

SANTAYANA: BIOGRAPHY AND THE FUTURE OF PHILOSOPHY

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ABSTRACT: The revival of Santayana research continues and there is much more to be done. In this essay, I delineate areas of future research relating to Santayana's biography and his philosophy. From his early childhood in Spain to his final residence in Rome, there are significant developments in his life that remain to be explored including his Spanish relations, Harvard colleagues and students, his global travels, and his later personal and philosophical development. Currently, universities are facing economic difficulties and philosophy as a central area of study is being questioned. Santayana expressed concern about American universities increasing businesslike approach to education and the diminishing focus on personal development. In addition, he suggests a number of directions philosophy might take in relation to literature, poetry, and science. He was a century ahead of his time in describing human consciousness in a manner similar to current neuroscience research. Finally, he develops a celebratory view of consciousness that is missing in contemporary neuroscience and philosophy.

Keywords: Santayana, skepticism, biography, Harvard, poetry, literature, neuroscience, consciousness

Santayana is best known as a philosopher, poet, novelist and autobiographer. During his lifetime (1863–1952) he initially gained international status with the publication of *The Sense of Beauty* (1896) and the five-volume *The Life of Reason* (1905–1906). His stature grew significantly after he retired from Harvard in 1912 at the age of forty-eight. Many of his colleagues never understood or forgave him for leaving Harvard at such an early age, but since 1893 he had planned his early retirement citing the university's increasing businesslike atmosphere and decreasing emphasis on personal intellectual development. One can only imagine what he would say about American higher education now. Although offered several distinguished chairs and honors, he never returned to America. He is known as one of the founders of classical American philosophy, even though he was never an American. Indeed, he proudly retained his Spanish passport throughout his life, and only Spanish was spoken in his family home in Boston. In the last two decades of his life, he achieved recognition rarely given to a philosopher by appearing on the front cover of *Time* magazine

(3 February 1936), and his novel *The Last Puritan* (1936) and his autobiography *Persons and Places* (1944) were best-selling books in the U.S., England and Europe. Santayana died in Rome, his principal residence since the mid-1920s. He made two requests regarding his burial: not to be buried in the U.S. and not in consecrated ground. Although respecting the better qualities of religious belief, he was an atheist. But at the Campo Verano Cemetery in Rome the unconsecrated ground was reserved for criminals and the homeless – not a place that Daniel Cory, his executor, would choose. Fortunately, the Spanish government came to the rescue, providing a place in the “Panteon de la Obra Pia espanola” reserved for Spanish diplomats and other well-known Spanish figures. Afterwards, this entire gravesite was largely converted into a memorial for Santayana. Santayana's marker was larger than the other names listed, and a quote was etched into a large vertical stone tablet from Santayana's *The Idea of Christ and the Gospels*, perhaps giving the appearance that Santayana was more a believer than he actually was. One can imagine his warm smile at these final arrangements: born in Madrid and buried in Spanish ground in Rome. Charles Frankel wrote in 1956, “I am inclined to believe that what happens to Santayana's reputation will be a touchstone of the quality of our culture, and of our growth in maturity and wisdom” (Frankel 1956, 11). At the same time, the culture of philosophical pursuits was going through a dramatic shift in Europe and America.

In the 1950s philosophers largely turned their focus on either an analysis of language or a phenomenological study of the subjective. As a result, Santayana's literary and naturalistic approach and appeal declined precipitously. In 1963 Arthur Danto called for a revival of Santayana studies, noting that many philosophers were recapitulating “the intellectual crisis which Santayana helped overcome,” breaking through “to a view of things not dissimilar to the one he [Santayana] achieved” (Danto 1963, 437–40). Not until the late 1970s did this revitalization emerge, evidenced by the critical edition of *The Works of George Santayana* published by MIT Press, the establishment of the Santayana Society and the

publications of *Overheard in Seville: The Bulletin of the Santayana Society*. The first international meeting of the Santayana Society was held in Avila, Spain, 27–30 May 1992. This conference brought together more than one thousand participants from many countries and continents. Because Santayana's works were forbidden to be read under the dictatorship of Francisco Franco, the conference was also a liberation of his thought in his native country. Four additional international conferences followed. Importantly there is a second international journal, *Limbo: Boletín internacional de estudios sobre Santayana*. This upward spiral of research and investigations into his compositions continue into the twenty-first century.

So, one might suggest that Santayana has regained his place in philosophy. However, rather than resting on laurels, I think there is much more to come and many challenges to meet. Indeed, his principal contributions still may be on the horizon of research in philosophy, biography, literature, and even in modern science. How can this be? In what follows I provide a few suggestions of possible future research regarding Santayana's life and the implications of his philosophical outlook. In all this, one should feel the crosscurrents and undercurrents of philosophical, historical and literary trends as well as the staggering implications of neurological research.

I. Biographical Research

Santayana's personal development remains open for significant research. John McCormick's *George Santayana: A Biography* remains the only extensive account of Santayana's life. But even with this carefully researched and well-written volume, there are sometimes only outlines of important developments. I will mention only a few.

Most of Santayana's childhood writings and letters have not been found, but one hopes that some of these may yet be discovered either in his Spanish family holdings or hidden away in other collections or repositories.

The missing letters to his father from the age of seven until his father's death in 1893 would contain important aspects of his life as a Spanish child growing up in protestant Boston, attending kindergarten to learn English, studying at the Boston Latin School and at Harvard University, and becoming a faculty member. Apart from these early letters, there are significant materials at Harvard that now include the Sturgis family files, as well as collections at Columbia University, Complutense University of Madrid, Princeton University and many more public and private collections that may be of assistance. The Santayana Edition now headed by Martin Coleman at Indiana University Indianapolis contains the records of the edition, my correspondence and notes, as well many files from the estate of Richard C. Lyon.

Other phases needing attention are Santayana's years as an undergraduate at Harvard when he was a member of over twenty organizations, including what is rarely noted, being elected Pope of the Laodicean Club named for a biblical description of a lukewarm congregation (*Revelations* 3: 14–22). Some may be surprised that being a cartoonist was the springboard for Santayana's professional career. Little has been done to catalogue and explicate the delightful fifty-one cartoons Santayana drew and captioned for *The Lampton* between 9 February 1883 and 25 June 1886. The cartoons reveal a significant artistic skill and ironic humor. The British weekly *Punch* served as a model for the *Lampton* staff, and Santayana had even more complex models. His cartoons likely owe much to his childhood in Àvila and reading *La Risa (Laughter)* and the *Enciclopedia de estravagancias*. The first volume, dated 1840, survives in the archives of Complutense University of Madrid among his father's (Augustín Ruiz de Santayana) collection. Moreover, Santayana's early sexual adventures remain something of a mystery. In 1929 Daniel Cory refers to a conversation with Santayana about A.E. Housman's poetry and homosexuality. Santayana told Cory that he may have been an unconscious homosexual during his Harvard days (Cory 1929, 40). Some of his close friends were openly homosexual or bisexual. In an unusual and hu-

morous letter written in 1887 to William Morton Fullerton, perhaps best known for his promiscuity and later as the bi-sexual lover of Edith Wharton, Santayana explores the amorous options open to men: “1. Wet dreams and the fidgets. 2. Masturbation [sic]. 3. Pailerastia. 4. Whoring. 5. Seductions or a mistress. 6. Matrimony.” He notes “I don’t put a mistress as a separate heading because it really comes under 4, 5, or 6, as the case may be.” He concludes “Oh matrimony, truly thou art an inevitable evil!” (Santayana, *Letters, Book One*, 91–3) And there are indications of his pursuit of women including the wife of a midwestern clergyman that is described in his “Notebooks” (Columbia University) and mentioned in his autobiography with her identity not revealed. In addition, little has been done with the meetings he held in his room for students exploring socialism as a political stance and only brief attention has been given to his friendships with many Jewish students who were considered “different” and lived in separate dorms. There is considerable correspondence revealing Santayana’s longstanding and complicated relationship with Horace Meyer Kallen who was the first Jew to ever teach at Princeton University in 1903 after studying with Santayana at Harvard. When his contract was not renewed at Princeton for being an avowed unbeliever, Kallen returned to Harvard to complete his doctorate and served as Santayana’s graduate assistant. Kallen was a founding member of The New School in New York City and worked closely with Sidney Hook serving on the ACLU’s academic freedom committee. Although Santayana and Kallen worked together at Harvard and maintained their friendship long after, their politics and outlook differed, and their correspondence reveals both respect and difference. The bulk of Kallen’s papers are in the American Jewish Archives at Hebrew Union College (Kallen Papers 1902–1982). Also, little has been researched regarding Santayana’s work with W.E.B. Du Bois and with Mary Whiton Calkins who completed her education at Harvard with William James but was not awarded a degree because she was a female. And, of course, there are the more obvious areas needing exploration that include his

relationships with his colleagues including William James, Josiah Royce, George Palmer, Hugo Munsterberg, to name a few. He was an admirer of Charles Sanders Peirce and was asked by Maurice Firuski to edit Peirce’s papers in 1926, but he indicated he was not the appropriate person for doing that, adding that he had met Peirce at one of his 1903 lectures at Harvard and “As a philosopher Peirce¹ has come late to be recognized, but his quality is unmistakably good, far better logically than Wm. James’s, and anything speculative from his pen would be welcomed, I think, by the learned public” (Santayana, *Letters, Book Three*, 312). These Harvard relationships would also have important bearings on the influences of Santayana on his colleagues and vice versa. In addition, the marginalia in Santayana’s books are quite revealing and provide a clear sense of his different philosophical orientation with his colleagues as well as other significant figures in philosophy and literature. No matter what approach one takes, Santayana’s Harvard days were full of activity, social gatherings, intellectual pursuits, and delight in the company of others. This is quite a different picture than the often portrayal of an isolated, monk-like Santayana in his later years.

Another worthwhile area would focus on Santayana’s development during WWI while he was stranded in England. This appears to be another turning point in his life, as he briefly abandoned long-term philosophical pursuits that would be published much later such as his notes for *Dominations and Powers* (1951) and the four books of *The Realms of Being* (1927, 1930, 1938, 1940). Instead, he turned to writing *Egotism in German Philosophy* (1916), which some have seen as a partisan effort because of its sharp critique of German philosophy. And he began lecturing on his experiences in America and published *Character and Opinion in the United States: With Reminiscences of William James and Josiah Royce and Academic Life in America* (1920). He had abandoned

¹ *Letters, Book Three* has a misspelling of ‘Peirce’ as ‘Pierce’. Earlier transcriptions have the correct spelling, and it appears the transcription in *Letters, Book Three* may be in error, e.g., see McCormick 90–91. I have used the correct spelling.

poetry in the early 1900s calling himself almost a poet. But during WWI he briefly returned to writing some of his best poetry. One poem, "The Undergraduate Killed in Battle," was included in Edith Wharton's 1915 *The Book of the Homeless* that raised money for American Hostels and the Children of Flanders Rescue Committee. Another, "To a Pacifist Friend" was likely written for Bertrand Russell in 1916 when Russell was removed from his academic position at Trinity College, Cambridge because of his pacifism. During this time Santayana seems to turn to a more partisan approach to politics, supporting English efforts in the war while still in the embryonic stages of a more naturalistic approach to politics, governmental organization, war, and individual freedom and responsibility. And little has been written about his relationships with the Vatican before and during WWII when his manuscripts were typed by a Miss Tindall who also worked at the Vatican, and in 1942 the Vatican helped smuggle the typescript of the first book of *Persons and Places* out of Rome and eventually to Scribner's in New York. Scribner's wanted to publish an account of how they received the typescript through the efforts of the Vatican and several Spanish diplomats, but Hugh S. Cummings, Jr., Assistant Chief of the United States Division of European Affairs, asked that such a statement not be released because of the ongoing war.

These are only hints at what is left to be done in biographical research. Even so, I want to emphasize the delight in investigating and understanding the development of Santayana's life and thought, and I await those who will rise to the task.

II. The Future of Philosophy

Many scholars are worried about the future of philosophy and the humanities in the twenty-first century. Philosophy has been a long-standing aspect of human inquiry and higher education, although it has worn many coats and taken different pathways. But now many universities are facing serious financial issues because of

the coronavirus pandemic coupled with dwindling state and national funding. To survive some are emphasizing preparing students for employment and job training while limiting or eliminating core courses in the liberal arts. Faculty in the liberal arts are being furloughed or dismissed, and fragile institutions may not survive. The institutions most vulnerable have small endowments, low or declining student enrollment, and too often a serious lack of long-range planning with significant faculty and staff input. The institutions that are best prepared have substantial endowments and external funding for research and teaching. They will need major investments supporting inclusive and equitable online-learning experiences, a carefully drafted business model with a focus on fundraising while expanding faculty development in online teaching as well as expanding health services.

During Santayana's Harvard years, he experienced an administrative oversight that focused on enrollments, gifts, and recognition, but he never faced the prospect of Harvard not surviving or of philosophy being eliminated from the curriculum. Even so, his encounters with President Eliot are telling. Eliot was energetic and ambitious and wanted to transform Harvard into a great modern university. Early in Santayana's career, he encountered Eliot in the Harvard Yard. Upon meeting, Eliot asked Santayana how his classes were going. Santayana began to detail how his students were completing work on Plato and advancing to Aristotle, and specifics about the intellectual growth of his students. Eliot interrupted, "No, no, Santayana, what I mean by my enquiry is, how many students have enrolled for you lectures?" (Santayana, *Character and Opinion*, 186). In *Persons and Places* Santayana writes that President Eliot "once said to me that we should teach *the facts*, not merely convey *ideas*." Santayana describes the President as an anti-humanist, and that he could have "replied that the only facts in philosophy were historical facts, namely the fact that people had or had had certain ideas. But of course, I only smiled and took note of *his idea*" (392). Santayana's ironic smile is evident. He then continues, "The history of philosophy is the only philosophy that should be taught

in a university. *Systems* of philosophy are taught only by sects or by individuals setting out to be prophets and to found a sect. I now have a system of philosophy, which I hadn't dreamt of then, although the reasons for it lay all in me; but this system is not intended to found a sect and will never do so. It aspires to be only a contribution to the humanities, the expression of a reflective, selective, and free mind" (392–3). Santayana persisted in his belief that philosophy cannot be taught. He saw teaching as an art, "a delightful paternal art, and especially teaching intelligent youngsters, as most American collegians are; but it is an art like acting, where the performance, often rehearsed, must be adapted to an audience hearing it only once... The best that is in him, as Mephistopheles says in *Faust*, he dare not tell them" (Santayana, *Character and Opinion*, 42). Santayana's concerns about the teaching of philosophy are echoed in the present day, but with the new undercurrent of downsizing and even elimination.

Although one cannot say with certainty what Santayana might say about our current circumstances at American universities or even globally, perhaps one can draw from his writings what may apply to our current circumstances and begin to draw some conclusions about the future of philosophy. However, in doing so one should feel Santayana's presence and hear him whisper the last words of his novel: "After life is over and the world has gone up in smoke, what realities might the spirit in us still call its own without illusion save the form of those very illusions which have made up our story?" (Santayana, *The Last Puritan*, 572) With that cautionary note, I suggest a number of possible insights or illusions into the future and longevity of the study of philosophy.

From the pre-Socratics till now, philosophy served many roles and fostered its findings as revealing the foundations of knowledge, of personal experience, and of the underlying realities of the universe. From these beginnings, philosophy has offered advice as to how to live, make decisions, create social environments, as well as highlighting what to avoid and what to foster. Some have taken philosophy more as poetry written in prose,

providing insight without attempting to describe reality. Others have seen it as critical reasoning, training oneself and others to analyze arguments and circumstances to determine a reasonable approach when others seem more bent on unthoughtful responses to difficult situations. Santayana grasped these approaches and did not endorse them although he seems at times to have tilted in various directions.

Perhaps the future of philosophy is to be understood as another form of literature or poetry. In the *Epilogue* to his novel, Santayana continues his fiction with an imaginary meeting with Mario Van de Weyer who asked him to document the life of Oliver Alden, the last puritan. There is a discussion as to whether Santayana should publish the book or not. Mario is not pleased with some of the accounts of his adventuresome sexual life, but he agrees that the book should be published, and he adds, "It's all your invention; but perhaps there's a better philosophy in it than in your other books." When Santayana asks why it is better than in his other books, Mario replies, "Because now you're not arguing or proving or criticising anything, but painting a picture. The trouble with you philosophers is that you misunderstand your vocation. You ought to be poets, but you insist on laying down the law for the universe, physical and moral, and are vexed with one another because your inspirations are not identical" (Santayana, *The Last Puritan*, 572).

If we take philosophy more as poetry, then it would be a literary work in which the expression of ideas is given an intensity through distinctive styles and cadence. Certainly, some of the best of philosophical works are captivating and having ventured through the first pages it is difficult to turn back. At the same time, some of the best philosophy is tedious, even boring, and the cadence is ponderous and not intense. As a result, I fear we would lose much of the major literature of philosophy.

Perhaps a better approach would be to revive parts of classical American philosophy that provide advice on how to make decisions and to live well. Undoubtedly, there are traits of Santayana, James, Dewey, Royce, and

even Peirce that move in this direction. And some contemporary philosophers influenced by American thought have moved in this direction. They largely take aspects of human life and social well-being and explore and illuminate their meaning and the consequences of individual actions and social activities. My mentor and friend, John Lachs,² is a preeminent Santayana scholar and has taken something like this approach as found in his works such as *Intermediate Man, A Community of Individuals* (1981), *Relevance of Philosophy to Life* (1995), *In Love with Life* (1998), *Stoic Pragmatism* (2012), *Freedom and Limits* (2014), *Meddling: On the Virtue of Leaving Others Alone* (2014), and *The Cost of Comfort* (2019). These books stretch the boundaries of academic philosophy and make philosophical considerations relevant for contemporary life and for understanding our world. But one may ask whether this is the proper role of philosophical discourse. Santayana thought that one of the perils of American philosophy was its effort to replace religious mentoring with the philosopher taking the place of one's minister, priest, rabbi or imam. So, there are questions about this approach as valuable as it is. The principal question is what standing the philosopher has to provide such analysis, insight and advice. Perhaps it is best to let this approach move forward and to see how well it is accepted beyond the academic world. After all, it is the acceptance of this approach that will assure its longevity. Of course, Santayana would be pleased that such an approach provides distinctive and often singular insights into living well that are shared by many inside and outside the academic world.

There is another approach to advice, that is, advising on what not to do. In *The Last Puritan* Oliver suggests to Mario that he should take a course from Santayana while at Harvard. Mario's reply is telling, indicating that

he can see Santayana as much as he wants at tea.³ And he notes that Santayana will not say, take my course or any other, but that "he will tell you that it doesn't very much matter; because in any system of philosophy you can find something important – to avoid: and you're much less likely to fall into the snare if you've seen it spread out plainly before your eyes than if you were wandering about unsuspectingly with your nose in the clouds" (Santayana, *The Last Puritan*, 412). Hence, one might conclude that the purpose of philosophy is to help you make wise decisions by knowing what to avoid. And that is not a bad purpose. But there is more.

III. Reason and Pragmatism Versus Santayana's Complete Naturalism

Santayana turned philosophy upside down, a point often missed by readers and scholars, and in doing so he opened the door for coordination between modern neurological science and philosophy – a point that will be discussed later. Historically, much of philosophy has been focused on reason as foundational in living well. Indeed, Santayana's five books of *The Life of Reason* catapulted him into being a leading figure in American and European philosophy. And although this work reveals hints and seeds of his later, fully developed naturalism, some have explicated it merely as another exposition on reason and its importance to living well, and Scribner's had even advertised the volume as a work of pragmatism to enhance sales. Santayana understood that sales were important, but he wanted to make clear that he was not a pragmatist nor a rationalist. He indicated he had a list of emendations and offered to write a new preface to any future editions that would make his stance clear. "Critics, and the sophisticated part of the public, seem to have been misled by these omissions, beginning by the friendly, and I daresay useful, advertisement prepared by yourselves in which my philosophy is called a kind of 'Pragmatism'. Mr. Dickinson also put me in the same

² One of the tragedies of Santayana scholarship is the loss of John Lachs's manuscript on Santayana's philosophy. While attending a conference in Paris in the late 1960s, Lachs' briefcase was taken from a cab. These were the days before computer use and electronic copies. The single copy of the manuscript was in the briefcase. Lachs partially recovered his efforts in a short volume, *George Santayana*, Twayne Publishers, 1988.

³ Santayana hosted students in his room on the Harvard Yard for teatime and discussion.

class, so that the fault evidently lay in my not stating explicitly enough that this book – long as it is – represents, to my mind, but a very casual and human aspect of the universe” (Santayana, *Letters, Book One*, 361–2).

He writes to Sterling P. Lamprecht in 1933, “the whole *Life of Reason*... was written with an eye to describing experience, not the cosmos. It was inspired partly by Greek ethics and partly by modern psychology and critical philosophy... But you are also right in feeling that I was rather carried away, at that time, by a kind of humanism and like[d] to degrade, or exalt, all things into the human notions of them, and the part they played, as counters, in the game of thought. It was a modern attitude which I hope I have outgrown – ‘Schlecht und Modern,’ as Goethe says, or Mephistopheles (Santayana, *Letters, Book Five*, 61). Santayana’s marginalia in his copy of James’s *Pragmatism* (1907) are also important.⁴ Where “truth in science” was in the text, Santayana wrote “orthodoxy.” James wrote “I have already insisted on the fact that truth is made largely out of previous truth” (p. 223), and Santayana’s marginalia substituted “belief” for “truth” both times. Where James notes the temporary nature of apparently permanent phenomena such as rights, wrongs, prohibitions, penalties, words, forms, idioms, or beliefs, Santayana comments, “The events related in history are not ambiguous because they are not simultaneous: the truth about them neither arises nor disappears with them. It is their form + the fact that they possess or shall possess it.” In short, Santayana was not a pragmatist, “Pragmatism seems to involve a confusion between the test and the meaning of truth,” he had written in 1905 (Santayana, *Letters, Book One*, 324), and to Horace Kallen he said in no uncertain terms, “I am no pragmatist” (Santayana, *Letters, Book Two*, 263).

⁴ See McCormick, p. 446. I was contacted by Georgetown University when they purchased Charles Augustus Strong’s Villa La Balze at Fiesole, Italy. During WWII the estate had been overrun by Nazi forces and all of the library and papers, including many of Santayana’s works, had been thrown into the yard. Thanks to the work of the gardener, they were recovered and placed back into the house. I asked John McCormick to visit the estate before the Santayana material was shipped and placed in the Georgetown University Archives. McCormick catalogued several of the items, and he and I had significant discussions about the marginalia, particularly that found in Santayana’s copy of James’s *Pragmatism*.

Although Santayana is not a member of the pragmatic school of thought, there are elements of pragmatism in his philosophy. He does not believe that pragmatic tests and reasoning necessarily lead to the truth or that pragmatism is an automatic progression towards a better society, but he does hold that the pragmatic method may be one path toward truth but not the only one. His view of truth is a form of correspondence theory holding that the truth or falsity of a belief is determined only by whether it accurately describes (i.e., corresponds with) the world. The material world does have a particular form and that form may change over time. Only a disembodied, non-relational being not bound by any particular circumstance or material relations could compare the forms of the material world with the form a person is conscious of in reasoning or even simply viewing a material object. No such being exists since all existing beings are embodied in a particular material setting. A human being, embodied and located in specific material circumstances, may attempt various tests for the truth of his or her conscious reasoning. A pragmatic approach is one method of testing. The scientific methods (emphasis is on the plural) approach truth in a variety of ways, but their work is never complete as one waits for further collaboration and counter evidence. Hence, Santayana holds a correspondence theory of truth while also believing that pragmatic tests for ascertaining the truth may be legitimate.

If one takes the view that Santayana is a pragmatist or humanistic rationalist, then he would simply be another figure in the early twentieth century who prizes reason and engages in philosophical discourse to highlight the importance of a rational life and pragmatic values. However, that is not Santayana. His naturalism in *Scepticism and Animal Faith* and *The Realms of Being* eliminates consciousness (or spirit) and reason as causes of human or animal action. With a resounding emphasis, reason becomes secondary and non-causal instead of being primary. For Santayana, human consciousness is an aftereffect caused by one’s psyche (physical being) interacting with one’s material environment. To the surprise of many of his contemporaries and some cur-

rent scholars, he describes consciousness as a byproduct of one's physical being that is without causal efficacy in human action. As a result, philosophy is turned on its head, and reason and consciousness are viewed as secondary effects of material causes within our physical being (our psyche). They are more like the sound of music coming from a symphony orchestra. The musical instruments and musicians are the material causes of the music just as our physical being interacting with the material environment is the cause of consciousness and thought. Music is temporary, transitory, and ends when the instruments are no longer played, and consciousness and reason do the same. They are aftereffects of material causes. Actions are not the result of rational thought. Instead, rational thought is a result and perhaps a reflection of our psyche interacting with the material world.

Some may view this as a form of intellectual metaphysics, but Santayana did not. In *Scepticism and Animal Faith* he makes this clear.

Moreover, my system, save in the mocking literary sense of the word, is not metaphysical. Now in natural philosophy I am a decided materialist – apparently the only one living; and I am well aware that idealists are fond of calling materialism, too, metaphysics, in rather an angry tone, so as to cast discredit upon it by assimilating it to their own systems. But my materialism, for all that, is not metaphysical. I do not profess to know what matter is in itself, and feel no confidence in the divination of those *esprits forts* who, leading a life of vice, thought the universe must be composed of nothing but dice and billiard-balls. I wait for the men of science to tell me what matter is, in so far as they can discover it, and am not at all surprised or troubled at the abstractness and vagueness of their ultimate conceptions: how should our notions of things so remote from the scale and scope of our senses be anything but schematic? But whatever matter may be, I call it matter boldly, as I call my acquaintances Smith and Jones without knowing their secrets: whatever it may be, it must present the aspects and undergo the motions of the gross objects that fill the world: and if belief in the existence of hidden parts and movements in nature be metaphysics, then the kitchen-maid is a metaphysician whenever she peels a potato. (Santayana, *Scepticism*, vii–viii)

By the 1920s, Santayana articulated his complete materialism or naturalism. He often uses the terms inter-

changeably. And his humor comes through as he notes he is apparently the only “decided materialist” living and compares his view to the kitchen maid. He is not trying to describe the material makeup of the universe, rather he leaves that to science and, as he says, he is willing to wait and see what science discovers. The sciences will describe the causal structures of the world, not philosophy or any intellectual metaphysics. But where does this leave reason as a common thread in philosophical history. Reason and consciousness become aftereffects but not unimportant in human life as I will describe later, they are celebrational and add quality and value to life.

Many scholars, including myself, have described Santayana as an epiphenomenalist, but he was not. In epiphenomenalism, consciousness is an entity generated by our physical being, but Santayana did not characterize consciousness as an entity. For Santayana, the only entities are physical, and awareness or consciousness is not physical and in modern terms is perhaps best understood as a general characteristic of certain neuron interactions in our central nervous system, possibly like the temperature of the body that is not located in any place.

In 1913 Santayana writes to Horace Kallen:

Therefore I am no epiphenomenalist, but a naturalist pure and simple, recognizing a material world, not a phenomenon but a substance, and a mental life struck off from it in its operation, like a spark from the flint and steel, having no other substance than that material world, but having a distinct existence of its own (as it is emitted continually out of bodily life as music is emitted from an instrument) and having a very different kind of being, since it is immaterial and moral and cognitive. (Santayana, *Letters, Book Two*, 127)

If consciousness is impotent, non-causal, and not an entity of any kind, where does that leave us. One might suggest a stoic approach to life, accepting the truth that our circumstances and actions are caused by determinants beyond our conscious awareness and generated by hidden causes. Although there are clearly stoic aspects in some of Santayana's philosophy, there is much more. He suggests that we should delight in the conscious celebration of life. The spiritual life as he calls it.

IV. Celebration of Life, Consciousness, Spirit, Spiritual Life

Consciousness as an aftereffect of material causes is now being advanced by neurological science. Santayana's insight was far ahead of his time. Stephen Hawking in 2016 (Burton), for example, emphasized this view. He cited neurologist Ben Libet of the University of California, San Francisco, who found that there are brain processes that occur nearly half a second before a person is aware of the decision to act. In other words, there are action-specific electrical activities in the brain that precede any awareness of a decision being made to act. This seems consistent with Santayana's non-scientific view that consciousness, thought, reason are aftereffects of physical activities that precede them.

What is missing in these neurophysiological explanations is a singularly important element that Santayana highlighted. Conscious life is not only an aftereffect of physical interactions, it is celebrational. Consciousness may be momentary and fragmented, but it is the art and music of the human psyche. It often is momentary as when a fragrance ushers back wonderful memories of times past, or it can be lengthy as when one is totally enveloped in symphonic music. Either way, it is temporary as one must get back to action in order to live, eat, survive and thrive. Instead of being rational agents, we, like all animals, are decision makers and our decisions are revealed in our actions. These fragmented conscious moments, if cultivated, are a delight. For Santayana, developing a life that fosters such moments is the spiritual life, temporary, non-causal, but eternal in the moment of celebration and delight.

Growing older often highlights the celebration of conscious life. As one's roles in business, parenting, universities, government, and social life are reduced, one may become more of an observer than a participant. Then the delight of consciousness may become more obvious than in our youthful active life. Waking up and looking out across a valley to hills and mountains may be an image one carries for the day or simply is enthralled

with it at the moment. Watching one's grandchildren mature while a flood of memories of one's own children color this very experience and make it more delightful. Cultivating this festive consciousness in one's last years gives delight that is not diminished by the decline of one's health or the growing isolation of age. Santayana cultivated his spiritual life from an early age until his death. Something that should be admired as a unique contribution to the spiritual life for all human beings.

V. Prospects for Collaborative Efforts between Philosophy and Science

Clearly Santayana was ahead of his time in a way that many of his contemporaries could not grasp. His view of human action, consciousness, reason and thought were revolutionary while at the same time these views made his thought more difficult to accept or build on in the first half of the twentieth century. But now, there are many neurological research efforts that seem to confirm Santayana's perspective as well as raise questions about Santayana's account of consciousness. And here one may begin to see the prospects for philosophers and scientists to coordinate efforts on understanding human consciousness as well as the ethical issues raised by neurological advances. Santayana's views provide some evidence as to how such collaboration might begin.

Consciousness and the objects of consciousness are not entities for Santayana but are "immaterial and moral and cognitive." However, if they are aftereffects of physical causes, that would seem to locate them as happening within the nearly 100 billion neurons that make up the brain. Historically, the mind and thoughts have been considered private and personal. But if thought is a causal effect of electrical impulses within our central nervous system, then perhaps we could locate these effects and even translate them into the thoughts that are occurring. That is, perhaps we can develop technology that will read our thoughts and even change or develop them in some fashion. Obviously, not a simple or easy task and if successful will carry numerous difficult issues regarding how

we understand human nature, consciousness, reason, and more. The research may be complicated by the brain as living organism that changes over time and perhaps frequently, so much so that would have to recalibrate to decode what a person was thinking, and perhaps this would become more individualistic and problematic. Even so, there are several companies and scientists working on discovering the neuron interaction associated with individual thoughts and human action. If they are successful with mapping the human brain in this way, then the result could be that one may need only to have a brain-reading machine to know what a person is thinking.

Moises Velasquez-Manoff wrote an opinion piece for the *New York Times* in which he cites a few companies and researchers working on brain implants as well as examining the brain without significant physical penetration into our skull (Velasquez-Manoff). The companies he references include Openwater, Synchron, Neuralink, BrainGate, Neurole, Facebook Reality Labs and several university researchers. Some of the research has significant practical bearing, for example, the abilities of amputees to move artificial limbs by connecting their brain neurons to electrical impulses that move the limbs when the person wants them to move, or stroke victims with restored connections to their natural limbs that they can move based on their own desire to walk, raise an arm, or pick up a piece of fruit. But suppose one could also determine what a person was seeing or thinking simply by examining parts of the brain. In a limited sense this is already possible and as such raises not only questions about our traditional understanding of the consciousness but also highlights concerns over the public nature of our thoughts and reasons. Velasquez-Manoff highlights the work of Dr. Jack Gallant, a computational neuroscientist at the University of California, Berkeley. For some time, there have been experiments showing us the kind of thing a person may be looking at from the way the brain was functioning, e.g., was the person looking at a human face or a cat. But only recently have Gallant and his colleagues been able to determine the exact image a person was viewing by examining the way

the brain was functioning. In brief, Gallant and his colleagues have been successful in identifying the particular image a person is viewing by matching brain activation prompted by moving images. Limiting the focus to a subsection of the visual cortex, there were some failures in translating what the person was seeing. But where they were successful, it was a dramatic achievement: “a machine translating patterns of brain activity into a moving image understandable by other people – a machine that can read the brain” (Gallant 2011, 1641–1646). The practical implications for such a machine are significant, notably for people with Lou Gehrig’s disease, or incapacitated by strokes, or with locked-in syndrome (LIS).⁵ And beyond the practical implications, the impact on our understanding of consciousness, thought and reason are dramatic and, for some, alarming.

Gallant wondered what might follow such discoveries. Could we develop technology that could read the human thoughts and make them open to public scrutiny, even thoughts the person may not be aware of or perhaps we could see and understand people’s memories? Speculatively, Gallant called such technology the “Google Cap.” Clearly no such technology now exists and it may be sometime before it does, if ever. But brain-machine research is continuing and one may expect significant discoveries that will have a major impacts on our understanding of thought, consciousness and the human mind.

The prospect of interventions or writing to the brain and correcting or enhancing certain aspects of human behavior are appealing to some. For example, based on his work with Parkinson’s disease, Casey Halpern successfully intervened in the overeating and obesity patterns in mice (Chow). Perhaps similar interventions will be successful for human impulse control not only dealing with obesity, but alcoholism, aggressiveness, depression, and more. If one generalizes one may ask what if we

⁵ LIS is also known as pseudocoma. The patient is aware but cannot move or communicate due to paralysis of nearly all voluntary muscles in the body except for vertical eye movements and blinking.

were able to enhance our mathematical ability, or the ability to concentrate on reading or listening, or other aspects of human personality. Indeed, we might begin to ask what are the limits of our own personality and the enhanced one. Such advances would also raise the questions of ownership of our thoughts, of our personality, or our impulses. Would there be a need for public rights to what was previously known as the privacy of our thoughts? In a court of law would a prosecutor have the right to incriminate a defendant on the basis of what is discovered in his or her brain?

Such concerns caused Dr. Rafael Yuste, Professor of Biological Sciences and Director of Neurotechnology Center at Columbia University, and twenty-four other signatories to call for “neurorights” as a protection against threats posed by machines that read our brains and our thoughts.⁶ Neurorights would protect brain information as medical data and perhaps would also protect one from self-incrimination in a court of law.

In part, these efforts at brain reading and translation into what a person is thinking confirm Santayana’s account of consciousness and thought. They are aftereffects of material causes. But this also calls into question whether thoughts are “immaterial and moral and cognitive” as Santayana suggests. If brain activity can be identified and translated into a public account of what a person is thinking, then one may wonder whether it is best to simply identify the thought and the brain activity as one, or should one maintain Santayana’s account that the objects of consciousness are not material? Hence, perhaps the beginning of some collaboration between philosophy and science that furthers our understanding of ourselves.

Conclusion: A Complete Humanist in a Complete Naturalist

I have described only some of the prospects for philosophy that are rooted in Santayana’s naturalism, and I am

⁶ See the following website for more information: <https://nri.ntc.columbia.edu/content/our-story-0>

confident others will find more. Indeed, there are many more possibilities in approaches that continue work in epistemology, logic, the history of philosophy, etc., as well as many other areas to explore the relationships between philosophy and the natural sciences as well as the social sciences. Despite all the challenges facing philosophy and academic programs in the liberal arts, I remain hopeful that the captivating as well as the ponderous aspects of philosophy will continue both inside and outside of higher education. Even if we go through a significant nadir in courses being offered and departments and faculty being secure, even if the public recognition of philosophical endeavors experiences a decline, I believe the underlying concerns raised in philosophical studies and debates are essential to human development and growth. Philosophers may have to open new doorways, take new paths, and find more collaboration with scholars in other areas of research.

One may wonder how best to judge any philosophical approach whether existing now or in the future. Santayana suggests there are two principal criteria. First, is the philosopher like Spinoza in being a complete naturalist allowing science to determine the causes of all events including human actions or is she or he superstitious and confused on this subject. And second, “how humane and representative is his sense of the good, and how far, by his disposition or sympathetic intelligence, does he appreciate all the types of excellence toward which life may be directed?... The complete moralist must not only be sound in physics, but must be inwardly inspired by a normal human soul and an adequate human tradition; he must be a complete humanist in a complete naturalist” (Santayana, *Persons and Places*, 235).

Regardless of the direction taken by philosophy in the future, whether it exists inside and/or outside of academia, whether it is another form of literature or a collaboration with neurological sciences or takes on any other form, these two tests remain important criteria for judging the value of philosophical endeavors. And this is another of Santayana’s contributions to the work of philosophers.

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