is of the lump of salt."

As spirit is eternal, it should be devoid of activity which is by its nature non-eternal. An activity is motivated by desire, and cannot function without modifying the individual who is its agent. The ātman by itself cannot be the locus of activity; there can be no agency without the limitation of the ātman by a body. Here it can be observed how Santayana differs from our theory. He does not deny activity to spirit. Spirit is the function of matter, says he. Of course, he adds that spirit loses all activity in its ideal or contemplative mood.

The eternal nature of consciousness tends to prove that it has no limit. From our consciousness of limits we apprehend that consciousness is more than the limit. Moreover, consciousness and limit are opposed in nature. Limit is the nature of a thing and consciousness is no thing. Here again Santayana differs from us. For Santayana, the spirit is both limited and free. It is limited, because it originates from the material psyche. The limitation of the spirit is shown by its piety to the psyche. Spirit is free in the sense that it is not itself matter, although the latter breeds the former. Spirit is intelligence, while matter is blind. The former has a reflective capacity by which it can have a vision of the eternal forms. Thus spirit constitutes a separate realm of its own, and in that sense it is free.

4. Samkara's Bhasya, iii.2.16.
"Then Santayana observes that spirituality, which is an aspect of the spiritual life, constitutes the aspiring side of religion, he wants to mean that in spirituality the character of religious experience has been fully expressed. We should, then, go deep in our explanation of his view of spirituality or the contemplative state of the spirit. In the contemplative state the spirit dwells on 'ideals'. This spiritual condition can be called 'the essence-directed stage' to which the spirit belongs for the time being. The phrase 'for the time being' is used, since the spirit's inability to remain long in a contemplative mood is due to the fact that it has to serve the material psyche in the latter's adaptation to alien things. In the contemplative state of the spirit essences appear to it in a form of beauty. Here the spirit gets an experience which can be characterised as aesthetic. Then on Santayana's view, religious experience and aesthetic experience seem to be the same thing. Shall we subscribe to this view? For having aesthetic experience, says Santayana, what is necessary as the only condition is emotional consciousness (pp.162-163). But do we not seek the religious object by the totality of our faculties and energies?

The religious object which we seek to realize in our whole being is called 'God'. But here God to whom we offer the nosegay of love is completely independent, is the spirit in him objectified. Then self-realization is the theme of the spiritual life. While Santayana refers to the spirit's 'essence-directed stage', our theory speaks of the spirit's 'self-directed stage'. This point of distinction..."
is the vital one which is to be borne in mind.

Spiritual experience can be had only through the perfection of body and mind. The proper development of the natural impulses of an individual helps to express the spirit in him. Santayana is on the right track when he finds a line of continuity between the life of reason and the life of spirit. The life of reason is not the end in itself. It is the condition and instrument of the life of spirit in man. Unless reason harmonizes the affects or impulses of human life, the spiritual life cannot be enjoyed. As the expression of the spiritual, the perfection of body and mind is an integral part of man's complete living. In the Taittiriya Aranyaka we read, "May the earth, water, fire, air and ether that compose my body become purified; may sound, touch, vision, taste and smell become purified ... may my thought, speech, actions become purified ... may my soul become purified so that I may become the effulgent spirit, free from sullying passion and sin."

In spiritual experience the tension of normal life disappears, giving rise to inward peace, power and joy. Santayana also says that in the contemplative state the spirit forgets its origin in the material psyche and thereby all the pains and tribulations of the engaged life of action and enjoys a life which is full of peace and joy. Some have

5. prthivyāpaś tejo vāyur ākāśā, me suddhyantām 
    sābda sparsa rūpa gandhā, me suddhyantām ....
    mano vakkāya karmāni me suddhyantām ....
    ātma me suddhyantām, jyotir aham virajā 
    vipāpma bhūyāsam.

(Taittiriya Aranyaka, x.66)
expressed this state of inward peace and joy negatively and some in the positive fashion. The word 'ataraxy' used by the Greeks is a negative expression of such a state of spiritual experience, while the Hindu term 'sānti' or peace is a positive expression of the same.

The actuality of spiritual experience cannot be questioned, although profounder intuitions do not normally occur. To quote the words of Dr. Radhakrishnan, "When we experience the illumination of new knowledge, the ecstasy of poetry or the subordination of self to something greater, family or nation, the self-abandonment of falling in love, we have faint glimpses of mystic moods." Spiritual experience is called intuitive consciousness or anubhava. Anubhava is the ineffable experience beyond thought and speech. It is the state of consciousness which is accompanied by what Russell calls "the true spirit of delight, the exaltation, the sense of being more than man."

Anubhava which consists in the personal experience of universal consciousness or Ātman is called mysticism. Religion in the mystic sense is what our entire self is, feels and does. Santayana takes the mystic consciousness as obscure and confuses it with the instinctive. To quote him, "..... when instinct guides without kindling any prophetic idea to which action may be inwardly referred; when life and hope and joy flow through the soul from an unknown region to an unknown end, then consciousness

6. An Idealist View of Life, p.93.
7. Philosophical Essays, p.73.
is mystical. The words "unknown end" suggest obscurity and ignorance in the case of mystical consciousness. But the mystical consciousness or anubhava is not devoid of an unknown end. On the other hand, it consists in the direct contact with a real object, with the spirit or Ātman. Mysticism assumes the indivisible oneness of human life, whose apprehension cannot be contrary to reason.

Our contention is that mystical experience is not different from spiritual experience. The inward essence of religion is spirituality and this side of religion is emphasised by mysticism. We then differ from Santayana when he says that mysticism constitutes a phase other than the phase of spirituality.

Santayana observes that all religion is a work of imagination. It is true that imagination has a place in religion, but it cannot be taken as a solid rock upon which religion is based. Religion, we should not forget, is rooted in spiritual experience. Spiritual experience has a character of ineffability. It transcends expression. There is no experience by which we can limit it, no conception by which we can define it. While the tools of sense and understanding fail to describe anubhava, creative imagination with its symbols and suggestions may be of assistance. If the myths and symbols are interpreted literally, we shall fail to penetrate into the real meaning suggested by them. In interpreting the myths we shall go behind the words to the moods they symbolise. The illusory character of the myths is not denied, since they are the products of creative imagination. But they

have their utility in this that through them is communicated to us the religious feeling experienced by the seers. Moreover, it is through the medium of myths that the ineffable realisation of seers and saints percolates down to the common mass of people. Hence Santayana is not justified when he says that rational religion should consist in the abolition of all myths and symbols.

VI. Santayana's Religious Standpoint:

The discussion made hitherto reveals to us the fact that Santayana is an atheist. His denial of God is a necessary corollary from his general philosophical standpoint which is known as materialistic. Of course, he suggests that matter may be called God (pp.329-330) so far as they both refer to the same "efficacious reality". Though in his view matter and God are interchangeable terms, he cannot still be regarded as a theist on the ground that he never means by God as the one, eternal Being or Consciousness. He always sticks to his position that matter is the ultimate reality, and consciousness springs from matter.

On going through Santayana's lecture, "Ultimate Religion", delivered at the Hague during the tercentenary celebration of Spinoza's birth, one may conceive the theistic position of Santayana. But theism goes against the whole philosophical outlook adopted by Santayana. It is necessary to find out what Santayana says in his "Ultimate Religion". Man's ultimate religion, says he, must be truthful in a Spinozistic sense, humble, disillusioned and cosmic.
To love God is "to love things spiritually". It is, in Santayana's chosen terms, a turning from existence to essence, from matter to spirit, from time to eternity. It is an actualization of spirit, which is aspiration become aware of itself. It is, hence, ultimate religion for man.

Now, why this turning from matter to spirit? Because, matter, the omnificient power, is beyond our spiritual control, and because, in relation to it our destiny is 'tragically single'. Hence to get an 'intellectual delight', to set the self free from the entanglement of matter (this freedom is, of course, not actual but ideal), we should adopt a disinterested outlook on all things in the world. To treat all things disinterestedly is to love them spiritually, to form all things of love into a single ineffable good or, what may be called, universal good. This "universal good" can be taken as what stands for "God". Thus has been conceived theistic position of Santayana. But it will be erroneous to think in that manner, since here "God", the preferred word for "universal good", is not the theistic God. 'God' of the theist is not only immanent in the world but also transcendent to it. The 'God' of Santayana, on the other hand, is fully immanent in the world, without being transcendent to it. For him, to love God is to love all things disinterestedly, and to love all things disinterestedly is to love God; that is, Santayana adopts the Spinozistic conclusion which is: God is Nature and Nature God. This

pantheistic absorption is surely not the theistic stand-
point. Thus we conclude that Santayana is not a theist.

Santayana's religious standpoint can be called
materialistic pantheism as against idealistic pantheism of
Fechner. Fechner holds that nature is only external appear-
ance whose indwelling soul is universal consciousness.
Universal consciousness as the inner reality determines
nature as its phenomenon. But materialistic pantheism of
Santayana holds the opposite view. According to it, matter
or nature is the fundamental reality which determines cons-
ciousness. It should be mentioned in this connection that
Santayana's materialistic pantheism is not the same as the
traditional pantheism of Spinoza. In Spinoza the substance
is a psycho-physical whole in which the physical and the
psychical, nature and mind, are regarded as having equal
status. But in Santayana we see, as mind comes from matter,
so they cannot possess equal status in the system of the
universe.

In the naturalistic religion of Santayana what
we find, then, is materialistic pantheism. Here we are
acquainted with the notion of power which is manifested as
blind, omnipotent matter, with its trampling march. This
recognition of cosmic power is also found in the naturalis-
tic thinkers of the nineteenth century, e.g., in Herbert
Spencer, in T. H. Huxley.

Santayana's naturalistic religion leads to two
serious consequences. First, it leads to Agnosticism. In
the face of the greatness of nature we are not encouraged
to ask the questions, Why? Whence? Whither? Our only virtue will be "childlike piety" which is the submission to the perpetual laws of nature. The second consequence to which Santayana's naturalistic religion leads is that of fatalism. Our fate or destiny is determined by nature. For the moment we may escape from the omnipotent matter and indulge ourselves in images, love and religion, but these experiences are not long-lived in comparison to matter, the only existential reality. That we indulge in those experiences is sheer madness or folly for us, since ultimately we are to follow the guidance of nature. Of course, we should not be led to think that Santayana is in favour of absolute determinism. When it is in our power to escape the almighty matter (for the time being) by our imaginative faculty, it should be admitted that we are partly free. This freedom of the spirit, though transient, ineffective or impotent in comparison to matter or substance, is a fact which cannot be denied.

In conclusion, we can say that Santayana's religious standpoint is not wholly naturalistic or wholly idealistic. His attitude to religion is a result of the combination of naturalism and idealism; that is, he is a "natural idealist" in his view of religion. His naturalism is expressed in his cosmic piety, and his idealism in the contemplation of "ideals". A question remains to be answered: Is Santayana a mystic? The mystic, says Santayana, indulges himself in the speculation of abstractions (p. 327). If that be so, we can ascribe to Santayana the title of the mystic. Santayana too loves to contemplate
the "ideals" which are also "abstractions", since they are denuded of existence and of everything that the physical world contains. In fine, the spirituality of the spiritual life, which Santayana takes as the aspiring side of religion, is a kind of experience which is mostly mystical.