

together and merged in the art of life, the only one wholly useful or fine among them.
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Bibliography

Works by John Dewey

- AE *Art as Experience*. New York: Minton, Balch and Company, 1934.
 RP *Reconstruction in Philosophy*. Henry Holt and Co., 1920. Enlarged edition. Beacon Press, 1948.

Works by George Santayana

- AFSL “The Photograph and the Mental Image” (ca. 1905) in John Lachs, editor. *Animal Faith and Spiritual Life*. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1967.
 DP *Dominations and Powers*. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1951.
 IPR *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion*. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1900.
 LR4 *Reason in Art*. Vol. 4 of *The Life of Reason*. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1905.
 OS “Hamlet” (1908) in *Obiter Scripta*. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1936.
 PP3 *My Host the World*. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1953.
 RB *Realms of Being*. One volume edition. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1942.
George Santayana’s Marginalia: A Critical Selection. Edited and with an introduction by John McCormick. The MIT Press, 2011.

Works by Others

- Auden, W. H. “The Poet of the Encirclement” (1943) in *Forewords and Afterwords*. New York: Vintage Books, 1973.
 Stevens, Wallace. *Opus Posthumous*. Edited, with an Introduction, by Samuel French Morse. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966.

Comment on Richard M. Rubin’s “Santayana and the Arts”

Richard Rubin’s fine essay demonstrates a deep understanding of Santayana’s philosophy and has the virtues of being for a new reader of Santayana a good introduction to the richness of his system while also for a long-time reader being an insightful lesson about connections in Santayana’s thought. Relating Santayana’s theory of art to his concrete observations and literary criticism is helpful for gaining a comprehensive understanding of Santayana’s outlook; the discussion about ideals likewise draws together many pieces of the system for any reader.

The essay takes up the question of whether Santayana’s reflections on art are valuable even though they seem to have led him to conclusions unsatisfactory for many to whom his perspective is otherwise appealing. Rubin considers dance, literature, and photography as art forms that Santayana got wrong. To determine what is valuable in Santayana’s broader views, Rubin structures the essay around three tensions in understanding art: 1) art as mirror vs. interpretation; 2) scope vs. suggestiveness as an artistic virtue; 3) art as representation of perfection vs. representation of experiences. The valuable conclusions that stand apart from Santayana’s particular judgments are that art is interpretation, its scope is most important, and it should represent perfection. This is reasonably qualified by the claim that Santayana’s conclusions are not rigid or dogmatic but rather indicate his emphases in a field of many and various particular cases. And these emphases are to be guides in the activity of living, that is, in the activity of judging those things in the artistic realm of life as helps or hindrances to living well. Rubin lays this out by considering Santayana’s views on literature and photography and then using the three tensions to compare Santayana views on art with those of John Dewey.

My critical comments concern the use of John Dewey’s views in the essay to clarify Santayana’s positions. Rubin claims that his “purpose is not to compare Santayana and Dewey on art . . . , but to use Dewey’s positions and views derived from them to illustrate what Santayana emphasized” (Rubin 46). It seems a helpful goal to attempt to throw Santayana’s views into relief by contrasting them with other views. But the explicit appropriation and modification of views assigned to a prominent figure introduces some risks. First, there is the risk of confusion from the outset. It is not clear what the difference is between comparing Santayana and Dewey on art and using Dewey’s position as a foil to bring out the character of Santayana’s position. It could be that more liberty is taken with Dewey’s positions in order to draw a sharper contrast. This introduces a second set of risks, namely distortion and misrepresentation.

Rubin is more aware than most people of the complex relations of similarity and difference between the ideas of Santayana and Dewey, so I certainly do not doubt his ability to read these thinkers carefully and thoughtfully. Rather, I am questioning the helpfulness of the device he adopts to clarify Santayana’s position regarding the three tensions. It is difficult to avoid comparing the positions of the two thinkers in spite of Rubin’s explicit denial that this is what he is doing; and at the end of the essay I am confused about how to regard the two thinkers in connection to the issues

discussed. I am uncertain as to the significance of their disagreements when, in the end, they come together in the vision of making the everyday as close to the ideal as possible.

An example of what perplexes me is the claim, in the section “Mirror vs. Interpretation,” that “for Dewey, the purpose of art is not so much refinement of experience, but appreciation and communication,” so that “he emphasized that the key function of art is capturing the emotional heart of experience” (Rubin 54). I think this is meant to show the difference between art as mirroring vs. art as interpretation. With Dewey’s emphasis on appreciation and communication inclining him to take art as mirroring and Santayana’s position representing art as interpretation. Yet, I cannot understand how appreciation and communication on Dewey’s view is not a refinement “by the side of which transubstantiation pales” (LW1.132). Dewey’s notion of appreciation requires reflection and a re-creation of the experience of another—not the taking over of it wholesale (whatever that could mean). And communication is not conducting content through a medium so that it is mirrored in another consciousness; it is cooperation in activity and the sharing of a perspective that is itself a new experience for the communicants.

Again, this is a fine and rich essay by a knowledgeable, thoughtful, and able scholar. The section on dance led me to the internet to watch videos of performers I did not know. The section on photography is quite interesting both historically and philosophically, and the section on literature is outstanding as it details both Santayana’s blindness and brilliance. The tensions are potentially a helpful device in thinking about the dialectically complex system of Santayana’s thought. My concern is that using positions attributed to Dewey as a foil to Santayana confuses more than it illuminates. Or, put differently, the essay seems to risk imparting distorted characterizations of the work of both thinkers. While it seems reasonable to use contrasting positions to clarify Santayana’s views, assigning the contrasting positions to another figure, in this case at least, runs the risk of exaggerating the positions of both figures in the interest of sharpening the contrast. The risk of confusion is especially great because Santayana himself may often seem to have held contrasting views in his attempts to consider several different perspectives on a topic.

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Rubin’s Reply to Coleman

Martin Coleman’s penetrating comments reveal the risks of using a framework of opposing concepts to distinguish the views of philosophers. While such a framework can sharpen the differences between the views of the philosophers, it has the danger of over-simplifying and even distorting them. In my article, I use three opposing pairs of concepts, all derived from remarks in Santayana’s writings. In using each pair, I attempt to show which side of the opposition each philosopher favored, recognizing that it is a matter of emphasis, not black-and-white choice. Coleman points out that in one of these pairs—art as a mirror vs art as interpretation—I have missed some of the subtleties in Dewey’s theory of art by placing Dewey on the side of art as a mirror. He specifically objects to my saying that Dewey is less focused on refinement of experience and more on appreciation and communication of what people actually do and undergo. The objection is that art can be considered a refinement in that it produces a new shared experience that transforms the original experiences on which it is based. This new experience can be thought of as a refined interpretation of the originals.

This objection is on target. The word “refinement” is misleading and I should have written “perfection” instead. I take pains to acknowledge the ambiguities of the terms used to frame the oppositions, especially the word “interpretation.” I introduce W. H. Auden, as an intermediary between Dewey and Santayana because, even though he emphatically uses the word “mirror,” his meaning is closer to Santayana’s idea of interpretation in that the best works of art show us to a better way to live. Although I acknowledge, both here and in the article, that Dewey’s “esthetic object” is a form of interpretation, this sort of interpretation remains quite different from Santayana’s. Dewey would have agreed that art is not just pure, unfiltered communication. He also would have agreed that art can disclose possibilities that have never been thought of before: but Dewey’s emphasis was on possibility, not on perfection.

I am sure that the general thrust of my comparison of Santayana and Dewey is trustworthy, as when I suggest that Dewey would have had a more favorable reading of *Hamlet* than Santayana did. This inference is derived from Dewey’s explicit criticism of Santayana for not appreciating Shakespeare’s depiction of “the free and varied system of nature itself as that works and moves in experience” (AE 321).¹ This example places Dewey closer to regarding art as a mirror of experience than as an interpretation in Santayana’s sense of teaching us how to live.

The *Hamlet* example also shows why I sometimes have elected to present illustrations written in a Deweyan vein rather than to quote directly from Dewey’s work. My exegetical energy was directed on Santayana’s work and it was sometimes useful to present a Dewey-like contrasting example, even where Dewey had not addressed a specific work directly. I am not aware of any extensive analysis of *Hamlet* by Dewey, nor, for that matter, of any work where he dealt with photography as an artistic medium. Such extrapolations of Dewey’s approach is very much in the Deweyan spirit, as Dewey did not encourage philosophers to simply repeat his words and ideas, but to address each problematic situation with questions and ideas appropriate to the matter at hand.

¹ John Dewey, *Art as Experience, The Later Works, 1925–1953*, Volume 10: 1934, edited by Jo Ann Boydston, Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 325.