
George Santayana's Idealistic Naturalism and Its Criticisms

KEREM AKILLI 
Ankara University

Research Article

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Abstract: This article examines George Santayana's philosophical naturalism and the criticisms directed against it by John Dewey and Roy Wood Sellars. It argues that Santayana cannot be reduced either to a strict materialist or to an idealist thinker, because his system is built on the coexistence of matter, essence, truth, and spirit within a single natural order. The study first explains Santayana's concept of animal faith as the primordial, non-rational basis of all knowledge and action. On this account, belief is not grounded in proof but in the biological conditions of life, practical need, and instinctive adaptation to the world. The article then shows how Santayana's four realms structure his ontology: matter as the ground of existence, essence as the field of intelligible forms, truth as the factual description of what has occurred, and spirit as the light of consciousness emerging from organic life. Within this framework, spirit remains dependent on matter while still making possible meaning, value, and reflective awareness. The second part of the article focuses on the major objections raised by Dewey and Sellars. Dewey accuses Santayana of introducing a dualism between material nature and timeless essences, thereby weakening naturalism. Sellars, by contrast, criticizes Santayana's epiphenomenalism and the claim that consciousness is merely passive. The article argues, however, that these criticisms overlook the consistency of Santayana's own naturalism, which refuses both crude reductionism and supernatural explanation. Santayana's use of idealist vocabulary

does not abandon nature; rather, it seeks to account for the emergence of meaning, consciousness, and value within nature itself. In this sense, Santayana's philosophy offers a distinctive alternative to both materialist reduction and transcendental idealism. Ultimately, the article suggests that Santayana's naturalism is best understood as a middle path: fully rooted in matter, yet broad enough to preserve human meaning, aesthetic experience, and crucial philosophical reflection.

Keywords: George Santayana, naturalism, animal faith, essence, epiphenomenalism.

Introduction

The term "naturalism" has no precise meaning in contemporary philosophy. Its current usage stems from the debates that took place in America during the first half of the last century. Among the philosophers of that period who defined themselves as "naturalists" were John Dewey, Ernest Nagel, Sidney Hook, and Roy Wood Sellars. These philosophers aimed to bring philosophy into a closer relationship with science. In this context, naturalist philosophers argued that reality is bound by nature, contains nothing supernatural, and that the scientific method should be used to investigate all domains of reality, including the human spirit.¹

Naturalism is sometimes conflated with materialism. It is possible to say that the reason for this is due to the great importance both views place on matter. In philosophical literature, the fundamental distinction between naturalism and materialism is determined through ontological scope and methodological boundaries. Materialism (physicalism) is a material substance-oriented doctrine which maintains that everything in the universe ultimately consists of physical substance and that mental states can be reduced to physical states. In contrast, naturalism is a broader methodological and worldview umbrella that rejects the existence of supernatural or spiritual forces

¹ David Papineau, "Naturalism," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/naturalism/> (accessed May 14, 2026).

and emphasizes that reality can only be understood through the methods of the natural sciences. Therefore, even if a naturalist accepts phenomena in the universe that appear to be non-material, they aim to explain them within a scientific continuity without resorting to a metaphysical realm. In this context, materialism can be evaluated as a strict subset regarding the world of existence that naturalism offers.²

One of the thinkers whose philosophy we can examine to better understand the distinction between naturalism and materialism is George Santayana. He engaged in a philosophy that sought not to settle for the explanations of materialism, but to go beyond them. However, this engagement caused him to transcend the classical understanding of naturalism as well. He incorporated concepts that could be seen within "idealist" philosophy – such as substance, spirit, and essence – into his own philosophy. For this reason, he was criticized by naturalist philosophers for practicing idealistic naturalism. Against these criticisms, Santayana expressed his own naturalism as "True Naturalism." In this study, we will first explain Santayana's so-called idealistic naturalism, and then, by taking the criticisms directed at him into account, we will attempt to evaluate whether Santayana's philosophy is indeed a naturalism associated with the idea of "idealism" in philosophy. While making this evaluation, it is important to bear in mind that Santayana, like other naturalists, embraced the idea of evolution. However, what kind of understanding of evolution he possessed will manifest itself while explaining his naturalism.

1. Naturalism with Idealist or Metaphysical Concepts

According to Santayana, philosophy must begin *in medias res*, that is, "in the very midst of things," within action; here lies an instinctive and irrational belief toward the natural world, namely, "animal faith." For George Santayana, animal faith constitutes the irrational foundation of all claims to knowledge. This is the deep layer of the biological order operating through our physical and unconscious existence; it produces beliefs that are radically impossible to prove.³ This

² David Papineau, *Philosophical Naturalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 1–2.

³ George Santayana, *Scepticism and Animal Faith: Introduction to a System of Philosophy* (New York: Scribner's; London: Constable, 1923), 35.

animal faith, which is irrational, is the first moment a living being senses or perceives the external world. According to Santayana, as the living being rises from passive intuition at this point, it shifts toward a belief in discourse, experience, substance, truth, and spirit due to a vital and structural necessity. It is conceivable that all these objects might be illusions. However, the faith placed in them does not rest on a pre-given probability; on the contrary, all judgments of probability are grounded upon them. These express a rational instinct or an instinctive reason; they voice the increasingly strengthening faith of the living being residing in a world it can observe and, from time to time, reshape.⁴ While Santayana characterizes these presuppositions as "animal," he aims to emphasize our biological foundation and our shared state of vitality. Ours is a deep-rooted and primitive belief; our most fundamental beliefs are elements of a kind of animal faith. For instance, it is the belief that a world exists, that a future lies ahead, that things sought can be found, and that things seen can be eaten.⁵

To express his account of animal faith more clearly, Santayana demonstrates it by contrasting it with consciousness. In this comparison, he shows the importance of instinct. According to Santayana, if consciousness had the duty to guide behavior better than instinct, it would have been highly inadequate for this task in the very beginning. The only thing that can keep thoughts and areas of interest within the boundaries of rationality is the order and balance possessed by a healthy instinct. In this context, the predetermined interests humans possess as animals have concentrated attention on practical matters and have not detached it from the periphery of significant events.⁶ Here, after showing how instinct serves the function of survival and living where intelligence or consciousness is absent in the evolutionary stage, Santayana demonstrates how an intention begins to emerge as a result of this instinct repeating the same things. It is possible to view this intention as animal faith. Therefore, animal faith is a state that does not contain knowledge to be obtained through intelligence

⁴ Santayana, *Scepticism and Animal Faith*, 308–309.

⁵ Santayana, *Scepticism and Animal Faith*, 180.

⁶ George Santayana, *Aklın Yaşamı: Kısa Denemeler* [The Life of Reason: Short Essays], trans. Oya Özağaç (Ankara: Fol Kitap, 2022), 18–19.

or consciousness, but rather carries data obtained as a result of the practice of instinct. In this context, animal faith is associated with willingness.

According to Santayana, what determines animal willing is needs. Needs hold an important place in the organism's discovery of the properties of objects and their relations with other objects. Animal willing is associated with the universal willingness belonging to the material power that places matter into specific forms. Universal willing, which also encompasses animal willingness, is the manifest effort within things belonging to any species to develop a certain form and to sustain it.⁷ If we consider universal willing as a form of energy, animal willing is the continuation of this universal willing inherent in nature within a living being. In this context, animal will possesses a structure that, through its needs, can pursue its practices, and with the multiplication or alteration of its practices, pursue its new needs. In this regard, animal faith can be interpreted, prior to reason or consciousness, as a pure "adaptation of the organism to the environment."

For according to Santayana, while the environment determines under which circumstances intuitions – or intentions in the sense of animal faith – will arise, the psyche – that is, the hereditary organization of the living being – determines the form of these intuitions. The ancient conditions of life on earth have undoubtedly designated which forms of psyche would emerge and develop. Many forms of intuition that probably seem completely unthinkable to humans express the facts and rhythms of nature to other living minds.⁸

According to Santayana, after starting in the very midst of things with animal faith, it is necessary to look at what these things are. In this context, there are four realms of being for Santayana. The first of these is matter, from which everything originates. According to Santayana, the origin of all events in the world is arbitrary, temporal, and

⁷ Yakup Hamdioğlu, "The Emergence of the Immaterial Spirit through the Material Psyche in the Philosophy of George Santayana" (PhD diss., Middle East Technical University, 2015), 157.

⁸ Santayana, *Scepticism and Animal Faith*, 88.

contingent. Matter – by whatever name it is called – is the fundamental principle of existence. It is often unruly and is the occasion for defect or conflict in things. Therefore, a pessimistic moralist may view matter as evil; however, according to Santayana, when looking at the matter from a broader perspective, it appears "good." For it is the principle of existence. It carries all things potentially within itself and is thus the condition for all their perfections or possible excellences.⁹ Yet, this perspective is still from the standpoint of animal life. For to Santayana, matter is the pre-discursive and natural foundation of all that exists. Therefore, in itself, it is neither good nor evil; but it can be perceived as such when evaluated from the standpoint of the interests of animal life. Animal interests turn the indistinguishable and neutral face of matter into a smile or a frown.¹⁰

After explaining matter, Santayana introduces the realm of essence as another realm of being. According to Santayana, essence is an ideal realm. It is, in a way, a state that serves to let us grasp a continuously changing external world ideally through fixations. In this context, it exists both in the mind and outside. However, one must not confuse Santayana's concept of "essence" with its meaning in idealistic and rationalist philosophies. Santayana treats the concept of essence alongside different concepts such as idea, datum, image, appearance, and form. In Santayana's system, the concept of essence is associated with terms related to mental processes. In this context, essence does not possess any predetermined character. Likewise, it does not have any purpose either. It is merely an inactive component within material existence. Essence relies neither on matter nor on the mind, yet it is embodied by matter and intuited by the mind. There is the essence of the object, or the essence embodied in matter. In addition to this, there is the essence of intuition, or the essence that manifests itself within intuition. Well then, from which source do the essences that appear here come? Within his system, Santayana does not specify any source for these essences, because for Santayana, essence

⁹ George Santayana, *The Realm of Matter: Book Second of Realms of Being* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1930), v.

¹⁰ Santayana, *The Realm of Matter*, 134.

is a name that meets the immanent ideal possibility of all things.¹¹

It is possible to express Santayana's concept of "essence" as a symbol that serves to fix change in the mind and, in this context, enables the acquisition of datum or knowledge. In this respect, the essence embodied in matter and the essence of intuition are merely a concept that the mind or intuition regards as "symbolic" in perceiving and understanding the external world. Therefore, considering that the foundation of everything is matter, essence is not something independent of matter. In this case, we can say that catching essences for humans is, in a way, catching symbols that are purely ideal, in order to better understand matter and the environment. By the term "symbolic essence" here, our intent is not that essence is a fiction with no value whatsoever. It is a concept that is subsequently treated by human intuition as if "it were there," yet is just as valuable functionally in understanding matter and life.

As the third realm of being, there is the realm of truth. At the beginning of his work, *The Realm of Truth*, Santayana criticizes the traditional understanding of "necessary truths" and associates truth with existence. According to him, existence is based on an "unnecessary, arbitrary, and contingent chance" rather than a logical necessity. At this point, truth is defined as "descriptive of existence"; therefore, just as existence itself is contingent, truth is likewise contingent. According to Santayana, which essences will be realized in the material world is not a predetermined necessity but a fact of nature, and truth is precisely the record of this factual state.¹² As can be seen, for Santayana, truth refers to the facts that have occurred in existence rather than its meanings in idealistic philosophy. In other words, once a fact occurs in the material world, the fact that that event has occurred enters the realm of truth eternally. Therefore, truth stands outside, and humans merely attempt to discover it.

The final realm, and the most important one concerning human

¹¹ Hamdioğlu, "The Emergence of the Immaterial Spirit," 145–146.

¹² George Santayana, *The Realm of Truth: Book Third of Realms of Being* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1938), 1–2.

consciousness, is the realm of spirit. In Santayana's hierarchy of being, although spirit ontologically relies on a material foundation, it functions as the constituent element of human moral, aesthetic, and emotional life, and consequently, of human happiness. Spirit does not possess a directly observable nature like a physical object; however, in order to gain existence and maintain its operation, it stands in need of the ground provided by nature and matter. According to Santayana, spirit is a pure light of consciousness that brings to light temporal, spatial, and value-oriented distinctions, and notices the diversity among essences. It is a unique power that takes potential essences in nature and restructures them at the level of consciousness into a new and meaningful realm of being.¹³ In this context, what Santayana means by spirit appears to be consciousness or awareness.

According to Santayana, consciousness evolved through the natural development of the physical world, and he leaves the explanation of this development to scientific accounts. He considers that spirit emerges during moments of harmony between the psyche and the environment, yet this harmony is temporary. Disordered natural forces allow spirit to emerge only in intermittent forms, to suffer, and to meet with failure. For just as the birth of spirit is joyful due to a new harmony that brings it about, the disruption or suppression of this harmony – which, if not sudden, leads to futile struggles and suffering. Santayana's understanding of consciousness carries the quality of being praised, rather than viewing it as a burden or an element that necessitates action. Spirit is, quite literally, the voice of order in nature; a joyful music that emerges alongside a partial and temporary perfection taking place in a certain vital rhythm.¹⁴

How, then, can this consciousness or spirit emerge from matter or the material body? To explain this, Santayana uses the concept of the *psyche* (can). In Santayana's philosophy, action and existence within the realm of matter come alive through the psyche, which is a

¹³ Aysun Aydın, "George Santayana ve Epifenomenal Natüralizmin Olanaklılığı" [George Santayana and the Possibility of Epiphenomenal Naturalism], *Muhakeme Der-gisi*3, no. 1 (2020): 4.

¹⁴ George Santayana, *The Birth of Reason and Other Essays*, ed. Daniel Cory (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 53.

part of nature. While the psyche, as a material foundation, establishes the unity between nature and human action, it simultaneously prepares the necessary ground for the birth of the spirit, which is an immaterial structure. This ground is established when the psyche reaches a complex level of organization under the conditions of animal existence. Animal faith, which forms the keystone of the system, is the fundamental dynamic that, through intention and the intuition of essence, opens the path leading from these animal foundations of the psyche to the consciousness of the spirit.¹⁵

If the spirit appears as an extension of the psyche's animal existence, the secret of this birth is hidden within the complexity of the psyche on the material plane. If the nature of the high level of organization that the psyche achieves in the material world, and its decisive function in the spirit's relation with essences are clarified, how the spirit traverses the path from a biological ground to consciousness will also be fully demonstrated. According to Santayana, this path first begins with animal beliefs. Since we live in a material world, we establish our connection with existence through our beliefs. In this process, animal alertness triggered by matter is crucial for the formation of the spirit. Animal alertness enables the noticing of objects in motion. Thanks to the contribution made by the psyche to the process of perception, essences transform into the objects we use in our thoughts and discourse. The formation of the knowledge process is the effect of neither matter nor essence alone; this process becomes possible through the unification of both within natural life. The spirit, on the other hand, is included in this structure spontaneously. It is neither a cause nor an effect; it is merely a product of the psyche's life. The complex and flexible structure of the psyche prepares appropriate ground for the emergence of the spirit by opening the path leading from matter to mental processes.¹⁶

According to Santayana, the volitional nature of the psyche is important. Considering that the organism acts in accordance with its needs, volition manifests itself here. The volitional psyche is in a state

¹⁵ Hamdioğlu, "The Emergence of the Immaterial Spirit," 137–138.

¹⁶ Hamdioğlu, "The Emergence of the Immaterial Spirit," 155–156.

of continuous struggle with difficulties such as hunger, illness, and death in order to sustain its existence in nature. The psyche's focus on the material world for the purpose of survival actually opens the path leading to the birth of the spirit. Thanks to this animal attention of the psyche, the spirit begins to notice the essences of objects and contemplate them. However, the spirit is not a power that governs material processes; on the contrary, it is in a structure that merely observes these processes. According to Santayana, all mental events are mere by-products of the physical actions of the psyche. In this system, since the spirit cannot intervene in events, it is like an ineffective light; its sole duty and purpose is to contemplate essences. If there were no material body and a psyche trying to survive, the emergence of the spirit would not be possible either. Therefore, the spirit is not a universal necessity, but an element required for the formation of a human way of life.¹⁷

In summary, in Santayana's understanding of naturalism, after establishing that matter is the foundation of everything, there are certain stages that arise from this matter. When we consider it within an evolutionary framework, matter – through its complex structure and a state that we can call volition or energy in the universe – creates life. This life generates a perception of practice by continuously repeating the same things. There are data within this perception of practice. In the evolutionary thought, following the stage reached with the animal, the material body of the animal develops and becomes much more complex. This complex structure, both due to its bodily characteristics and through the outcomes arising from continuous action, forms an intention. With this intention, it looks at the external world and continues to develop in this context. A consciousness begins to form by means of this volitional psyche present in the animal. That consciousness goes even beyond animal intention and generates the act of thinking.

When contemplating how it is possible to transition from matter to consciousness, people generally think of matter in its crudest form

¹⁷ Hamdioğlu, "The Emergence of the Immaterial Spirit," 158–159.

and consciousness in its most advanced state. However, when we consider the evolutionary process, this is not quite appropriate. Within the evolutionary process, matter can undergo change – in a sense, "development" – and can be in a state close to the formation of the simplest consciousness. Therefore, the transition from matter to consciousness is a matter of possibility occurring when matter is at its closest state to consciousness. The moment the animal begins to think, it becomes possible to produce mental symbols in order to survive and make life easier. With the help of these symbols, mental production continues. Consequently, although they are mental, ideal concepts or symbols are actually a result of this natural process as well. In this case, humans have arrived at a certain point, and they do not have to regress from this point. In other words, even if everything originates from matter, there is nothing preventing humans, at the point currently reached, from producing something beyond matter. In this context, the idealistic concepts that Santayana uses demonstrate the current stage reached by human beings who originate from matter. Likewise, the greatest example of ideals and symbols is morality, the ability of humans to live together. Situations such as humans being capable of abstract pleasures and being able to rationally imagine something that does not exist demonstrate the current stage that humanity has reached.

Although Santayana attaches importance to symbols and ideals, this does not mean that he fully embraces idealistic philosophy. According to Santayana, there must be an understanding of ideals that is grounded. Therefore, material existence and empirical reality are important. Santayana explains his naturalist philosophy, which we have discussed so far, with the following words: "The human race is divided into two classes: those who have no ideals but are grounded like Sancho Panzas, and those who have ideals but are at the same time mad like Don Quixotes."¹⁸ As can be seen from this, humans should not remain at the level of materialism. In materialism, one's feet are on the ground, but because there are no ideals, one cannot go further. In ide-

¹⁸ Santayana, *Akılın Yaşamı*, 111.

alism, on the other hand, there may be ideals that can move one forward, but because one's feet are not planted in material reality, those ideals are of no use. In this context, it is possible to say that Santayana, in his own naturalist understanding, reconciles these two perspectives to some extent. However, for Santayana, instead of being different categories as understood in traditional philosophy, these two perspectives are handled within a single naturalness.

2. Criticisms of Idealistic Naturalism: The Cases of John Dewey and Roy Wood Sellars

One of the philosophers who criticizes Santayana's naturalism is John Dewey, who belongs to the pragmatist tradition. Instead of using concepts inherent in idealistic philosophy like Santayana does, John Dewey expresses human life and experience as a relationship between the environment and the organism. According to him, senses are the organs through which the living creature directly participates in the events of the world around it. In this participation, the various wonders and splendors of this world become concrete through the qualities it experiences. In this context, experience is the result, the sign, and the reward of the interaction between the organism and the environment; when this interaction is fully carried out, a dimension of participation and communication is added to the interaction.¹⁹ In this respect, Dewey provides an account of immediate experiencing regarding the experience of the external world. The environment and the organism are within the same nature, and humans experience the external world immediately. From this point of view, the most important criticism Dewey directs at Santayana has been through this issue of immediacy.

Dewey and Santayana engaged in mutual criticisms regarding their approaches to naturalism. The fundamental debate between them stems from Santayana's opposition to the principle of immediacy in pragmatic naturalism and his definition of a realm of being that precedes experience. Equating nature with experience, Dewey op-

¹⁹ John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Minton, Balch & Co., 1934), 22.

poses any acceptance of being that lies beyond experience or transcends nature. For this reason, Dewey characterizes Santayana's approach as dualistic and idealistic. In response, Santayana asserts that Dewey's philosophy of experience carries hidden metaphysical assumptions within itself. Dewey, on the other hand, contends that Santayana, by substituting the concepts of spirit and substance for the metaphysics of experience in his own philosophy, actually constructs an alternative metaphysics. Furthermore, Dewey argues that the notion of animal faith within natural things, which Santayana defends, is in essence no different from the idea of the direct (immediate) experiencing of nature.²⁰

As seen from these criticisms, Dewey's concern is the matter of not losing the natural ground of experience. From Dewey's perspective, Santayana's use of metaphysical concepts that are not within nature may cause this natural ground to be lost and idealistic terms to dominate. This is an occurrence that does not belong within naturalist philosophy. However, a question comes to mind here. Even though Santayana uses idealistic terms, how far has he actually moved away from natural ground as someone who states that the foundation of everything is matter? Another issue is the question of whether that which is natural must exist only "physically" within nature. If matter, within its own naturalness, can produce something outside of itself, how accurate is it to call this supernatural? In this context, from Santayana's point of view, concepts such as essence, substance, and spirit, which are products of consciousness, are within a perfectly natural process. Therefore, even if experience is mediated, it has not lost its natural ground.

Another criticism Dewey levels against Santayana's philosophy is that of "dualism." In his critical essay written on George Santayana's work *The Realm of Essence*, John Dewey characterizes Santayana's naturalism as inconsistent dualism and accuses him of being a Platonic idealist wearing a naturalist mask. According to Dewey, a holistic and genuine naturalism must not accept any transcendent realm

²⁰ Aydın, "George Santayana ve Epifenomenal Natüralizmin Olanaklılığı," 4-5.

of being beyond nature, independent of it, or isolated from time. However, Santayana disrupts the unity of nature by dividing the universe into two sharp compartments: material existence (substance) and eternal essences. Dewey refers to this situation as a "half-hearted" or "reluctant" naturalism; for while Santayana claims on the one hand that matter is at the foundation of everything, on the other hand, he completely detaches meanings, qualities, and forms from the material world and places them into a timeless, static "Realm of Essence." According to Dewey's instrumentalist philosophy, the meanings and qualities that objects possess are functions of natural processes and the practical interactions that a living organism establishes with the environment. Detaching these from the flow within nature and turning them into self-existing, eternal ideas is a scholastic approach that contradicts the essence of naturalism. Consequently, Dewey rejects this kind of distinction, asserting that in Santayana's system, the material world is reduced to a blind and irrational brute force, while the human spirit and mind are condemned to a passive Platonism that observes this world from afar.²¹

It is possible to interpret this criticism by returning once again to Santayana's thought that matter is the foundation of everything. In our study, we have stated that Santayana's understanding of essence is one that arises from matter. Likewise, we have noted that the essence has no physical existence in the external world. In this case, when Santayana's system is examined more closely, the validity of Dewey's criticisms becomes debatable. Contrary to what Dewey claims, the "Realm of Essence" in Santayana's system is not a transcendent repository of Platonic ideals that is independent of the physical world, capable of acting on its own, or governing nature. According to Santayana, essences have never possessed a material power, extension, causal effect, or creative force; therefore, essences are not things that "exist" in the literal sense of the word. The sole sovereign power that exists, moves, transforms, and initiates any kind of mental or physical process in the field of reality is matter. The emergence of an

²¹ John Dewey, "Half-Hearted Naturalism," *The Journal of Philosophy* 24, no. 3 (February 1927): 57–64.

essence, its recognition at the level of consciousness, or its gaining of visibility depends entirely on the biological and physical orientation of the "psyche," which possesses a completely material foundation. In this context, Santayana maintains the naturalist line because he bases the origin and explanation of everything on matter; his definition of essences as isolated from time and space does not mean that he attributes an ontological independence or a supernatural power to them. By accepting matter as the sole constitutive and executive power, Santayana fulfills the fundamental condition of naturalism; as for essences, he defines them merely as ineffective, passive forms used by this material power (the psyche) to give meaning to the world and to comprehend it aesthetically and morally

Another prominent philosopher who levels criticism against Santayana is Roy Wood Sellars. Sellars and Santayana contributed different chapters with parallel ideas to the work *Essays in Critical Realism*, published in 1920. Later on, they diverged intellectually due to the differences that formed in their views regarding the issues of essences and the ineffectiveness of the spirit. According to Sellars, Santayana resorted to the concept of "essence" in order to solve the problems in the new realism's understanding of perception. Santayana conceived of essence as something common present both in the mind and in the object. However, as Sellars notes, how precisely to detect this common structure created a significant difficulty. For this reason, Santayana turned toward the concepts of "intuition" and "animal faith". Sellars also states that Santayana grasped these essences like 'semi-Platonic entities' and, even though he could not directly penetrate the external object, he attempted to develop explanations regarding the embodiment of essences in objects.²²

Sellars's stronger objection to Santayana is directed toward his understanding of epiphenomenalism. Santayana had stated that the material forms and affects the spirit, but the spirit does not affect the material, remaining merely a passive spectator. This understanding of epiphenomenalism, which posits a one-way influence from the

²² Roy Wood Sellars, *Reflections on American Philosophy From Within* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969), 44–45.

physical to the mental, became the point of Sellars's criticism. According to Sellars, the structure of consciousness reflects the organism's position and its adaptation to the environment. The conscious self is associated with the interest-based/concerned response that the organism gives to objects of perception.²³ Within the framework of his understanding of evolutionary naturalism, Sellars strongly opposes the idea that consciousness has no causal power over physical processes. He rejects the view of consciousness as an ineffective by-product (epiphenomenon) that merely observes from the outside what goes on in the brain and repeats what happens like a parrot. According to Sellars, the mind cannot be just a translator or an ineffective shadow of the physical world; on the contrary, it possesses a functional power that guides the survival of the organism.²⁴

According to Sellars, systems that position the mind or the spirit as an ineffective shadow are the product of a mechanical understanding of nature that does not take evolution, which is a biological reality, seriously. When evolution is taken seriously, the mind becomes an organic category of nature.²⁵ Sellars defines the nature of evolutionary synthesis through two constitutive elements. According to him, evolution is a critical process of growth within reality that accommodates both "genetic continuity" and "the emergence of new qualities" simultaneously within its structure. This understanding of evolutionary synthesis is the sole way to explain the emergence of entirely new and complex levels in nature, such as the mind, without requiring any extra-systemic or supernatural factor.²⁶

Considering Santayana's view that everything emerges from matter, Sellars's criticisms are remarkably powerful. If active matter has brought forth a state like consciousness/spirit from within itself, how can this state be passive? As Sellars points out, when looked at from the perspective of the evolutionary process, if consciousness pos-

²³ Roy Wood Sellars, *Evolutionary Naturalism* (Chicago: Open Court Publishing, 1922), 287.

²⁴ Sellars, *Evolutionary Naturalism*, 290.

²⁵ Sellars, *Evolutionary Naturalism*, 296.

²⁶ Sellars, *Evolutionary Naturalism*, 297.

esses a structure that is, so to speak, an advanced form or a continuation of matter, how can it not be in a position to affect matter? Especially when we consider the understanding inferred from Santayana's philosophy – that humans originate from matter but will not remain static with it – this situation demonstrates the importance of the ideal. However, it is a curious state of affairs that consciousness is so passive while Santayana simultaneously attributes such importance to ideals. Based on an understanding of a continuously progressing evolution, if the ultimate point reached is consciousness, then consciousness ought to possess a structure capable of continuing in the most powerful and active manner. Nevertheless, Santayana's understanding of a passive spirit can be interpreted as a way of not detaching from material reality and a reminder that no matter how far we advance, we cannot continue without it since everything is made of matter. Furthermore, when viewed from the perspective of Santayana, who demands a grounded philosophy, it is important for consciousness to constantly keep its feet on the ground in the context of not forgetting its origin, let's say, no matter how advanced it might be. This is because a philosophy that is not grounded, even with advanced consciousness, could easily get lost in the realm of fantasies and lose all sense of reality.

Contrary to these criticisms, there are also approaches that evaluate Santayana's ontology as an attempt to overcome the reductionist impasse into which naturalism falls when explaining mental and moral processes. Angus Kerr-Lawson views Santayana's fourfold classification of being – consisting of the realms of matter, essence, spirit, and truth – as an example of a radical and consistent naturalism that does not get bogged down in a rigid physical reductionism. According to Kerr-Lawson, Santayana accepts the epistemological priorities of contemporary naturalism, which limits reality solely to the material world and thereby pushes consciousness outside of experience, as a philosophical problem. While Santayana's materialistic stance assigns causal priority in nature to matter, the approach of epiphenomenalism he developed prevents this priority from turning into a mechanical physical reductionism. In this way, human domains such as ethics, aesthetics, language, and mind, which scientific reductionism

fails to adequately explain, are preserved on a non-reductionist, broad, ontological ground. Consequently, Kerr-Lawson argues that against contemporary philosophy of mind's tendency to sacrifice consciousness to the physical world, Santayana's theory of epiphenomenal spirit and essences serves an inevitable function in order to ontologically ground consciousness and experience.²⁷

Conclusion

In general terms, naturalism is an umbrella concept that rejects the existence of supernatural powers and maintains that reality can be entirely explained through the methods of the natural sciences. Materialism, on the other hand, is a more rigid philosophy which asserts that everything ultimately consists of physical matter. Although Santayana aligns with the materialistic and naturalist line by accepting that the foundation of all existence is the material world, he did not limit his philosophical system merely to a crude materialism; rather, he incorporated concepts frequently encountered in the idealistic tradition, such as essence, spirit, and truth, into his philosophy. This situation constitutes the primary source of the criticisms indicating that he stepped outside the boundaries of naturalism and drifted into an inconsistent idealism.

The foundation of Santayana's philosophical system is formed by "animal faith," which is seen as necessary to prove for the continuation of vitality. According to the philosopher, every claim to knowledge and philosophical inquiry begins right in the midst of things, with this biologically based, unconscious instinct. In stages of the evolutionary process where consciousness does not yet exist, what guides the living creature is healthy instincts. The living organism functionally experiences the external world in line with its vital needs and its effort to adapt to the environment. This biological ground constitutes the starting point of the fourfold realm of being (matter, essence, truth, and spirit) constructed by Santayana. Stating that matter is the foundational constitutive and executive power of everything, the philosopher argues that the mind produces "essences" in order to

²⁷ Aydın, "George Santayana ve Epifenomenal Natüralizmin Olanaklılığı," 6.

fix and make sense of the world in accordance with practical needs. Correctness or truth, on the other hand, consists merely of a timeless record of the factual situations that take place in this material world. The spirit or consciousness, located at the highest stage of the system, emerges as a natural product of the "psyche," which has reached a complex level of biological organization.

A significant criticism of this comprehensive system of Santayana's came from John Dewey, one of the pioneers of pragmatist philosophy. Dewey viewed nature and experience as a whole and maintained that humans experience the external world directly, that is, in an immediate manner. According to Dewey, Santayana disrupted the unity of nature and fell into an inconsistent dualism by dividing the universe into two distinct categories: material existence and eternal essences. Because he detached meanings and qualities from the practical flow within nature and placed them into a timeless "Realm of Essence," Dewey characterized Santayana's philosophy as a "reluctant or half-hearted naturalism," or as a Platonism wearing a naturalist mask. However, when Santayana's system is examined more closely, it is seen that essences are not transcendent Platonic ideas capable of acting independently of the physical world. According to Santayana, essences possess no causal effect, creative force, or material power; therefore, they are not substantial structures that exist in the field of reality. The recognition of an essence at the level of consciousness depends entirely on the biological orientation of the psyche, which has a completely material foundation. Santayana did not abandon the naturalist line, as he based the origin and explanation of everything on matter. Essences are merely ineffective and passive forms to which this material power resorts in order to make sense of the world and to comprehend it aesthetically and morally.

The second powerful criticism directed at Santayana was made within the context of epiphenomenalism by Roy Wood Sellars, with whom he stood alongside in the ranks of critical realism. Santayana asserted that there is a one-way influence from the physical to the mental, and that the spirit is a passive spectator (an epiphenomenon) which cannot govern material processes or intervene in events.

Within the framework of evolutionary naturalism, Sellars strongly opposed positioning consciousness as such an ineffective shadow or by-product. According to Sellars, the mind possesses a functional and active power that guides the survival of the organism. Approaches that view the mind as ineffective are products of mechanical understandings of nature that do not take evolution, which is a biological reality, seriously enough. Sellars's theory of "evolutionary synthesis" maintains that nature preserves genetic continuity during its own internal development process while also being capable of bringing entirely new qualities (novelty) into existence, and that consciousness is an active element of this process. Although Santayana's understanding of a passive spirit does not offer an evolutionary consciousness as active as Sellars's, it serves as a philosophical insurance policy that prevents humans from forgetting their origins and becoming completely lost in a realm of fantasies. Santayana emphasized the passivity of the spirit so that humans would not detach from material reality and would remember that no matter how advanced a level of consciousness they reach, they cannot exist without the material body.

In contrast to the harsh criticisms of his contemporaries such as Dewey and Sellars, thinkers like Angus Kerr-Lawson have defended Santayana's philosophy, viewing it as an effort to overcome the "reductionist impasse," which is one of the greatest problems of naturalism. Kerr-Lawson accepts Santayana's fourfold classification of being – consisting of the realms of matter, essence, spirit, and truth – as an example of a radical and consistent naturalism that does not get bogged down in a rigid physical reductionism. Contemporary naturalism and philosophy of mind tend to push consciousness outside of experience by limiting reality solely to the material world, or to disregard it completely by reducing it entirely to physical processes. Santayana, on the other hand, while maintaining the causal priority of matter, sought to rescue consciousness from physical reductionism through his epiphenomenalist perspective. In this way, human and cultural domains such as ethics, aesthetics, language, and mind, which scientific and mechanical reductionism fail to adequately explain, could be preserved on a non-reductionist, broad ontological ground without

resorting to supernatural powers.

Summarizing his own naturalist approach, Santayana divides human society into two groups: the grounded "Sancho Panzas" who lack ideals, and the crazy "Don Quixotes" who possess ideals, but whose feet do not touch the ground. The philosopher refuses both to live a life devoid of ideals by remaining solely at the level of materialism, and to detach completely from material reality by yielding entirely to idealism. The system he established is an attempt to reconcile these two philosophical attitudes within a single naturalness and evolutionary continuity. Consequently, George Santayana's philosophy is not an "idealism" detached from nature in the classic sense of philosophical literature. He is a radical naturalist who places matter at the foundation of everything; however, he is a broad-minded naturalist who refuses to reduce the richness of human consciousness, art, morality, and the capacity for abstract thought merely to blind chemical and physical reactions. The theory of essences and spirit he developed is not an escape into a transcendent world, but rather an effort to explain human experience – the most recent and refined stage produced by nature in the evolutionary process – in all its dimensions and by giving it its full due. In this respect, Santayana's naturalism should be evaluated as a non-reductionist philosophical system that stretches the rigid boundaries of contemporary philosophy of mind and naturalism.

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