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GEORGE SANTAYANA: A COSMOPOLITAN

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Abstract: Santayana is a cosmopolitan who does not endorse cosmopolitanism in the traditional sense of sanctioning a universal moral or political code. Santayana has more in common with the contemporary cosmopolitanism of Kwame Appiah where individuals respect each other without necessarily agreeing with each other. Being cosmopolitan is central to Santayana's philosophical outlook. His family background is enriched by his parents' Spanish diplomatic history. His personal, philosophical, and literary ventures are also international using classical terms and extend through centuries, bringing an impact of contemporary relevance and a decided bearing on present-day issues. His non-reductive naturalism led him to focus on individual achievements in varying and contingent political and environmental contexts rather than considering every human as a member of a universal community guided by universal standards. Santayana was ahead of his time appreciating the diversity of human life and its many perfections, and his account of consciousness resonates with current neurological research.

Keywords: Appiah, Autobiography, Materialism, Moral relativism, Respect, Universal Concern.

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1. Introduction

Santayana is cosmopolitan in the sense of having an international perspective on world events and not being bound by the narrower viewpoint of one nation or region. He does not endorse a cosmopolitanism that advocates one universal moral or political code for all human beings. In that respect his views are more like that of Kwame Appiah and not like that of Immanuel Kant. As shall be discussed later, Appiah endorses a world view where people respect each other without necessarily agreeing on political or moral perspectives. Whereas Kant envisions a cosmopolitanism where the entire world is governed by a representative global institution and armies are abolished. In the strict sense traditional cosmopolitanism proposes that humans should form a cohesive and unified community under a universal code. In contrast, Santayana views the world and human beings as natural entities in which their heritage and environment nurture various actions and outlooks that may well conflict with one another. Humans are animals that behave in a manner structured by their environment and physical makeup, just like all other living creatures. That humans live in different social, political, and moral structures does not mean that one structure is right and the others are wrong, or even that one is better and the others are not. Humans should structure their lives as best they can, and in a manner that individuals living in their societies can flourish as much as is possible given the environment and their individual capabilities. As a result, our inherited environmental circumstances and our physical interaction with them will vary and sometimes may result in dramatically different social, political and moral structures that depend on specific circumstances and individual characteristics. As we shall see, Santayana's focus on the individual may raise questions regarding how one may best engage in bringing about societal goals.

His family background is enriched by his parents' Spanish diplomatic history that had a major impact on his birth, childhood, and his arrival in Boston. His personal, philosophical, and literary ventures are international and extend through centuries, bringing their impact to

contemporary relevance and a decided bearing on present-day issues[1]. His non-reductive naturalism led him to focus on individual achievements in varying and contingent political and environmental contexts. And in many ways, Santayana was ahead of his time by appreciating the diversity of human life and its many perfections. Even his account of human/animal consciousness is surprising and was rarely taken seriously during his day, but now in the twenty-first century his account of consciousness resonates with current neurological research.

In his autobiography, *Persons and* Places, Santayana describes the development of his life and thought as divided into three parts: (1) background (1863-1886), (2) America and Europe (1886-1912), and (3) Europe (1912-1952). The background of his life basically spans his childhood in Spain through his undergraduate years at Harvard. Santayana's trans-Atlantic penchant for traveling led him to describe his years as a graduate student and professor at Harvard as on both sides of the Atlantic, a description he suggested as a title for the second part of his autobiography. Likewise, the third part of his life he described as all on the other side, indicating the forty years he spent as a full-time writer in Europe after retiring from Harvard in 1912. His Spanish background and his parents' diplomatic roles provide the origins for his being a cosmopolitan even during his early childhood and eventually leading to his life in Boston as being both in Europe and the U.S. Let us first turn to his heritage and outlook that led to the development of his cosmopolitan views.

2. Santayana's Family Background[2]

Santayana was a child of Spanish diplomats whose outlook were shaped by their lives in various countries and cultures while rooted in their Spanish heritage. Agustín Santayana, Santayana's father, was born in 1812. He practiced law for a brief time before entering the colonial service where he was posted in the Philippines. Even while studying law he served as an apprentice to a professional painter of the school of Goya. His reading was extensive as was his library, and he translated four Senecan tragedies into Spanish and wrote an unpublished book about the island of Mindanao. He made three trips around the world. He became the governor of Batang, a small island in the Philippines. One of the remarkable contingencies of Santayana's background is that Agustín took over the governorship from the recently deceased José Borrás y Bofarull, who was the father of Josefina Borrás. Josefina later becomes Agustín's wife in 1861 and the mother of Jorge Agustín Nicolás Santayana y Borrás (George Santayana) on December 16, 1863. In the normal course of events, one might have expected Agustín and Josefina to begin their courtship at this point since she was the only Spanish woman on the island. But this diplomatic happenstance did not follow that path. Why Josefina left the island after Agustín arrived is not clear. Perhaps she was uncomfortable with the situation when she left for Manila. There she met and married a Boston businessman. In 1856, Agustín again met Josefina while traveling on board ship from Manila for Spain. She was with her husband George Sturgis and their three surviving children were with them. This time Agustín traveled to Boston and Niagara, then to New York City and to England. His final post was as the Financial Secretary to General

[1] See H.J. Saatkamp Jr., *Santayana: Philosopher for the Twenty-First Century*, in M.A. Coleman, G. Tiller (ed.), *The Palgrave Companion to George Santayana's Scepticism and Animal Faith*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2024, for more information.

[2] For more detailed information on this see H.J. Saatkamp Jr., *Autobiography*, in *Oxford Handbook on Santayana*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, forthcoming.

Pavia Marqués de Novaliches, Governor-General of the Philippines. The tropics were not good for his health and he retired early in his late forties at an age similar to his future son's (George Santayana) retirement from Harvard at the age of forty-eight. In 1861 he returned to Madrid and fortuitously again met the widow Josefina Borrás Sturgis. They married that year.

Josefina Borrás life was also filled with happenstance and dramatic forces. Spanish in background, she was born in Glasgow, Scotland, around 1826-1828. Interestingly, she spent her early life in Virginia (U.S.A) and Barcelona (Spain). As an adult she spent her life in the Philippines, Spain, and the last 43 years of her life in Boston, Massachusetts. Her father's political views caused him to leave Spain for Scotland, and ironically when they moved to the U.S., he became the American Consul for Barcelona, Spain. The Spanish government later turned more in his direction, and he was appointed to a lucrative post in the Philippines. But it was not a simple voyage. Six months passed during their travel from Cádiz to Manila around the Cape of Good Hope, complicated by a storm the captain described as the worse he had ever experienced. During their travel, the Spanish government had changed again, and he was no longer to be appointed to the high paying position, but a small post as Governor of Batang was now his. When her father died, Josefina was now without family on the island, but she was resourceful and established a modestly profitable export business. However, she left for Manila when Agustín Santayana arrived. In Manila she met George Sturgis, a Boston aristocrat and businessman and they married, had five children, two died in early childhood, and then George Sturgis died. He was young when he died and his business was failing. Josefina once again was stranded in the Philippines but this time with several children. A brother of her husband offered her $10,000 to help and she moved to Boston. Interestingly, the funds were the same amount she would leave to each of her surviving children when she died in 1912. She met Agustín again in Madrid in 1861 and they married. He was close to fifty years old and she was probably thirty-five. George Santayana was born in 1863, and they decided to move to Ávila sometime between 1864 and 1866. Although a beautiful walled city, Josefina found Ávila not the best place to raise her Sturgis children, and first her one surviving son from her first marriage returned to Boston. And then in 1869 she left for Boston with her two daughters. From 1869 until 1872 Agustín and his son, Jorge (George), lived in Ávila. But in 1872 Agustín decided that his son would have a better life in Boston as well. According to letters, Agustín made an effort to adjust to Boston and American life, but he preferred Spain and Ávila. After a few months, he left to return home, and the separation of mother and father was permanent. In 1888 Agustín wrote to Josefina:

> When we were married I felt as if it were written that I should be united with you, yielding to the force of destiny […]. Strange marriage, this of ours! So you say, and so it is in fact. I love you very much, and you too have cared for me, yet we do not live together[3].

3. Life in Boston

When Santayana came to Boston, his English was not the best, and although he would turn nine years old in 1872, he attended Miss Welchman's Kindergarten on Chestnutt Street to

[3] G. Santayana, *Persons and Places. Fragments of Autobiography*, eds. W.G. Holzberger and H.J. Saatkamp Jr., Cambridge, The MIT Press, 1986, p. 9.

improve his English. Later he attended the Boston Latin School (1874-1882) and Harvard College (1882-1886). In 1889 he completed his Ph.D. at Harvard College. He writes:

> From the point of view of learning, my education at the Boston Latin School and at Harvard College was not solid or thorough; it would not have been solid or thorough in Spain; yet what scraps of learning or ideas I might have gathered there would have been vital, the wind of politics and of poetry would have swelled them, and allied them with notions of honour. But then I should have become a different man; so that my father's decision was all for my good, if I was to be the person that I am now[4].

How true! Had he remained in Spain, he would have been a different person with a different outlook and future. Even so, he says his father's decision to bring him to the U.S. was good in the sense of shaping the person he became.

From 1889-1912 he became a vital member of Harvard's Department of Philosophy. William James, Josiah Royce and Santayana were internationally known colleagues during one of the most esteemed times for the department. Among his students were poets (Conrad Aiken, T.S. Eliot, Robert Frost, Wallace Stevens), journalists and writers (Walter Lippmann, Max Eastman, Van Wyck Brooks), professors (Samuel Eliot Morison, Harry Austryn Wolfson), a Supreme Court Justice (Felix Frankfurter), numerous diplomats (including his friend, Bronson Cutting), and a university president (James B. Conant).

Santayana was distinctly different from his Harvard colleagues, students, and the general population of protestant, puritanical and pragmatic Boston. Santayana's Spanish and Catholic background were unusual in that setting. He lived with his mother and siblings from another father. He spoke Spanish at home, and his dress and appearance were often different. His sense of being distinctive was prominent, but it did not keep him from fully engaging in undergraduate and graduate life. Some have portrayed Santayana almost as a recluse and isolated throughout his life, but that is simply false. He was a member of over twenty clubs and organizations, including the Harvard Lampoon, Hasty Pudding Club, the OK Club, the Harvard Monthly, and rarely is it noted that he was elected Pope! That is the position he was elected to when he helped form the Laodicean Club[5]. He traveled to Europe each summer following his freshman year, and clearly enjoyed the adventures and frivolity of an undergraduate young man as is attested to by his letters to family, particularly his father, and to friends. Two of his graduate years were spent abroad, primarily in Germany and England. Santayana's career at Harvard was productive, active, and remarkable in achievement. In his mid-thirties, after publishing books of poetry, he wrote *The Sense of Beauty* (1896)[6] and *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion* (1900)[7]. *The Sense of Beauty* is based on his lectures from his Harvard aesthetics course. Rather than noting aesthetics as based on refined mental qualities, he places aesthetics in the natural sensibilities as a construct and response to human/animal activity. His distinct approach again is highlighted in *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion* where religion and poetry are portrayed as imaginative by-products that supervene on the natural order.

His Harvard mentors and colleagues were well-known for their views of muscular imagination that was essential to pragmatism and to idealism. Santayana's different philosophy and outlook were clear and to some offensive. These were the roots of his

[4] *Ibidem*.

[5] A reference to the Laodicean Church that was lukewarm and complacent as found in *Revelation* 3: 14-22.

[6] Cfr. G. Santayana, *The Sense of Beauty. Being the Outlines of Aesthetic Theory*, New York, Scribner's, 1896.

[7] Cfr. G. Santayana, *Interpretation of Poetry and Religion*, New York, Scribner's, 1900.

mature philosophy developed after he left Harvard when he views thought as meaningless in its consequence but eloquent in expression. Imagination and consciousness have no practical value as they are celebrational and festive reflections of one's physical (psyche) interaction with ones environment. This theme was largely shaped by his Spanish and Catholic heritage, and even in its rudimentary form, was not well received in a university known for shaping future generations to have a significant impact on the nation's governance and business based on their education and mental abilities. Santayana's future in the department was in question but that changed with the publication of the five-volume *The Life of Reason* (1905)[8] which was well received partly because it was misunderstood. To many Santayana had finally crossed the American line since it appeared that he now maintained the practical impact of mental constructs and reason. And even though he expressed this in classical terms, it seemed to his American colleagues a welcome turn to an approach that had practical impacts and seemed more in the American tradition. The five volumes were advertised as works in the pragmatic tradition, and Santayana complained to Scribner's about this and asked that it be corrected[9]. Later he would write that the volumes satisfied Americans because «it moves in a moralistic, humanistic, atmosphere which they can appreciate. I think it is sensible, and contains some good passages and sayings as Erskine quotes. But neither as a writer nor a philosopher can I be judged by it»[10]. Regardless of his reception, favorable and unfavorable, his notice as a serious philosopher was well established by the turn of the century, and shortly after the publication of *The Life of Reason* he was promoted to full Professor. Had he been a typical professor, he could have looked at a lifetime of teaching and writing at one of the principal American universities. But he was not typical.

As early 1893 he began what he refers to as his *metanoia*, an awakening from somnambulism which led him to begin to set aside money and work towards an early retirement. He saw this as the end of youth and a move toward maturity that occurred over a long period of time punctuated by his early retirement in 1912 and followed by the development of his fully naturalistic philosophy and way of life ending only at his death in 1952. However, even though this change was slow he notes there were three events that brought about his initial change in perspective in 1893: (1) the death of a young student, (2) the death of his father, and (3) the marriage of Susanna[11]. In contrast to his many activities and recognitions, the contingency of life was dramatically brought forward by the unexpected death from cholera of Warwick Potter, Harvard class of 1893, while sailing with his friend Edgar Scott[12].

> Though he was a general favourite and a long procession of us walked behind the bier at his funeral, there was after all nothing extraordinary about him. The cause of my emotion was in myself. I was brimming over with the sense of parting, of being divided by fortune where at heart there was no division. I found myself, unwillingly and irreparably, separated from Spain, from England, from Europe, from my youth and from my religion. It was not good simple Warwick alone that inspired my verses about him. It was the thought of everything that was escaping me: the Good in all the modes of it that I might have caught a glimpse of and lost[13].

[8] G. Santayana, *The Life of Reason; or, The Phases of Human Progress*, New York, Scribner's, 1905.

[9] Cfr. G. Santayana, *The Letters of George Santayana, Book One, 1868-1909*, eds. W.G. Holzberger and H.J. Saatkamp Jr., Cambridge, The MIT Press, 2001, pp. 361-362.

[10] Ivi, p. 45.

[11] Cfr. G. Santayana, *Persons and Places*, cit., pp. 423-425.

[12] J. McCormick, *George Santayana. A Biography*, New York, Knopf, 1987, p. 104.

[13] G. Santayana, *Persons and Places*, cit., p. 423.

The death of his father in the same year brought forward Santayana's sense of what life might be like after his energic youth one that he saw as less than positive but leading over a long period to a more positive inward and isolated existence. He writes of his father:

> He was seventy-nine years old, deaf, half-blind, and poor; he had desired his own death and had attempted to hasten it. The fact that he was my father, whose character and destiny were strikingly repeated, with variations, in my own, called up a lurid image of what my life in the world was likely to be: solitary, obscure, trivial, and wasted. I must not look ahead. Ahead, after youth was gone, everything would grow sadder and sadder. I must look within or above[14].

The marriage of his half-sister, Susana, perhaps had an even deeper impact than the previous ones. She was his closest relationship in many ways, and he cherished their communication and care for each other, particularly given the distant relationship with their mother and his father living in Spain. In 1893 Susana married Celedonio Sastre who was widowed and a prominent person in Ávila. She was forty-one years old, and Celedonio already had six children. For Santayana this was a marriage of need and not of love. And her move to Spain and care for the children and the prominent role in the Ávila community meant the relationship with Santayana would be quite different and perhaps even difficult. Earlier in her life she had joined a convent only to leave it before being fully a nun. Santayana initially saw this move as seeking to be true to her religion and showing contempt for the world, but he admired her leaving the convent because she had tried too much too late.

> Her leaving the convent then was no surprise; she had attempted too much and too late; but her marriage now proved more conclusively that she had no contempt of the world; that her religious enthusiasm itself had been something human and social, and that she, who had given the first impulse to my speculative life, had never had any speculative or mystical insight. She was a Sturgis; and her charm and her ascendency over me had been founded only on her natural warmth, geniality and fun, themselves now less spontaneous and engaging than when she was younger. She still clung to the Church with an intense party spirit, which she developed also in politics; but she couldn't live her religion as I lived my philosophy. It was too unreal for her human nature[15].

And from this point, he went on to live by his philosophy, regarding himself as a world citizen who visited many countries and regions, valuing the benefits of their cultures while knowing he viewed them from his own perspective[16]. However, this change of life was a slow process he describes as his «retirement from the world»[17]. Not until 1912 did he leave his Harvard position.

As he quietly planned for his early retirement, his sense grew that university life was unsuitable for his desire to be a full-time writer. He avoided faculty meetings and any administrative tasks. He found faculty meetings, committees, and governance structures and their discussions superficial consisting mostly of partisan heat over false issues. The general corporate and business-like adaptation of universities was not conducive to intellectual curiosity, development, and growth. His general description of the Harvard faculty was «an anonymous concourse of coral insects, each secreting one cell, and leaving that fossil legacy

[14] Ivi, p. 424.
[15] Ivi, p. 425.
[16] Cfr. H.J. Saatkamp Jr., *A Life of Scholarship with Santayana*, eds Ch. Padrón and K.P. Skowroński, Leiden and Boston, Brill, 2021, pp. 100-125.
[17] G. Santayana, *Persons and Places*, cit., p. 422.

to enlarge the earth»[18]. Surprisingly even with this awakening outlook, his successes as a professor are well documented, and, indeed, these successes made possible his early retirement. At the same time, the new expectations and restrictions accompanying his achievements convinced Santayana that the academic environment was not the proper place for a serious philosopher with the desire to be a full-time writer who did not want to be restricted by the American idea of practical outcomes and a view that America was the model for all other countries to follow. His sense was that America was a young country following outdated philosophies. But his writings and lectures led to many opportunities even in America. It is interesting that difference can both set one apart and also make one more interesting and more attractive. The latter was Santayana's fate; it was one of the portals that led to his being a cosmopolitan, and his last years at Harvard brought trips to major universities, receptions and parties in New York, and widespread recognitions and friendships. There is evidence he was being courted by Columbia, Williams, Wisconsin, and Berkeley. However, his resolve for early retirement is confirmed in letters to his sister in 1909[19]. When he announced his retirement in May 1911, President Lowell asked him to wait and agreed to provide Santayana with as much free time as he wanted. Santayana initially assented to teach only during the fall term with a full year's leave for 1912-13. However, in 1912 while he was on board ship to England, his mother died, leaving him and his siblings $10,000 each. With his savings, steady income from his publications, and the inheritance, he could retire. His resolve to live his own life, to write, and to travel, overtook his sense of obligation to Harvard and, at the age of forty-eight, he left Harvard and the U.S. to spend the remaining forty years of his life in Europe never to return to the U.S. He asked his half-brother Robert Sturgis to manage his finances (something Robert had done for their mother) with the understanding that Robert or his descendants would inherit the full capital upon Santayana's death. Hence, in January 1912, at the age of forty-eight, Santayana was free to write, free to travel, free to choose his residence and country, and free from the constraints of university regimen and expectations. Santayana welcomed the release.

4. Europe

At first Santayana was not sure where he wanted his principal residence in Europe to be. He made many trips between Europe and England in 1912-1914. He appears to have settled on Paris, but he was in London when World War I broke out, and remained in England, mostly at Oxford, until 1919. He received offers of lifetime membership at both Corpus Christi and New College, but he chose a life of the traveling writer. He then was truly the vagabond scholar. Thereafter, his locales revolved around Paris, Madrid, the Riviera, Florence, Cortina d'Ampezzo, and finally by the mid-1920s his established patterns began to center more and more in Rome. There were efforts to have him return to the U.S., but he did not accept any of these. As early as 1917 Harvard asked Santayana to return, and as late as 1929 he was offered the Norton Chair in Poetry, one of Harvard's most respected chairs. In 1931 he turned down an invitation from Brown University, and Harvard later tempted him to accept for only a term the William James Lecturer in Philosophy, a newly established honorary post[20]. Santayana never returned to Harvard, nor to America. He appeared on the

[18] Ivi, p. 397.
[19] G. Santayana, *The Letters of George Santayana, Book One, 1868–1909*, cit., p. 401.
[20] Cfr. J. McCormick, *George Santayana. A Biography*, cit., pp. 301-302.

front of *Time* magazine February 3, 1936, in conjunction with his best-selling novel, *The Last Puritan*. He also received a number of awards including the Royal Society of Literature Benson Medal (1925) and the Columbia University Butler Gold Medal (1945). Unsuccessful in his efforts to leave Rome before World War II, in 1941 he entered the Clinica della Piccola Compagna di Maria, a clinic administered by a Catholic order of nuns better known as the Blue Nuns for the color of their habit. His autobiography, *Persons and Places*, was smuggled out of Rome during the war and was a Book-of-the-Month Club selection in 1944-45. He died at the clinic on September 26, 1952, at the age of eighty-eight, having published 27 books and numerous articles during his lifetime.

5. Philosophical Aspects of His Being a Cosmopolitan

The critical edition of his autobiography restores many passages that were omitted from the original publication because of the difficulties of publishing during WWII and some censorship by the press and by Santayana himself who initially wanted his autobiography to be published after his death. Because of the cost and difficulties, Scribner's did not publish any of Santayana's 644 marginal comments that were intended to be a part of the autobiography. Santayana strongly expressed his hope that one day the text and the marginal comments would be restored, and that occurred in 1986 with the critical edition being published by MIT Press. This text provides the first true edition of Santayana's autobiography as he wrote it in his manuscript and corrected. Some of the omitted marginalia provide three insights as to the principal tenets of Santayana's philosophy and his cosmopolitan views. There are three principal portals through which Santayana views the world: (1) materialism, (2) moral relativism and (3) integrity and self-definition[21].

6. Materialism[22]

In Chapter XI of *Persons and Places*, «The Church of the Immaculate Conception», Santayana describes the development of his own thought from the idealisms of boyhood and from the intellectual materialism of a traveling student to the complete, materialistic outlook of the adult Santayana. Interestingly, he emphasizes the continuity throughout his life minimizing the different youthful perspectives in contrast to his mature materialism. He writes, «The more I change the more I am the same person»[23].

In a marginal heading he records that his boyhood idealisms were never his genuine beliefs[24].

> But those ideal universes in my head did not produce any firm convictions or actual duties. They had nothing to do with the wretched poverty-stricken real world in which I was condemned to live. That the real was rotten and only the imaginary at all interesting seemed to me axiomatic. That was too sweeping; yet allowing for the rash generalisations of youth, it is still what I think. My philosophy has never changed[25].

[21] These three steps are described in marginal comments (headings) in the holograph of *Persons and Places* (cit.). These comments were omitted from publications prior to the 1986 critical edition of the autobiography.
[22] Santayana often uses «materialism» and «naturalism» as interchangeable.
[23] G. Santayana, *Persons and Places*, cit., p. 159, marginal heading [mh].
[24] Ivi, p. 166, mh.
[25] Ivi, p. 167.

Hence, he notes, in spite «of my religious and other day-dreams, I was at bottom a young realist; I knew I was dreaming, and so was awake. A sure proof of this was that I was never *anxious* about what those dreams would have involved if they had been true. I never had the least touch of superstition»[26].

> From the boy dreaming awake in the church of the Immaculate Conception, to the travelling student seeing the world in Germany, England, and Spain there had been no great change in sentiment. I was still «at the church door». Yet in belief, in the clarification of my philosophy, I had taken an important step. I no longer wavered between alternate views of the world, to be put on or taken off like alternate plays at the theatre. I now saw that there was only one possible play, the actual history of nature and of mankind, although there might well be ghosts among the characters and soliloquies among the speeches. Religions, *all* religions, and idealistic philosophies, *all* idealistic philosophies, were the soliloquies and the ghosts. They might be eloquent and profound. Like Hamlet's soliloquy they might be excellent reflective criticisms of the play as a whole. Nevertheless they were only parts of it, and their value as criticisms lay entirely in their fidelity to the facts, and to the sentiments which those facts aroused in the critic[27].

The full statement and development of his materialism did not occur until later in his life. It was in place by the time of *Scepticism and Animal Faith* (1923)[28] and not fully so at the time of *The Life of Reason* (1905).

Within Santayana's fully cultivated materialism, the origins of all events in the world are arbitrary, temporal, and contingent. Matter (by whatever name it is called) is the principle of existence. It is «often untoward, and an occasion of imperfection or conflict in things». Hence, a «sour moralist» may consider it evil, but, according to Santayana, if one takes a wider view «matter would seem a good […] because it is the principle of existence: it is all things in their potentiality and therefore the condition of all their excellence or possible perfection»[29]. Matter is the non-discursive, natural foundation for all that is. In itself, it is neither good nor evil but may be perceived as such when viewed from the vested interest of animal life. Matter's nondiscernible, neutral face is converted to a smile or frown by latent animal interests. But «moral values cannot preside over nature»[30]. Principled values are the products of natural forces: «The germination, definition, and prevalence of any good must be grounded in nature herself, not in human eloquence»[31]. From the point of view of origins, therefore, the realm of matter is the matrix and the source of everything: it is nature, the sphere of genesis, the universal mother. The truth cannot dictate to us the esteem in which we shall hold it: that is not a question of fact but of preference[32].

Clearly the contingent events of his background, birth, and early childhood were major factors in his life and form a backdrop for his materialism. There are forces beyond one's reach, shaping one's destiny, and at the same time providing a chance for a good life. And from the perspective of a cosmopolitan, these forces shape what is possible in one's life.

[26] *Ibidem*.
[27] Ivi, p. 169.
[28] Cfr. G. Santayana, *Scepticism and Animal Faith. Introduction to a System of Philosophy*, New York, Scribner's, 1923.
[29] G. Santayana, *The Realm of Matter: Book Second*, New York, Scribner's, 1930, p. v.
[30] Ivi, p. 134.
[31] Ivi, p. 131.
[32] Ivi, p. XI.

7. Moral Relativism: The Forms of the Good are Diverse

The diversity of what is good in different material contexts led Santayana to a moral relativism that increased his sense of being a world citizen or a cosmopolitan. He writes, «the forms of the good are divergent». This enabled Santayana to overcome «moral and ideal provinciality, and to see that every form of life had its own perfection, which it was stupid and cruel to condemn for differing from some other form, by chance one's own»[33].

Santayana's moral relativism is consistent with his materialism. It is the neutral perspective of the naturalistic observer who, because he does not have the same commitments, can observe the behavior of others and value it for what it is, not because it coincides with his own interests. No doubt this insight was influenced by the diplomatic careers and lifestyles of his parents, their distant and respectful marriage, the experiences of the young Santayana in Miss Welchman's Kindergarten on Chestnut Street and in the Boston Latin School, the wanderings and deliberations of the traveling student, the personal and professional experiences of the young Harvard professor, and the success and travels of the mature, distinguished writer. It is clear that being Spanish, having a Catholic background, and perhaps being an «unconscious homosexual»[34] set him apart in Protestant America. He nevertheless participated in and valued the American experience though he could never fully identify with it. Later, he chose Hermes the Interpreter as his god[35], paralleling his mature insight as interpreter of views and values. Hermes is at home in the world of discourse – unraveling, decoding, and interpreting one perspective from another. Likewise, Santayana approaches philosophy as reflective discourse, understanding and interpreting many perspectives in his own dialect.

Materialism provides the naturalistic basis for morality while the unlimited realm of essence provides unlimited forms for imagination and interpretation. Santayana's naturalism projects a neutral, objective view towards the moralities, the vested interests, of animals[36]. His realm of essence, likewise, is neutral to the realization or status of any possible form. «Any special system has alternatives, and must tremble for its frontiers; whereas the realm of essence, in its perfect catholicity, is placid and safe and the same whatever may happen in earth or heaven»[37].

Santayana's insight that the forms of the good are divergent reveals a boundless realm of possible goods not logically or morally ordered by animal interests or talents. However, a fully neutral perspective is not possible. Perspectives derive from some living being in a particular place and time with latent interests originating from their physiology and physical environment. Santayana's naturalism is balanced by a polarity between the neutral, objective understanding of behavior and activity on the one hand and the committed, vested interest of the living being on the other hand. One may recognize that every form of the good has its own perfection, and one may respect that perfection, but «the right of alien

[33] G. Santayana, *Persons and Places*, cit., p. 170.

[34] Daniel Cory relates that Santayana in 1929, after a discussion of A.E. Housman's poetry and homosexuality, remarked: «I think I must have been that way in my Harvard days – although I was unconscious of it at the time». D. Cory, *Santayana: The Later Years. A Portrait with Letters*, New York, Braziller, 1963, p. 40.

[35] G. Santayana, *Hermes the Interpreter*, in *Soliloquies in England*, Ann Arbor, The University of Michigan Press, 1967, p. 259.

[36] For more detailed information see H.J. Saatkamp Jr., *Naturalism*, in *Oxford Handbook on Santayana*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, forthcoming.

[37] G. Santayana, *Realms of Being*, One-volume edition, New York, Scribner's, 1942, p. 82.

natures to pursue their proper aims can never abolish our right to pursue ours»[38]. Hence, Santayana's third tenet: each form of the good is definite and final.

8. Integrity: Each Form of the Good is Definite and Final

From the perspective of autobiography, Santayana's clear notion of self-knowledge, in the sense of the Greeks, is one of his most distinguishing marks. For Santayana, «integrity or self-definition is and remains first and fundamental in morals»[39]. Decided elements of his self-definition are found in his retirement from Harvard and his life as a roving scholar. After Harvard, his daily activities and long-term achievements were matters of his own direction. Free to choose his own environment and habitual practices, his life was festive and fruitful. Santayana was true to his own form of life to the end. Two days before his death Cory asked him if he was suffering: «Yes, my friend. But my anguish is entirely physical; there are no moral difficulties whatsoever»[40].

Integrity was not only a central part of Santayana's life, his cosmopolitanism was based on respect for the multiplicity of human (and animal) interests suited not just for survival but for living well within one's environment and throughout one's lifetime. As Santayana notes: «Survival is something impossible: but it is possible to have lived and died well»[41]. Living and dying well are not abstract values that are the same for all, but rather they are rooted in one's heritable traits, physiological development, and culture. They are reflected in speech, literature, art and the whole of individual human lives. However presented, they are reflections of individual physiology rooted in diverse human and animal cultures. Santayana's philosophy rests on his materialism and on his humane and sympathetic appreciation for the excellence of each life. Like his naturalism and his realm of essence, this insight establishes his thought in a wide tradition, and it marks his career and his personal life with distinction.

A central part of the gravitas of Santayana's cosmopolitan outlook is his account of the relative values of all life, relative to one's heritable traits, one's physical development, and the physical structures of one's culture and the natural world. Respecting all forms of life and all forms of good does not remove the central integrity of one's own life and the natural drive to flourish and to live well in accord with one's natural psyche and physical culture.

9. Spiritual Life

For Santayana spiritual life was integral to living well. However spiritual life for Santayana is quite different from its usual account and is not something he recommends for everyone. The spirit or consciousness is an aftereffect of one's physical being (psyche) interacting with one's environment. It is temporary, fleeting, and not a way of living. It is not an influence that structures one's existence, but it is rather a reflection in consciousness of the quality of one's existence. If the spiritual life was considered a dominating or guiding influence in structuring one's life, then one would be forced to choose between the life of

[38] G. Santayana, *Persons and Places*, cit., p. 170.
[39] *Ibidem*.
[40] D. Cory, *Santayana: The Later Years*, cit., p. 325.
[41] G. Santayana, *Dominations and Powers. Reflections on Liberty, Society, and Government*, New York, Scribner's, 1951, pp. 209-210.

everyday existence and the life of the spirit as a monk or a nun much choose between the life of the world and that of the religious order. But for Santayana, no such conflict exists because spirituality is an awareness over an extended period of time. Spiritual life is a life of receptivity to all that comes in the moment while suspending animal interests. One may experience this spirituality for some extended time as when one is fully captivated by the beauty of a symphony, painting, poetry, or the delight of friendship or love. But if one suspends one's natural interests, such as eating or sleeping, for any extended period that would be both detrimental and tragic. Indeed, any effort to choose such a life would be short lived.

For Santayana, consciousness essentially is only an awareness of and a full focus on what is given. It is not an instrument in reshaping one's life or the world. Consciousness emerged late in the evolutionary pathway and is a flowering of happy circumstances that celebrates what is given, and when truly recognized, does only that. It is joyful, delighting in what is presented, and not troubled by where it leads or what it means. Religions that turn spiritual life into a science, social club or political movements are confused. Spirit, or consciousness, is momentary, fleeting, and depends on the physical forces of our bodies and environment in order to exist. Shaping one's life to enhance these spiritual, fleeting moments, extending them as long as is practical, is one of the delights of living for some people, but it is certainly not a goal for all, nor should it be.

10. Santayana and Contemporary Cosmopolitanism

Historically much has been written about cosmopolitanism, and one may find it worthwhile to explore various writers such as Diogenes of Sinope (c. 412 B.C.) who is thought of as the founder of cosmopolitanism. Historically, the cosmopolitan ethic echoes in forms of stoicism and in the Abrahamic religions: «there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus»[42]. One also finds it in the Enlightenment through the «Declaration of the Rights of Man» (1789) and in Kant's proposal for a league of nations. Immanuel Kant, Emmanuel Levinas, and Jacques Derrida all have written on cosmopolitanism and have made significant contributions. Of course, historical alternatives such as Hitler and Stalin attacked «rootless cosmopolitans», justifying their anti-Semitic views and positing them as clear threats to their regimes. And in today's world the rise of the right wing has increased antisemitic views, racism, and threats to immigrants not only in the U.S. but in other countries as well.

Perhaps the best-known contemporary cosmopolitan is Kwame Anthony Appiah. His international background enables him to honor his own heritage while maintaining that there are moral standards that may guide citizens of different countries and backgrounds. In some ways Santayana's views overlap with many of Appiah's. Both maintain concern for all humans living well and respect for legitimate differences. Unlike the rational principles in utilitarianism and other approaches, the values of concern and respect for all humans do not have the form of a consistent set of rational principles. Rather both recognize that moral agreements and disagreements are more often based on accepted views and values and not on rational principles. Even one's own accepted values may clash with one another rather than being consistent. As Appiah puts it:

[42] *Galatians* 3: 28, King James Version (KJV).

> As we'll see, there will be times when these two ideals – universal concern and respect for legitimate difference – clash. There's a sense in which cosmopolitanism is the name not of the solution but of the challenge[43].

The challenge of cosmopolitanism is how do we respect differences and find ways of living together even when there may be little or no agreements regarding important social issues. These issues may have wider implications for Appiah than for Santayana because of the remarkable interconnections in our modern world. Appiah maintains that the «very idea of morality» is that you have responsibilities for each person «you know and can affect». Obviously, the number of people we may affect in our contemporary world is much greater than it was in Santayana's lifetime. Our present interconnectedness makes us responsible for many more people than ever before. We have grown from living in local groups and now find ourselves in a «global tribe»[44].

Cosmopolitans largely maintain that the differences between cultures have been over emphasized and the differences highlighted depend on a commonality among peoples throughout the world.

> So, naturally, the ethnographer didn't usually come back with a report whose one-sentence summary was: they are pretty much like us. And yet, of course, they had to be. They did, after all, mostly have gods, food, language, dance, music, carving, medicines, family lives, rituals, jokes, and children's tales. They smiled, slept, had sex and children, wept, and, in the end, died. And it was possible for this total stranger, the anthropologist, who was, nevertheless, a fellow human being, to make progress with their language and religion, their habits – things that every adult member of the society had had a couple of decades to work on – in a year or two. Without those similarities, how could cultural anthropology be possible?[45]

This commonality is the basis of respect for others and living together even without a generally agreed on standard. Our shared traits and habits enable us to learn from and respect differences. Through communication, often through storytelling, we gain a better sense of each other and how we respond to the world and to each other, to problems and puzzles, is one way of aligning our responses to issues. And as Appiah notes: «And that alignment of responses is, in turn, one of the ways we maintain the social fabric, the texture of our relationships»[46]. Other people, other cultures reveal themselves through fiction and nonfiction, music, painting, sculpture and dance. But what happens when there is a dramatically different response to the world?

Some responses may be shown as false while others are simply different ways of describing or organizing our way of living. Appiah notes that witchcraft can be shown to be false, and some of his kinsmen in Ghana maintain a belief in witchcraft. Even so, one can still live together when someone holds a view that is false, indeed, one can live together among many family and extended relations where there may be clearly false views. It is respect for the differences that makes the difference.

However, in his own heritage there is also a different way of understanding the organization of families which is simply a different way of structuring our lives and is an accurate account within that culture. This is the Akan idea of abusua which is different from the traditional western view. Abusua membership depends only on who your mother is. This

[43] K.A. Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers*, New York, Norton, 2006, p. XV.
[44] Ivi, p. XIII.
[45] Ivi, p. 14.
[46] Ivi, p. 29.

leads to a strikingly different structure of families, not one that is true or false, but only one that establishes different relationships and responsibilities than the western approach where family membership except for one's paternal name is often divided between maternal and paternal relations. For example, Appiah notes «So I am in the same abusua as my sister's children but not in the same one as my brother's children. And, since I am not related to my father through a woman, he is not a member of my abusua either»[47]. Hence, this is considerably different from the western perspective, yet there are commonalities. Good parenting is considered a value in both the abusua arrangements and in western views, even while family arrangements are thickly enmeshed with the local culture, customs and expectations. Respecting such differences is central to modern cosmopolitanism. One may find examples in our literature. For example, Atticus Finch in Harper Lee's novel, *To Kill a Mocking Bird* (1960), tells his daughter Scout that «you never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view», and at the end of the novel Scout says she is grateful to her father for letting her know that «you never really know a man until you stand in his shoes and walk around in them»[48]. Imagination and empathy are important ingredients in this account.

An important question is how we can get along without agreeing on why. If we exaggerate the role of reason, as is often the case in philosophy, we may not come to an agreement, but according to Appiah and Santayana, most conflicts do not arise from warring values[49].

One of Appiah's principal claims is that we can agree on living together without agreeing why. We may have differing judgments and reasons for living together without agreeing on the values that make it good to live together[50]. Sociologists normally do not begin with an examination of reasons as to why people disagree, although philosophers often do. For the most part, Appiah claims we rarely make judgments based on carefully elucidated principles applied to particular circumstances and facts. Rather we should «recognize this simple fact: a large part of what we do we do because it is just what we do»[51]. «And a good deal of what we intuitively take to be right, we take to be right just because it is what we are used to»[52].

The cosmopolitan universal value of living together, of getting along with each other, enables us to live together, even in harmony, without agreeing on the underlying principles of our values[53]. Respecting each other and living together does not require agreeing on our rationality for behavior, but rather it requires an effort to understand and learn from each other. «Often enough, as Faust said, in the beginning is the deed: practices and not principles are what enable us to live together in peace»[54].

> And I stress the role of the imagination here because the encounters, properly conducted, are valuable in themselves. Conversation doesn't have to lead to consensus about anything, especially not values; it's enough that it helps people get used to one another[55].

[47] Ivi, p. 48.
[48] H. Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, New York, Harper & Row, 1961, p. 33.
[49] Cfr. K.A. Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism*, cit., p. 67.
[50] Cfr. ivi, pp. 69-71.
[51] Ivi, p. 73.
[52] Ivi, p. 72.
[53] Ivi, p. 78.
[54] Ivi, p. 85.
[55] *Ibidem*.

Our commonality enables us to understand and respect each other. Such commonality is found in our social structures as well as in our biology, in our memes as well as in our genes. Here Appiah and Santayana are taking similar paths. As Appiah says:

> Finally, there's just a great deal of everyday life that is utterly, humanly familiar. People in Ghana, people everywhere, buy and sell, eat, read the papers, watch movies, sleep, go to church or mosque, laugh, marry, make love, commit adultery, go to funerals, die. Most of the time, once someone has translated the language you don't know, or explained some little unfamiliar symbol or custom, you'll have no more (and, of course, no less) trouble understanding why they do what they do than you do making sense of your neighbors back home[56].

Of course, some people cannot live well or even long with others. Socially, culturally, and biologically they focus on conflict, harm, and destruction. Psychopaths are unlikely prospects for having a sense of responsibility for others or for respecting differences. And there are many variations along the scale of responsibility and respect for others, and even sometimes significant variations in our talents and abilities. Musicians, geniuses, artists, scientists, business people, monks, nuns, and many more people represent the divergence in our human cultures. Even so there are models for how we can get along, understand each other, and live together that are based on the norms in human beings. One model used by Appiah is color language.

Most humans see colors: red, green, yellow, and blue. But some are born color blind or color deficient. There are also a few humans who are tetrachromats[57] and see far more colors than normal. Musicians and mathematicians appear to have abilities that are not common to most humans. Even so, most humans are kind and sympathize with one another, and most recognize a responsibility for others. There are statistical norms in human society as in our norm for seeing colors, and these norms provide a basis for commonality, communication, and living together[58].

The basis for these norms lies in our biology and cultures. It may not be clear that we would fully understand someone who came from a dramatically different culture and biological heritage. Appiah quotes Wittgenstein: «If a lion could speak, we couldn't understand him». But our shared nature allows us to communicate with each other and to share a sense of each other's perspective[59]. However, Wittgenstein's approach may be too narrow. Some recent research on the phonetic alphabet of whales and other animals may broaden our boundaries of community and commonality[60]. Most of us already live a cosmopolitan life with influences that are global: art, literature, politics, film and lifestyles from many parts of the world. And now our understanding of other animal cultures and communications may be at a dramatic turning point. If there ever was a monochrome

[56] Ivi, p. 94.

[57] Tetrachromacy is the condition of possessing four independent channels for conveying color information, or possessing four types of cone cell in the eye. Apes (including humans) normally have three types of cone cell and are therefore trichromats. However, human tetrachromacy is suspected to exist in a small percentage of the population.

[58] K.A. Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism*, cit., p. 96.

[59] Cfr. ivi, p. 97.

[60] Cfr. S. Kuta, *Scientists Discover a 'Phonetic Alphabet' Used by Sperm Whales, Moving One Step Closer to Decoding Their Chatter*, in «Smithsonian Magazine», 8 May, 2024, online: https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/scientists-discover-a-phonetic-alphabet-used-by-sperm-whales-moving-one-step-closer-to-decoding-their-chatter-180984326/

culture without other influences, that seems rare if not impossible today. As Appiah says, «Cultural purity is an oxymoron»[61].

11. Conclusion

As engaging as Appiah and Santayana are, they leave us with challenges and unanswered questions. Some of the challenges will depend on further scientific research and the extent to which communication and respecting each other extends beyond human culture to other animal cultures. There are also distinctly different approaches that Santayana and Appiah take to understanding how we establish a community that works well together. Santayana focuses on individuals and the ability to live well based on one's chosen way of life while Appiah focuses on our communities fostering respect for differences that makes possible living well together. Both note that life is not based on rational principles but on patterns of behavior. Santayana's approach seems more naturalistic in terms of animal behavior while Appiah's approach seems more community oriented and how respect for differences propels society to a greater sense of working together regardless of differences. Put simply, one may ask how one makes a chorus out of individual voices and should the focus be on individuals or on the community, or on both. Of course, Appiah and Santayana's backgrounds and cultures are different, and one can only imagine what a conversation between the two would be like. Their respect for each other would be clear, but would they agree on the basic foundation of community? Appiah's more global perspective would conflict with Santayana's more European and Western views. And it might become clear that not only their personal heritage is quite different, but the world community of each is quite different. Santayana lived at a time when the western perspective was dominant in his writings and discussions, whereas Appiah lives in a time of global interconnectedness with all its possibilities and potential disasters. It is not clear that Santayana's individualism and his focus on spirituality will find roots in our modern society, but the best parts of it might be welcomed. His notion of consciousness as an impotent byproduct of one's physical interaction with the physical environment seems to be supported by contemporary research in neurosciences[62].

The twin fears of private anarchy and public uniformity appear to be as real in American society and our global community today as they were when Santayana launched his criticisms, coupled with his early concern of American imperialism. But is a moral compass that points primarily to individual action and responsibilities sufficient in the face of global

[61] K.A. Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism*, cit., p. 113.

[62] For more information see: Ch.Q. Choi, *Brain Researchers Can Detect Who We Are Thinking About*, in «Scientific American», 14 March 2013, online: https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/brain-researchers-can-detect-who-we-are-thinking-about/; J.L. Gallant, *Reconstructing Visual Experiences from Brain Activity Evoked by Natural Movies*, in «Current Biology», 11 October 2011, pp. 1641-46; O. Goldhill, *Neuroscientists Can Read Brain Activity to Predict Decisions 11 Seconds Before People Act*, in «Quartz», 9 March 2019, online: https://qz.com/1569158/neuroscientists-read-unconscious-brain-activity-to-predict-decisions; N. Lanese, *Scientist Design Algorithm That 'Reads' People's Thoughts from Brain Scans*, in «LiveScience», 24 October 2022, online: https://www.livescience.com/algorithm-mind-reading-from-fmri; K. Smith, *Brain Makes Decisions Before You Even Know It*, in «Nature», 11 April 2008, online: https://www.nature.com/articles/news.2008.751; D. Van Praet, *Our Brains Make Up Our Minds Before We Know It*, in «Psychology Today», 21 December 2020, online: https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/unconscious-branding/202012/our-brains-make-our-minds-we-know-it? amp; M. Velasquez-Manoff, *The Brain Implants That Could Change Humanity: Brains are talking to computers, and computers to brains. Are our daydreams safe?*, in «The New York Times», 28 August 2020, online: https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/28/opinion/sunday/brain-machine-artificial-intelligence.html; and R. Yuste, *The NeuroRights Foundation*, 2019: https://neurorightsfoundation.org/.

issues that cross individual and national boundaries? How can an individual help those who need it the most without the involvement of the larger community. Perhaps Appiah's concern for others bridges community and the individual, even as our communities grow dramatically in our interdependence. Santayana's focus on spirituality may find connections with Appiah's central view that art and literature are important bridges to living together. It is even possible that they would largely agree on Santayana's two criteria for judging any approach to understanding human nature and societies: (1) Does one, «like Spinoza, understand the natural basis of morality, or is he confused and superstitious on the subject»[63]? In other words, is one a complete naturalist allowing science to determine the causes of all events including human actions or does one imagine non-natural explanations without material causality. And (2) «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»[64]. And Appiah would most likely his own criteria of universal concern and respect for others.

When Santayana was buried in «Panteon de la Obra Pia española» in Rome's Campo Verano cemetery, Daniel Cory read lines from Santayana's *The Poet's Testament*, that confirmed his naturalistic outlook:

> I give back to the earth what the earth gave,
> All to the furrow, nothing to the grave.
> The candle's out, the spirit's vigil spent;
> Sight may not follow where the vision went[65].

Santayana's vision leaves us with enduring questions and remarkable insights into contemporary issues. This includes his account of consciousness as an aftereffect of our psyche's interaction with our physical environment, his moral relativism and the multiple senses of individual goods, as well as his respect for many cultures and their approaches to living well. Appiah's universal concern and the notion of respect for differing views moves some of Santayana's views and questions even further in our contemporary society.

[63] G. Santayana, *Persons and Places*, cit., p. 235.

[64] *Ibidem*.

[65] G. Santayana, *The Complete Poems of George Santayana*. *A Critical Edition*, ed. by W.G. Holzberger, Lewisburg, Bucknell University Press, 1979, p. 268.