

## ANIMAL FAITH

ALVIN E. KEATON

A discussion of animal faith can, it seems to me, profitably be divided into two parts: first, into a treatment of the supposed origin and basic function of animal faith, wherein other naturalists will largely agree with Santayana and, indeed, may have an almost synonymous term for animal faith in their own system; and, second, into an examination of the way Santayana elaborates a system of philosophy relying upon animal faith as a bridge between man and nature. In this discussion, the concepts of essence and substance of necessity enter in. I think it will also be useful to examine Santayana's differences with Kant, contrasting essences with phenomena. The differences are subtle, but they do throw into relief the faith posited in action—Santayana's animal faith.

What exists, or what are we justified in affirming to exist? The customary starting point for the elaboration of an answer to this question in modern times is Descartes:

And as I observed that in the words *I think, hence I am*, there is nothing at all which gives me assurance of their truth beyond this, that I see very clearly that in order to think it is necessary to exist, I concluded that I might take, as a general rule, the principle, that all the things which we very clearly and distinctly conceive are true. . . .<sup>1</sup>

If, with the empiricists, we maintain that conceptions are dependent upon and elaborated out of experience, we customarily replace the word "conceive" with the word "experience" in Descartes' formula for certitude.

At this point, again following custom, a good deal can be said about Hume and Kant with the upshot of the discussion being that we experience only phenomena and that things in themselves lie beyond the possibility of our experience—forever filtered through the *a priori* categories.

Santayana says, "Nothing given exists." By this I understand him to mean that nothing given or presented in experience has any claim to objective existence. Experience may be likened to the strain an organism feels under the stress of shocks from the environment.

Santayana attributes existence to a flux of events occurring in nature which are not experienced, but are, nevertheless, objects of belief. This belief is posited in action:

Every part of experience, as it comes, is illusion; and the source of this illusion is my animal nature, blindly labouring in a blind world.<sup>2</sup>

. . . the mention of some ulterior refuge or substance is indispensable to the doctrine of illusion, and though it may be expressed mythically must be taken

to heart, too. It points to other realms of being—such as those which by nature cannot be data of intuition but must be posited (if recognised by man at all) by an instinctive faith expressed in action.<sup>3</sup>

Animal faith, belief posited in action, is both an expression of naturally induced states and a shorthand phrase for any group of justificatory remarks describing any form of adaptive behavior on the part of an organism. It is also used as an explanatory rationale for action. In this respect, animal faith becomes a hypothetical construct.

Animal faith, being an expression of hunger, pursuit, shock, or fear, is directed upon *things*; that is, it assumes the existence of alien self-developing beings, independent of knowledge, but capable of being affected by action. While things are running on in the dark, they may be suddenly seized, appropriated, or destroyed. In other words, animal faith posits substances, and indicates their locus in the field of action of which the animal occupies the center. Being faith in action and inspired by action, it logically presupposes that the agent is a substance himself, that can act on other things and be affected by them. . . .<sup>4</sup>

The above quote is the transition point between the first and second parts of my paper. Most naturalists will agree with Santayana in positing the basically irrational, blind, groping, action-oriented animal nature out of which and, indeed, in subservience to which the rational functions develop; but they will not all agree with Santayana's description of the way this development proceeds. That Santayana is able to proceed in his own particular way is dependent upon a very subtle shift in the meaning of "posit" in the above quote. When Santayana has animal faith posit substance, "posit" is used in the sense of our explaining something after the fact. Animal faith used with "posit" in this sense retains its status as a hypothetical construct. Santayana also uses "posit" with the overtones of an act performed by an entity. Thus, animal faith begins to take on the character of an organizing entity. The first use of "posit" belongs to the order of explanation, the second to the order of genesis.

When Santayana goes on to have animal faith posit the self, there is no doubt that "posit" is used in the second sense. By this gradual and subtle shift in the meaning of "posit," Santayana transforms animal faith from an explanatory postulate into an active organizing force. Animal faith not only is a reasonable explanatory postulate arising from and directed upon nature, but it also begins to rationalize nature. First alien beings and then the self, by analogous extension, are posited.

In nature, modes of matter confront man, and man reacts to these modes of matter, whatever they may be. The human mind, having only the most vague understanding of material nature, attributes the reality of the aroused feelings in experience to essences. Our attention is thus directed to words, symbols, myths, and metaphysics. Animal faith is misdirected and takes these ghosts for its object rather than the substance

behind the symbols. Santayana refers to this state of affairs as sublimation of animal faith. Perhaps a better word than "sublimation" here would be "misdirection." Santayana refers to these ghosts onto which animal faith may be directed as false substances. "I will here draw up a list of the chief false substances which human faith may rest on when the characteristic human veil of words and pictures hides the modes of matter which actually confront the human race in action, and which therefore, throughout, are the *intended* object of its faith."<sup>5</sup> The six false substances that Santayana lists are souls, Platonic ideals, phenomena, truth, facts, and events.

The role of animal faith in Santayana's philosophy may be made clearer by contrasting Santayana's world view and Kant's with respect to essences given in intuition, or what Kant calls phenomena.

For Kant, the world emerges from the subject. Essentially, data given in experience are *organized* into the appearances of an external world. For Santayana, the subject, or self, emerges from the world through the agency of animal faith. Thus, Santayana reverses Kant on the role of the subject with respect to the world. Kant's view of the self in relation to the world is somewhat analogous to a man inside a machine equipped with instruments affected by the outside world but not exactly representing it. Kant's self also has the function of organizing experience. It is prescriptive for nature, prescribing the forms and condition under which it may appear to us. Whenever we ask why we already have knowledge *a priori* about the world of appearances, a Kantian will answer that we know because the same knowledge was at work in the formation of what appears. Santayana's self is a derived entity posited by animal faith. The world acts on the organism, and modifications engendered by the environment stimulate the intuition of essences. Santayana's self is almost, if not completely, passive. It is, therefore, hard to imagine much meaningful self-direction in Santayana's philosophy. The best that can be said is that when we are in one of life's calms, when the press of affairs abate, there occurs a more or less free play of essences; but this state of affairs might be likened to an engine running without a load.

Kant left us the problem of the subject-object split. If we accept Santayana's position, we recover the world but lose the self, or at least deprive it of its most cherished attributes. This problem, the overcoming of the subject-object split, is so important for Santayana that he is apparently willing to assign this minor derivative role to the self.

Kant and his continental followers, particularly the existentialists, start their examination of the self as they find it in a fully mature adult. The naturalists examine the self in terms of its historical development. The naturalists seek to explain the self whereas the followers of Kant seek to

describe it. If the starting point is a developed self, trouble arises in explaining the world. If, on the other hand, the starting point is nature, trouble arises in explaining the self.

Santayana's postulate, animal faith, is, in the words of Whitehead, "an objectification by the mediation of feeling." Santayana's thoughts are, at least in Whitehead's opinion, compatible with the system posited in *Process and Reality*: "If we allow the term 'animal faith' to describe a kind of perception which has been neglected by the philosophic tradition, then practically the whole of Santayana's discussion is in accord with the organic philosophy."<sup>6</sup>

Although animal faith posits substantial objects, it is possible for it to be misdirected and to take for its object not a mode of matter but some conglomerate of essences. The latter situation Santayana would, of course, regard as a delusion, an instance of taking the shadow for the substance. The only possible guiding function that the self might have in Santayana's system is that it might be able to prevent the misdirection or pathological sublimation of animal faith. If one has any degree of self-determination, it can best be used to bring one into harmony with nature.

The difference between Kant's phenomena and Santayana's essences given in intuition is the role they play. Kant's phenomena are primary in his system. Santayana's essences, as well as being symbols, are important for rationalizing the world. One also gets the feeling that Santayana expects more correspondence than Kant between what is given in experience and what exists. Although Santayana says animal faith posits objects, one almost has the feeling that animal faith actually gives us an awareness of objects. Almost, it seems that animal faith is a kind of perception, but a deeper, more basic perception than is conveyed by the senses. It is almost as if animal faith stands surety for perception.

Santayana's argument for abandoning scepticism is similar to that of the ancient stoics. There are certain features of the external world which compel belief. Their existence is posited whenever we react to them. Scepticism must be abandoned for the simple reason that *we cannot as human beings maintain it*. No matter how great our vigilance, in our unguarded moments we find ourselves slipping into belief. The story of Pyrrho and the mad dog illustrates this very well. As Pyrrho was descending the tree he apologized to his followers for being unable to "escape his humanity."

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Rene Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, trans. by John Vetch (La Salle: Open Court, 1962), p. 36.

<sup>2</sup> George Santayana, *Scepticism and Animal Faith* (New York: Dover, 1955), p. 52.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 54.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 214.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 218.

<sup>6</sup> Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (New York: Macmillan, 1929), p. 215.