

AESTHETIC EXISTENCE AND THE THERAPY OF PASSIONS IN THE WORLD OF GEORGE SANTAYANA

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ABSTRACT: The protagonist of my study, George Santayana, by idealizing love and sublimating sexual desires, has become the author of an aesthetics of existence elevated to literature and philosophy. He made self-cultivation and a life of satisfying desires a philosophical problem. His life's work is based on aesthetics, but it cannot be clearly placed within either Pragmatism or Platonism. My interpretation of Santayana from the perspective of the philosophy of desire takes the philosopher out of the conservative interpretative framework. His philosophy was centred on sensory perception, and although he sought spiritualism through his Platonism, his *The Sense of Beauty* is based on pleasure. His personal life and individual motivations are a vague background to his poetry and theoretical writings, and it is therefore necessary to view his creative world as a whole.

Keywords: George Santayana, Pragmatism, Platonism, aesthetics, desire, poetry, aesthetic existence, beauty, idealization

1. Introduction

In a letter dated 1924, Santayana wrote to Harry Abbot:

Love has never made me long unhappy, nor sexual impulse uncomfortable: on the contrary in the comparatively manageable form in which they have visited me, they have been great fun, because they have given me an interest in people and (by a natural extension of emotion) in things, places, and stories, such as religion, which otherwise would have failed me altogether; because in itself, apart from the golden light of diffused erotic feeling falling upon it, the world I have been condemned to live in most of my life would have been simply deadly. I have never been anything but utterly bored and disgusted with the public world, the world of business, politics, family, and society. It was only the glimmer of sport, humour, friendship, or love falling over it that made it tolerable¹ (Holzberger 2002, 179).

¹ G. S. to H. W. Abbott, Rome, January 16, 1924.

Love, presented as an essential component of a good life, is a recurring theme of Santayana's philosophy. His early sonnets are fueled by the idea of immortal love, he built the last chapters of *The Sense of Beauty* on the psychology of desiring, devoted a separate chapter to love in *Reason in Society (The Life of Reason)* and all his books on poetry - *The Interpretations of Poetry and Religion* and in *Three Philosophical Poets* - the trinity of love-desire-sexuality also plays a cardinal role in exploring the relationship between poetry and philosophy. Santayana declared many times the importance of the ideal combination of love, beauty and the good life.

In the introduction to the essay *Love*, Santayana warns that we should never lose sight of two things when examining love:

one, that love has an animal basis; the other, that it has an ideal object. Since these two propositions have usually been thought contradictory, no writer has ventured to present more than half the truth, and that half out of its true relations (Santayana 1930, 8).

American thought in the 19th century was largely dominated by pragmatism, and in New England the Puritan heritage was dominant. That is why the works of life that sought to show the world-dominating power of beauty, through poems, prose, works of art, or entire philosophical systems, are considered special. George Santayana is one of those who, after several decades of living in America, chose Europe because they did not feel at home in the American milieu. His respect for Europe can be explained by his admiration for old traditions, cultural assets and works of art. According to Santayana, man definitely needs an ultimate ideal by which he can approach perfection. He linked the ideal to the joy of contemplation and to love. The idea, the so-called „Hellenic idea”, in which, in addition to the idealization of Greek mythology, religion, philosophy, masculine hero-cult, friendship and love, a cardinal role is played by beauty's power to entice knowledge, to invite upward, and its power to ensnare the whole of life. The idea was fueled by Plato's *Phaedrus*

and *Symposium*. The dialogues of the feast are permeated with homoerotics. The idealization of moving away from physicality unfolds in the dialogue between Socrates and Diotima, although the separation of heavenly and earthly Eros is already present in the speech of Pausanias. In the case of Santayana, as in the case of his contemporaries - Fred Holland Day or Edward Perry Warren - the appeal of homoeroticism cannot be ignored. According to William G. Holzberger:

So far as we know, Santayana never had a romantic relationship with a woman, though there were several women with whom he enjoyed close friendship and lifelong correspondence. [...] From his letters, from the events of *The Last Puritan* and his remarks about the novel in the letters, and from the conversation about A. E. Housman reported by Cory, it seems clear that Santayana's sexual orientation was not conventional (Holzberger 2001, xxxviii).

2. Based on the basic nature of sexual passion

Santayana devotes most attention to sexual attraction and sexual desire in *The Sense of Beauty*. As he writes:

The capacity to love gives our contemplation that glow without which it might often fail to manifest beauty; and the whole sentimental side of our aesthetic sensibility —without which it would be perceptive and mathematical rather than sensitive— is due to our sexual organization remotely stirred (Santayana 1955, 38).

A healthy body is held together by well-coordinated vital functions, the task of which is to provide a person with a surplus of energy. Santayana believes that the sexual instinct is halfway between life functions and social functions. We do not need to assume a big difference between men and women in terms of the object and area of aesthetic interest, because in emotional life it is not important „which sex an animal has, but that it has a sex at all” (Santayana, 1955, 37). If we consider the complicated problem that nature solves in sexual reproduction, and the delicate guidance of instincts that is necessary for this process, we will see that the receptivity implanted in the individual is the same in both sexes, just as the

sexual organization is basically similar in both - he claims (ibid). Regarding the effectiveness of sexual attraction, he writes that it could not be effective enough if it did not primarily affect the senses. Secondary sexual characteristics are found in both sexes; the gender feeling also extends to various secondary objects. Color, grace, form, which are the stimuli of sexual passion, acquire a certain beauty for their own sake before they fulfill their purpose. In other words, they do not exist only to promote reproduction (Santayana, 1955, 38). These secondary objects of interest - which are the most striking elements of beauty - can be called sexual, because the reactions they provoke greatly determine our sexual life (Santayana, 1955, 39). „If any one were desirous to produce a being with a great susceptibility to beauty, he could not invent an instrument better designed for that object than sex” (ibid.) – we can read, but before we label him a radical naturalist, he sneaks in the examination of the senses into the part examining the materials of beauty, and comes to the conclusion that the joys of the eye, ear, imagination and memory are most easily objectified and become ideas, and although touch, taste and smell are called inferior senses, far from aesthetics, and artists constantly resort to these senses. Fragrant gardens, mouth-watering meats, incense and perfumes, colors and shapes that stimulate the senses are presented to us. As an example, he cites Keats, the „most sensuous of English poets, in whom the love of beauty is supreme”, and despite his sophistication, he still sings the glory of perception considered less noble (Santayana 1955, 43). Based on all this, we can conclude that the path to beauty leads through sexual desire. Colors and shapes are sexualized when we interpret them as capable of arousing sexual desire. It was nonsense on the part of Santayana's critics to accuse him with asexuality. The Freudian sublimation theory can be recalled in the part when he talks about the conversion of sexual passion. Sex is not the only object of sexual passion, he says, because when love does not find its usual object, the suppressed fire

breaks out in different directions - it can turn into religious fandom, fanatical philanthropy, love of nature or love of art, and then the overflowing passion visibly it floods areas that would otherwise not be emphasized. Based on these, Santayana claims that in this case everything can become a secondary object of sexual passion for a person, „and that to this fact the beauty of nature is largely due”(Santayana, 1955, 40). He believes that the vital energy would be used most optimally if every male only aroused his desire for the female that would take care of the succession, and only as often as this was necessary from the point of view of reproduction; thus, the male’s energy and attention could be freed up and directed elsewhere. However, he does not write anything about women’s ‘untapped’ desires.

Santayana misses open speech in poetry. He praises Lucretius because he is the most ingenuous, but blames him for not writing with his great honesty „the drama of the awakened senses, the poignant suasion of beauty” which fogs the brain (Santayana, 1930, 15). He points out that Western poets should not disparage Asians’ poetry of unparalleled elegance, the expression of joy at the gaze of the beloved, the happiness of the chase and being chased, and the soaring of lovers together (ibid.). He mentions situations that Plato, Xenophon, and Plutarch discuss in connection with male couples, and it can be assumed that he is also thinking of male love when he writes that if the honest passion of young people arouses disgust, they are forced into aloofness and hypocrisy because of gossip (ibid. 17). And thus, banished from the open scene, mocked, beauty will necessarily flourish in hidden places and unfathomable hearts, but this divides the world into two, separates the inner and outer life. As a result, many people become alienated from the conventional, moralizing world, which they instinctively feel artificial and alien. Rather, they escape to a private fairyland, where unexpected joys await them. For „the thousand and one nights of their dreams”, they happily forget the barren, unfriendly world in which they are forced to

live. The confessional nature of this extraordinary and surprising train of thought is confirmed by the letter that Santayana wrote to his well-known friend from Harvard, William Morton Fullerton², at the end of the 1880s. Passions and instincts made him think very seriously, and in a strange way, in a letter he expressed his views on the problems of sexuality affecting young boys. It’s a shockingly personal and outspoken opinion, but nobody knows how Fullerton reacted to it. Santayana lists six things that boys have to choose from – or rather, when they can’t handle their imagination anymore:

1. Wet dreams and the fidgets.
2. Masturbation.
3. Päderastia.
4. Whoring.
5. Seductions or a mistress.
6. Matrimony (Holzberger 2001, 92-93).

He excludes 4 because he knows that a prostitute belongs to everyone, so the matter will end sooner or later. He believed that only the 3-4-5 was worth talking about. 4 can harm your health, he says, 5 can have serious consequences - children, legal trouble, etc. He knows that „päderastia” was popular in ancient times and in Eastern cultures, but he also rejects it - his reasoning speaks for itself: he goes beyond it not because he considers it morally reprehensible, but because it is surrounded by so many prejudices, „that it hardly comes under the possibilities for us” (ibid. 93). In another letter he wrote to Henry Ward Abbott on April 23, 1887, Santayana quoted a verse that also speaks volumes about his thoughts. According to Holzberger the comments of the young Santayana in that letter about women and marriage are common in the banter of young men, but the general tone there is obviously not heterosexual:

² „William Morton Fullerton (1865–1952), member of the Harvard class of 1886, became a journalist and spent most of his life in Paris. He was a member of the international literary society. Fullerton had numerous love affairs with both men and women and awakened the dormant sexuality of such notable writers as Henry James and Edith Wharton. (See Marion Mainwaring’s *Mysteries of Paris: The Quest for Morton Fullerton* [Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2000].)” (Holzberger 2001, 14).

... I hate my own arrogance and would worship the man who should knock it out of me. Says a Spanish song:

I am searching land & ocean
For the man that I might love,
And whenever my heart finds him
Then he will have found his slave.

Man or thing—it makes no difference—but heaven grant it be no woman. ... Of course all girls aren't foolish—some are charming and I am tender on two or three myself; but if I ever humbug a woman into marrying me, it will be a piece of selfishness on my part, depend upon it, and not a conquest on hers (Holzberger 2001, xxxviii).

Santayana's works clearly shed light on the relationship between aesthetics and sexuality, showing us a profound conceptual difficulty in relation to desire and eroticism, which was not only influenced by the late Victorian debates on aesthetics and sexuality, but also foreshadowed Freud's earliest expositions on creativity and sublimation. He believed that sexuality and aesthetics are related concepts. According to Christopher Lane, Santayana, like Henry James, sometimes sexualized beauty and wanted to connect the works of thinkers of such disparate character and influence as Plato, Keats, Schopenhauer, Lotze, Emerson, William James and Walter Pater. The result of this work is the exciting fluctuation between passion and asceticism, which is also reflected in *The Last Puritan* (Lane 1999, 166). According to Lane, McCormick's excellent biography of Santayana confirms this reading because he points out that Santayana used the latest psychological research for his aesthetics (ibid. 165). And indeed, his first theoretical work, *The Sense of Beauty*, became the main summary of this topic. When Sanda, the sister of the famous art collector Bernard Berenson remarked that she considered Santayana's theory of beauty in the book to be an overflow of sexual passion, Berenson reprimanded her (Samuels, 1979, 314), because during their decades of friendship he had perhaps already experienced Santayana's praise of physical beauty - on the Platonic model - to the higher regions it is used to collect the energy needed for ascent.

3. Related to the Platonic conception of love - from the perception of beauty to the ennoblement of idealization into religion

...it is still a deep and dumb instinctive affinity, an inexplicable emotion seizing the heart, an influence organising the world, like a luminous crystal, about one magic point. So that although love seldom springs up suddenly in these days into anything like a full-blown passion, it is sight, it is presence, that makes in time a conquest over the heart; for all virtues, sympathies, confidences will fail to move a man to tenderness and to worship, unless a poignant effluence from the object envelop him, so that he begins to walk, as it were, in a dream. Not to believe in love is a great sign of dulness (Santayana 1930, 27).

Santayana, in his essay on Platonic love, names constancy in a changing world and Platonic love as representing „something absolute” as the essence of Platonic philosophy (Santayana 1931, 100). According to the dualistic view, assuming a difference between the world of people and the real world of ideas, in beauty and love the ordinary person can feel as if he is benefiting from pieces of a better world, as if the visit of beauty and love gives him a glimpse of an otherwise inaccessible world, to lost happiness. With the hopeful expectation of demi-humans, he looks for this happiness at every turn, in every new face he sees: (ibid. 101)

We, and the whole universe, exist only by the passionate attempt to return to our perfection, by the radical need of losing ourselves again in God. That ineffable good is our natural possession ; all we honour in this life is but the partial recovery of our birthright ; every delightful thing is like a rift in the clouds through which we catch a glimpse of our native heaven. If that heaven seems so far away and the idea of it so dim and unreal, it is because we are so far from self-knowledge, so much immersed in what is alien and destructive to the soul (Santayana 1931, 102).

The pursuit of perfection and the desire that pervades the whole life will be the essence of the philosophy of life, which, based on Platonic foundations, but denying independently existing ideas, considers beauty to be the ultimate perfection. Since for Santayana, beauty is born from an embodied sense of pleasure, our ability to feel

pleasure determines whether we can enjoy the feeling of perfection. Even because of the rejection of absolute ideas, we cannot say that his thinking lacks upward dynamics in the Platonic sense, because through the perfection found in the ecstasy of love and the joy of contemplation, he hopes to rise to the spiritual life, in which he already shakes off all worldly feelings that bind body and soul. In Santayana's conception of beauty and love, he also tries to harmonize idealism with the sensuality-based conception of naturalism.

In 1891, Santayana wrote a critique of William James' *The Principles of Psychology*, in which he clearly denies the idea of the independent existence of ideas:

Ideas are not substances that exist by themselves and now and then allow us to look upon them. They are creatures of our thought, bubbles of our stream of life, mental figures in our mental kaleidoscope. When we lose sight of them, they no longer exist" (Kerr-Lawson 1991, 37).³

According to Anthony Woodward, Santayana's naturalism denies dualism of any kind and it is pointless to insist too much on characterizing the nature of the essence-existence difference as Platonist or dualist. There are no two existing worlds, he says, and supports this with a Santayana quote from *The Realms of Being* (Woodward, 1991, 6):

There is only one world, the natural world, and only one truth about it; but this world has a spiritual life possible in it, which looks not to another world but to the beauty and perfection that this world suggests, approaches, and misses... (ibid. 7).

Santayana's works published in the twenties and thirties no longer only reject the independent existence of ideas, but also the dualistic worldview, at least to the extent that they posit the special spiritual sphere, which also fits the destination of escape, as a world that can be lived within the real world. However, this does not change the assessment of the noble role attributed to love, different from all others.

According to Santayana, perfections must remain unattainable. The ideal thing is the result of aspiration itself, existing in the imagination of those creatures who live in the realm of spirit (Singer 2000, 84). A perfect form, an adequate ideal does not exist apart from the role it plays in the life of a given individual. Making judgments is also the creation of an ideal. The ideal does not exist independently of its function. Based on Santayana's late writings, the so-called ideals „essences" that guide us, but are not realized or perfected (Arnett 1957, 54-55).

Apologia Pro Mente Sua reveals that for Josiah Royce the core of Santayana's philosophy is the separation of the concepts of essence and existence. This was one of those rare criticisms that open one's eyes to one's own nature, Santayana wrote. The *Apologia* is a candid confession of the most controversial issues in Santayana's philosophy. In his explanation of his early works, he also clarifies the concept of „ideal“:

...in *Interpretation of Poetry and Religion*, then just published, I freely referred to „ideals“, insisting that Platonic Ideas and the deities and dogmas of religion were ideal only: that is to say, they were fictions inspired by the moral imagination, and they expressed unsatisfied demands or implicit standards native to the human mind. Ideals belonged to poetry, not to science or to serious hypothesis (Santayana 1940, 497).

In Santayana's philosophy, there can be no love without imagination. Imagination not only creates one's ideals, but allows one to subsume loved ones under them. This latter function is what Santayana calls idealization. In accordance with its animal basis, love originates from instincts, but it demands that it is otherwise just an ordinary natural thing, to be idealized. Santayana talks about men and women who are driven towards each other by a material force that governs their sexual desires and affections, and then highlights the change caused by the intervention of love. During the imaginative act, the beloved appears to the lover in a form reminiscent of an ideal. The lover's love expresses a double attraction: on the one hand, to the ideal belonging to the object -

³ Originally in George Santayana, Daniel Cory (ed): *The Idler and His Works*, pp. 97-107. New York: Braziller, 1957.

which is the result of human imagination - and on the other hand to the beloved, who is a partial embodiment of the good or beautiful to which he is attracted as an ideal (Singer 2000, 85-86). For Santayana, as for Plato, all love worthy of the name must have an ideal object: the lovers find in each other the ideal form that is essentially eternal and capable of infinite embodiment. This „form“ or „essence“, as Santayana later called it, is a potential of the perfect. If a man falls in love with a light-haired woman, it is because his heart is captured by the idea of the perfect blonde. This ideal thing is what man really loves, not woman, in its dimness and contingency (ibid. 83). According to Singer, although elements of Santayana's philosophy are commonly called Platonist, this idea is closer to the Renaissance interpretation of Plato than to Plato himself. People smuggle ideals into real things as part of their struggle with the environment. With the help of imagination, we imagine possibilities that, if realized, could cause constant pleasure (ibid. 84). In Santayana's interpretation, love is an imaginative search for unattainable ideals. What used to be a competition for instinctual gratification has become a longing for perfection (ibid. 85-86):

Such is the nature of idealization. Like the Venus of Apelles, in which all known beauties were combined, the ideal is the union of all we prize in all creatures; and the mind that has once felt the irresistible compulsion to create this ideal and to believe in it has become incapable of unreserved love of anything else. The absolute is a jealous god; [...] All things become to the worshipper of the ideal so many signs and symbols of what he seeks“ (Santayana 1927, 127).

In the last decades of the quattrocento, the influence of the Platonic-inspired doctrine of Beauty, which spread with Ficino's ideas in literary and artistic circles, became dominant. For Ficino, the assumption of the role of Beauty as a theoretical mediator is essential, because it started from the Plotinian principle according to which the soul rises from the finite light of the world to the infinite brilliance of the divine light. According to Ficino's theorem Beauty represents the most developed radiance of

that supreme Good, which is reflected in perceptible order. But for this very reason, Beauty constantly encourages the soul, so that it moves from love to beauty, from form to form, and returns to the most primal of all forms, to the absolute first and pure Beauty, in which the divine essence itself is reflected and exalted. Based on these, Beauty is the symbol of complete and final perfection and the idea of the Beautiful is engraved in our minds „ab aeterno“ (Vasoli 1983, 54-55).

Santayana provides the most detailed analysis of the nature of idealization in *Platonic Love in Some Italian Poets*. Here, he examines the transformation of the appreciation of beautiful things into the worship of ideal beauty. He is interested in moving from the love of individuals to the love of God. He turns to the poetry of Dante and Michelangelo for illustration. In the works of 13-16th century poets he saw the reincarnation of old wisdom and not its imitation (Santayana, 1927, 120). The figure and poetry of Dante accompanied Santayana throughout his life. He was already a fan of it as a teenager, and when he got to Harvard - thanks to Charles Eliot Norton's art lectures and Dante translations, as well as Dante research and evenings - interpretation possibilities were revealed to him that he didn't know before. The Dante cult in Boston clearly contributed to the formation of Santayana's taste, but it is already presented as part of a concept in the 1910 *Three Philosophical Poets*. Along with Goethe and Lucretius, Dante builds his theory on the importance of philosophical poetry, in which the praise of Dante's love poetry is also repeated:

It has taught us to love and to renounce, to judge and to worship. What more could a poet do? Dante poetized all life and nature as he found them. His imagination dominated and focused the whole world. He thereby touched the ultimate goal to which a poet can aspire; he set the standard for all possible performance (Santayana 1910, 133).

Santayana traces the process of divineization and perfection of love for Beatrice in the works of Dante. As Beatrice becomes the personification of virtue and beauty,

the poet's love is purified, and he begins to respect the lady of his heart as a saint. Feelings for the girl who has reached heaven turn into mystical adoration. Beatrice is also a representative of God, whose greatness and majesty the poet praises through Beatrice's beauty:

The eyes of Beatrice reflect a supernal light. It is the ineffable vision of God, the beatific vision, that alone can make us happy and be the reason and the end of our loves and our pilgrimages. A supreme ideal of peace and perfection which moves the lover, and which moves the sky, is more easily named than understood (ibid. 97-98).

A true ideal is not just an ill-conceived utopia. If we make it our own, it changes our lives because it guides us like a lantern, giving us strength and pride:

perhaps it would be better to say that to have an ideal does not mean so much to have any image in the fancy, any Utopia more or less articulate, but rather to take a consistent moral attitude towards all the things of this world, to judge and coordinate our interests, to establish a hierarchy of goods and evils, and to value events and persons, not by a casual personal impression or instinct, but according to their real nature and tendency. So understood, an ultimate ideal is no mere vision of the philosophical dreamer, but a powerful and passionate force in the poet and the orator. It is the voice of his love or hate, of his hope or sorrow, idealizing, challenging, or condemning the world (ibid. 98).

Santayana's analysis of Dante is far from thorough, as he only briefly mentions interpretation possibilities that he was well aware of. „I am not a Dante scholar nor a Goethe scholar. [...] They have attracted me; they have moved me to reflection; they have revealed to me certain aspects of nature and of philosophy...” (ibid. v.) – wrote in the preface to *Three Philosophical Poets*. He does not mention, for example, John Addington Symonds' investigations into the relationship between Platonic and chivalric love, or his writings about Dante, which testify to much greater knowledge and the brave, open expression of their author's opinions, even though he knew them because he used Symonds' translations of poems. In his essay *The Dantesque and Platonic Ideals of Love*, published in 1893, we read the following from Symonds:

Beatrice is not only Beatrice, Portinari's daughter and Simone's wife. She is also all that the poet-philosopher learned and saw and loved of beautiful or good or true; the whole of which, as springing from her influence, he carries to her credit, and worships under her sign and symbol. This, I repeat, is a difficult attitude of mind for us modern men, with our positive conceptions, to assimilate. In order to approach the task more easily, it may be well to consider another type of amorous enthusiasm which once flourished in the world for a short season, and which also assumed the philosophical mantle. I allude to that specific type of Greek love which Plato expounds in the „*Phaedrus*” and „*Symposium*” (Symonds MCMXVIII, 60):

Greek love and chivalrous love form two extraordinary and exceptional phases of psychological experience. By comparing them in their points of similarity and points of difference, we may come to understand more of that peculiar enthusiasm which they possessed in common, which made love in either case a ladder for scaling the higher fortresses of intellectual truth, and which it is now well-nigh impossible for us to realise as actual (ibid. 61).

Strangely, in none of Santayana's early works does he analyze the dialogues of Plato, which he also loved, which formed the main material of his seminars and basically determined the themes and style of his early poetry. He knew and liked the Plato reading habits of the Oxfordians, and this also contributed to the fact that he remembered the Oxford milieu with such great affection throughout his life. In the essay „Platonic Love in Some Italian Poets”, following the example of Dante, he succeeds in continuing his theory about higher emotions, but not by turning to the original source, but to poetry again. If we are looking for an example of an even more direct expression of the idealization of love, of turning the perception of beauty into a religion, we have to turn to Michelangelo, he writes (Santayana 1927, 131):

We find in Michael Angelo's poems a few recurring ideas, or rather the varied expression of a single half aesthetic, half religious creed. [...] All true beauty leads to the idea of perfection; the effort toward perfection is the burden of all art, which labours, therefore, with a superhuman and

insoluble problem. All love, also, that does not lead to the love of God and merge into that love, is a long and hopeless torment; while the light of love is already the light of heaven, the fire of love is already the fire of hell. These are the thoughts that perpetually recur, varied [...] (ibid. 132.).

„A perfect love is founded on despair” – says Santayana in the sonnet XXXIII (Santayana 1896, 37). He also adds an explanation in his autobiography:

It is not love simply, but only perfect love that includes despair. Love in itself includes hope, or at least a desire to preserve the object of it, to enshrine and defend it. And in regard to the object even perfect love retains this solicitude. It is only in regard to the lover, as a poor human being, that hope must be cut off, plucked up by the roots, if love is ever to become pure, happy and immortal. The perfect lover must renounce pursuit and the hope of possession (Santayana, 1953, 15).

The „perfect” love included in a sonnet (XXXIII.) involves not only renunciation, but also anguish: „I am thy pupil in the school of pain” - writes Santayana. The beauty of his beloved taught him „proud sorrow” and „eternal prayer”, but if he can no longer see him/her, he can only keep his/her memory in his mind (Santayana, 1896, 37). Santayana carried within himself the image (eidon) of his beloved, whose beauty manifests Eros and opens the gaze, the vision. According to Ernesto Grassi, carrying an image within has a double meaning: on the one hand, it means the – as much sensual as it is spiritual – striving, which is the experience of a restlessness that demands an explanation, because this restlessness carries within us the original inspiration for which we are destined. However, carrying an image inside is also the defining moment of the artist, who is able to grasp the similarity in his own works by comparing the inner image with the outer figure (Grassi, 1997, 57). In all his works, be they fictional or autobiographically inspired, poetry analysis or poetry, Santayana was concerned with this very special type of love, which is never fulfilled, full of renunciation and torment, or even turning into idealization. He never wanted to own or collect things and people. At the end of his biography, he calls the mentality when we want to

keep material and physical beings for ourselves animal passion. He felt that his indifference to physical things had made him a platonist in love. He considered the people and things thrown into his path by fate as gifts from which he could gain pure ideas (Santayana, 1953, 130). „All mortal loves are tragic because never is the creature we think we possess the true and final object of our love ;” – wrote Santayana (Santayana 1927, 141). Similar ideas were immortalized also in the sonnet XVI.:

The wings of sacred Eros as he flew / And left me to the love of things not seen.
'T is a sad love, like an eternal prayer, / And knows no keen delight, no faint surcease (Santayana, 1896, 18).

Santayana loved Stendhal’s book *On Love*, he could identify with the thoughts of the French writer, who said that people with money will never understand the happiness of the dreamers who inspired him to write his book. Stendhal distinguished four types of love: „l’amour physique, l’amour vanité, l’amour gout, la grande passion”. In Santayana’s opinion, it is not psychologically impossible that in passionate love physical desire can be transformed into complete devotion and heroism, self-sacrifice and renunciation. Great passion can turn into worship by the end of the transformation (Santayana, 1953, 15). „Amour gout” can also become capable of transformation, if it becomes the pure joy of beauty and charm - and therefore in its entirety - it becomes aesthetic. It is clear from the confession that for Santayana, pure adoration is the most perfect form of love, which can only be achieved by completely giving up the physical and all selfish intentions:

The passion of love, sublimated, does not become bloodless, or free from bodily trepidation [...]. It is essentially the spiritual flame of carnal fire that has turned all its fuel into light. The psyche is not thereby atrophied; on the contrary, the range of its reactions has been enlarged. It has learned to vibrate harmoniously to many things at once in a peace which is an orchestration of transcended sorrows (ibid.).

What torments Michelangelo’s giants on the frescoes of the Sistine Chapel, what sorrow or love agony causes

their writhing suffering? asks Santayana in *Platonic Love in Some Italian Poets* (Santayana, 1927, 133). We can find the answer in his love for the beauty of the human body, in his artistic disappointments, and in the vicissitudes of fate: we don't have to find „vulgar” reasons for the extraordinary feelings of this extraordinary man, says Santayana (ibid. 134). Although he mentions Symonds' translation of Michelangelo's *The Birth of Love and Beauty*, unlike Symonds, he does not mention Tomasso di Cavalieri, one of the main inspirations for Michelangelo's poems. He doesn't want to bring it up, he doesn't look for „vulgar reasons”. He is a fan of Michelangelo's art and feels for it with every inch, but he does not analyze the sources of his emotions, lest he get too close to the secrets of his own soul. Not only his heroes, he himself overcame the passions in order to ennoble already treatable feelings with the energy gained from them:

So long as we live at all we must trust in something, at least in the coherence and permanence of the visible world and in the value of the objects of our own desires. And if we live nobly, we are under the same necessity of believing in noble things. However unreal, therefore, these Platonic intuitions may seem to those of us whose interests lie in other quarters, we may rest assured that these very thoughts would dominate our minds and these eternal companionships would cheer our desolation, if we had wrestled as manfully with the same passions and passed through the transmuting fire of as great a love (ibid. 146).

In *The Nature of Love* and his volume of studies on Santayana, Irving Singer relates and compares Freud's and Santayana's thoughts on love, bearing in mind the importance of the concept of idealization in their theories. Idealization also appears in Freud as a characteristic of love. But his idea is different from that of the Platonists. Freud considers idealization to be the same as „overestimation” or „overvaluation” (Singer 2000, 86). It is puzzling to what extent Freud's writings influenced Santayana. In 1923, after reading *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, he formulated his study on Freud, entitled *A Long Way Round to Nirvana; or Much Ado About Dying* (ibid. 98). According to Singer, a Platonist or Neo-Platonist like

Santayana cannot fully agree with Freud's assertion that what psychoanalysis calls sexuality in the broadest sense of the word coincides comprehensively with the Eros of Plato's *Symposium* (ibid. 88). According to Singer, Platonic eros is the desire for objectively real, eternal and unchanging and perfectly unified absolute goodness and beauty. Platonic eros is directed towards the search for the ideal, while Freudian eros is merely libidinal energy, which is governed by biological need and has no transcendent component. In relation to Freud's conception of Eros, we should mention Herbert Marcuse's book *Eros and Civilization*, in which he claims that Freud's interpretation of Eros recalls Plato's early philosophy:

Freud's interpretation of being in terms of Eros recaptures the early stage of Plato's philosophy, which conceived of culture not as the repressive sublimation but as the free self-development of Eros. As early as Plato, this conception appears as an archaic-mythical residue. Eros is being absorbed into Logos, and Logos is reason which subdues the instincts. The history of ontology reflects the reality principle which governs the world ever more exclusively: The insights contained in the metaphysical notion of Eros were driven underground. They survived, in eschatological distortion, in many heretic movements, in the hedonistic philosophy. [...] Freud's own theory follows the general trend: in his work, the rationality of the predominant reality principle supersedes the metaphysical speculations on Eros (Marcuse 1966, 125-126).

The novelty of Singer's idea lies in the fact that he saw both Freudian and Platonic features in Santayana's approach, as if Santayana had combined the two theories. For Santayana, the ideal does not objectively exist, he derives all ideals from interests that can be related to needs and desires. For him, the ideal object is only an imagined satisfaction, and it is authentic and authoritative only to the extent that it becomes so by the will of a human being. Santayana's ideals come from the imagination, just as Freud's ego ideals come from the libido (Singer 2000, 88-89).

In Santayana's conception of love, Platonic, Plotinian and Ficino elements are mixed. Eros, as an all-pervading desire, as the driving force of the pursuit of perfection,

cannot be excluded from his philosophy. However, he does not believe in objectively existing ideas. Idealization is the right and duty of our imagination, and we could not exist without it. We can often read in him about God, whose perfection we should cling to, but Santayana is not a believer in the ordinary sense of the word. However, it needs the eroticization of Ficino's amor dei, which does not exist in Plato. He claimed that the only thing that animates us and the whole world is the passionate attempt to return to perfection, to lose ourselves in God again (Santayana 1931, 102). Santayana identifies with God the ideal perfection and harmony of the processes and elements of the world. God is never a power, but an ideal (Arnett 1957, 15).

Santayana knew that very few people truly embraced the Platonic concept of love. In a study of Plotinus, he writes:

I know that in practise a devotion that passes from individuals to the ideal is seldom an honest devotion. Platonic love has the reputation of being either frigid or hypocritical, or perhaps both at once; when it really exists, it is commonly only a sort of abstract sensuality or estheticism, at once selfish and visionary. Yet in its origin, and in the experience of the few in whom it is a spontaneous religion, Platonic, love is precisely the opposite of all that. It is a passion for individuals so intense, so arresting, so disproportionate to their poor human merits, that it seems and is the revelation of an essence greater than theirs, of something that, could we live always in its presence, would render us supremely happy. [...] So that if there is anything morbid in Platonic love, it is not its unnatural coldness, but its disproportionate fervor, not the barren egoism of it, but its suicidal self-surrender; for the Platonic lover loves so religiously that his love must needs carry him beyond its initial object, and beyond himself (Santayana 1913, 595).

This is how love gradually becomes a „natural, true religion“ for Santayana, with a visible cult that ignites natural beauty and sanctifies a natural mystery, but the object of its worship is not the visible image, but in fact, the origin of all good (Santayana 1930, 32).

Santayana's belief is most comparable to what he attributed to Michelangelo - a half-aesthetic, half-religi-

ous creed, the basic tenet of which is that all true beauty leads to the idea of perfection, and thus, the perception of beauty can turn into a religion (Santayana 1927, 131-132). It is no coincidence that he noted in his earliest philosophical work that there are those among us who never even try to think about the nature of perfection as a whole, yet we can say that „our whole life is an act of worship to this unknown divinity“. We have to search and research so that we can experience in the ecstasy of love or the joy of contemplation the moment in which our pursuit reaches its goal, the light of perfection flashes (Santayana 1955, 161-162). According to the *Phaidros* of Plato, who sees something like a god, which faithfully reflects beauty, first shudders, and something of the former trepidation creeps into his heart, then, looking at it, he respects it as a god, and if he were not afraid of the suspicion of madness, he would sacrifice it to his beloved, as if to a statue of a god.⁴ This was Santayana's credo. In 1900, in a letter to William James, he stated that neither Protestantism nor Catholicism influenced him as strongly as Plato and Aristotle, who gave him self-confidence and the right to be honest (McCormick 1987, 88).

4. Life in the shadow of the immortals

In Aristotle's eyes, the highest degree of pleasure is related to the exercise of acquired abilities. Joy is a manifestation of the natural state of our existence (*energeia*). The most perfect joy includes spontaneity, unhindered, unconstrained activity. The greatest happiness is the work of the intellect. Santayana could never be exclusively enthusiastic about contemporary philosophy, nor could he identify with the enthusiasms around him. As he wrote in his biography: „I was a teacher of philosophy in the place where philosophy was most modern, most deeply Protestant, most hopefully new! – the very things from which, in speculation, my metanoia turned me away. I

⁴ after the *Phaidros* of Plato (251a)

could never be, I will not say a leader, but even a happy participator in the intellectual faith of my neighbours.”

And thinking of ancient philosophy, he remarked: „I could live only with the dead. It was comfort, but a cold comfort, to say that I was living among the immortels” (Santayana 1953, 12). Already during his studies in Germany, he felt that he was most interested in Greek ethics. He read Herodotus and Epicurus:

Epicurus renounced most of the things called pleasures, for the sake of peace, equanimity, and intelligence, and Solon’s heroes renounced life itself for the sake of a beautiful moment or a beautiful death. The extreme of classical heroism here becomes romantic; because the most romantic career, if deliberately chosen and accepted without illusion, would be a form of happiness: something in which a living will recognised its fulfillment and found its peace (Santayana 1945, 8).

Santayana „blends Stoicism with Epicureanism, the power to renounce with the capacity to enjoy.” –claims Ames (Ames 1937, 94). Thomas Alexander also draws a parallel between Santayana and the sages of the ancient Hellenistic schools, who used philosophical principles as a means of life, with which they could reach a state of spiritual freedom. The practice of ataraxia, autonomy and askesis is characteristic of a personality cultivated in Hellenistic philosophy (Alexander 1997, 330). According to Plato, the main means of overcoming resistance to desires and pleasures is training, that is, asceticism, which includes both the training of the body and the soul (Foucault 1999, 77). Asceticism is a prominent issue in classical Greek thought, because it plays an important role in becoming a moral subject. As Michel Foucault pointed out in his work on the aesthetics of existence, based on Greek philosophical writings, asceticism is part of a virtuous life, which also means the life of a „free” person in the full, positive and political sense of the word (ibid. 83). Taking different lifestyles into account, ancient ethics articulates the requirement of aestheticizing human existence. In this ethic, self-control and moderation in all aspects of life were the guarantee of a beautiful and harmonious life. In shaping life into a work of art, eve-

ryone can only rely on their own moral activity, which will be individual by nature, since its starting point is the individual’s relationship with himself. According to the Foucault theoretician Marcelli, the ethics of the individual results in the aestheticization of life, but social functions are already connected to it (Marcelli 2006, 162).

At the time of writing *Apologia Pro Mente Sua*, Santayana felt that his aestheticism was actually „a modest Epicurean humanism” (Santayana 1940, 503) and at the end of *Realms of Being*, in the General Review, he wrote that his philosophy, like that of the ancients, was based on the discipline of mind and heart. He calls his philosophy a „lay religion”. My understanding is that this is some kind of secular religion. One of the main goals of this so-called „lay religion” was spiritual liberation. The discipline of the soul is one of the most important principles in Santayana’s thinking, which cannot exclude the spiritual freedom born as a result of active contemplation. He wrote about Lucretius, but he could have meant the following: „His materialism is completed by an aspiration towards freedom and quietness of spirit” (Santayana 1910, 5). The admiration for the Hellenic idea is clearly shown in Santayana’s lines about Lucretius:

This is one complete system of philosophy, materialism in natural science, humanism in ethics. Such was the gist (veleje, magva) of all Greek philosophy before Socrates, of that philosophy which was truly Hellenic and corresponded with the movement which produced Greek manners, Greek government, and Greek art a movement towards simplicity, autonomy, and reasonableness in everything, from dress to religion. Such is the gist also of what may be called the philosophy of the Renaissance, the reassertion of science and liberty in the modern world, by Bacon, by Spinoza, by the whole contemporary school that looks to science for its view of the facts, and to the happiness of men on earth for its ideal. This system is called naturalism; and of this Lucretius is the unrivalled poet (Santayana 1910, 5).

Because of his doctrine of immortality and the soul, Santayana calls Lucretius an imperfect psychologist and a self-proclaimed moralist. He believes that Lucretius is zealously trying to prove the mortality of the soul in order

to allay fears of possible future punishments. This frees the soul and gives you the opportunity to rest (ibid. 45). In relation to Lucretius, he speaks with great respect of Epicurus, who retired to his own garden with his friends and students, searching for the possibilities of peace. He lived in moderation and self-restraint, spoke softly, distributed alms to the poor, while preaching against wealth, ambition and passion. He defended free will, which he wanted to exercise by withdrawing from the world and not by swimming against the tide (ibid. 30). Santayana's ideas agree with the main ideas of Epicurean ethics, for example in the affirmation of things that cause joy and pleasure, which lead to a state without disturbance and pain, or in emphasizing independence (autarkeia). For Santayana, the fact that Epicurus does not approve of public activities and turns his back on the social sphere may have been attractive to him. According to Santayana, if reason cannot control the passions, happiness is impossible. In other words, the pursuit of happiness also depends on reason, which can create harmony between the instincts and impulses of a given living being, as well as between it and its environment. So reason is the means of achieving harmony (Arnett 1957, 5). In her book *The Therapy of Desire*, Martha C. Nussbaum examines the philosophy of Epicurus and states that, according to Epicurus, we come into the world as healthy living beings, our abilities work reliably, but soon after we are polluted and corrupted by external forces, to which we become prisoners. Among the external influences, Epicurus includes religious superstitions (which teach fear of the gods and death), loves (which complicate the natural sexual desire), and speeches glorifying wealth and power (Nussbaum 1994, 107). In Epicurus's theory - as in Santayana's - man can control his emotions and passions with the help of reason, and in this way he can become independent from the outside world. „Lathe bioszasz” - „Live hidden” - is the Epicurean slogan that ensures the ataraxia of each person. For Epicurus, the gods exist in metacosmions, in themselves, cut off from the world. In his dissertation,

Marx claimed that the happy Epicurean gods actually represented a specific philosopher's ideal of life. An ideal that Epicurus tried to realize in his own school (ibid. 548).

The hiding was not total for either Epicurus or Santayana, because while the former surrounded himself with his students, the latter also had an extensive circle of friends. Santayana arrived at the ideal of friendship that binds the master and his students only as a result of a slow process, which is as much related to his personal experiences as his theory about love and idealization. As a young lecturer, he wanted to be more of a friend and companion to the students, as an extension of the study period spent at the university. He wanted to remain a student and a companion, and he managed to do so until the age difference between him and his students became noticeable. Between the ages of thirty and forty, he broke down because of this and turned away not only from teaching, but also from the community of students. However, his faith in friendship was never broken. The Epicurean ideal was alive in him, according to which there is no greater wealth and joy than friendship. He already wrote that in *The Sense of Beauty*:

The variety of nature and the infinity of art, with the companionship of our fellows, would fill the leisure of that ideal existence. These are the elements of our positive happiness, the things which, amid a thousand vexations and vanities, make the clear profit of living (Santayana 1955, 20-21).

In the section on Lucretius in *Three Philosophical Poets*, he examines the topic of friendship. He believes that although friendship was held in high esteem in all ancient states, only Epicurean philosophy could intensify the emphasis on friendship. He taught people that their existence in the universe is only accidental, and that comrades tossing and turning on the same raft can only count on each other. Santayana mentions the passage from Lucretius where he revives the Epicurean idyll in which the friends picnic together by the stream: „the little word „together” is all he vouchsafes us to mark what must be the chief ingredient in such rural happiness.” – wrote Sa-

ntayana (Santayana 1910, 66). He praises Horace, who is less superficial on this subject (ibid).

We can find many references in Santayana's works, in which you can feel the respect for the power of friendship above all else. In his theoretical explanations, he probably did not devote more space to the question of friendship, because in his only novel, his greatest success, *The Last Puritan*, he included everything he knew and experienced about the relationship between two men in the relationship between Oliver and Mario: it „contain all I know about America, about women, and about young men. As this last is rather my strong point“ (Singer 2000, 39) – said Santayana. We know of only one independent text, to which he specifically gave the title Friendship. The essay, which rested for a long time among Santayana's manuscripts, became known by Daniel Cory.⁵ Based on the author's literary style, the type of paper and the color of the ink, Cory dated the birth of the essay between 1935 and 1950, to which he found no reference anywhere and believed that Santayana should have returned to this text, because at the end he started so many new threads, which are not explained (Cory 1968). That may have been the reason he never published it. Knowing Santayana's biography, the conclusions of the text are particularly interesting. It is known that he strove for freedom throughout his life, and when he really had the opportunity to do so with his inheritance, he created an independent and isolated, but not lonely, life for himself. His really serious friendships from his youth were permeated by love, so it is no wonder that in his analysis he relates the essence of friendship - free choice and the joy of free discovery - to the passion of love. According to Santayana, friendship has vital roots in human society as a valuable nurturer of love (Cory 1968, 79).

In Santayana's essay, the most frequently occurring concept related to friendship is freedom: or example,

when he writes that friendship is the joining of two free souls who have met by chance, recognize and appreciate each other, but remain free (ibid. 81). But he specifically states that one of the main qualities of friendship must be freedom, and that freedom should not be burdened by any obligations (ibid. 84). Friendship, the essential feature of which is the chance meeting of free souls, is devoid of envy, as well as the desire for power and appropriation. Such meetings rarely settle on the whole soul, and never on the whole life. Friendship is a state of freedom; something spiritual – says Santayana (ibid. 85).

In its ideal form, Santayana friendship is associated with youth, the period of searching for one's way, when one's thoughts are bound by the things of the world, and is happy when one finds kindred spirits in one's wanderings. According to his thoughts, friendship is a fundamentally open bond that does not develop from home and does not seek to found a new family. Driven by the desire for adventure and discovery, he is imbued with a sense of wanderlust, dreaming of a free and reckless life, even if it is dangerous. In contrast to boyish brotherly love, this is clearly chosen, personal and exclusive (ibid. 80). in this sense it is similar to the passion of love. Each excites the imagination in a way that brotherly love cannot. In friendship, it is not the friendship itself that excites the imagination, as in love, where the whole world becomes uninteresting and confusing outside of love. The imagination of friends is filled with the world, as the field of action or the object of judgment; the recognition and selection of the friend's personality is due to his exceptionally sympathetic actions, thinking, and feelings towards other things and persons (ibid. 80-81.). Santayana sees friendship as a „vital, biological thing“. He doesn't believe in their eternal oath, because he believes that no fact, no feeling can guarantee its own duration, but he is sure that the feeling of indelibility will remain forever even after such defining human relationships have cooled (ibid. 83). Those with whom he had really deep feelings died early. And in Francis Russell

⁵ Between 1927 and 1952 he was Santayana's secretary. In 1968, he published the compilation *The Birth of Reason* for the first time.

- whom he believed to be a kindred spirit - he was hugely disappointed. His former admiration was drowned in indifference - at least to the outside world, but the feelings he experienced in friendship probably remained indelible. Cory, who was working as Santayana's secretary when Russell died, testifies to this. Santayana received the news with complete indifference, and Cory asked in bewilderment: "Mr. Santayana, if I dropped dead in front of you at this moment, would you be emotionally moved at all?" To which Santayana calmly replied: „You should not ask me personal questions. I knew Russell a long time ago. And the man I knew and loved then died, I am sure, many, many years ago" (McCormick 1987, 122). In 1886 he first met John Francis Stanley Russell, Bertrand Russell's brother. He had never had the opportunity to talk to English people before, so he found the opportunity exciting. Francis Russell was the grandson and heir of the famous Lord John Russell, but according to Santayana he was „extraordinary in his own right" (Santayana 1945, 44). In his biography, he gives such a detailed and enthusiastic description of the young nobleman that he openly reveals his true feelings: „Tall young man of twenty", „with abundant tawny hair, clear little steel-blue eyes, and a florid complexion", „he moved deliberately, gracefully, stealthily, like a tiger [...]" (ibid. 44). When they first met, Russell already felt so at home in the Harvard student room that, examining the bookshelf, crouching on the floor, he read from Swinburne to Santayana, who remembered years later:

I had not heard poetry read in this way I had not known that the English language could become, like stained glass, an object and a delight in itself (ibid. 45).

William James saw that Santayana made a deep impression on Russell, and Santayana felt that he was able to tune in to the thoughts of a man who had allowed himself to be close to someone who completely disregarded convention. Of his friends, only Henry Ward Abbott and Herbert Lyman spoke openly about his feelings for Russell. In 1887 he wrote to Abbott:

Russell is the ablest man, all round, that I have ever met. You have no idea what a splendid creature he is, no more had I till I had seen a great deal of him. [...] He isn't good, that is he is completely selfish and rather cruel [...]" but „intellectually he is really brilliant... I know I am making a fool of myself in writing about him. ... but I send a note of his so that you may judge for yourself and also have some idea of the men I am seeing here. Pass the note on to Herbert Lyman and let him keep it or send it back to me. I am going tomorrow to stay with Russell again, for he is laid up and wants company. ... Don't tell this round, I beg of you, but I tell you because I am telling you everything to-day. I make an exception of Herbert, because I should have to tell him sooner or later, and he won't chuckle over it as if it were a joke merely, which it isn't (Holzberger 2003, vi).

A week later he sent the following letter to Abbott:

... what I call my "fall from grace and self-control" ... is simply this. Russell has a way of treating people which is insufferably insolent and insulting. Never for a moment did I imagine I could allow anyone to treat me in such a way. But I find that instead of caring for my own dignity and independence ... I find that I don't care a rap for my interest in myself or my ways of doing things, but that I am quite willing to stand anything, however outrageous, that comes from a certain quarter. This is what has happened to me. I am a fool to say a word about it (ibid.)...

We don't know exactly what happened, but the emotional rollercoaster he experienced with Russell left a deep mark on Santayana. In several of his letters, he hinted that he modeled Jim Darnley in *The Last Puritan* on Frank Russell. Most of the time he used the word „love" in the novel to describe the feeling that Mario and Oliver had for each other, or to show the attraction that Oliver had for Jim Darnley (Singer 2000, 58-59).

In order to understand Santayana's friendships and affections, one must know the fascination for antiquity that was revived at the end of the nineteenth century, an integral part of which was the admiration for noble male friendships, the most poetic immortalizer of which was certainly Plato. The Hellenists and Medievalists of Victorian England agreed that the nature of male love is characterized by purity and spirituality. In an analysis by John Addington Symonds, he mentions mythological and

historical male couples who were connected either by a pederastic relationship or by a friendship known from Aristotle („non-sexual fellowship”).⁶ This was the typical, official, Victorian attitude towards male couples in Greek history. Perhaps it was the fact that Russell’s behavior fell too far from the ideal that upset Santayana. When Russell was dismissed from Oxford because of his published letters and Lionel Johnson, Santayana made an ironic comment on the story Russell described. He knew that the reference to the „white virginal flame of innocence” from Russell’s mouth was a „cheeky lie, when so many of his readers know the facts” (McCormick 1987, 65). Santayana defined the concepts of moderation, restraint, and purity based on Plato and Aristotle, with which his entire thought system was embedded in the value system of ancient Athens. His love poems and essays about love quote Plato, while the chapter ‚Free Society’ of Reason in Society is based on the concept of friendship in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*. Michel Foucault, examining Greek philosophical asceticism, came to the conclusion that the principle of unlimited self-restraint is expressed in boyish love, in which renunciation becomes an ideal, exemplified by Socrates, who steadfastly resists all temptations, and also the formulation of the proposition that renunciation it has a high intellectual value in itself (Foucault 1999, 246). The requirement of strictness, which follows from the fact of knowing how to control oneself, does not appear as a universal law to which everyone must submit; rather, it is a stylization principle of behavior that is intended for those who want to give their existence the most beautiful and complete form possible (ibid. 251).

5. Individual „philosophical metanoia”

Around the age of thirty, Santayana suffered a mental crisis. Later on, he called the turning point in his life metanoia, when he experienced that he was already viewed

differently by those around him and could no longer consider himself young in the same way as his students. He became a teacher only to support himself, but he considered learning to be his life’s calling, and if it were up to him, he would have gladly remained a student. He was inspired by the students’ interests, their pastimes, and their groups of friends. It was a huge break for him when he realized that he would be forced out of the students’ communities when his youth was over (Santayana 1953, 7-8). His grief only increased when his family background, which he felt was secure, was shattered, with the death of his father and the marriage of his sister, who moved to Spain. Considering his letters and resume, he seems to have expected nothing, unexpectedly and painfully affected by the news of his family. He could no longer avoid a mental breakdown when he found out that his dearest student, his closest friend whom he loved as a younger brother, Warwick Potter, died of cholera on a boat trip to France. The ordinary world has taken on a different color for him, now he has really moved away from reality. He could have thought of describing the turning from the many to the ideal in Plato’s *Symposium* when he wrote:

The platonic transition was therefore at once spontaneous and inevitable, from the many to the one, from the existent but transitory to the ideal and eternal. This transition may be called philosophic *metanoia*. Like the tragic catharsis it turns disaster into a kind of rapture without those false comforts and delusions by which religious *metanoia* is often cheapened (ibid. 8).

His carefree youth was gone in seconds. As he wrote in his autobiography: „I found myself unwillingly, and irreparably separated from Spain, from England, from Europe from my youth and from my religion” (ibid).

Warwick Potter, according to several biographers of Santayana, was the great love of the philosopher’s life. In the biography, he is listed among the first and defining friends. Robert K. Martin, in *The Homosexual Tradition in American Poetry*, states that the two most defining affections of Santayana’s youth were for a student named Bayley and for Warwick Potter. Bayley, by

⁶ in *Studies of the Greek Poets* and in *The Dantesque and Platonic Ideals in Love*; the latter is in *In the Key of Blue*;

Santayana's own admission, served as the model for *The Last Puritan's* hero, „W.P.” and the recipient of contemporary sonnets. He reveals very little about Potter in his autobiography, but the figure of the boy served as an eternal model for him to sing about the transformation of body into soul. In the 1894 volume of poems, he commemorated Potter with four sonnets. The title of the series is „To W. P.”. In the first of the four sonnets, Potter's virginal figure is the embodiment of spiritual Beauty. According to the poem, the beauty and goodness of the boy who died young was left untouched by time. With his death, Santayana became an eternal, erotic figure to whom he could always remain faithful. It is clear from his works that Potter's figure changed over time into an idealized boy figure, preserved in its perfection by death (Martin 1998, 110). The second sonnet: he sings of the feeling of loss. In the third, he asks why this feeling could not live longer, and then reassures himself that Potter's youth was not lost, but preserved, and that love became immortal. The fourth sonnet also reflects on the relationship between time and eternity and glorifies death as a victory over time (ibid. 111). His poems suggest that those separated by misfortune can be united in immortality. The XXXII. sonnet was also addressed to a loved one, whom he asked to be his in God and in the grave, if the cruel waves of life and bad language had already torn them apart (Santayana 1896, 36).

In 1902, under controversial circumstances, the young poet Lionel Johnson, whom Santayana met through Russell, also died in a street accident. Johnson, a young man described as a „product” of Walter Pater, was known among Oxford students for his poetry and extravagant lifestyle (Santayana 1945, 55). Russell collected and preserved the letters he received from Johnson when he was seventeen or eighteen years old, and Santayana knew the contents of several of them and quoted from them in his biography. In one of these, Johnson wrote that a person's real life does not consist of the actions that are visible to everyone, but is embodied in enjoying

the sunlight, reading the books we choose, and in the faces we love (ibid. 57).

A complete edition of Santayana's poems was published in 1979. According to McCormick, thanks to this, we can look at Santayana's personality from an aspect that we did not have the opportunity to do before, because in his previously published works he persistently suppressed the feelings he unleashed in his poems. Santayana was never religious, but in his sonnets amorous adoration is almost always intertwined with images of religious adoration. According to Epstein and Porte, it is completely unnecessary to talk about Santayana's sexuality, in their studies he is presented as asexual. Despite the abundance of poems and letters, Epstein claims that paying attention to Santayana's erotic interests is the sheerest twaddle (Lane 1999, 178). Santayana's affection for young men is clear from the poems, but there is no concrete evidence, and perhaps there is no need for it. Daniel Cory's notes testify that the question of homosexuality did not particularly excite Santayana himself. In 1929, the conversation that many now cite in their Santayana biographies took place: Santayana is said to have said to Cory about A.E. Housman's poetry:

I suppose Housman was really what people nowadays call 'homosexual,' [...] I think I must have been that way in my Harvard days – although I was unconscious of it at the time (McCormick 1987, 51).

According to McCormick, it is hard to believe that a person with such education and such acquaintances as Santayana would not have discovered this about himself, until he was 65 years old. He knew the works of Plato well enough to know that not all of the friendships described in them were „Platonic”, he knew the works of Tacitus, but above all, he experienced Oscar Wilde's trial, his arrest and the circumstances of his release. He was also related and good friends with Howard Sturgis, who lived in Windsor, and was a classmate of William Fullerton, whose lifestyle was also well known (McCormick 1987, 51). In the *Apologia*, Santayana notes that his

poems cannot be analyzed purely technically. Judgment is not for professors of rhetoric, for true poetry is found in content and idea. He declares that his poetry is not words or concepts, but poetry of things. Only those who understand what the author is referring to can appreciate the capture by words in the poet's work. Only those who have knowledge of what the poet wrote can judge (Santayana 1940, 599). Santayana's anger was primarily directed against Howgate, who tried to connect biographical events to his poems without knowing Spain, old Boston, Harvard, or England, France, Italy. But he called the most serious deficiency the complete lack of knowledge of Platonism on the part of Howgate, who was unable to understand the poems whose substance and secret, according to Santayana, lay in Platonism. Even in his old age, Santayana felt that when he wrote those Platonizing sonnets, Platonism was a living experience for him, not a mere imitation without knowledge of the feelings of the Italians (ibid. 600).

The poems are an integral part of Santayana's philosophy, as well as other works from his youth, even if he could no longer identify with them in his old age. Santayana told to Bruno Lind that the first edition of *Hermit of Carmel* was a mistake and should never have been reissued because it was a misguided effort. He believed that only those who were writing a psychological study of his thoughts should read it (Lind 1962, 73).

Philosophical metanoia robbed Santayana of his faith in himself and in poetry. He had broken. Even his faith in the power of imagination was almost shaken. His doubts about his own poetry were expressed most forcefully in a letter he wrote in 1905 to Robert Trevelyan - one of the „Cambridge Apostles“. Trevelyan had previously sent Santayana his poem *The Birth of Parsival*, but in the reply letter, instead of a concrete value judgment, he found Santayana's confession about poetry:

The truth is that I have fallen out of love with poetry and feel a kind of incompetence of speaking of it, as one might in the case of a sweetheart that had jilted one (McCormick, 1987, 114).

Contrary to his thoughts expressed elsewhere, in this letter he is incredibly pessimistic and disillusioned. It even occurs to him that all the imaginative work that the poet does is only a „hollow anachronism“, a dilettantish flirtation, which is brought to life by facing our own world - and „the incapacity to face our own world“, to live our true passions (ibid. 115).

6. Conclusion

In the case of Santayana, a contemplative philosophy of life striving for happiness and perfection can be demonstrated, the driving force of which is longing. In my study, I claimed that - although Santayana approaches the investigation of the sense of beauty in a naturalistic way - an all-pervading Platonist attitude can be detected in his philosophy, which, starting from the concept of love, is ennobled into a religion with the help of idealization. Santayana's work is an example of how it is possible to create an aesthetic ontology based on the Platonic conception of beauty even by maintaining the rejection of independent aesthetics within philosophy. The connection of poetry, religion and philosophy in his works also echoes the ancient Greek perception. I believe that the life work of George Santayana is an unmissable chapter in the history of pragmatist aesthetics and thinking about aesthetic living, as a forerunner of philosophical ideas promoting aesthetic living and self-cultivation, such as Rorty, Shusterman and Nehamas, and also as an heir to the ancient teachings on the care of the soul. can be assessed. According to Richard Shusterman, the postmodern ethics of taste attempts to fuse the aesthetic and moral spheres into one, by looking with suspicion at the long tradition of their philosophical separation. We can see exactly this with Santayana. His writings on the search for beauty are not isolated theoretical works, but poetically composed self-expressions of his life, secret thoughts and motivations. With his sensitive aesthetic knowledge, he created a special way of life. His aestheticism is mixed with

radical asceticism, which cannot be defined without the all-pervading presence of desire.

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