

# Santayana's Lectures on Aesthetics<sup>1</sup>

George Santayana was a reluctant professor; not indifferent to his role, but willing to play the role only on his terms. The “professor’s chair,” according to Santayana, was one of the “traps that strangle philosophy” and “as soon as possible [he] got out ... .”<sup>2</sup> Santayana became a lecturer in 1889, shortly after taking his Ph.D. from Harvard, and was given the task of teaching a class on aesthetics in 1892–93, which had not been offered at Harvard previously. “I was a kind of poet, I was alive to architecture and the other arts, I was at home in several languages: ‘aesthetics’ might be regarded as my specialty” (PP 393). From his experience teaching the course he would write *The Sense of Beauty*, which not only established him in the faculty, but established him as an original thinker in philosophy. Previously Santayana had published cartoons, reviews, articles, and poetry for the *Latin School Register*, *Harvard Lampoon*, *Harvard Monthly*, *Mind*, and the *Atlantic Monthly*. His only published book before *The Sense of Beauty* was an 1894 collection of poems entitled *Sonnets and Other Verses*.

In 1950 Santayana was interviewed by Catherine Casey and said *The Sense of Beauty*: “was prompted not by the Holy Ghost, but by being told by good friends that it would be better to write something if I wanted to stay on at Harvard.”<sup>3</sup> Pressed by friends and professional pressures, Santayana chose this overlooked subject to make his appearance as an innovative voice in the philosophical world. “My sham course in ‘aesthetics’ had served

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<sup>1</sup> A sort of course outline, as compiled from the lecture notes of H. B. Hastings, is appended at the end of this paper.

<sup>2</sup> “Maxims,” Columbia Manuscript Collection, IX: 12, copyright 1967, Daniel Cory. Cited in *Animal Faith and Spiritual Life* edited by John Lachs (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1967, p. 168).

<sup>3</sup> Catherine Casey, “Philosopher Lives in the Nun’s Nest,” *Continental Daily Mail*, 19 July 1950, p.4. Cited in John McCormick’s *George Santayana: A Biography* (New York: Paragon House, 1988, p. 127), to be abbreviated as MCCORMICK.

its purpose and so had my little book. ... I was reappointed year by year ... with ... a seat in the Faculty, which I seldom occupied" (PP 393).

The publication of *The Sense of Beauty* brought Santayana together with the publishing house of Charles Scribner's Sons. *The Sense of Beauty*, according to Santayana, "established pleasant relations between [him] and Scribner which have lasted for fifty years" (PP 393). The immediate benefit of this relationship for Santayana was that the editors encouraged him to revise and be more aware of his writing style. Santayana wrote the following to Scribner's regarding *The Sense of Beauty*, "I am conscious of my inexperience in writing, and value your suggestions very much."<sup>4</sup>

The importance of this book for Santayana's professional career stretches beyond establishing Santayana's status on the Harvard faculty and his relationship with Charles Scribner's Sons. *The Sense of Beauty* was a philosophical treatise on aesthetics at a time when the subject was not talked about widely, let alone written and published on. According to John McCormick "*The Sense of Beauty* was the first American treatise on [aesthetics], and among the first in Britain or on the continent" (MCCORMICK 127). And as Arthur Danto points out it remains solidly in "the thin canon of aesthetics."<sup>5</sup>

In writing a book based on his aesthetics course, Santayana had the good fortune to obtain the notebook of a former student. Horatius Bonar Hastings, who graduated from Harvard University with an A.M. in 1893, was a student in Santayana's 1892–93 aesthetics' class. Hastings's detailed class notebook proved to be invaluable for Santayana.<sup>6</sup> Santayana wrote to Mr.

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<sup>4</sup> Letter to Charles Scribner's Sons dated 26 July 1896 from George Santayana.

<sup>5</sup> "Introduction," *The Sense of Beauty*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press Critical Edition, 1986, p. xv.

<sup>6</sup> The Santayana Edition received the notebook as a gift from the Hastings family in the late 1990s when the edition was housed at Texas A&M University. Brenda Bridges transcribed the first half before the edition moved to Indianapolis. Johanna Resler finished the

Hastings regarding the notebook because he wished to use it as a guide in writing *The Sense of Beauty*. “Mr Henshaw showed me yesterday the very careful and full notes you took in Phil. 8. Might I borrow them long enough to have them copied? They will be very useful to me as they are much more full than the brief headings from which I lectured[.] I am thinking of publishing a little book based on these discussions, so that your notes will be invaluable to me.”<sup>7</sup>

The use of the term “notebook” is prompted by the internal attributes of the lecture notes rather than the physical appearance, which consists of boards covered in marbled paper with a red leather spine. On the spine is printed, in gold lettering, “Aesthetics” and Santayana’s last name appears under the class title. Also printed on the spine is the course number, “Phil. VIII.” The book itself is approximately 8½ by 7 inches and comes from McNamee Binder in Cambridge, Massachusetts. There are 161 pages numbered by Hastings, which do not fill all of the blank pages of the notebook. The letter cited above from Santayana to Hastings’s was pasted into the front of the notebook, presumably by Hastings. The lecture notes are written in black pen and in pencil with marginalia that is written in red and black ink, and pencil (the Edition is unsure whether the marginalia can be attributed to Santayana even though he is known for habitual jotting of marginalia). John Cummings, a fellow student, wrote the notes for the 21 October 1892 lecture, and for the 24 October 1892 lecture Hastings borrowed Geo. Turner’s notes to copy into his notebook. There is also a copy of a test that Santayana gave to his class that has been pasted in towards the end of the notebook. Throughout the notebook there

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transcription and is in the process of proofing the work with Kristine Frost. Horatius’s son, John, received the notebook from his father, which enabled the family to later pass on the treasure to the Santayana Edition via the grandson, Paul. There were two other notebooks that Horatius Hastings passed on to his son at the time, Fine Arts I and II (two notebooks) from the 1891–92 class with Professor Charles H. Moore.

<sup>7</sup> Letter to Hastings dated 14 April 1893 from George Santayana.

are pictures depicting certain topics and themes discussed in class. The provenance of the pictures, which range from building façades to angels, is most likely from Hastings, due to the fact that a majority of them have been pasted in, in relation to particular lectures.

The lecture notes share an organization with *The Sense of Beauty* and correspond to the four main divisions of the published work. The notes for the four lectures of 30 September through 7 October treat the nature of beauty, the notes for seven of the eight lectures of 10 October through 2 November treat the materials of beauty (the lecture of 26 October is an exception), and the notes for the 13 lectures of 4 November through 7 December treat the topic of form. Only one lecture, the final one of 16 December 1892, treats the topic of expression, which is dealt with in the fourth and second-longest part of the published work.

While the lecture notes and the book are similar in structure, the notes reveal how the aesthetics course differed in content from the subsequent published work. The notes record Santayana's references to specific thinkers and philosophical works, diagrams he used in lectures, and detailed discussions which are eliminated in the published work. A further feature of the lecture notes is the inclusion of illustrations of specific art works along with notes of Santayana's comments on these works. The largest collection of such comments is found in a lecture on works that depict angels, a trace of which appears in *The Sense of Beauty*, only in an extremely attenuated form.

Notes for the lectures of 30 September and 5 October record the texts for Santayana's course along with recommendations for term papers. The primary texts appear to have been Gustav Theodor Fechner's *Vorschule der Aesthetik* (1876), Sully-Prudhomme's *L'Expression dans les Beaux-Arts* (1883), and Grant Allen's *Physiological Aesthetics* (1877). Further texts discussed include various articles by Allen, Jean-Marie Guyau's *Les Problèmes de l'Esthétique Contemporaine* (1884), Edmund Gurney's *The Power of Sound* (1880), Hermann von Helmholtz's *On the Sensations of Tone as a Physiological Basis for the Theory of Music* (1875), Herbert Spencer's *The Principles of*

*Psychology* (1855), and Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757). The mention of Guyau and Spencer confirms part of McCormick's speculations about what Santayana had read in aesthetics at the time of his course (MCCORMICK 127-2).

Other thinkers were discussed in lectures on pleasure and pain, where Santayana engaged the theories of Augustine, Plato, Schopenhauer, and Locke, as well as contemporary work of Münsterberg and James (whose *Principles of Psychology* Santayana had reviewed the previous year for the *Atlantic Monthly*). Santayana also discussed contemporary evolutionists' theory of pleasure and pain and objections to their position. In lectures notes on perception of form, discussions of Wundt, James, Fechner, and Kant appear. Discussion of apperception and Kant's theory is more prominent in the course notes than in the published work, where it is scattered and without direct reference to Kant. In his lectures on materials of beauty and color, Santayana made passing reference to Goethe's work on color, but in *The Sense of Beauty* the several mentions of Goethe all concern his poetry.

Santayana went into great detail in his lectures about the physiology of the ear and the eye, and Hastings has included in his notes diagrams presumably used in lectures. Notes for 21 October show a drawing of an ear and auditory nerve perceiving sound. Notes for 4 November have a couple of drawings of the anatomy of the eye as part of an explanation of color perception. The detailed physiological explanations certainly date the lectures in terms of the science of the day, and perhaps dispensing with this material in the published work came from a sense of what would most quickly become obsolete (though references to the ether in a discussion of a theory of vision can be found in *The Sense of Beauty*).

In addition to the physiological diagrams there is a diagram more relevant to Santayana's own ideas that appears in the notes for 10 October. In this lecture Santayana summarized the preceding lectures on the nature of beauty and presented a diagram of his classification of perceptions (this classification is key to the notion at issue in Altman's article, "Santayana's

Troubled Distinction: Aesthetics and Ethics in *The Sense of Beauty*,” which appears in the Fall 1998 edition of *Overheard in Seville: Bulletin of the Santayana Society*). It graphically represents the distinctions Santayana draws between perceptions of fact and perceptions of value. The latter perceptions are further discriminated into perceptions of pain and perceptions of pleasure. The latter are again distinguished as perceptions of extrinsic and intrinsic pleasures; and finally they are divided into perceptions of positive value in a thing objectified (that is, perceptions of beauty) and perceptions of positive value consciously subjectified.

Other notable material found in Santayana’s lectures includes criticisms of Whitman and American culture that are harsher compared to what appears in the published work. The lecture notes for 16 November correspond to section 27 of *The Sense of Beauty*, “Aesthetics of democracy,” in which democracy is cited as a case of unity in multiplicity through uniformity and Whitman is acknowledged as the poet of democracy. In lecture Santayana characterized Whitman as a great force though not a great poet and said that he was “at heart a very uncouth [poet].” Santayana characterized contemporary American life as narrow and lacking in noble interests, and he commented unfavorably on American modes of dress. In contrast, Santayana seems to have taken greater pains in his book to find the virtues of Whitman and democracy even as he acknowledged the difficulty of doing so. Santayana’s views are not surprising, of course, but it is interesting nonetheless to observe his restraint in print made explicit in the comparison.

The notes also contain, as one may expect, local wit and well-crafted expressions for which Santayana has a deserved reputation. His discussion of color included a comment about the objective ugliness of Yale blue; and his fondness for football appeared in his lectures and elicited laughter (according to the notes taken) when he remarked on the “rough sort ... of somber beauty” of football (7 October 1892). The notes record several interesting general observations on philosophy in connection with his discussion of metaphysical explanations of pleasure and pain. Santayana discussed the connection between morals and

metaphysical claims (which figures in his later criticism of Dewey) and made the claim “we are rationalists or irrationalists in our philosophy as a whole if we believe the world is good as it is or bad” (17 October 1892). And when he discussed the ultimately disadvantageous character of indefinite form in relation to the flaws of Emerson he flatly stated: “Better a definite wrong view than an indeterminate view that is neither right nor wrong” (23 November 1892).

The lecture notes come with a collection of photographs of works of art including buildings, paintings, drawings, and a mosaic. The photographs of buildings go with lectures in which architecture is discussed (9 November 1892 and 30 November 1892). The majority of examples are European cathedrals, though the Eiffel Tower is included in the illustrations and mentioned in lecture. About half the photographs are loose in the notebook, but many are pasted into the notebook with the corresponding lecture. This is, for the most part, the case with the works discussed in the lecture of 26 October 1892.

On the opposite page of the *Bulletin* here is a diagram of types of perceptions discussed in Santayana's course on aesthetics. This diagram was included with the lecture notes.

On 26 October Santayana gave a lecture for which there is no counterpart in *The Sense of Beauty*. It is atypical of the lectures in that it bears a title: “A lecture on Angels.” It is a survey of works by the artists Filippino Lippi (Italian painter, 1457–1504), Pietro Perugino (Italian painter, 1450–1523), Donatello (Italian sculptor, 1386–1466), Sir Joshua Reynolds (English painter, 1723–92), Carlo Crivelli (Italian painter, 1430/35–1495), Tintoretto (Italian painter, 1528–94), Titian (Italian painter, 1485–1576), Bartolomé Esteban Murillo (Spanish painter, 1617–82), Carlo Dolci (Italian painter, 1616–86), and Michaelangelo (Italian painter and sculptor, 1475–1564). The lecture notes record Santayana's comments on these artists and their work concerned with angels, and these comments are supplemented with pictures of many of the works mentioned.

This lecture falls toward the end of his lectures that correspond with Part II of *The Sense of Beauty*, “The Materials of Beauty”; however, the only obvious trace of the lecture to appear in the published work is found in section 46, “Ideal Characters,” a section in Part III, “Form.” In this section of *The Sense of Beauty* there is a paragraph about imaginary forms that takes as an example the form of a “winged man.” Santayana characterizes Michelangelo as one whose appreciation of the actual human form was so deep that such an imaginative form was uninteresting. This characterization appears rooted in an observation recorded in the lecture notes where Santayana is reported to have said, “Angelo never painted angels with wings” (26 October 1892).

The main interest of the lecture notes is the picture they provide of Santayana’s preparation for writing *The Sense of Beauty*. Specific thinkers and works of art are discussed thereby recording influences on Santayana’s book. Because it is known that Santayana himself inspected the notes and used them in writing *The Sense of Beauty*, as attested to by his letter to the student, they carry added reliability as a source of the published work. Included with this discussion of the lecture notes is a brief outline of the notebook. It is intended to make apparent the correspondence of the notebook with *The Sense of Beauty* and to situate lectures and topics mentioned in this discussion.

The outline of the notebook appears in the following pages.

MARTIN COLEMAN  
JOHANNA E. RESLER

*Santayana Edition, IUPUI, Indianapolis*

***Aesthetics, Philosophy 8***  
***George Santayana***

(From the lecture notes by H. B. Hastings unless otherwise indicated)

**30 September 1892**

- I. The topic of the course
  - A. Nature of taste
- II. History of philosophical discussion of taste
  - A. Ancients: Pythagoreans, Plato, Aristotle, Epicureans, Hebrews

**3 October 1892**

- I. Present day speculation on nature of beauty
- II. Field of aesthetics
  - A. Beauty is a sensation
  - B. Perception of value, not judgment of fact

**5 October 1892**

- I. Discussion of texts
  - A. Fechner, Sully-Prudhomme, Gurney, Helmholtz, Spencer, Grant Allen, Guyau, Burke
- II. Aesthetics
  - A. Judgment of value, not perception of fact
  - B. Aesthetic and moral judgments differ

**7 October 1892**

- I. Aesthetics as play
  - A. Kant
  - B. Evolutionists, Spencer
  - C. Santayana's response
- II. Athletics and aesthetics

**10 October 1892**

- I. Summary of preceding lectures
  - Diagram of types of perceptions
- II. Psychological theory of perception
- III. Idea of beauty
- IV. Pleasure and pain
  - A. Pain as absence of pleasure or vice versa
    - 1. Theological idea
      - a. Augustine, scholastics
      - b. Plato, Schopenhauer
      - c. Locke
    - 2. Pain something metaphysical
  - B. Pleasure and pain independent

**14 October 1892**

- I. The ugly
- II. Aesthetic value in whole, not elemental effects
- III. Color
- IV. Pleasure and pain
  - A. Theories of Münsterberg, James

**17 October 1892**

- I. Objection to evolutionists' theory of pain, pleasure
- II. Metaphysics and theory of pain
- III. Three views of pleasure and pain
  - A. Metaphysical
  - B. Physical
  - C. Specific nerves for pain, pleasure
- IV. Materials of aesthetics from senses
  - A. Generally from eye and ear
  - B. Breathing
  - C. Eating
  - D. Drinking

**19 October 1892**

- I. Contribution of vital processes to aesthetics
  - A. Aesthetic effects of solid food
  - B. Aesthetic effect of wine

## II. Cultural comparisons

- A. America
- B. Ancients
- C. Contemporary England

## III. Aesthetic sensibility and sexual instinct

**21 October 1892**

("by kindness of John Cummings;" these notes written in other hand)

## I. Music

- A. Hearing overtones
- B. Perception of changing melody

## II. Beauty and music

**24 October 1892**

("From Geo. Turners notes")

## I. Relation of passion to aesthetics

## II. Moral feelings and aesthetic feelings

**26 October 1892**—"A lecture on Angels"

## I. Byzantine angels

## II. Lippi

## III. Perugino

- A. *Tobias and the angel*
- B. *Virgin adoring child*

## IV. Donatello

## V. Reynolds

- A. Photographs of work

## VI. Crivelli

## VII. Tintoretto

## VIII. Titian

- A. *Entombment*

## IX. Murillo

- A. *La Conception de la Vierge*

## X. Dolci

- A. Photographs of works

## XI. Michaelangelo

**2 November 1892**

- I. The eye
- II. Colors

**4 November 1892**

- I. Design or form
- II. Problems to be solved by sense of sight
  - A. Speculation on evolution of sight
  - B. Theories of sight
    - 1. Light perception
    - 2. Wundt
    - 3. James

**9 November 1892**

- I. Fechner's experiments in aesthetics
  - A. Determining most pleasing shape
- II. *Goldner Schnitt* (Golden Mean) in architecture
- III. Architecture

**11 November 1892**

- I. Three kinds of unity in multiplicity
  - A. Uniformity
  - B. Arbitrary or indefinite organization
  - C. Definite organization
- II. Uniformity
- III. Analysis of aesthetic effect of sensuous infinity
  - A. Dangers
    - 1. Monotony

**16 November 1892**

- I. Democracy as case of uniformity
  - A. Advantages of uniformity
    - 1. Walt Whitman
- II. No historical idealized uniform society
  - A. Ancient Greeks much more uniform than contemporary America
  - B. Contemporary American life is narrow
- III. Walt Whitman

- A. Great merit: sees beauty of everyday
  - B. Great force, not great poet
- IV. Santayana dislikes uniformity

**18 November 1892**

- I. Second type of unity in multiplicity: Indeterminate organization
- II. Apperception
  - A. Indefinite organization brings out apperception
    - 1. Kant
    - 2. Wundt
  - B. Determination of apperception
  - C. Habits of apperception
- III. Apperceiving landscapes

**21 November 1892**

- I. Bias of observer necessary to apperception
  - A. Landscape
  - B. History
  - C. Others in sphere of subjective judgments
    - 1. Politics
    - 2. Religion
    - 3. Philosophy

**23 November 1892**

- I. Advantages of indeterminate organization
- II. Disadvantages of indeterminate organization
- III. Psychological character of apperception
  - A. History of apperception
  - B. Value of apperception
  - C. Passion for truth

**25 November 1892**

- I. Aesthetic apperception
- II. Third kind of unity in multiplicity: Determinate organization
  - A. Form compels one to see in certain order
  - B. Aesthetic value of organizing work to impose structure on observer

**28 November 1892**

## I. Art of decadence

A. Work more realistic in some aspect, becomes unreal in other aspects

B. Realism and idealism in art

## II. Advantage of organized object

A. Trains apperception

B. Enables ability to see beauty

## III. Variations in apperception of beauty

A. Beautiful human form in different ages

B. Beautiful dogs and horses

C. Arab music

**30 November 1892**

## I. Organized art objects

## II. Architecture

A. Same materials as nature

B. Motive reason is practical: shelter

C. Aesthetic seems adventitious at first

## III. Ornament can bring attention to form

**2 December 1892**

## I. Language

A. Material

B. One theory of origin language

C. Difference among languages

D. Children learning language

## II. Aesthetic factors in language

A. Vowels, consonants, etc.

B. Accent

C. Parts of speech

D. Inflexion

E. Rhythm

F. Rhyme in modern poetry

**5 December 1892**

- I. Literary form
- II. Epic: elements and effects
- III. Drama

**7 December 1892**

- I. Modern drama
  - A. Tragedy of manners
  - B. Provides something novel cannot
- II. Satire
- III. Character

**16 December 1892**

- I. Principles of classification
  - A. First term has intrinsic interest
  - B. First term has no intrinsic interest
  - C. Four cases
  - D. Comment on cases
- II. Artificial form
  - A. Condemned by person of taste
- III. Taste
- IV. Experience of landscape