CHAPTER IV

ESSENCE AND EXISTENCE

I. Materialism:

Before we take up the relation between essence and existence for discussion, it is desirable to explain Santayana's materialism which, as it has been already noted (p.49), he takes as a presumption. From the earliest phase of his philosophy he cherishes deep-seated respect for the claims of materialism. His conviction is that the materialists are the good observers of the world and of themselves. Materialism is the under-current or the main burden of his thought, inspite of its semblance to the contrary.

A. Materialism: Naturalism.

Sometimes Santayana uses 'naturalism' instead of 'materialism' for the reason that the ambient world produces at any moment effect upon us according to our nature, i.e., according to our sensibility and equipment at that time. But naturalism might include psychologism, "a theory which fuses the two disparate substances posited by Descartes, and maintains that while the inner essence of substance everywhere is to think, or at least to feel, its distribution, movement, and aspect, seen from without, are those of matter." Psychologism is well marked in all the Greek naturalists before Democritus. There is no doubt that they studied nature attentively, with scientific intent. But they adopted 'a false step' of philosophy when

1. The Philosophy of George Santayana, ed. by P.A.Schilpp, p.508.
"they mistook both the field of psychology and the field of logic for parts or the whole of the field of matter, or the physical universe."  

Having sensed that the term 'naturalism' might lead to a false step of philosophy, Santayana proclaims that the term 'materialism' seems to him 'safer', since it is unambiguous in its meaning. Matter is that which is the indefinite or undefined. Materialism implies no false realism about itself. Democritus cannot be said to be materialistic, since he creates a false realism about matter when he attributes geometrical forms (which are nothing but essences) to matter absolutely. Matter which is said to be the indefinite cannot be thus qualified. Among the Greek naturalists Santayana credits Anaximander who, by regarding matter as the indefinite, might seem to have escaped false realism about matter.  

B. Materialism as a necessary presupposition:  

Santayana takes materialism as the presupposition which he cannot live without making. It is "the presupposition not only of all natural science but of all deliberate action." Any deliberate action (say, judging, or looking at something) is made possible only on the assumption of a continuous dynamic world external to us. As to the existence of matter Santayana leaves no doubt, since matter is only a name for the principle of existence itself.  

6. The Philosophy of George Santayana, ed. by Schilpp, p.505.
He warns those who seek to find out the ground of his materialism, since "existence is groundless". To seek the ground of existence would involve us in looking for the ground of that ground, and thus we shall be landed in an infinite regress.

C. Matter and Substance are interchangeable:

Santayana takes matter and substance as interchangeable terms. "Matter is properly a name for the actual substance of the natural world, whatever that substance may be." Matter or substance is posited by animal faith. In Santayana's materialism 'matter' is specified as that which exists. In Scepticism and Animal Faith, The Realm of Essence and The Realm of Matter "existent" has been defined as what comes-to-be, endures and passes away; that is, "existent" is what is flux. Matter is also defined to mean flux or that which is in flux. Thus when we say that minds or anything else exist, it means that they are in process and are material. And to deny that they are material is to deny that they exist at all.

D. Santayana's materialism in his earlier and later works:

Santayana's materialism is found in both of his earlier and later works. We find it in The Life of Reason (his earlier work) as "forthright Democritean materialism" which asserts that "existing nature is a system of bodies long antedating sentience" and that in

7. Ibid., p.505.
8. The Realm of Matter, p.100.
natural philosophy "mechanism is explanation itself." Santayana's earlier Democritean materialism which is mechanistic seems to have changed in Scepticism and Animal Faith, The Realm of Essence and The Realm of Matter (his later works) where his materialism treats matter or existence as 'flux'. But has there been really a shift in Santayana's position from The Life of Reason to Scepticism and Animal Faith, The Realm of Essence and The Realm of Matter? Before we come upon this discussion, let us see how his materialism in its earlier and later forms has been dominated and influenced by the theories of his predecessors as well as by modern science.

**Santayana and Democritus**

Santayana accepts Democritus in this that the inner structure of matter is atomic. But he points out that Democritus has introduced into his physics the radical vice of metaphysics. Democritus holds that the atoms are extended, yet absolutely indivisible. Thus he has logically denied that his extended atoms are divisible. The cause of such denial lies in his identification of matter, a name for something existent, with pure being, a merely logical term. Pure being is indivisible, and matter, being identified with pure being, becomes indivisible. Santayana absolves himself from accepting the Democritean thesis (logically inconsistent) that the extended atoms are indivisible. He, however, accepts the atomic theory of Democritus and says that such a theory is alone possible and inherent in physics.

10. Ibid., p.24.
By emphasizing the fact that the extended atoms must be divisible, Santayana comes very close to the modern scientific theory of matter according to which atoms are divisible. The modern scientific theory of matter is called the electronic theory. This theory holds that electron, proton and neutron — in various combinations — make up atoms. Electron is the natural unit of negative electric charge. Every atom contains one or more electrons. Proton is the unit of positive electric charge. The charge on an atomic nucleus comes from the protons in it. And neutron is an uncharged particle. Except for the lightest hydrogen nucleus, every atomic nucleus contains one or more neutrons. Not proceeding further with the electronic theory, we may point out that it asserts atomic matter as active or as always in a process. Santayana also takes the very kernel of the modern scientific theory of matter. To him, as we have seen, matter is flux; it is active.

The very nature of existence, says Santayana, is to be dispersed. Hence matter is dispersed, but it is also a continuum and is in constant flux. Santayana here is nearer to Heraclitus than to Democritus. In The Realm of Matter such a position of his has been exposed in many ways. The insight of Heraclitus is that all things change, existence is a perpetual flux. In this connection we may refer to what Aristotle says. He treats matter not as bodies, but as the surd factor in substances by virtue of which they change and move. Similarly, Santayana's materialism of Scepticism and Animal Faith and of The Realms of
Being, instead of asserting that nature is composed of moving bodies whose actions and reactions exhibit mechanical regularity as that was conceived in classical mechanics, asserts that nature is process or whatever is going on.

The above discussion facilitates us in conceiving that Santayana's materialism has been moulded by two great systems, its earlier phase by Democritus and its later phase by Heraclitus. Democritus takes existing nature as "a system of bodies", while Heraclitus takes it as a 'flux'. The one takes nature as a thing, while the other conceives it as a process. Santayana himself observes, "Two great systems offered, in two legitimate directions, what are doubtless the final and radical accounts of physical being." If either of the two phases of Santayana's materialism is judged separately, contradiction is not found in it. But if his materialism (both of its phases taken together) is viewed as a whole, it seems to involve contradiction. This position of Santayana leads some modern philosophers to think that his materialism has not developed consistently from The Life of Reason to Scepticism and Animal Faith, The Realm of Essence and The Realm of Matter.

E. Consistency between earlier and later phases of Santayana's materialism:

The present writer thinks that Santayana's earlier materialism does not differ from his later position concerning it. In Reason in Common Sense, volume one of The Life of Reason, by matter he understands existence, whatever that existence may be. There he says that material

11 Reason in Common Sense, p. 22
existents are occurrent, and the state of mind is also said to be occurrent. "The stuff of external reality, the matter is...continuous with the stuff and matter of our own minds. Their common substance is the immediate flux." The principle of existence which is implied in Reason in Common Sense has been more elaborately and consistently developed in his later works.

Democritean materialism which forms the earlier position of Santayana advocates atomic theory according to which force or activity is inherent in atoms. This theory can be distinguished from Plato's theory of force. Plato holds a static conception of matter in contrast with the materialist's dynamic conception of the same. The former attributes the source of all material change to a force coming from without in dead matter, while the latter thinks that motion is native to the material atoms. The Democritean thesis that change is spontaneous to the material existents is carried out consistently by Santayana in his later works in the principle of existence which asserts that existence or matter is flux. Again, Santayana's allegiance to Democritean materialism expresses some negative convictions which are quite in consistency with his later position. Those negative convictions are: that the processes of nature do not require for their occurrence any support or cause beyond them; that the processes of nature require nothing but their own occurrence.

In Reason in Common Sense (p.37) we find Santayana using the phrase 'efficacious' order which exists in the world. This usage made by Santayana leads some critics
to interpret that beyond the events there are some forces which necessitate order in the world; that is, what they mean is that chaos in the world precedes order established in it by some external agencies. But Santayana answers, "by chaos we understand a nature" which "must be presumed to have an order" if we give attention to its movement. There is in the world change and continuity which are not to be termed as chaos but as order. "Order is accordingly continual". Thus Santayana's use of the phrase "efficacious" order lies beneath chaos. And we can get down to the bed-rock of order and regularity in nature as she is explored further and further.

We see, then, that in The Life of Reason Santayana takes the existent nature as rational (in the sense of having order) and as explicable. But in Scepticism and Animal Faith (one of his later works) we find Santayana asserting that existence "is necessarily irrational and in-explicable." The two versions seem to differ. But actually they do not. Existence is called irrational either in the sense that it is not essence of which intuition is possible or in the sense that it defies any control of a priori logic or mathematics. Again, existence is inexplicable either in the sense that beyond existence there are no causes to which we might appeal for its explanation or in the sense that no certain evidence can be given of existence, since existence, on Santayana's definition, is what is believed.

13. Ibid., p.36.
14. Ibid., p.36.
The above observations lead us to conclude that Santayana's materialism maintains a single thread running through from The Life of Reason to Scepticism and Animal Faith, The Realm of Essence and The Realm of Matter.

Santayana never claims to be a materialist in the sense that matter is the only reality, since essences and spirit stand in contrast with matter. He is a materialist mainly in that he holds that only matter does anything. He formulates "the great axiom of materialism" as asserting "the dominance of matter in every existing being, even when that being is spiritual." This great axiom, says Santayana, should be complemental with a truism that matter is no fiction, that it "is no model devised by the human imagination."

II. Is Santayana an agnostic?

Santayana says that substance, though it is posited by animal faith, cannot be possessed. We feel its pulsations, but we cannot know it. We cannot conceive it, since existence is a flux. Moreover, existence is a surd or irrational, and what is irrational cannot be conceived by reason. As Santayana observes, "We may enjoy it, we may enact it, but we cannot conceive it; not because our intellect by accident is inadequate, but because existence, which substance makes continuous, is intrinsically a surd, a flux, and a contradiction." Thus substance defies our

17. The Realm of Matter, p.100.
18. Ibid., p.100.
19. Ibid., p.27.
utmost efforts at penetration. In this respect Santayana tends to stoop towards modern science. Though the modern scientists penetrate into atom and electron, yet matter itself remains as mysterious as ever. As substance or matter cannot be conceived in its true nature, Santayana, therefore, calls it 'dark'. But here the term 'dark' has a relative significance. Substance seems to be dark, i.e., remains 'unknown' to the subject.

Santayana insists that substance is not unknowable, but it is unknown. In this connection we should be acquainted with the difference in meanings between the terms "unknown" and "unknowable". What is unknown may not be unknowable. What is unknown now can be known afterwards. Thus there is a scope for possibility of an unknown object of becoming known. But what is unknowable can never be known. The unknowable remains for ever transcendent to us. Matter is not in itself unknowable. Santayana does not tolerate Herbert Spencer's usage of the term 'unknowable'. He says, "Nothing can be intrinsically unknowable." Though matter or substance is not unknowable, it is, however, unknown and as such 'dark' and 'alien' to the subject. Santayana treats matter not as unknowable, and yet he makes it so when he says that existence is a surd or a contradiction. Being a surd or irrational, it cannot be conceived by reason. Again, being a contradiction, it cannot be brought into harmony with the intellect. Thus it remains beyond reason for ever, that is, remains inscrutable and impenetrable. And what is inscrutable and

impenetrable is unknowable also! Thus though Herbert Spencer's 'unknowable' is not welcome to Santayana, yet he cannot avoid it with regard to matter.

III. Scepticism and Animal Faith:

Existence and matter, says Santayana, are what are to be believed. Existent matter is the object of animal faith. Animal faith is only a name for a certain kind of blind impulse. In Scepticism and Animal Faith all rational arguments for any kind of belief are discarded. Santayana holds that complete scepticism is not inconsistent with animal faith. By complete scepticism we find out essence or the given which is non-existent; and by animal faith we assert the existence of everything not given. Thus "the admission that nothing given exists is not incompatible with belief in things not given." Belief in the existence of anything, including myself, is incapable of proof, and this belief rests on some irrational persuasion.

Now, to call an unproved premise "irrational" is hardly warranted. All unproved beliefs are mere expressions of animal faith. But the epistemological problem lies in finding some way of choosing some of these beliefs as more worthy of credence than others. Now, this cannot be done by complete scepticism which denies them all. Nor can it be done by animal faith which accepts them all. If we are going to accept some by rejecting others, then we need some principle intermediate between complete scepticism and animal faith. But Santayana does not provide us with such a principle.

IV. Santayana's conception of Matter, Psyche and Spirit:

A. Substance or matter is physical:

Substance of which Santayana speaks is not metaphysical, but physical substance. But in his other statements, we find that substance is not conceived as physical. In the notion of substance he includes spiritual entities, intuitions, all remembered experiences and mental discourse. Again, we find, "every event, even if wholly psychological or phenomenal, is a substance."

From these varied statements we come to know that substance is not limited to the physical only, though Santayana admits rather emphatically that substance must be physical.

Santayana opines that spirit being an entelechy cannot be a substance. It is true that we often confuse spirit with substance. This confusion, however, is due to the incarnation of spirit. Actually, spirit cannot be a substance in the material sense of the term. We find a point of similarity between John Locke and Santayana in their notions of substance. Both of them assert that substance is "what we know not". But while, according to Locke, there may be material and immaterial, incogitative and cogitative substances, according to Santayana, however, all substance must be material or physical, thus banishing spiritual substances altogether from his mind. Thus Santayana's view becomes just the opposite of the view of Berkeley. According to Berkeley, there is only spiritual

22. Ibid., p.201.
23. Ibid., p.47.
24. Ibid., p.182.
substance, the notion of material substance being meaningless to him. Santayana asserts that substance which is not material is only grammatical. Again, he makes fun of Leibnitz and Berkeley as "muscular idealists".

B. Dynamic nature of matter:

It has been hinted at that, according to Santayana, matter is not static or inert. It is dynamic and has least stability. He cannot admit that substance 'is'. What he accepts is that substance 'becomes'. The notion of becoming or change is also found in the Kṣaṇikvāda of Buddhism in India, later on in the doctrine of fire of Heraclitus and in modern times in the doctrine of Time of Henri Bergson. William James, whose influence Santayana cannot escape, particularly has a lively sense for the flux of existence. Santayana insists that the flux of matter is not chaotic; it has order. Its order is maintained by its lateral and forward tensions. Dynamic matter is mechanically guided by forward tensions determined and modified by the force of lateral tensions. Nature is a perfect machine. In the mechanism of nature there is no place for God. Matter moves by itself and in itself; in its movement it is not guided by any supernatural agent or God. Santayana here remains near to the position of the Greek atomist Democritus. Democritus holds that the material atoms are from the beginning in a state of rotary motion. The movement of the atoms is mechanically held. Thus Democritus also banishes the idea of God in his atomic theory. Santayana is also supported by modern science and the Jains in India. Both modern science and Jainism hold that the atoms move by
themselves, and there is no interference of God in the movement of atomic matter.

C. Habits of matter:

Santayana says that matter has habits of its own, that is, it has some procedures which are habitual in nature. These habitual procedures which are called "tropes" by Santayana arise from the dynamic tensions of matter. Tropes are repeated with much regularity. They are mechanical, and have spontaneity. In our egotism we may take them as the laws of nature. But actually they are not so; they are merely the habits of matter. Again, tropes by which are meant repetition and regularity in nature cannot be conceived as manifestations of any fixed law. The concept of a law, says Santayana, is useful as "a measure of events". By it events can neither be described nor be produced.

D. Reproduction and evolution of dynamic matter:

If nature is mechanical, no teleological purpose is served by it. But Santayana admits reproduction and evolution of dynamic matter. Reproduction and evolution are not principles of matter; they are simply its results, and these results are due to its movement. As Santayana observes, "In the first case we speak of reproduction, in the second of evolution: but these words do not stand for different forces or principles but only for different results. In reproduction the flux repeats the same trope, in evolution it changes the trope for one more...

Santayana's theory of the evolution of matter can be compared to the Samkhya theory of evolution which is found in Indian philosophy. The Samkhya theory holds that from dynamic matter the whole evolutionary process takes place. Santayana also maintains the very same view. But the Samkhya system urges that without coming into contact with passive Puruṣa or Self matter or Prakṛti cannot evolve. Santayana differs from the Samkhya theory on this point. According to him, matter evolves by itself.

E. Psyche as a trope of matter:

In Santayana's materialism the 'psyche' has an important place. But what is meant by the psyche? Is it material or not? If it be material, why is it called psychical and not physical? These are the questions which naturally crop up. The psyche, as we know from Santayana, is not different from matter. It is called a habit or trope of matter. The psyche, when it is a habit of matter, is natural. In The Realm of Matter Santayana emphasizes that the psyche is a natural phenomenon, a part of matter. The psyche does not admit any mental machinery. On the other hand, it has a physical operation. But what sort of physical operation? The operation of growth, instinct and action. The psyche serves as the biological principle of life in animals. The living organism can defend and express itself due to the presence of the psyche in it. The psyche is integral with life. That is why, it is called psychical and not physical. As Santayana says, "This sort of physical

operation is called psychical, because it falls within the trope of a life, and belongs to the self-defence and self-expression of a living organism. In The Realm of Spirit the psyche is conceived as a hidden power in matter which carries the potentialities of life in its various stages.

F. Psyche or Self:

To Santayana the psyche and the self are not different. The self is not something immaterial. The self is to be posited, if we want to make our experience possible. We shall discuss, in a separate chapter on Santayana's epistemology, how, according to him, experience becomes possible. Now, the self which is to be posited is the living psyche. Two approaches are distinguished for studying this postulated self or psyche: an external, behaviouristic and an internal, introspective analysis. For his behaviouristic attitude Santayana is to some extent indebted to William James. James' studies in abnormal psychology lead him to seek the springs of consciousness and conduct in physiological processes. Such a naturalistic psychology serves to fortify Santayana's naturalism. Another approach which may be taken for studying the self is internal. This is the more difficult and dangerous approach. When we try to observe our own selves, we get vague notions about them and never catch hold of them as true selves. The self is what "slumbers and breathes below, a mysterious natural organism". The same mysterious and hidden nature of the psyche is stressed in Soliloquies in England. In

27. Ibid., pp.139-40.
The Realm of Matter Santayana indicates that the psyche has a certain amount of pliability; it bends to circumstances in order to sustain itself by its adaptations to the ambient world.

G. Psyche and Spirit:

From the material psyche originates spirit or mind. According to Santayana, spirit and mind are identical. The psyche itself is unconscious and unintelligent. In its adaptations to alien things it becomes intelligent and creates spirit. As Santayana observes, "Spirit is bred in the psyche because the psyche, in living, is obliged to adjust herself to alien things: she does so in her own interest; but in taking cognisance of other things, in moulding a part of her dream to follow their alien fortunes, she becomes intelligent, she creates spirit." Thus spirit is an epiphenomenon. In the dependence of spirit upon psyche we have frank materialism. Spirit cannot enjoy free-will; nor can it have mastery over the material body. These two statements are made for the same reason that spirit springs from the material psyche. Spirit being grounded in animal life makes the pragmatic function of physical sensibility possible. But it overleaps this function, and becomes associated with the intellectual, moral and aesthetic function. Thus Santayana encourages pure spirituality in art and life. And with this encouragement exists side by side a pragmatic ethics in Santayana's philosophy. He has referred to fixed aims or ideals of life. These

ideals, however, do not lose their charm by the fact that they are grounded in animal life. Herein lies the uniqueness of Santayana's philosophy. His view of morality will be discussed in a separate chapter.

We can here refer to the Indian view of spirit which has of late been applauded much by Santayana. The Hindu views that spirit is infinite and is independent of all the accidents of existence have also been approved by him. But the Indians maintain the freedom of spirit at an unnecessary cost of worldly servitude. On the other hand, it has been already noted that on Santayana's view the freedom of spirit cannot be maintained, since spirit takes its origin from the material psyche.

H. Santayana's charge against the Indians:

Santayana makes a caustic remark about the scientific inferiority of the Indians. He says that they "did not study the movement and mechanism of nature: they had no science." But this remark is objectionable. Even if by science is meant the study of the movement and mechanism of nature, it may be said that the Indians have to their credit a study of the positive sciences. And this study was no mean achievement considering its antiquity when the much-vaunted scientific progress of Europe was unachieved. In the Nyāya-Vaisesika and Jaina atomism, in the Sāṁkhya theory of evolution, in the Advaita theory of creation, we get enough proof of the scientific pattern of the Indian mind. As Brajendra Nath Seal says, "The Hindus

no less than the Greeks have shared in the work of constructing scientific concepts and methods in the investigation of physical phenomena, as well as of building up a body of positive knowledge which has been applied to industrial technique; and Hindu scientific ideas and methodology (e.g., the inductive method or methods of algebraic analysis) have influenced the course of natural philosophy in Asia—in the East as well as the West—in China and Japan, as well as in the Saracen Empire.  

Thus the view that Indian philosophy has no science results from ignorance. Perhaps, Santayana's mind was not so prepared to enter into the depths of Indian philosophy.

I. Realm of Spirit:

Spirit, according to Santayana, is the highest manifestation of consciousness. It has a reflective capacity, and in this it is distinguished from animal or vegetable consciousness. It is intelligence in act. Spirit is not essence, for it is directed at essence. Again, it is not matter, although it may be considered a function of matter. It accordingly forms a new realm of being. Not only spirit is simple awareness or consciousness but also it implies 'intent', 'belief' and 'eagerness'. It is a category and by it essences are made appearances and things objects of belief. There are as many forms of spirit as there are essences, each being a distinct "spiritual fact". Spirit cannot be observed as an essence is observed. Nor can it be encountered as a thing is encountered. It "can be discovered

32. Scepticism and Animal Faith, p.274.
only by implication in all discourse". Discourse is what "is a perusal of essence, or its recurring presence to spirit." The existence of spirit in discourse becomes self-evident.

J. Criticism:

Matter is the matrix of all life and thought. It is capable of eliciting feeling and thought, since it is the only power or agency in the universe. All things, even those immaterial like spirit, must be reduced to a material plane as 'habits' of material substance. Santayana, however, admits that this "may sound dogmatical". He has tried to bridge over the gulf between spirit and matter by the term 'psyche'. Spirit being rooted in the psyche is related to matter. But the immaterial spirit cannot take its origin from the material psyche. Spirit and matter, as they are antagonistic to each other, cannot be linked by any via media. There is no half-way ground between the realm of spirit and the realm of matter. Santayana says that the "office of matter is precisely to breed mind and to feed it." This is a contradiction in terms, since it is not at all possible for matter to 'breed' that which is not material. Santayana is unable to explain how the psyche comes to generate the spirit. He is content to accept mind and spirit as facts which experience reveals.

33. Ibid., p.275.
34. Ibid., p.275.
35. Ibid., p.109.
36. The Realm of Truth, p.441.
V. Santayana and Dialectical Materialism:

Santayana's materialism can be understood in relation to dialectical materialism. In materialist dialectic, as in Santayana's materialism, matter is taken as real in its own right, neither deriving its reality from any supernatural source nor dependent for its existence on the human mind. The ancient Heraclitean insight that matter is flux has been shared by both dialectic materialism and Santayana. Motion is an inalienable property of matter. But while dialectical materialism proposes a dialectical theory of change, Santayana holds a mechanistic theory of change. According to the former, everything, whether it be a physical object or an idea, is in a process of change; it is a unity which turns out, upon analysis, to be made up of oppositely acting elements. This unity or stability, however, is temporary, and what is permanent is change or motion. The law of the unity of opposites as held by dialectical materialism is not found in Santayana's materialism.

Moreover, dialectical materialism suggests that qualities are not something opposed to matter. They form a system of inter-relationships in motion. This does not exist as transcendental to the material order, but is the material order. Dialectical materialism also holds that quality is not permanent and unchanging, as metaphysicians think. Santayana, again, differs from such a view of dialectical materialism. He thinks that qualities have a realm of their own. This is called the realm of essence. Essence is the quality sensed. A thing may have characters or qualities. But these characters or qualities
do not change with the change of matter; they are essentially unchanging.

Further, the dialectical materialist holds that matter moves, but the universal motion is not aimless, it conforms to patterns expressible as laws. The laws are to be regarded as "a guide to activity and scientific research, not a dogma." Santayana, on the other hand, asserts that the flux of matter does not conform to any law. It functions mechanically but perfectly as an independent power. It may be said in this connection that when we think of the dialectical materialists, Santayana's statement that he is "apparently the only one (materialist) living" seems to be rather broad. In the criticism of dialectical materialism it may be said that the mechanism of this theory is to some extent of the Hegelian type, and hence bears an idealistic colouring. Santayana's materialism is, however, free from such a defect. He becomes idealistic as regards his theory of essence.

VI. Essence and Existence:

We have so far described Santayana's materialism. We have come to know from him that existence is the principle of substance and the object of animal faith. The relation of existence to essence constitutes a main theme in Santayana's metaphysics.

A. Distinction between essence and existence:

The distinction between essence and existence

was not started fresh by Santayana. It was made by the ancients as well as by the medieval thinkers.

(i) Plato and Aristotle:

Plato teaches that Ideas form a world which exists of itself. They are eternal and unchanging. The earthly sensuous things are merely shadowy images of the bright world of Ideas. The Platonic Ideas are laid up in heaven as patterns to be distantly imitated by the things that exist here below. Aristotle rejects Plato’s view that Ideas exist for themselves alone and independent of the particular things. He points out that the essence of a thing is its inner principle which preserves and improves it, explains it and makes it what it is. The essences, according to him, cannot be outside the things of which they are the essences. Both Plato and Aristotle, however, agree that the true essences are relatively few, that they can only be comprehended by reason, and that they act on things. Both of them also hold that in contrast with the essences, things are intrinsically deficient and vague. They lay a moral load upon essences by saying that they are good and that they are what things ought to be. The real essence is that whose fulfilment makes the individual truly happy and true happiness is the achievement of the individual’s proper good.

(ii) St. Thomas:

Santayana asserts that essences have no "natural being" but only "aesthetic immediacy and logical definition." Essences are thus the most clearly known,

39. Ibid., p.75.
and are the true objects of the intellect. Santayana's view is substantiated by St. Thomas's statement that the essence or quiddity of a thing is the proper object of the intellect. Essence, according to St. Thomas, is distinct from existence. Such distinction he accepts in the case of created reals. But in the case of God the above distinction becomes meaningless, since in Him the act of existing is His essence.

For St. Thomas essence is distinct from existence, and yet it is not antagonistic to the latter. The former is compared to the latter as potentiality to act. The form or quiddity or essence is real but not existent; it is ordered, however, to an existential status. In substances composed of matter and form, three terms must be clearly set apart: form, substance and act of existing. Form is that-by-which-a-thing-is, quo est. Thus it serves as the principle of existing. Substance is that-which-is, quod est; and by act of existing is meant that-by-which-the-substance-is-denominated-a-bieng. Form or quiddity is not the act of existing. But it is related to act of existing as 'whiteness' is to 'the act of being white' or as 'light' to 'the act of illuminating'. Thus essence though it is not existent is, however, ordered to an existential status. It is to be mentioned in this connection that in intellectual or spiritual substances there remains only form as a subsisting substance; here it is not quo est but quod est. Form is not treated here as a principle of existing or as that-by-which-a-thing-is; it serves as a substance or that-which-is. And in the case of spiritual substances the act of existing is itself the principle of existing (quo est). The act is that-by-which the form is.
For St. Thomas essence is ordered to an existential status, while for Santayana, in contrast, essence stands continually and intelligibly in opposition to the irrational realm of natural entities. In medieval thought a strong tendency is found to hypostatise essence, not as a substance but as a thought, this tendency being not only present in the realists who identify Platonic ideas with the ideas of God, but also in the nominalists who identify essences with human thoughts of them. Plato also hypostatises essence as something eternally existent; by such hypostatisation he fails to distinguish between essence and existence. St. Thomas and later on Spinoza identify the essence of anything with the existence of anything. This is the pantheistic position. This position is, of course, inconsistent with the Christian doctrines of divine transcendence and creation. The medieval distinction between essence and existence is commonly accepted by philosophers to-day. But does Santayana also make the same distinction? This question can be answered both in the affirmative and in the negative. Let us see how.

(iii) Santayana's distinction between essence and existence:

Santayana makes the logical distinction between essence and existence - the very distinction which is medieval in origin. The distinction he makes between essence and existence is that between what a thing is and that it is, between its character or kind and its occurrence as a case of the kind, between the rosiness of the rose and the fact that it is there. His distinction between essence
and existence does not mean the separation between the two. In his Transcendental Absolutism he has urged a protest against Royce who says that the gist of Santayana's philosophy is the separation of essence from existence. Santayana claims his distinction between essence and existence to be logical, not entitative. If this distinction be entitative, it will be as good as separation. But it will be shortly noticed that Santayana maintains an entitative separation between essence and existence.

Plato says that to be self-identical is to be eternal. Thus he confuses logical identity with everlasting existence. This logical flaw is due to his hypostatisation of essence as eternally existent. Santayana marks it. But he himself also hypostatises essence not, however, as existent, but in a realm of its own, the realm of essence. And the logical flaw in Plato's passage from self-identity to eternity is also made by Santayana. The essence of a thing is itself a thing in a realm of its own, different from that of which it is the essence. Thus instead of one thing we now have two, the essence (a thing which is self-identical in its own realm) and the thing of which it is the essence. And these two things are not only distinguished but also separated. This is what is called entitative separation. Having thus separated

40. "If there was insight in Royce’s saying that I separated essence from existence, there was not absolute accuracy. I do not separate the two, I merely distinguish them." Twentieth Century Philosophy, p.315.
41. The Philosophy of George Santayana, ed. by Schilpp, p.497.
essence from existence, Santayana speaks of the essence as eternal, because it is self-identical. Plato also in an analogous way spoke of a real existent thing as eternal, because it is self-identical. Santayana differs from Plato only in this that the eternal essence is not existent. To be existent is to be in time. To Santayana 'eternal existence' is contradictory, since, according to him, "eternity intrinsic to all essences is timeless." It may be said in this connection that the entitative separation Santayana makes between essence and existence is not made by the medieval thinkers. Let us see now how Santayana distinguishes between essence and existence.

(1) First, the principle of existence is change, whereas that of essence is self-identity. 'Existent' means what comes-to-be, endures and passes away, i.e., in flux. Essence is that which is inert. Santayana regards existence as Heraclitean while essence he treats as Parmenidean, or rather Platonic. For him, as for Plato, the realm of essence is many and infinite; but in the principle of its being it is not different from the One of Parmenides. The cause of this kind of separation is to be found, methinks, in the contradictory demands of Santayana's temperament, at once materialistic and religious, Heraclitean and Platonic.

(2) Secondly, the self-identity of essence implies its eternity, unity and internality of relations. On the other hand, the flux of existence implies disunity,
contradiction and externality of relations.

(3) Thirdly, matter which is existent is creative; it is the causative force. But essence is inert. It cannot produce either itself or anything else. It has no material efficacy.

(4) Fourthly, existence is external to essence. But an essence, says Santayana, can be caught in the flux of existence and incorporated in a substance. In such a state of incarnation the essence acquires a frame of external relations, but it is not identified with the substance which is 'more and other than the essence'. The embodiment of an essence in substance does not violate the eternal character of that essence. The constant flux of existence enables the essence to elude the grasp of its captor, except to permit momentary external relations. As Santayana holds, "It is only by such embodiment in matter that essences can be loosened, as it were, from their essential setting and turned into the characters of facts; or rather — since their essential setting is eternal and holds them even while embodiments of them are passing through existence — it is only by being distributed in the field of action that essences can add for a moment external and variable relations to those which their proper nature involves." 43

(5) Fifthly, essences or data of intuition do not exist. What exist are the facts or events believed to occur in nature. These facts or events are intuitions themselves, pains and pleasures, all remembered experiences

43. The Realm of Matter, pp.275-76.
and physical things and events. Thus existences, from the epistemological point of view, are facts or events affirmed. It has been said that data of intuition do not exist. Let us suppose that this is not true. Then its opposite, viz., presence to intuition is necessary for existence, is true. But Santayana affirms that this can be easily disproved by a reductio ad absurdum. If it be true that what is present to intuition necessarily exists, intuition itself would not exist. The existence of anything is posited by intuition, but this intuition becomes groundless, if it is posited by any other intuition. Again, if presence to intuition were necessary to existence, then "everything mentionable would exist without question", and it would be impossible for us to think the non-existent and to deny anything existent since it is present to intuition. What are present to intuition are certain. As a result, there would be no fancy, illusion and hallucination.

(6) Sixthly, Santayana says that we believe existence but we intuit essence. Professor Savery makes a remark about Santayana that the latter "believes in eternal essences". Santayana, in his article Transcendental Absolutism, says that this remark of Professor Savery is objectionable. To believe in anything means to believe that it exists. But eternal essences are such as cannot be said to exist. Existence has no ground in any sense. Existence, says Santayana, is contingent. He differs from the Thomist and the Existentialist on this point. Since there is originally no necessity that you or I exist, there is no

44. Scepticism and Animal Faith, p.46.
necessity that anything exists at all. Thus the notion that the nature of God is His necessary existence is a chimera. That an essence should entail its existence on the finite plane of objects is finite nonsense. And that it should do so on the infinite divine plane is infinite nonsense.

B. Santayana and Existentialism:

Santayana gives primary importance to essence. Existence is secondary, according to him. Existentialism, the latest movement of European thought which has achieved popular success in contemporary France, also distinguishes between essence and existence, but, unlike Santayana, affirms the priority of existence over essence. Martin Heidegger says that existence in its proper form is experienced in the case of self alone. I cannot ask the question, 'what I am', without presupposing my own existence. Here existence is primarily given, essence is secondary. Heidegger makes a sharp distinction between essence and existence. When we ask about a thing as to what it is, we are asking about its essence. Having known what it is, we may still ask whether it exists. This shows that essence does not include existence. That essence is not existent is also propounded by Santayana. It is a cardinal doctrine with all existentialists that existence precedes essence, and their main concern is with existence. But though. Santayana speaks of himself as a materialist, yet what, according to him, is primary is essence. His main concern is with essence. The notion of essence is the foundation stone of his whole system of philosophy. The primacy of
essence in every aspect, epistemological, moral and religious, has been ascertained by him. The role of essence in cognition, the moral function of essence and the religious significance of essence will be subsequently discussed.

As to the notion of existence there is a striking similarity between Santayana and the existentialists. Santayana, as we have already noticed, takes existence as a process or flux. According to existentialism also, 'to exist' is not equal to 'to be'. Existence is an act. True existence implies true becoming, and true becoming implies liberty. It implies continuous progress. To most existentialists existence and being are the same in meaning. Santayana, on the other hand, distinguishes between being and existence. He takes being as an essence or as that which is present to all essences. Santayana's concept of being has been already discussed along with the exposition of the notion of essence. The existentialists are mistaken when they regard existence and being as identical. And the same mistake is done by Santayana by making essence identical with being. Being is such as includes both essence and existence. It cannot be identical with either of them. Unfortunately enough, both existentialists and Santayana lack this insight.

Santayana distinguishes essence from existence, but he does not forget to mention their interrelationship. Their interrelationship is as follows: "The flux flows by flowing through essences; and essences are manifested as the flux of matter or of attention picks them up and drops them." Essences render existence intelligible. But there
are other essences which are not realized in existence.

The distinction Santayana has made is between the two realms of being - the realm of existence and the realm of essence. Santayana's realm of essence comes as a possibility over against the realm of existence. What are possibles other than existents are essences. That whether the realm of essence can be taken as a possible alternative as against the realm of existence will be discussed shortly in connection with its criticism. Here we shall refer to the other philosophical views on 'possibles' and compare them with Santayana's view of the same.

C. Santayana and W. Norris Clarke, S.J.:

Both Santayana and Clarke speak of the realms of 'existence' and 'possible'. Again, both argue that possibles are not existents. But Clarke, unlike Santayana, maintains that the existent, the actual, is the only real being; and though not real or actual in themselves, possibles are intelligibly related to the real. The status of the possible is that of esse intentionale. The existence of a thought object or intentional real is not a "to be real", but a "to-be-really-thought by a real act of a real mind". Thus the "reality resides entirely in the real act of the mind thinking, not in the object of this thought." Similarly, the possibles, though not real in themselves, are intelligibly ordered to be real. "Their intelligibility has intentional existence entirely in and through the reality of God, His essence and His act of

thought, and can only be validly postulated and analyzed by us through the mediation of the divine reality, as a necessary consequence of the divine attributes. The possibles, then, on Clarke's view, being not real in themselves, are inseparably linked with existent or real being by a relation of necessary intelligibility - "a quasi projection of the Supreme Being's own necessary intelligibility as existent, intelligent, and all-powerful."

Santayana differs from Clarke mainly in two respects. First, unlike Clarke, Santayana preserves for essences a realm of their own which should be sharply contrasted with the realm of existence. While, according to Clarke, the 'really real' is the existent being, according to Santayana, however, the 'really real' is essence. Clarke predicates 'intentional existence' of possibles. But no kind of existence either intentional or actual has been predicated of essence by Santayana. Secondly, reality is used by Clarke in the sense of actuality. What is actual is real. In that case the existent being is the only real being. But on Santayana's view, the reality of essence is not an existential reality. Unchangeable and inevitable, its reality is classically real. When an existent changes, essences are not changed, but can be exchanged. At every step, existence casts off one essence and picks up another.

47. Ibid., p.456.
48. Ibid., p.456.
D. Santayana and Henri Bergson:

While Clarke inquires into the meaning and status of possibles as possibles, Bergson is interested in the "possible" implications of an actual real. The possible is to be judged against the background of reality. According to Bergson, "reality is global, and undivided growth, progressive invention, duration: it resembles a gradually expanding rubber balloon assuming at each moment unexpected forms." Reality is in continuous procession and is continually unfolding novelties. Possibles, on Bergson's view, are those which come after this process. They are not simply "there" awaiting actuation; they are not ideally pre-existent. It is actuation which brings forward what has been made possible. Thus possibility acquires a distinctively "existential" character, being always "after-the-fact". It is "the real which makes itself possible, and not the possible which becomes real."

The conception of existence as flux is found in both Santayana and Bergson. Bergson, constant duration being to him the only reality, is perhaps on the right track when he maintains that possibility is not anterior to existence, that possibility, being consequent upon existence, achieves an "existential" character. We find in Bergson's conception of Reality a total system, having no break in it. Santayana does not say that essences or possibles are not anterior to existence; what he says only is that their realm is totally separate from the realm of existence. While according to Santayana essences have no

49. Ibid., p.460.
50. Ibid., p.466.
existential character, Bergson's view is that possibles have existential character.

Again, duration or constant change or flux, according to Bergson, is the "really real". Santayana, on the other hand, asserts that the "really real" is essence which is unchangeable. Further, on his view, essences, though not existential, wear an existential garb when they are picked up by existence and are thus realized by us. But such a view will not get recognition from Bergson who says that the idea "immanent in most philosophies and natural to the human mind, of possibles which would be realized by an acquisition of existence, is....pure illusion." Finally, while Clarke imparts indirectly 'intentional existence' to possibles and Bergson directly communicates existential character to them, Santayana, on the other hand, by separating essences from the irrational realm of natural entities, differs from both Clarke and Bergson.

E. Santayana and A.N.Whitehead:

Whitehead's doctrine of possibility is to be understood against the background of his conceptions of reality and creation. Like Aristotle, Whitehead says that the 'fully existent' things are the primary concern of the metaphysical enquiry. He holds, "The general Aristotelian principle is maintained that apart from things that are actual, there is nothing - nothing either in fact or in efficacy." Thus what is "really real" according to him is

51. Ibid., p.464.
the actual entity or the 'fully existent' thing. But here Whitehead is to be contrasted with Santayana who holds that the "really real" is essence.

Whitehead conceives 'process' as intrinsic to the nature of actual entity. Each actual entity becomes or comes into existence by a process of activity which is not present to this or that actuality only, but is generic to all actualities. Thus each actuality is an individualization of the ultimate generic activity. This ultimate generic activity Whitehead terms 'creativity'. Creativity is the ultimate source of all creation. But it cannot create something out of nothing. In order to produce an actual entity the whole pre-existing world is to be considered. But this world is composed of other actual entities, which again are the previous products of creativity itself. Moreover, in the production of an actual entity, not some, but all actual entities contribute their share of influence, although their effects are not all equally noticed. This explains Whitehead's theory of relativity according to which every event is related to every other event in the world. When we consider the fact that out of an existing world of actual entities creativity has a choice of creating a particular actual entity rather than another, we must recognize a third factor too, viz., alternative possible forms of synthesis. These are called "eternal objects". These are called eternal, since becoming, process, transition are irrelevant to their nature. They are called objects,

53. Whitehead has often used "actuality" as a synonym for "actual entity".
since they are always 'given' for an actuality in becoming.

Eternal objects are the forms of actualities. Actualities become definite by their participation in the eternal objects. Do eternal objects form a realm of their own? As they are 'pure potentials' for the determination of actualities, they, therefore, by their nature must have ingression in some actuality or actualities. The eternal forms are 'given' as 'objects' for present actualities in becoming, only by virtue of their existence in antecedent actualities. Eternal objects are given as possible forms the synthesis of which imparts definiteness to actuality.

The 'eternal objects' of Whitehead can be compared to Santayana's essences. One outstanding resem­blance between them is that both are recognised as eternal, in the sense that they do not undergo any process or tran­sition. Again, Whitehead says that actualities become definite by having ingression into eternal forms. Santayana also with a somewhat similar tone pronounces that an exist­tential event can be described (description implies defi­niteness of what is described) when it assumes certain essences. In other words, as for Whitehead eternal forms remain as 'possible' objects for the determination of actuality, so for Santayana essences appear as 'possible' sense­qualities for the description of an object or objects.

Meanwhile, some important points of difference between the two philosophers deserve notice. First, for Whitehead eternal objects remain as ingredients of actualities. But Santayana speaks of a realm of essence sharply distinguished from the realm of existence. Secondly, there
is intrinsic 'togetherness' among eternal objects. Whithead says, "An eternal object, considered as an abstract entity, cannot be divorced from its reference to other eternal objects, from its reference to actuality generally." But Santayana's is the opposite view. He says that each essence is self-identical and independent, and hence forms no intrinsic togetherness with other essences.

F. Criticism:

(1) Santayana's realm of essence comes as a possibility over and above the realm of existence. If there be any duality of existence and something else, it does not strictly mean that that something will be other than existence. Something which is possible other than existence is 'possible existence' if there be anything. The duality we get is between existence and possible existence. The 'possible' is what belongs to actual nature. An individual can be described not merely in terms of certainties, of what they are and will be, but also in terms of possibilities, of what they may be or do. Santayana, however, maintains that the 'possible', instead of belonging to actual nature, belongs to the realm of essence. He says, "in the actual universe, its essence being completely determined by the events which compose it, all that is actual is necessary and all else impossible. But this of course does not preclude the possibility of any different world." The possibility of the universe other than the

55. The Realm of Essence, p.28.
existential universe is here intended to be the realm of essence. Here two criticisms can be made against treating the realm of essence as a possibility other than the realm of existence.

(i) First, each essence possesses a nature, incompatible with the word 'can'. It is said that an essence is what it is, and hence is an actuality; thus it cannot be said to be a possibility.

(ii) Secondly, in making a transition from essence to existence we shall see that what becomes metaphysically or ultimately possible is existence, not essence. If the realm of essence is self-complete, the transition from essence to existence is not surely effected by essence itself. The transition is not effected by essence itself for another reason. To make such a transition possible is to attribute activity to essence. But essences are not defined as dynamic. Now, if the transition is not made from the side of essence, it may be effected from the side of existence. And Santayana himself says that existence or matter or spirit "selects" essences. But this selection could not have taken place if the world had not been already existent.

Thus what is to be metaphysically presupposed is existence. Possibility has a natural basis in the character of what exists. There is no need for a separate realm of essence to house non-actualized possibilities.

(2) Essences cannot really exist apart from the act of existence. They are entitative parts of every real being. In real being essence and existence are not separable
since they unite to make 'being' be. Essences can, however, be distinguished from existence intellectually. But still an abstracted essence takes on a new (intentional) mode of existence in the intellect. The main upshot is that essence is not separable from existence. Santayana's cardinal error lies in positing essence as the supreme reality, since it deprives the mind of the existent reality that is its natural and proper object. The awareness of existence is, in the words of M. Gilson, "the beginning of philosophical wisdom". In a technical sense, Santayana never even began to be a philosopher. St. Thomas is on the right track when he points out that existence precedes essence logically, in that the mind grasps the notion of essence by its apprehension of the essence of some existing thing. The existentialists also deserve much credit, since they become first aware of existence. But they make a common mistake with Santayana by distinguishing existence from essence. The mind cannot abstract existence from essence, since existence is not a form, but the act of all forms.

(3) Existence, says Santayana, is dumb as to its origin or goal. It cannot provide any explanation of itself. It is blind. How does this blind and dumb existence happen to embody selected essences in particular forms and patterns? Incarnation of essences cannot be their own doing, since they are inert. Is this incarnation

56. "Existence... is necessarily irrational and inexplicable. It cannot, therefore, contain any principle of explanation a priori." Scepticism and Animal Faith, p. 208.
due to any extrinsic creative power? Santayana does not admit any such power. Then how is this marvellous feat performed? It is by matter itself, the principle of irrational existence. How does matter perform it? Santayana fails to give any definite answer to this question. He says that it just happens. The appearance of essence, its relation to matter and to mind are the puzzles which our philosopher has not tried fully to solve. In fact, Santayana's metaphysics is hardly speculative at all.