

Three Philosophical
Poets:
Lucretius, Dante And
Goethe



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Lanny says

This book is foul. Not the text especially but its self. It literally makes me sneeze it's so grotty and old. I read some article in the Berkeley Philosophy Journal Qui Parle a while back which sort of pegged George Santayana as a politically indifferent Bourgeois Classicist, and maybe he is. I really don't think any sort of direct critique of thought or people or anything is very interesting anyway, as if Nature's true meaning can be just 'had out' by some yapping grad-student.. Just look at language itself the word Writan which meant 'scratch' and gives us writing written backwards damn near gives you Nature, and Nature written backwards gives you 'Ruttin' or perhaps Ratan.. at any rate, there are far too many variables in Nature for human thought to become anything other than another level of irony in that final reckoning whatever sublimely horrible decoction that will be. In 3 philosophical poems, GS not only grapples with each of these figures, but takes the time to dig up the criticism which has been done and basically offers "mediated encounters" and subsequent meditation. Sometimes you think the critic is right, at first, until further hermeneusis by George on the text which amounts to him gargling some wine and spitting it in your face. Ha! This books is actually not even a book, but a kind of delirious wine tasting by one of the great modern Epicureans!

I like George Santayana precisely because he is unpopular, and a bit wrong-headed and goes on about 'chaste folds' and innocent marbles far too long to take seriously, which I absolutely do!

Tim McKay says

A refreshing text.

Chris Schaeffer says

I guess one could fairly call Santayana a kind of bougie hedge-artist, and I guess that would be sort of correct. He's concerned with aesthetics, definitely, and the metaphysics of creating, and if he preferred to tie his tie on and contemplate Dante on a yacht instead of politicizing his arguments, well, it certainly doesn't endear him to me personally, but nor does it make his work any less important or engaging.

Santayana's apolitical aesthetic sense is unfashionable nowadays but has its defenders-- I see something like it in Elaine Scarry's delicate and fierce 'On Beauty and Being Just'-- and, I think, has its place as well. His sort of peculiar naturalism allowed that beauty is worth striving to as an end in itself as well as a clearer lens through which to examine social conditions. Although this seems naively idealistic nowadays, it makes a gentle approach towards Foucault's apparatuses that's sort of downplayed by a lot of commentators. The point being, I like Santayana, I think he's underappreciated, and I think this book in particular is a lost

classic.

In brief, he looks at three poets as paragons of three distinct philosophical methodologies. Lucretius is his icon of materialism (and its here that his moral sympathies seem to coincide the most), Dante as a religious poet, and Goethe as the poet of the Romantic mentality. I appreciate the attention he pays to the second part of 'Faust,' in favor of the perhaps overly favored first part. Do I agree with him? No, not in the big picture, although his readings are acute and sensitive, and argued with a bright and comradely conviction. What I think it most valuable about the book is the spirit it was written in, its function as an artifact of a brief and optimistic crest in American thought.

Alberto says

The book adds absolutely nothing to my understanding of the three poets, beyond what I could gather by just reading the original texts on my own. Adds no value to the canon.

Pavel says

Refreshingly good read. The chapter on Lucretius is masterful. The invocation of the future master poet, who will synthesize the sentiments and visions of the three discussed philosophical po, is gripping.

Jon says

I have only read the introduction and the third of the book that is about Dante; but it is excellent. I knew very little about Santayana, other than the famous quote about being doomed to relive history; but he was apparently very well known for his artful prose and his witty quotes. He does not fail to deliver in this book. He makes fun of Plato's insistence on emphasizing final causes for objects found in the real world, saying that it leads to ideas like: the reason we have very long intestines is so that we don't have to eat constantly and as a result can spend more time in philosophical contemplation. Hmmmm. I'm working hard on Lucretius right now, and once I've made it all the way through, I look forward to reading Santayana's critique of that poet--an ancient Roman materialist with whom he apparently had a lot in common.
