PADRÓN Charles & Krzysztof Piotr SKOWROŃSKI (eds),
The Life of Reason in an Age of Terrorism

Brill/Rodopi, Leiden-Boston, 2018, 266 pages

María Aurelia Di Berardino

Translator: Leonardo de Rose

Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/ejpap/1562>

DOI: 10.4000/ejpap.1562

ISSN: 2036-4091

Publisher

Associazione Pragma

Electronic reference

María Aurelia Di Berardino, « PADRÓN Charles & Krzysztof Piotr SKOWROŃSKI (eds), *The Life of Reason in an Age of Terrorism* », *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy* [Online], XI-1 | 2019, Online since 19 July 2019, connection on 24 September 2020. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/ejpap/1562> ; DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/ejpap.1562>

This text was automatically generated on 24 September 2020.

Author retains copyright and grants the *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy* right of first publication with the work simultaneously licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.

PADRÓN Charles & Krzysztof Piotr SKOWROŃSKI (eds), *The Life of Reason in an Age of Terrorism*

Brill/Rodopi, Leiden-Boston, 2018, 266 pages

María Aurelia Di Berardino

Translation : Leonardo de Rose

REFERENCES

PADRÓN Charles & Krzysztof Piotr SKOWROŃSKI (eds), *The Life of Reason in an Age of Terrorism*, Brill/Rodopi, Leiden-Boston, 2018, 266 pages

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This work is developed within the framework of the ffi2017-84781-p research project, which is co-funded by the AEI (Spain) and the FEDER (European Union).

- 1 More than one reader of George Santayana will approach the pages of this book with the same anxiety that led me to go through them: Could it be even possible to give account of a current burning problem, *terrorism*, with elements of the philosophy of that “detached” thinker? A problem, the one of terrorism, that as the editors of the book note, presents itself with an uncommon visceral intensity whose media coverage surpasses by far the one of other urgent topics (global warming, immigration, etc.)
- 2 This book joins in its pages two indefinable potentials: *reason* (such as it is conceived by Santayana) and *terrorism*. What this ordered display that buries its roots into chaos and instinct may exactly refer to, and how the kaleidoscopic reality of terrorism can be dissected, seem to meet here in a raw dialogue that refuses to take distance from the circumstances, at the same time that it prudently steps away in order to gain

perspective. It is a strategy worthy of Santayana that we find in these pages: sometimes producing ironies from the grave and, some others, generating strategies to help us understand (understanding ourselves) some passage of this maze.

- 3 The territory of this dialogic meeting (reason and terrorism) is run through by this tension that is a vague ghostly reflection of what the very reading of Santayana generates. We have seen him detached but not overwhelmed; we know him ironic and, at the same time, joyful of the unusual moments of lucidity in the history of the human animal; we think him deaf, but still with wide open eyes. This ambivalence will probably be better understood if we resort to an analogy: let us imagine that the multiple interpretations contained in the book represent an effort similar to the one made by a group of athletes who are ordered to keep jumping two steps away from an abyss. Only two rules that the organizer of this strange competence might have dreamed are suspected (Santayana): 1) not getting too close to the edge, and 2) not getting too far away from the edge. Violating rule number 1 constitutes “the” rule of some philosophies (those I call “philosophies of the urgency”). On the contrary, violating rule number 2 seems to be the recurring strategy of what could be called “philosophies of the distancing.” As a spectator of the tournament, I think that Santayana, the organizer, has always chosen to violate rule number 2). That is to say, he has chosen the ironic retreat to his own citadel:

The philosophers and the nations cannot be happy unless they are separated; then they can only have a single purpose in their house and be tolerant in the street. If they possess a spirit worthy of being cultivated – which is not always the case –, they need to entrench it in some established citadel, in which it can reach its perfect expression. (Santayana, 2006, *The Realms of Being*, 17)

- 4 Nevertheless, someone might say that the game mentioned in the analogy presents a problem in the very formulation of its rules, which would disable any binary exclusive reading such as the one I have just offered: near/distant. After all, how many steps imply an “approach” and how many represent a “distancing”? Could it be that the interpretation of these rules depends, as in the case of dominations and powers, on who evaluates them? Is it thinkable that, being Santayana a philosopher of the distancing, he offers, in spite of himself, discursive strategies to face urgencies? Because, let me remind you, the issue (terrorism) is urgent, but our thinker seems not to be in a hurry, and to prefer the flight of the freed soul to the scream of the shipwrecked sailor.
- 5 In this light, the territory itself is a whole provocation that leads us to think that at times the tension is precisely that, a tension and, in that case, Santayana turns out to be a *philosopher of the balance*: he can calculate the steps in such a way that, as he mentions something interesting to understand terrorism – the urgent –, he sits back in his Poltrona armchair to see the sad show of the world – the invariant.
- 6 Going through these pages, I have got closer to the game containing the abyss of interpretations of this book. In that key, I think that some of them meet a balanced view of Santayana’s thinking; others insist on the distancing, but even then, they find reasons to reflect on the background of his philosophy; and others, why not, challenge the analogy, the view and the categories with which I read this happy provocation.
- 7 Jaquelyn Ann Kegley (“Forgetting and Remembering History: Memory and Self Identity”) takes us closer to the phenomenon of terrorism from the memory/oblivion dynamic. This way, from her perspective, a good part of the terrorist’s task lies in the destruction

of history with the purpose of proposing new narrations and generating other identities. Two concerns lead Kegley's proposal, namely: 1) why would terrorism deliberately try to "erase" memory and, consequently, to destroy history? And 2) which are the conditions of possibility for terrorism to be able to perform this task? The answers to what terrorism is will arise from Santayana's work, as long as it allows us to ask ourselves: what are those things that prevent us from being morally free and from being exposed to an attack, which might well "erase" our history without having even started babbling about what this all has been about?

- 8 Herman Saatkamp Jr. ("The Life of Reason and Terrorism: Strategies") sketches for us a Santayana that more than a "philosopher of the distancing" turns out to be a perfect sceptic. Saatkamp will pose out two questions regarding terrorism: What can we do? and what should we do? The author's strategy will be to rebuild four movements of Santayana's thinking to answer these questions (life of reason as an art, the possibility of a government that encourages it, the unpredictability of governments, and the monastic model). Santayana's answer is individualistic, and, what is more, reason is ineffective.
- 9 Katarzyna Krempleska ("Managing Necessity: Santayana on Forms of Power and the Human Condition") offers an analysis of Santayana's policy highlighting a hermeneutic tool which, for the authoress, constitutes Santayana's legacy to understand some current political phenomena, namely *management of necessity*. It is a tool that, on the other hand, implies a class of anthropological, naturalistic hermeneutic of self-governance. This is a significantly methodological reading which places necessity between dominations and powers.
- 10 Charles Padrón ("Santayanan Reason, Terror and Terrorism, and the Everyday World") wonders about the reach of Santayana's distrust in the potentiality of reason. The answer he offers advances in the following direction: it supposes the evolution and the recalibration of that concept throughout Santayana's life and work, which begins as an almost ubiquitous presence, to end as a brief perception of a murmur of nature. This fading away of the role of reason seems to render it quite ineffective against terrorism.
- 11 Eduardo Mendieta ("Assassination Nation: The Drone as Thanatological Dispositif") inspires a philosophic taxonomy to shine a light on his reading of Santayana. He points out that there would be a way of writing the history of philosophy by making a distinction between pacifist philosophers and proponents of war. Santayana is characterised here as a philosopher of war who, paradoxically, did not even thematise the real wars.
- 12 Luka Nolić ("Santayana and the (Postmodern) Spirit of Terrorism") explores the modifications that terrorism has generated in the societies threatened by it. He specifically focuses on the substantial change that the idea of "death" has suffered. While, for Santayana, death is conceived from the perspective of temporality, terrorism makes us think about the contingency of the moment of death.
- 13 Till Kinzel ("Santayana, Self-Knowledge and the Limits of Politics") analyses a peculiarity of the political life of the 21st century: the one of being the result of a deep disappointment about political organization in many countries. This state of affairs is a fertile ground to think about politics and its limits. In this text, Santayana will act as Cicerone in the attempt to rebuild a thought framed in a tradition of philosophical

modesty: a thought that is far from concrete political circumstances even though it stops to consider concepts such as those of freedom, democracy, and authority.

- 14 Daniel Moreno ("Santayana on Americanism") will return to a problematic relationship between philosophy and politics in Santayana, namely philosophic distancing which is not – and cannot be understood as – political indifference. Leaving aside the fact that Santayana did not answer to the events he witnessed, Moreno understands that his philosophy does indeed belong to this world inasmuch as it can be set as a conceptual frame to delineate some solutions to the here and now. It is the essay *Americanism* that will guide Moreno's reflections to give an account of this pretension of bringing Santayana's flight down to earth
- 15 Matthew Caleb Flamm ("Liberalism and the Vertigo of Spirit: Santayana's Political Theodicy") develops Santayana's political theodicy. According to Flamm, this author's power lies in its interesting proposals about the origin and destiny of societies. This destiny conceals a paradox: having conquered matter, human beings feel more miserable every time.
- 16 Matteo Santarelli ("Dewey, Santayana, and 'Ndrangheta: Understanding a Complex Phenomenon") invites George Santayana and John Dewey to dine with the Calabrian mafia: the 'Ndrangheta. Two things will appear as relevant here: on the one hand, the need to think organised crime philosophically; and on the other hand, the need to think it multifocally. Santayana's contribution is related to his conception of the activist order, specifically, in his characterization of what a faction is. The point that makes the direct association between the mafia and the activist order difficult is that the mafia has updated (*aggiornato*) as an enterprise. However, behind the corporate shine, there remain aftertastes of both the old wars between clans and the existence of codes of honour – chivalry – which would allow for *Santayanan* reading.
- 17 Nóra Horváth's interest (in "'A Happy Snow-Flake Dancing in the Flaw': Reflections on Santayanan Alternatives and Surviving a New Dark Age") lies in giving an account, from Santayana, of a state of anxiety: that of the current changes in international politics. Some of the questions the authoress intends to answer are about the nature of what kind of political position to take and what to do at an individual and collective level; ultimately, how to face radicalism. Santayana will be understood here as a social critical philosopher, since he understands that political conditions originate in human ambitions. The political use of these ambitions may be prevented partly by resorting to self-knowledge and, partly, by promoting a political system ensuring the opportunities to take genuinely free decisions.
- 18 Giuseppe Patella ("Barbarism Begins at Home: Santayana and Barbarism in Art and Life") reflects on barbarism and its place in history. From Walter Benjamin to George Santayana, through Giambattista Vico, the author proposes that we understand the phenomenon of barbarism as a central component of any civilization. But he also proposes to understand barbarism in local terms; this means that every well understood barbarism begins at home. Patella will analyse Santayana's conception of barbarism, which is closely linked to this author's conception of art. In contrast to the barbaric idea of *art for art's sake* (which exalts vehemence and abundance without questioning the consequences), his notion of art incorporates him into life and, by doing so, he is given back intelligence. Associating art with life becomes an antidote against barbarism.

- 19 Daniel Pinkas (“Egotism, Violence and the Devil: On Santayana’s Use of the Concept of Egotism”) gives us a reading of egotism in Santayana, relating it to the resurgence of this topic in current psychology, and to its links with violence and aggression. In this way, he recovers those considerations that Santayana placed in his analysis of the German philosophy and egotism. This approach of Santayana to the transcendental philosophy also implies a possible relationship between egotism and Teutonic bellicosity.
- 20 José Beltrán Llavador (“A Religion without Fanaticism: Little Lessons of Wisdom from Santayana”) journeys through the history of Santayana’s education through his intellectual autobiography. This journey is the complete expression of an initial idea: behind any theory, there is a biography. From *Persons and Places* to *The Realms of Being*, Santayana displays his philosophical credo: spiritual materialism. Santayana’s actuality consists, in the author’s opinion, in leaving us a foldable manifest throughout all his work, or even, some materials to attain a state of utopia. The acknowledgement of barbaric elements in the existence is precisely the reason for dreaming of a possible better world.
- 21 Andrés Tutor (“Santayana on Pluralism, Relativism and Rationality”) intends to analyse the problem of the pluralism of values in Santayana’s socio-political writings. This becomes an indispensable procedure once Tutor defines terrorism as a conflict of values. In Santayana’s opinion, pluralism belongs to the realm of matter, and not to the one of essences. If the latter were the case, there would be no conflict of values, because essences do not admit contradiction among themselves. Therefore, Tutor will wonder if Santayana is even a relativist, and will offer, as part of his answer, a strategy that changes the axis of the discussion: he will propose the notion of “relationism” to state explicitly its values and plurality, according to Santayana.
- 22 Cayetano Estébanez (“Santayana’s Idea of Madness and Normal Madness in a Troubled Age”) will refer to the loss of the humanistic sense of life in the current world. This is a real loss of which Santayana has a lot to say from his philosophy. Especially, regarding (Nietzschean and contemporary) nihilism, Santayana represents a philosophical/poetic effort to explore the weight *madness* and *normal madness* have in our lives *without sacrificing reason*. Estébanez reminds us that, far from sinking into the egotism that he criticises so much, Santayana makes of this one an open approach – such as life itself –, towards which all his worries are directed.
- 23 Krzysztof Piotr Skowroński (“Santayana’s Philosophy of Education against Fanaticism and Barbarity”) approaches the reflections about education in Santayana’s work. The progress through philosophy, liberal arts, and humanities possibly constitutes the means to prevent or limit barbarism and fanaticism. It is true, Skowroński says, that there is no systematised corpus on education in Santayana. However, it is a research we owe ourselves and which can shed light on current events. Skowroński points out the fact that schooling becomes part of a broader humanistic project (the one of boosting individuals by encouraging creativity, harmonization of interests in conflict, imagination, and self-expression) which makes sense especially when we want to think about social and political matters seriously. That all-inclusive and humanistic project represents an alternative way to say that the possibility of thinking freely blocks, in principle, any domination.

AUTHORS

MARÍA AURELIA DI BERARDINO

Universidad Nacional de La Plata, Argentina

aure.diberardino[at]gmail.com