ESSENCE AND KNOWLEDGE

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Foreword

To write a paper about one's philosophy which I am very little acquainted with is a painful as well as sinful affair. It is as if to be compelled to set out on an arctic journey without any technical knowledge or equipments. My knowledge as to where the North Pole is does not help me so much in this exploration.

Furthermore whatever constitutes a part of one's philosophy could not be fully understood without the proper perspective which can see the whole of it and discern the necessary relationships of that part with the whole. And I lack this perspective miserably.

Scepticism and Animal Faith and The Realm of Essence and lectures and discussions in the class are the only tangible sources out of which I drew the references in the following presentation.
I. WHAT THE REALM OF ESSENCE IS

When we thrust a straight stick in the water and observe that it is bent, we are assured of the deceptive character of our senses. The desire to get away from this deception once for all has driven many honest minds to the direction of scepticism. Many chose the annihilation of themselves, and others were satisfied with the dogmatic substitute. The conquest of illusion, however, is not achieved by neglecting its actuality, but by accepting it openly as an illusion and by discarding, with the sceptical consistency, whatever belief we may have about the being beyond the immediate presence. If the stick, which I know as having been straight a moment ago, now looks bent in the water, my intuition of bentness of the stick is not illusory, but real and undeniably there. Of course, I do not claim that the character of bentness which I perceive belongs to the stick, or I refrain even from making a sophisticated explanation of the refraction of light. If I see a certain length in the stick, this spatial quality is merely specious. Thus the sceptic, as a dialectic gymnast, arrives at this concept of "immediate thereness" and stops. He stops because he cannot doubt the presence of that "thereness" when it is there. For instance, the nature of essence:

"...... appears in nothing better than in
beautiful. . . . . . In a form felt to be beautiful an obvious complexity composes an obvious unity; a marked intensity and individuality are seen to belong to a reality utterly immaterial and incapable of existing otherwise than speciously. This divine beauty is evident, fugitive, impalpable, and homeless in the world of material fact; yet it is unmistakably individual and sufficient unto itself, and although perhaps soon eclipsed is never extinguished: for it visits time, but belongs to eternity."

In the sense that it is, without existing, contemporary with all times, every essence is eternal.

It is also universal not because we can enumerate repeated manifestations of one essence, but because "It is individuated internally by its character, not externally by its position in the flux of nature." Thus even if a certain essence occurs only once because of the compounding complication of historical events, the perfect identity and individuality of that essence allows it the claim of universality.

The number of essences is infinite. "The realm of essence is comparable to an infinite Koran---or the Logos that was in the beginning---written in invisible but indelible ink, prophesying all the Being could ever be or contain."'

Each essence, of course, has a unity, otherwise it is not an essence. Pure unity is qualitative, but the continuum pervaded by this pure unity may give rise to a unity of quantity, system, and order. Though complexity in unity

(1) Santayana: The Realm of Essence; Scribners, 1927. pp.153-4
(2) ibid., p.36
(3) ibid., p.22
is limitless, any essence is itself, unanalysable. In other words, "in material compounds the essence of the whole is not compounded of the essence of the parts." Thus each essence, whether it is an essence of Pure Being or of bentness, enjoys an absolute democracy in the realm of essence. No one has any moral prerogative or any cosmic influence upon another.

Furthermore, essences are unsubstantial, involving no consequence or sequel. Also they have no implication or meaning. When one essence, for instance bentness, is there, it is just there. When we make water from hydrogen and oxygen in the chemical laboratory, the essence of water which we intuit has no reference to the question how it was made. And if we intuit also the method by which we produced water out of hydrogen and oxygen, we are not intuiting water, but the whole process of making water itself. "Predication is therefore not a discovery of composition," it is a discovery of unanalysable non-implicative unity in immediacy.

Thus the data of our experiences are essences, and nothing more. The recognition of this fact is Platonic, but at the same time contrary to sentimentalism in Plato. Essences are neutral in value, non-moral, and not perfections

(4) ibid., p.138

(5) Santayana defines the implication as "explicit inclusion of a part in a whole." (ibid., p.88)

(6) ibid., p.89
towards which things aspire. "Every bad thing—bad because false to the ideal which its own nature may propose to do it—illustrates an essence quite as accurately as if it had been good." (n)

II. KNOWLEDGE

Above was the nature of the realm of essence. Plato and other great idealistic philosophers, being in love with intuition, attempted the emancipation from the existential vissicitudes. "To turn away from the existence may be the deepest wisdom in the end. What better than to blow out the candle, and to bed!" (s) But the pressure of the living presence of doubts is undeniable and so strong that "as long as I remain awake and the light burning, that total dogmatic scepticism is evidently an impossible attitude." (a) We, as animals, hitting on one obstacle here and tackling with another there, are compelled to believe in the existence of matter or substance. This postulate of the existence is merely a matter of animal faith. "If there is any existence at all, presence to consciousness is neither necessary nor sufficient to render it an existence." (v) Thus the flux of nature stands for ever external to thought.

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(7) Santayana: Scepticism and Animal Faith, Scribners, 1923 p.79
(8) ibid., p.171  (9) ibid, p.171  (10) ibid., p.45
Human discourse, which itself is an expression of material life, steers its animal intent and, identifying the essence it intuits with the object it intends, tries to satisfy the animal economy.

"Dialectic, then, while ostensibly following ideal implications absolved from allegiance to facts or to actual instances of reasoning, secretly expresses a material life, and this in two stages. The phase is predetermined at birth to certain generic conceptions and transitions; and these are rendered precise and irrevocable by habits formed under the pressure of circumstances."

(11) Santayana: The Realm of Essence p.99

Knowledge is built on this discourse. Intuition subsists beneath knowledge, and the latter employs essences as its indispensable tools. (12) But knowledge can be knowledge only because it postulates the existence as that which it is knowledge of. But who knows that what one intuits and builds up in discourse is that which one intends? No body! But this is immaterial. Knowledge is not the goal that the reproduction of the existence which it postulates is possible nor that it can be approximated.

"It (knowledge) is such an enlightening of the self by intuitions arising there, that what the self ima-
gines and asserts of the collateral thing, with
which it wrestles in action, is actually true of that
thing. Truth in such presumptions or conceptions
does not imply adequacy, nor a pictorial identity
between the essence in intuition and the constitution
of the object . . . . . The truth which discourse
can achieve is truth in its own terms, appropriate
description: it is no incorporation or reproduction
of the objects in the mind. The mind notices
and intends; it cannot incorporate or reproduce
anything not an intention or an intuition." (13)

Thus truth in discourse can be said to be instru-
mental in the sense that that sensation or theory is true
of the object if it expresses the true relation in which the
object stands to the self, so that it will turn out to be
successful for what the self intends to have it done.
But such an understanding of discursive truth is no denying
of the fact that there is an absolute truth. On the very
hypothesis that anything exists, truth appears, "since this
existence must have one character rather than another, so
that only one description of it in terms of essence will be
complete." (14) The Absolute truth will be this "standard com-
prehensive description of any fact in all its relations," (15)
which
no living animal can ever intuit. Each animal mind has
its significance in having the local perspective. "An ob-
server, himself a part of the world he observes, must have
be a particular station in it, he cannot equally near to every-
thing, nor internal to anything but himself; of the rest he

(13) Scepticism and Animal Faith; p.179
(14) ibid., p.269 (15) ibid., p.268
can only take views, abstracted according to his sensibility and foreshortened according to his interests." (16) So no one of systems of knowledge can claim its moral prerogative over the other. The ideal of knowledge is neither the possession of the absolute truth nor the contemplation of eternal essences, but, being an act of animal faith mediated by symbols, it only seeks to become natural science, namely the attempt "to discover what sort of world this disturbing world happens to be." (17)

(16) The Realm of Essence; p. xiii
(17) Scepticism and Animal Faith; p. 181