George Santayana, "Natural and Ultimate Religion"

67-70—Santayana's question, Why do human beings possess a religion at all? evidently asks precisely for an explanation, or "an explanatory theory," of religion. Unlike Prozesky, however, Santayana doesn't give one answer to it but two: human beings possess a religion "for two reasons, and on two levels." "The first reason, on the level of natural life, is that we are all committed, without our previous consent, to the enterprise of living . . . . Yet since . . . success in any project is doubtful, and even the interpretation of our own wills often uncertain, we are prone to imagine a God . . . who shall abet us in our hazardous enterprise and assure us of ultimate success. Such is the first origin and function of human religion: it arises in a mind sure of its purposes but incapable of carrying them out unaided." Interestingly, Santayana's explicit formulations of the second type of religion are not comparably explicit. But if one were to try to construct such, they would presumably read somewhat as follows: "The second reason, on the level of the spirit, is knowledge of the predicament in which life finds itself not by accident but just because it is life, because it is a movement from the forgotten into the unforeseen. This knowledge first opens to us the door to the eternal and founds the ultimate religion of the spirit upon the very vanity of things. Such is the second origin and function of human religion: it arises in a mind knowledgeable of the predicament of life as life and of the vanity of things, and it comes to redeem us from the enterprise of life itself."

67—The apparent contradiction between Santayana's statement here that "even the interpretation of our own wills [is] often uncertain" and his statement later on 68, that mind on the natural level is "sure of its purposes" need be no more than apparent. "Wills" (or "purposes") are one thing; "interpretation" of them, something else. It is uncertainty, not about the first, but about the second, that explains the animal soul's appeal to heaven for guidance.

68—If the forces in question are "treacherous in the end," Santayana would have better spoken of them as "the natural or supernatural forces by which the spirit is actually surrounded," rather than "supported."

68—In Santayana's view, presumably, the image of God or gods is, "at least a good poetic symbol" for the forces upon which human life is actually dependent. In this sense, it is full of "the truth of experience," even if the spirit cast that truth in such terms as it found at hand. Being itself a work of the spirit that is "essentially a poet," "traditional religion, ancient or modern, mythological or scriptural," is not something with which the spirit need trouble to quarrel. But if even natural religion is, to this extent, or for this reason, spiritual, it is nonetheless different from "the ultimate religion of the spirit," by which I take Santayana to mean, the kind of religion to which spirit finally comes, given knowledge of the predicament of life simply as life.

70—Santayana's reasoning here is evidently thoroughly classical, i.e., monopolar. To share the enterprise of life is one thing; to be in every respect simply a part of life, even if greater than any other part, is something else. It is perfectly possible to conceive of *an individual*, i.e., a genidentical concrete, that universally interacts with all things, and in that sense shares the enterprise of life, but that, precisely because its interaction is *universal*, is not and cannot be simply one part of life alongside all others, however great. For this reason as well as others, it is false to say that "we living animals [including *the* living animal] are all alike a temporary brood of chaos."