

# Getting Over the Quarrel Between Philosophy and Poetry

## *Superando a Disputa Entre a Filosofia e a Poesia*

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**Abstract:** Athenian culture, including the likes of Plato and Aristophanes, set poetry and philosophy at odds. The quarrel between the two has remained at the core of western philosophical practices into the twenty-first century to the extent that many if not most professional philosophers today still do not accept Augustine, Emerson, or the late Heidegger as “philosophers.” The tide seems slowly to be shifting but little is said concerning the ancient quarrel. Here I aim to draw on the work of C. S. Peirce, William James, and George Santayana to show that the basis of the quarrel is mistaken. As philosophy moves past its deductivist failures of the last few centuries, it will begin to see that poetry and philosophy are continuous features of what Santayana calls the human spirit, and that they work in concert to yield knowledge of human experience. Peirce’s work elicits the continuity between the two; James and Santayana suggest that poetry returns to our discourses the “thickness” of experience that is generally eliminated by conceptual analysis; and Santayana reveals and enacts a picture of philosophy that makes art and poetic expression central to a philosophical life.

**Keywords:** James. Peirce. Plato. Poetry. Santayana. Spirit.

**Resumo:** *A cultura ateniense, inclusive personagens como Platão e Aristófanes, colocou a poesia e a filosofia em choque. A disputa entre os dois permaneceu no cerne das práticas filosóficas ocidentais até o Século XXI, ao ponto de muitos, se não a maioria, dos filósofos profissionais hoje, ainda não aceitarem Agostinho, Emerson ou mesmo Heidegger como “filósofos”. Esta tendência parece estar mudando lentamente, já que pouco se fala sobre a antiga disputa. Aqui, pretendo recorrer à obra de C.S. Peirce, William James e George Santayana para demonstrar que a base da disputa é equivocada. À medida que a filosofia passa por seus fracassos dedutivistas dos últimos séculos, começará a ver que a poesia e a filosofia são aspectos contínuos do que Santayana denomina o espírito humano, e que trabalham em conjunto para gerar conhecimento sobre a experiência humana. A obra de Peirce traz à tona a continuidade entre as duas; James e Santayana sugerem que a poesia devolve aos nossos discursos a “densidade” da experiência que é geralmente eliminada pela análise conceitual; e Santayana revela e interpreta uma imagem da filosofia que torna a arte e a expressão poética como ponto focal da vida filosófica.*

**Palavras-chave:** James. Peirce. Platão. Poesia. Santayana. Espírito.

I have, since my first reading of Plato, wondered about the quarrel between philosophy and poetry. Like a stone in my shoe, it has bothered me throughout my career. I have learned much from Plato and Aristotle, but equally much from Baudelaire, T. S. Eliot, and Elizabeth Bishop. Moreover, in contemporary culture most young people launch their philosophical questioning from the lyrics of popular songs—lyrics that speak directly about their lives and experiences. Consider the cultural impact of the Beatles, Lou Reed, Joni Mitchell, Tupac, and Laura Marling. Something has been amiss in philosophy for some years, and I suspect that one aspect of this has been the separation of poetry from philosophy.

At 600-601 of the *Republic*, Plato notably, perhaps notoriously, described the basis of the quarrel between philosophy and poetry:

In like manner the poet with his words and phrases may be said to lay on the colours of the several arts, himself understanding their nature only enough to imitate them; and other people, who are as ignorant as he is, and judge only from his words, imagine that if he speaks of cobbling, or of military tactics, or of anything else, in metre and harmony and rhythm, he speaks very well—such is the sweet influence which melody and rhythm by nature have. And I think you must have observed again and again what a poor appearance the tales of poets make when stripped of the colours which music puts upon them, and recited in simple prose [...]

The imitator or maker of the images knows nothing of true existence; he knows only appearances [...]<sup>1</sup>

Socrates' initial worry is that poets peddle untruths—appearances rather than actualities. But he also worries that poetry, in being imitative, teases and titillates without appealing at all to the rational dimension of our souls:

The best of us, as I conceive, when we listen to a passage of Homer, or one of the tragedians, in which he represents some pitiful hero who is drawling out his sorrows in a long oration, or weeping, and smiting his breast—the best of us, you know, delight in giving way to sympathy, and are in raptures at the excellence of the poet who stirs our feelings most.<sup>2</sup>

And yet, when stripped of its ornamentation, poetry is seen to be barren. As Stanley Rosen puts it, “poetry encourages desire and hence the will.”<sup>3</sup> One sees this same worry more recently in the 1980s in Alan Bloom's rejection of the music of Mick Jagger and Prince.<sup>4</sup> The caricatured and, I think, the standard view of Plato's concern

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1 Trans. Benjamin Jowett. Available in: <http://www.literaturepage.com/read/therepublic/364.html>.

2 *Ibid.*, 371.

3 ROSEN, Stanley. *The Quarrel between Philosophy and Poetry*. New York: Routledge, 1988, p. 13.

4 BLOOM, Allan. *The Closing of the American Mind*. New York: Simon and Schuster, Inc., 1987.

usually ends here. In short, philosophers should eliminate poetic elements from their thought and their writing. It's easy to see just how effective this suggestion was in the twentieth century—one need only read the work of early Wittgenstein, A. J. Ayer, Hans Reichenbach, Rudolf Carnap, and the younger Sellars. These are stark, barren language-scapes, free of all serious experiential consideration of and open relation to feelings, attitudes, perceptions, and orientations. They are unpoetic in both style and content. Those of us who grew up philosophically in the late twentieth century learned how to write philosophy that was freed from connections to basic human experiences and from poetic intervention. In retrospect, it seems a tawdry sort of skill to have intentionally developed, but that is how cultural habits work. Philosophy, despite its many changes since the 1970s and despite the late work of Heidegger, has still not moved very far in the direction of bringing philosophy and poetry back to working in concert.

But the lines in the *Republic* leave us with a question staring directly and boldly at us. George Santayana gave articulation to this question some years ago: “why did Plato, after banishing the poets, poetize the universe in his prose?”<sup>5</sup> As Rosen points out, “the Republic, like all Platonic dialogues [...] is itself a poem.”<sup>6</sup> Rosen then cuts to the chase, offering an assessment that would have been congenial to Santayana: “Philosophy without poetry, exactly like poetry without philosophy, is immediate or unmeasured. In the last analysis, there is no quarrel between philosophy and poetry.”<sup>7</sup> I want to explore Rosen's claim in a superficial way using the ideas of three North American thinkers: Charles Peirce, William James, and George Santayana. Leaving the technical depth for later occasions, I want to sketch some possible grounds for getting over the quarrel between philosophy and poetry.

Rosen's insightful analysis of Plato's work still leaves one with a sense that philosophy and poetry are completely separate realms that need to be, one might say, forced into a relationship as external allies. The three thinkers I have in mind, as I read them, suggest that poetry and philosophy, though practically distinguishable, should be considered integral to each other and continuous as related features of the workings of what Santayana called “spirit.” Indeed, if Ivo Ibrí is right, Peirce's philosophy is a rational development of a poetic insight.<sup>8</sup> These thinkers present us with ideas that make sense of the phrase “poetic philosophy.”

In early North American thought, Margaret Fuller, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Henry Thoreau are easily identified as “poetic philosophers.” And this fact is the reason all three have been excommunicated from “philosophy proper” since the beginning of the twentieth century. At the beginning of my career it was virtually impossible to publish anything about these thinkers in philosophy venues. Though things have changed a bit since then, there are still many—if not most—in the “profession” who would not count these thinkers as “philosophers.” Peirce, James, and Santayana were all, in different ways, influenced by these thinkers and, I will

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5 SANTAYANA, George. *The Essential Santayana*. Martin Coleman (ed.). Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009, p. 272.

6 ROSEN, p. 1.

7 SANTAYANA, p. 26.

8 IBRI, Ivo. “Reflections on a Poetic Ground in Peirce's Philosophy,” *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, 45, 3, 2009, pp. 273-307.

contend, the grounds for making sense of and championing “poetic philosophy” found their way into the philosophical schema of all three.

My own experience has led me to agree with Rosen that, to be their best, philosophy and poetry must in some way work together. I believe the future of the discipline, and the basic philosophical endeavor of humanity, lies in this direction. In what follows, I will simply sketch some of the ways in which Peirce, James, and Santayana open some avenues for bringing philosophy and poetry back together.

## Peirce and the Poets

Charles Peirce makes two claims about language that should make us reconsider twentieth century attempts to finalize meaning and truth. The first is his off-hand remark that languages begin with the bringing together of metaphors and indices (in the form of prepositions).<sup>9</sup> Since both metaphors and indices, in different ways, are constitutively vague, it is a mistake to suppose that any semeiotic meaning is fully and finally made clear. This does not mean that we should not hunt for methods of clarifying, but it does mean that we should not overstate the degree to which we actually *do* clarify our meanings. In a variety of places over the course of his career, Peirce asserted in passing that all signs, and all languages, are inherently vague:

No communication of one person to another can be entirely definite, i.e., non-vague. We may reasonably hope that physiologists will some day find some means of comparing the qualities of one person's feelings with those of another, so that it would not be fair to insist upon their present incomparability as an inevitable source of misunderstanding. Besides, it does not affect the intellectual purport of communications. But wherever degree or any other possibility of continuous variation subsists, absolute precision is impossible. Much else must be vague, because no man's interpretation of words is based on exactly the same experience as any other man's. Even in our most intellectual conceptions, the more we strive to be precise, the more unattainable precision seems. It should never be forgotten that our own thinking is carried on as a dialogue, and though mostly in a lesser degree, is subject to almost every imperfection of language.<sup>10</sup>

In short, then, to claim that philosophy can ultimately escape the vagueness that both underwrites and constitutes poetic language is to begin with a fundamental mistake. Like a pack of hounds misled by a bait trail, philosophers in the last century seem to have gone down the wrong road—a road that from a Peircean perspective arrives at a dead end.

A better road opens up, Peirce suggested, if philosophers and scientists (those whose focus is inquiry and reasoning) realize that they should learn from poets how to perceive better and how to better attend to our everyday experiences. Peirce

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9 PEIRCE, Charles. *The Collected Papers of Charles S. Peirce*, vols. 1-8. Hartshorne, Weiss, and Burks (eds.). Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931-58 [Listed here by volume and paragraph number. 2.290, note 1].

10 *Ibid.*, 5.506.

first brings poetry and the presentness of experience together: “The poetic mood approaches that state in which the present appears as it is present.”<sup>11</sup> Moreover, one of the three primary skills for phenomenologically encountering the world is, for Peirce, the “artist’s observational power.”<sup>12</sup> This is not a gratuitous claim on Peirce’s part; for him, good reasoning begins with good observation. Moreover, good observation is an intellectual act—perception always involves perceptual judgment. Perception—the poet’s talent—and reasoning—the philosopher’s talent—are thus, in Peirce’s cosmos, continuous with each other; there is no stark and clear dividing line. This is clear in Peirce’s occasional division of persons according to his three categories. Those who emphasize firstness tend to be artists and poets; those who emphasize secondness are active folks who try to accomplish as much as they can; and those who emphasize thirdness tend to be reasoners such as scientists and philosophers. But Peirce makes these distinctions as a matter of emphasis. The categories remain continuous; they can be distinguished but they are not ontologically separable. So, every person, regardless of their categorial emphasis, has the ability to participate in all three modes of being.

A final interesting point Peirce made regarding poetry was his well known claim that the development of the cosmos creates both a poem and an argument: “The Universe as an argument is necessarily a great work of art—for every fine argument is a poem and a symphony—just as every true poem is a sound argument [...]”<sup>13</sup> This is in part a reminder that arguments are open-ended and open to revision. Peirce jettisoned the modernist tendency to take deduction as the model for all reasoning, and he embraced his own abductive/inductive method as exemplary of the very best reasoning available to human animals. This is *why* the cosmos can be both an argument and a poem. But Peirce also maintained that poetry could be true and false:

Bad poetry is false, I grant; but nothing is truer than true poetry. And let me tell the scientific men that the artists are much finer and more accurate observers than they are, except of the special minutiae that the scientific man is looking for.<sup>14</sup>

Peirce’s linking of poetry and perception, together with his emphasis on the function of perception in inquiry, creates the possibility of seeing in his work one way of ending the quarrel.

Despite these suggestions, however, Peirce remained wary when firstness-folks or literary people took to writing or commenting on philosophy. “Bad poetry is false” after all. However, we should be clear that he was worried not by the presence of poesy but by the absence of adequate thought in its deployment. In short, if a literary or poetic bent leads one away from truth-seeking into merely rhetorical and commercial territory, then Peirce finds it wanting. As for Plato, it

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11 PEIRCE. *The Essential Peirce*, vol. 2, eds. Houser *et al.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998, pp. 149-50.

12 *Ibid.*, 147.

13 PEIRCE, CP, 5.119.

14 *Ibid.*, 1.315.

seems, it is not poetry itself that is warned off, but specific kinds of poetry. And, one would assume that *prose* that suffers from the same problems would also not be welcome in Peirce's world of inquiry.

### William James, Concepts, and Immediacy

Of the original pragmatists, William James was the most poetically inclined as a writer. For this reason he is often claimed to be the best stylist—and the worst philosopher—among the three. And it is also for this reason that mainstream philosophy of the mid- to late-twentieth century either ignored James's work or explicitly rejected it for being non-philosophical.

A number of avenues toward defending poetic philosophy arise in James's writings. Here I will address the one that I find most compelling—James's attention to and insistence on the importance of immediacy or immediate experience. James was throughout his career interested in the way that concepts worked; he saw their importance as a tool for organizing and inquiring into the world. But he also worried that we rely too heavily on them for tasks for which they are not well suited.

As did Peirce, James maintained that knowing begins in perception—the direct encounter with the environment in which we find ourselves. In perception we encounter or experience what James sometimes called the “thickness” of things. This is the rich center of our experiences. Out of our perceptions we develop conceptions that selectively give articulation to features of experience. These conceptions then become filters for and organizers of future perceptions. For James, “concepts flow out of perceptions and into them again.”<sup>15</sup> Or again, “Percepts and concepts interpenetrate and melt together, impregnate, and fertilize each other. Neither taken alone, knows reality in its completeness.”<sup>16</sup>

The upshot is that conceptual knowing—especially when one's conceptions are sharp and clear—holds us at a remove from the thickness of primary experience. Moreover, *because* it is selective, conceptualizing, *by its very nature*, leaves out some aspects of our immediate experiences. Thus, for James, “Conceptual knowledge is forever inadequate to the fullness of the reality to be known.”<sup>17</sup>

The selectivity and piecemeal nature of conceptual knowing leaves James with the problem of how it is we might get a fuller knowledge or a better grasp of our primary experiences. James's own rhetorical practice was to load his texts with analogies and metaphors that he believed would better illustrate or reflect the features of his experiences. Indeed, this is what often led literalist readers astray in their reading of *Pragmatism*, especially in James's various descriptions of “truth.” Poetic philosophy requires a much more nuanced reading. Thus, for James, as for Peirce, all inquiry must begin with good perceptual skills.<sup>18</sup>

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15 JAMES, William. *Some Problems of Philosophy*. New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1916, p. 232.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 235.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 245.

18 Though I will not develop the idea here, one of the key philosophical features of American philosophers is a focus on receptivity and perception. I have written about this elsewhere in a variety of places.

The deeper features of reality are found only in our perceptual experience. Here alone do we acquaint ourselves with continuity, or the immersion of one thing in another, here alone with self, with substance, with qualities, with activity in its various modes, with time, with cause, with change, with novelty, with tendency, and with freedom.<sup>19</sup>

The problem that arises for James has to do with how we might give articulation to these perceptual knowings. The more narrow, fixed, and inflexible the concepts, the less power they have for this articulation despite their strength in generalizing particular actions and events. The more vague, general (that is, in range of applicability), and metaphorical they are, the better their ability to give voice to the thickness. It is at this juncture, as we will see, that Santayana took up and developed James's work. Apart from his own writing practices, which were often poetic in nature, James did not explicitly turn to poetry to solve his problem. However, he did acknowledge the inadequacy of a philosophy stuck with narrow and fixed concepts.

If the aim of philosophy were the taking full possession of all reality by the mind, then nothing short of the whole of immediate perceptual experience could be the subject-matter of philosophy, for only in such experience is reality intimately and concretely found.<sup>20</sup>

I do think approaching the possession of reality is one aim of philosophy. And it is precisely poetic language that enables this possession in a conceptual way. James here opens the door to poetic philosophy though he stops short of openly endorsing it, except perhaps in *A Pluralistic Universe* where he argues that inquiry must draw on all possible sources of evidence—from what we call empirical data, to biography, to witnessing, to psychic experiences. He left it to his, perhaps wayward, student, Santayana, to step through the door and take up the cause of poetic philosophy directly.

### Santayana and the Modes of Spirit

George Santayana stepped into the doorways opened by James and walked farther down the road to poetizing philosophy. As he recounts, the deepest lesson he learned from his teacher was the importance of perception, of the thick worlds of human experiences.

Even then what I learned from him was perhaps chiefly things he explicitly never taught, but which I imbibed from the spirit and background of his teaching. Chief of these, I should say, was a sense of the immediate: for the unadulterated, unexplained, instant fact of experience.<sup>21</sup>

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19 JAMES, p. 252.

20 *Ibid.*, 251-52.

21 SANTAYANA, p. 12.

This lesson called for a reorientation of philosophical practice—a reorientation that became the basis of Santayana’s philosophical career.

First and foremost, Santayana rejected the uncriticized belief that philosophers were to seek absolute truth. Our very finitude argues against such an aim. This, after all, is why Peirce, and later Royce as well, turned to an ongoing community of inquirers in the face of human fallibility. As Santayana put it, “the absolute truth is undiscoverable just because it is not a perspective. Perspectives are essential to animal apprehension [...]”<sup>22</sup> The ontology of finitude requires that we re-think what the human animal does and can do as a philosopher. This was another central lesson learned from James. Santayana cashed out the philosophizing of the finite animal in what he called “spirit.” We are made for self-discovery and self-expression but not for grasping the whole of the absolute. In Jamesian terms, we can develop “truths” in attempting to handle the “real,” but we have no direct access to what James called “Essential Truth.” “Mind,” Santayana argued,

was not created for the sake of discovering the absolute truth [...]. The function of mind is rather to increase the wealth of the universe in the spiritual dimension, by adding appearance to substance and passion to necessity, and by creating all those private perspectives, and those emotions of wonder, adventure, curiosity, and laughter which omniscience would exclude.”<sup>23</sup>

Instead of building barriers between various human capacities, Santayana focused on their continuity and the power of their synthetic development: “This world of free expression, this drift of sensations, passions, and ideas, perpetually kindled and fading in the light of consciousness, I call the *Realm of Spirit*.”<sup>24</sup>

The intellectual dimension of spirit seeks truth, not as absolute, but only as reformulated in a Jamesian way: “The truth that is requisite for the honour and peace of spirit is not omniscience but the absence of delusions; and this, where humility exists, does not demand infinite information.”<sup>25</sup> We must turn away from an abstracted God’s view of things and focus on the thickness of our own living immediacies. We must look at experience with openness and honesty, and speak as plainly as we can about what we find. In doing so, we will be capable of sharing visions with each other and of enriching the lives of individuals and cultures. Santayana takes our naturalness and finitude seriously; our “knowing” needs to be grasped as it is experienced. As do Peirce and James, Santayana does not reject truth as an ideal but only as an actuality and a finality: “knowledge is not truth, but a view or expression of the truth; a glimpse of it secured by some animal with special organs under special circumstances.”<sup>26</sup> When philosophy is re-oriented toward being an act of spirit for self-expression and self-knowledge, the door to poetic philosophy

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22 *Ibid.*, p. 153.

23 *Ibid.*, pp. 153-54.

24 *Ibid.*, p. 152.

25 *Ibid.*, p. 403.

26 *Ibid.*, p. 232.

is opened wide. But Santayana does more than *allow* poetic philosophy. He asks us to pursue it so that we will be better philosophers.

Santayana does not reject the abstracting work of the intellect—that too is an essential and important feature of spirit's abilities. Nor does he resist system-building, as his own work illustrates. But he does maintain that we need to understand philosophical outlooks and systems for what they are: "a system of philosophy is a personal work of art which gives a specious unity to some chance vista in the cosmic labyrinth [...] it would be something novel if a philosopher [...] should substitute the pursuit of sincerity for the pursuit of omniscience."<sup>27</sup>

If philosophy is to engage in open and sincere reflection on the "truths" of experience, then poetry becomes crucial to its practice for several reasons. The first reason is that intellectual, discursively presented abstractions, as James noted, are *intended* to be removed from the thickness of perceptual experience. Poetry stays closer to the experiential source:

If poetry in its higher reaches is more philosophical than history, because it presents the memorable types of men and things apart from unmeaning circumstances, so in its primary substance and texture poetry is more philosophical than prose because it is nearer to our immediate experience.<sup>28</sup>

The poetic features of spirit thus work in concert with our prosaic intellect to build the richest philosophical outlooks. Some of what gets ignored or filtered out by conceptual abstraction can be returned to one's outlook through poesy. Thus, for Santayana,

Even if defeated in the pursuit of truth, the spirit may be victorious in self-expression and self-knowledge; and if a philosopher could be nothing else, he might still be a moralist and a poet. He will do well to endow his vision of things with all the force, colour, and scope of which his soul is capable.<sup>29</sup>

In this connection, I think not only of Plato's dialogues but also of Augustine's *Confessions* and Emerson's essays. Models of such thinking occur throughout the history of western thought—even recently as when we look at the writings of someone like Henry Bugbee whose work as an assistant professor at Harvard in 1947 was liked by Quine (and later by Hilary Putnam) though it did not measure up to their conceptions of philosophy. Quine, for example, said "Henry [Bugbee] is the ultimate exemplar of the examined life."<sup>30</sup> (Mooney, p. ix); but that did not translate into his being a good professional philosopher of the twentieth century.

As James noted, concepts intend to leave out force, colour, and detail of various kinds. Poetry allows the philosopher to restore some of this to her philosophical vision. The poet employs language and sound, and occasionally visual cues, to reach for things otherwise missed or ignored. As Santayana suggested, the poet

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27 *Ibid.* p. 47.

28 *Ibid.*, p. 268.

29 *Ibid.*, p. 155.

30 MOONEY, Edward (ed.). *Wilderness and the Heart*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1999, p. ix.

dips into the chaos that underlies the rational shell of the world and brings up some superfluous image, some emotion dropped by the way, and reattaches it to the present object; he reinstates things unnecessary, he emphasizes things ignored, he paints in again into the landscape the tints which the intellect has allowed to fade from it.<sup>31</sup>

Consider the difference between T. S. Eliot's attempt in his dissertation to describe immediate experience in the thought of F. H. Bradley and his similar attempt in *Four Quartets*. In his dissertation, Eliot argues that "although we cannot know immediate experience directly as an object, yet we can arrive at it by inference, and even conclude that it is the starting point of our knowing, since it is only in immediate experience that knowledge and its object are one."<sup>32</sup> In "Burnt Norton" he says the following:

At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless;  
Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is,  
But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity,  
Where past and future are gathered. Neither movement from nor towards,  
Neither ascent nor decline. Except for the point, the still point,  
There would be no dance, and there is only the dance.<sup>33</sup>

The latter is infinitely richer, more interesting, and I would argue, in some ways more on target. The *Quartets* bring alive and direct our attention to the hidden features of the conceptual story outlined in the dissertation. *Taken together*, the prose and the poetry provide an even fuller picture of what Eliot means by immediate experience, temporality, and our abilities to grasp either.

Twentieth century analytic philosophy openly and persistently excommunicated feeling and emotion from the creating of philosophical discourses. Its aim, apparently, was to purify reason and thus to purify philosophy—to keep them both untainted by anything a-rational or irrational. What philosophers of analysis failed to note were the emotional and felt attachments already present in their worlds of experience; instead, they seemed bent on achieving that non-perspectival position of the absolute. The sincere philosopher would do better to stay aware of these and the roles they play even in the most logically pure thought. Anyone who attended and participated in APA meetings in the 1970s would have noted the irony of the anger, viciousness, and conceit that pervaded "discussions" of the finer points of logic and reasoning that were supposed to be above and beyond emotion and feeling. One suspects that if the points were openly and absolutely clear and reasonable, the tensions in the debates—and their consequent emotions—would not have arisen. Again, poetry enables more sincerity and honesty on this score:

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31 SANTAYANA, p. 269.

32 ELIOT, T. S. *Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F. H. Bradley*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1989, p. 19.

33 ELIOT. "Four Quartets". Available in: <http://www.coldbacon.com/poems/fq.html>.

“For the first element which the intellect rejects in forming its ideas of things is the emotion which accompanies the perception; and this emotion is the first thing the poet restores.”<sup>34</sup>

Or again, “in poetic thinking the guiding principle is often a mood or a quality of sentiment.”<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, as both Peirce and James noted earlier, poetry cuts across the various features of the cosmos and brings things together through analogy and metaphor. The very history of western sciences is laden with and depends upon such poetic analogizing from ether to atoms to waves. Philosophy, instead of running from poetry to achieve purity, ought to embrace poetry to enhance the richness and to deepen the honesty of one’s outlook.

## In Sum

Plato worried about the effects of poetry in his ideal city. But, as Rosen carefully documents, his quarrel was with specific kinds of poetic activity: poetry that aimed simply at rhetorical effect and poetry that was cheap and imitative. Peirce worried about the looseness of literary thinkers’ attempts to handle philosophical ideas. Santayana too worried about poetry that was insincere. He was especially concerned by poets who sought ends other than self-expression and self-knowledge: fame, money, persuasion, and so on. But poetry is not the only linguistic vehicle for disseminating lies and seeking self-aggrandizement. Still, insofar as it may be the most effective vehicle, it is worth our wariness.

Nevertheless, philosophy without poetry is less than it could be, however good it is. And, if we keep our eyes open, we will see this. As Santayana saw it,

Plato poetized his dialogues because the abstraction by which the world of science and of practice is drawn out of our experience, is too violent to satisfy even the thoughtless and the vulgar; the ideality of the machine we call Nature, the conventionality of the drama we call the world, are too glaring not to be somehow perceived by all. Each must challenge this apparition with the thought of death; he must ask himself for the mainspring and value of his life.<sup>36</sup>

We need to step back and look at what has happened to philosophy over the last century under the guise of its “professionalization.” Philosophy is not *essentially* a profession. It is an endeavor of the spirit of the human animal to figure things out, to get a sense of things, and to express its perspective on the relations of self and world. To that end, it should embrace all its capacities—it should embrace both intellect and affect, both the poetic and the prosaic. Apart from the wariness of insincerity, there ought to be no quarrel between philosophy and poetry.

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34 SANTAYANA, p. 270.

35 *Ibid.*

36 *Ibid.*, p. 272.

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