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DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.12775/RF.2022.028>

American Naturalism and the Future of Philosophy

When one reaches the final steps of the academic ladder and retires, one takes delight at the accomplishments of rising scholars. This publication represents the excellent work of such scholars. Katarzyna Krempleska organized and edited this volume, and her exceptional scholarship is represented in her recent publication of *George Santayana's Political Hermeneutics*¹ which is the best work on Santayana's political philosophy that exists.²

I. Challenges

Scholars and universities have always faced challenges, but many of today's challenges are different from the traditional ones. Traditional chal-

¹ Katarzyna Krempleska, *George Santayana's Political Hermeneutics* (Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2022).

² I also want to acknowledge the remarkable challenges the people of Warsaw and Poland are facing with the flood of Ukrainian refugees. This is not an easy time, and you have chosen to meet these challenges well. Thank you.

lenges may be highlighted by George Santayana's encounter with President Eliot (1869–1909) in the Harvard Yard in the 1890s. President Eliot asked Santayana how his class in Greek philosophy was going. Santayana began to explain the progress his students were making in understanding the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle and the problems they were encountering. The president quickly interrupted saying: "No, no, Santayana, what I mean by my enquiry is, how many students have enrolled for your lectures?"³

As a former president, one understands the temptation to make academic judgments based on numbers, on financial concerns, and on the economic returns of investments. As president, one's daily life is infused with calculations regarding the viability of projects and plans, mostly presented in the context of affordability in the arena of historic expenditures and economic returns. One must balance such calculations with academic needs and future developments. One also knows that when financial concerns are dominant, they may overlook the intellectual growth of students and can undermine the value of scholarly research whose expenditures often are not equal to the financial costs of the university. These are traditional challenges that continue to be faced by scholars and administrators, but now they are joined by difficulties not encountered by previous generations.

Santayana thought President Eliot's goals for Harvard College overshadowed intellectual pursuits and placed student learning more in line with professional preparation for holding positions in major business enterprises and political offices. But even with this traditional concern, neither Santayana nor Dewey faced the prospects of their departments being eliminated or significantly reduced. In the United States current economic challenges remain coupled with a focus on job training and employment, along with an increased political involvement in higher education. The more recent challenges include a significant reduction or elimination of liberal arts graduate programs. Undergraduate liberal arts majors are also being reduced. Some are eliminated while preserving them as elements of a core curriculum that may also be facing a reduction of required courses. Research support for liberal arts faculty is limited and sometimes eliminated altogether.⁴

³ George Santayana, *Character and Opinion in the United States, With Reminiscences of William James and Josiah Royce and Academic Life in America* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920), 186.

⁴ For more information see Herman J. Saatkamp, Jr., "Higher Education: The Challenges and John Ryder's Response," *Pragmatism Today* 12(2) (2021): 169–177.

These problems are not isolated to the United States. There are worldwide issues. Since 2006 there has been a rise in authoritarian governments. Notably China achieved considerable economic success by making autocratic decisions not bound by conflicts in representative democracies. Such autocratic approaches may appear to be more effective in meeting pressing demands by not having to deal with the growing divisions in many democratic societies. Russia and other dictatorships have been on the rise. Using the POLITY data series, in 2020 the Center for Systemic Peace classified the United States as an anocracy, a mixture of democratic and autocratic features. A notice on the front page of the CSP website read:

The USA has dropped below the “democracy threshold” (+6) on the POLITY scale in 2020 and is now considered an anocracy (+5). It has also lost its designation as the world’s oldest, continuous democracy; that designation now belongs to Switzerland (171 years), followed by New Zealand (142) and the United Kingdom (139). Further degradation of democratic authority in the USA will trigger an Adverse Regime Change event.⁵

But in 2021 a more positive note occurred:

NOTE: The USA dropped below the “democracy threshold” (+6) on the POLITY scale in 2020 and was considered an anocracy (+5) at the end of the year 2020; the USA score for 2021 returned to democracy (+8).⁶

The 2020 designation of anocracy, a semi-democracy, is likely caused by several political turns in America, principally the Republican Party moving more towards autocratic measures that suppress voting by minorities, women’s rights, political equality, and increased economic and health insecurities for significant portions of our population. By 2021 the Republicans no longer held the presidency in the US, and the Democrats had a slight majority in both the House of Representatives and the Senate. But now it appears that slim majority is in jeopardy as the U.S. approaches its 2022 mid-term elections and the 2024 presidential election. Some are suggesting that the Russian invasion of Ukraine may change the global democratic recession by uniting free societies giving support to liberal democratic policies. In addition, in the US some are suggesting that the leak of the draft Supreme Court decision overturning *Roe vs. Wade* may also play a role in the upcoming elections by bringing out

⁵ <https://www.systemicpeace.org/>.

⁶ <https://www.systemicpeace.org/>.

supporters of liberal democratic principles. In addition, China's response to the coronavirus pandemic appears to have slowed or stopped their economic advancement, causing some to believe there is renewed hope for more democratic and less authoritarian governments. Predicting the future of governmental structures is not easy or simple. As a result, we simply must wait and see what changes, if any, come in the rise of autocracies worldwide. In the United States the November 2022 mid-term elections, followed by the 2024 presidential election, will provide telling indicators of the direction of American democracy or anocracy, but currently there is a global democratic recession.

II. Democratic Recession

Internationally there is a democratic recession and a rising autocratic political tide that challenges many of the basic elements of liberal democracies. The democratic recession is highlighted in Larry Diamond's 2015 article "Facing up to the Democratic Recession."⁷ This article underscores many of the concerns regarding the rise of autocracies and the decline of democracies. Diamond's explication of the worldwide decline in democracies led to other researchers exploring the rise of autocracies and even to university courses focusing on the democratic recession.

Coupled with this global democratic recession, there is a growing censorship of topics that right-wing autocratic societies find disturbing, and in the United States there are efforts, some successful, to eliminate tenure and diminish support for research not only in the humanities but in the sciences as well. Even while this is occurring, there is significant research in the biological and neurosciences leading to a better understanding of human cognition and behavior that challenge traditional views of cognition and human interaction with others and with our environment. Where all this will lead no one knows. Even if the faculty positions lost during the pandemic are restored in the future, it is very likely that the makeup of the faculty will not mirror the pre-pandemic disciplines. Instead, most expect any significant increases in faculty will likely come in areas other than the liberal arts. What we do know is that it will be the rising scholars who will face these new challenges and, we hope, who will work to resolve them in a productive and positive manner.

⁷ Larry Diamond, "Facing up to the Democratic Recession," *Journal of Democracy* 26(1) (2015): 141–155.

III. American Naturalisms

Philosophical naturalism should play a major role in confronting these challenges. But what is naturalism and what direction should it take? Within this article it is not possible either to describe in detail American naturalism or to map out all the alternative routes open to it. As a result, only the outlines of naturalism and its possible responses to contemporary challenges will be given, and I look forward to rising scholars building more coherent approaches and providing intellectual insights that may be missed.

Put simply, there are two major types of American naturalism. One is a progressive naturalism exemplified in John Dewey. The other is the thorough, non-reductive naturalism exemplified in George Santayana. The two views have overlapping areas sharing some of the same principles and views, although there are also significant differences.

A. Cultural Naturalism (John Dewey)

Cultural naturalism views the philosophical enterprise as engaged in society, working to resolve problems that confront individuals, organizations, governments, and human relationships in particular situations. Dewey preferred his outlook to be called a cultural naturalism rather than pragmatism or instrumentalism, partly because it is a broader characterization and perhaps because it is less likely to be seen as idiosyncratic to American culture. In fact, today one finds a reluctance even in America for individuals outside of philosophy to endorse views of pragmatism or instrumentalism because they seem to be too limited to the practical and what works. Too often pragmatism and instrumentalism appear to many as terms of the past, having passed their usefulness in the natural and social sciences. With an ironic smile, one might say if you use the pragmatic criterion, then perhaps one should not use the term "pragmatism."

The reluctance to use the classification of pragmatism has been my experience in teaching undergraduate honors courses in molecular genetics as well as being a Professor of Medical and Molecular Genetics in medical schools and in my clinical experiences in hospitals. However, cultural naturalism retains a positive and progressive approach to contemporary issues. The progressive nature is focused on human experience, avoiding any dualism, and situating all human activities in resolving problems and moving towards a better set of circumstances.

There is no dualism of mind and body, rather the mind is an activity that works to resolve personal and social problems. One should think of the word 'mind' as a verb in which one minds one's actions to benefit society and oneself. Neither are individuals and societies separated, but they interact together with individuals functioning to build a better society. And for Dewey, democracy is both a form of life and a form of government. As a form of life its aim is to create circumstances in which every person may flourish.

The focus on education is central to cultural naturalism. Education is seen as the basis for individuals to flourish in society and for society to achieve the best environment for the individuals. They are interdependent. Hence, this form of naturalism is optimistic, suggesting that one's task is always melioristic, always leading to improvement in one's circumstances. Human interaction with the natural processes is aimed at producing outcomes that are improvements over what might have occurred. There is the optimism that something better is possible.

B. Thorough, Non-Reductive Naturalism (Santayana)

A full naturalist is less optimistic regarding human intervention in social and natural circumstances. Humans are seen as animals living in their environments, shaped by their natural circumstances out of which arise their cultural environments. Although humans and other animals may always try to make things better, there may be some circumstances in which nothing better is possible, and only the tragic lies on the horizon. Even in such circumstances a naturalistic humor is possible and perhaps needed. One of the best representatives of such humor is George Carlin who makes fun of efforts to save the planet. He notes the planet will be here much longer than humans, so the planet is fine, but the people are not.⁸

Some naturalists are reductionist, maintaining that all human activity can be reduced to natural causes, and if we are to understand human individuals and societies, we need to look only at the material and natural conditions that shape our actions, societies, and environments. Santayana is a non-reductive naturalist who maintains that there are aspects of human life and societies that simply cannot be reduced to their material conditions. These include art, music, consciousness, and much that makes life worthwhile. In fact, his view of the spiritual life,

⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7W33HRc1A6c>.

the life of cultivating consciousness and its values, should be the principal aim for humans so inclined, as he was. For Santayana, the life of consciousness provides an elevation above the material causality of all life, creating a world not bound by temporary existence and enabling a delight in consciousness not shaped by environmental practical needs. Even so, although it may be prolonged through cultivation, it is temporary because animal life requires us to eat, find shelter, and confront practical difficulties in everyday life.

Santayana endorsed a view that each individual should flourish in their environment and as much as possible do so without impeding the life of others. However, he did not think that democracy as a form of government was suitable for everyone in all circumstances. Depending on the natural circumstances, other forms of government may be better.

Others shared Santayana's view. Walter Lippman in 1922 published *Public Opinion*⁹ in which he advances the idea that most people, no matter their educational background, can be manipulated. History is brimming with such manipulation through false information and/or leadership committed to extreme causes. One may think of the January 1942 Wannsee Conference near Berlin that formulated the Nazi Final Solution in ninety minutes time. The attendees consisted of mostly highly educated people. Or one may note the current United States extreme right wing putting forward false information to pursue their agenda. Many of the leaders are well-educated, as well as many of their followers. Lippman indicates that such manipulation is often overlooked, leading to a "democratic fallacy" regarding the viability of any democracy. Based on this "realistic" approach, others suggested that the best government might be more aristocratic in which a few well-educated and wise people directed governmental activities. Some suggested this might be reached through representative governments or parliamentary approaches without the direct daily influence of public opinion. Both Santayana and Bertrand Russell were concerned about Dewey's optimistic approach, and Santayana, in particular, took a more naturalistic approach, suggesting that various forms of governments, including democracies, in their different settings may be organized for the betterment of individuals. But Santayana did not think that a democratic form of government was necessarily the best for all societies, nor does a democratic way of life necessarily foster what is best for all individuals. Santayana's criteria for a good society focuses on the values of harmony and

⁹ Walter Lippman, *Public Opinion* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1922).

charity, as Katarzyna Krempleska explicates in her book mentioned earlier. She writes:

I have attempted my own interpretation with the support of two hermeneutic keys, namely the notions of harmony and charity. What emerges from this reading is an eclectic, modern, and reflective approach, which seeks to explain justice in terms of three of its possible motivations – the pursuit of harmony by a disinterested reason, the admiration and recognition of multi-form human excellence, and a universal incentive, reflected in different religious and philosophical traditions worldwide, to minimize suffering. While all of them are meant to express some shade of impartiality, the first one is a principle of the life of reason, the second and the third may be described as different facets of love – love as idealization or a premonition of perfection in the other, and love as a sense of sympathy with the suffering other, accompanied by a desire to relieve them.¹⁰

Santayana's view is that the role of these values depends on the environment. The social organization promoting these values may vary in many ways including some that may be democratic in governmental structure and others not.

IV. Alternative Approaches

Where does this leave us, or lead us? The two forms of American naturalism leave open many alternatives in the face of a global decline in the liberal arts and especially in philosophy, coupled with a worldwide democratic recession. Here are some alternative approaches open to philosophers and other scholars.

A. Abandon the University Life

We might follow Santayana's approach and abandon the university setting and practice philosophy as a way of life rather than as a university professor, giving one the freedom to travel and write as an independent scholar, as Santayana did. Santayana planned his retirement from Harvard beginning in 1893–1894. Around 1910 he announced he was retiring, but the new president of Harvard, Abbot Lawrence Lowell (1909–1933), asked him not to retire and there was an agreement that he would teach one year at the Sorbonne and one year at Harvard. But Santayana

¹⁰ Krempleska, *George Santayana's Political Hermeneutics*, 327.

was clear that this was a tentative agreement, and he was not sure how long he could honor the terms of the agreement. Finally, he retired in 1912 at the age of forty-eight. His books sold quite well making retirement possible, and he also received an inheritance from his mother in 1912 that augmented his savings. In addition, his works continued to sell well after his retirement, and his novel, *The Last Puritan*, and the first book of his autobiography, *Persons and Places*, were best-selling books in the US, England, and parts of Europe. His popularity as a writer was demonstrated in 1936 when he appeared on the front of *Time* magazine.¹¹ As a result, he was free from the strictures of academic life and the limitations, as he saw them, of the United States. He spent the remainder of his life traveling, hosting many guests, and eventually in November 1924 setting up permanent residence at the Bristol Hotel on the Piazza Barberini, Rome, where he spent most of the year while living in Cortina D'Ampezzo in northern Italy during the summers. He never owned a house but lived as a resident in hotels or with friends during his travels and stay in Rome. Following his failed attempt to leave Italy during the Mussolini regime, he eventually took up residence on October 14, 1941 at Clinica della Piccola Compagna di Maria on the Caelian Hill, a hospital run by the Blue Nuns where he resided until his death in 1952. At that time, it was not unusual for hospitals to provide residence for famous people in the later years of their lives.

However, abandoning university life is an unlikely path for most scholars because of one's personal interests in teaching, not to mention financial and professional concerns. Even so, there are several philosophers who have followed this course and delighted in their freedom, although sometimes missing their students and colleagues. Most of us may look forward to such freedom and delight in retirement, if it is well planned.

B. Abandon Philosophy and Become an Administrator

This is not an uncommon alternative. I and several of my colleagues have become not only department chairs, but deans, provosts and presidents. Being able to support the work of others is a positive occupation, and it requires considerable time the more one moves up the administrative ladder causing one's own research and publications to diminish or end. Quite a few colleagues have returned to the academic life of students, col-

¹¹ *Time*, vol. 27, no. 5 (February 3, 1936).

leagues, and scholarship after trying administrative life for a few years. They find the interaction with students and colleagues, their own research, and the freedom of the summers far better than the pace and rewards of an administrative career. This is understandable. Having held the positions of chair, dean, and president, I think the most rewarding career is the classroom and research. Even so, the administrative combination of critical reasoning along with a clear sense of academic goals, financial acumen, public speaking, fund raising abilities, and interactions with public figures provide dimensions to life rarely found in an academic career. For some such a career is the culmination of their active life before retirement that ends with many celebrations and awards for one's contributions and achievements. For others it ends early with a return to faculty status, and one hopes a better life. For others it ends in the most unpleasant way as academic and political interests conflict, or academics and athletics conflict (particularly with Division 1 football and basketball), or financial support diminishes resulting in very difficult decisions, or there are simply unresolved conflicts with the governing board or state oversight commissions or a combination of such conflicts resulting in the end of a career. Being an administrator is not an easy alternative to being a professor, and one should choose carefully. Even with care, it is not always easy to discover or predict the complications that will come in one's administrative career. Hence, take care.

C. Continue as a University Professor

Most academics will likely choose this course of action. A few who are employed in well-established and well-endowed universities will continue their teaching and research as they have before, expanding their horizons and delighting in the progress of the students. However, if the support for liberal arts continues to decline, many academics in the liberal arts are likely to face more limited teaching and research opportunities as their department and number of colleagues decline and the student enrollment in liberal arts courses continues to decrease as well. The professional and financial support for the liberal arts appears likely to worsen through the next decade and perhaps longer. So, what are the options for philosophers, and others, who are facing this less positive future? There are many.

1. Philosophy as Literature*

Perhaps the future of philosophy is to become a part of literature or poetry. In the past, and in some current universities, philosophy is a part of a larger department that may include English, history, and other disciplines. Some think philosophy's contemporary roles may better align with a literature program. In Santayana's novel, *The Last Puritan*, he appends an "Epilogue." There, a fictional figure from the novel, Mario Van de Weyer, engages in a conversation with Santayana about whether the novel should be published. One can only guess that Santayana was smiling and enjoying writing this fictional dialogue. Mario reportedly had asked Santayana to document the life of Oliver Alden, the last puritan. But Mario is unhappy with Santayana's accounts of Mario's sexual adventures. Even so, he agrees that the book should be published saying, "It's all your invention, but perhaps there's a better philosophy in it than in your other books." One might expect a normal philosopher to be unhappy with such a comment, but not Santayana. He asks why is it better and the response is:

Because now you're not arguing or proving or criticizing anything, but painting a picture. The trouble with you philosophers is that you misunderstand your vocation. You ought to be poets, but you insist on laying down the law for the universe, physical and moral, and are vexed with one another because your inspirations are not identical.¹²

Today, there are some who see great value not only in interpreting philosophy as literature or poetry, but also much value in the poetic value of philosophy. And one might think well of a philosopher who is less interested in arguing whether his outlook is true or accurate, and more interested in portraying the human condition and circumstances in literature, poetry, or perhaps better, in a novel.

Jerry Griswold's proposed work on Wallace Stevens' indebtedness to Santayana¹³ is an example of poetry reflecting philosophy, and per-

* See also Herman J. Saatkamp Jr., "Santayana: Biography and the Future of Philosophy," *Pragmatism Today: The Journal of the Central-European Pragmatist Forum* 11(2) (2020): 129–130.

¹² George Santayana, *The Last Puritan: A Memoir in the Form of a Novel*, ed. William G. Holzberger, Herman J. Saatkamp, Jr. (Cambridge, Massachusetts–London, England: The MIT Press, 1994), 572.

¹³ Jerry Griswold applied for a National Endowment for the Humanities Fellowship in the spring of 2022 to pursue this work and eventual publication. Un-

haps in a mode that is better and more expressive than philosophical works. Griswold explores the possibility that Stevens' *The Rock* is modeled after sections of Santayana's *Scepticism and Animal Faith*. He proposes a poem-for-chapter parallel between the two works. Griswold clearly succeeds in establishing a strong relationship between Santayana and Stevens, and his effort to establish a stronger relationship may be questioned by some, but his effort succeeds in establishing parallels between their works and also showing that Stevens goes beyond Santayana's philosophical endeavors and provides a more articulate and clear expression of issues through poetry than is possible in philosophy. Santayana's fictional conversation with Mario in *The Last Puritan* suggests that philosophers would be better if they were poets. In essence Santayana is endorsing "philosophy in poetry," and that is exactly what Griswold establishes Stevens is doing with great originality and significant advancement in his own work.

2. Revive Classical American Philosophy's Giving Advice

Giving advice is central to some of the history of classical American philosophy, advice on living well and making decisions fostering the best of opportunities. One may find elements of this approach in Royce, James, Santayana, Dewey, and even Peirce. Some contemporary philosophers have also pursued this pathway, often with reflections on their own approach to living well and hoping others of like mind may benefit from their perspectives. John Lachs, my mentor and friend, is a philosophical scholar who takes this approach without the sense that his is the only way to live well. His works such as *Intermediate Man, A Community of Individuals* (1981), *Relevance of Philosophy to Life* (1995), *In Love with Life* (1998), *Stoic Pragmatism* (2012), *Freedom and Limits* (2014), *Meddling: On the Virtue of Leaving Others Alone* (2014), and *The Cost of Comfort* (2019) expand parameters of philosophy by explicating how some philosophical considerations and understandings are relevant to everyday life, illuminating the significance and consequences of human action.

Although giving advice is a central part of the history of philosophy, today few philosophers can give advice that the public will find of interest. Hence, this approach may be open only to a few philosophers with the skill of writing that is not embellished with academic jargon and is

fortunately, Jerry Griswold died in 2022 before his NEH application could be fully reviewed.

readily understood by the general, educated public. Even if this is the case, the approach is one that is open to some philosophers, and some do it quite well.

3. Reach out to Other Disciplines and Collaborate

In a time of declining support some philosophers, perhaps many, may find it rewarding to break through the isolation of their departmental boundaries and begin collaborative efforts with other disciplines. Philosophers are sometimes surprised at how welcome such collaboration is and by their own delight that comes from working with others on projects, research, and even classroom teaching. Of course, there are too many possible areas of collaboration to mention them all. In what follows, I will outline a few areas and focus on the natural sciences which has been my principal area of interest.

a. Education and Politics

One should follow Dewey's example and engage in pre-university education, building programs that address the intellectual inquiries and methods raised by original thinkers in the area including Dewey, Rousseau, Freire, and others. Pre-university education needs active support and originality to prepare students to be independent and responsible citizens. In so doing, one may find that engaging in political discussions and in local, state, national, and international politics not only will be helpful in making policies more thoughtful and thorough, but one will also learn a great deal. Dewey's engagement in pre-university education was important to him and to his various efforts to enhance public and private education. Within many universities, there are programs and schools for K-12 students. It may well be a good time for philosophers to follow in Dewey's footsteps and reengage in pre-university education. Some have advised me that this option is not as open as it once was to philosophers, but I have also found many educators who welcome the insights and the collaborative work of philosophers in K-12 grades in both public and private schools. Even if one thinks it is not as open as it once was, it is worth the effort.

b. History, Art, Music, and More

Understanding our history and cultural backgrounds is a vital element in tackling problems we face as well as living worthwhile lives. As Cicero said: “To be ignorant of what happened before you were born, is to remain a child forever.”¹⁴ Philosophical issues are often shaped by historical circumstances, and the teamwork of historians and philosophers often provide insights not highlighted without the collaboration. There is much to be explored collaboratively in art. Apart from art sometimes reflecting philosophical issues, there are particular themes that have philosophical dimensions such as the chiaroscuro (light-dark) reflections on life that uses contrasts of light to achieve volume in paintings. Cinema and photography portray visually many human dilemmas faced in life. Music is remarkable with many musicians and composers influenced by philosophical works. One thinks of Glenn Gould who referred to himself as “the last puritan” described in Santayana’s novel.¹⁵ Or Luis de Pablo’s setting Santayana’s poem, “Cape Cod,” to music¹⁶ and his secretly reading Santayana even when Santayana was not permitted to be read during the Franco regime in Spain.¹⁷ And there is so much more regarding themes, rhythms, repetition, images, undercurrents – all worth a philosopher’s examination and explication.

c. Artificial Intelligence

Collaborating with computer scientists and scholars in artificial intelligence not only helps one to share philosophical insights and their implications for issues (knowledge, intelligence, ethics, consciousness, epistemology, free will, etc.), but it also enables one to have a first-hand experience with AI.

¹⁴ “nescire quid antequam natus sis acciderit, id est semper esse puerum.” Marcus Tullius Cicero, *De Oratore* [*On the Orator*], Book XXXIV (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1914), 120.

¹⁵ “Glenn Gould,” Wikipedia. See also <https://www.tutorhunt.com/resource/12919/>.

¹⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Luis_de_Pablo. See also <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RLHgxxMx2lg>.

¹⁷ Luis de Pablo discussed this with me one of the times we met in Madrid while I was working on the MIT critical edition of *The Works of George Santayana*.

d. Social Sciences

Studying the concepts, methods, and logic of the social sciences is a vital aspect of higher education and our societies. Working collaboratively with social scientists will advance philosophical understanding and enhance the social sciences. The practical consequences of the social sciences may also enliven and provide a base for philosophical conjectures and outlooks.

e. Natural Sciences¹⁸

There are many areas in the natural sciences where philosophers may collaborate in research and publications. My own experience has been in genetics and the neurosciences, and I will focus on that.

Philosophical naturalism and the neurosciences have common interests including the concepts and processes of consciousness, rationality, intelligence, agency, ethics, knowledge, truth, cognitive processes such as (reflection, inference, hypothesis testing), society, habits, sensations, emotion, perception, animal and human mental life, culture, evolution, responsibility, freedom, autonomy, blame, art, music, and more.

One may wonder what to call such collaborations. Several philosophers are suggesting that the field be called *neuro pragmatism*, but I suggest that *neuro naturalism* is a better classification based on my previous comments that the use of pragmatism, even in the US, may not meet the pragmatic criterion of being helpful and useful. The common meaning of pragmatism is something practical, but that seems to carry little weight in a laboratory setting or in collaborative discussions. Hence, *neuro naturalism* is likely to have a better reception. In addition, it uses terminology that both Dewey and Santayana preferred.

Santayana left to the sciences any explanation of the causation of human action. Consciousness is a reflection of one's psyche, the material conditions of oneself, interacting with one's environment. And in many ways, Santayana was a century ahead of his time as some recent neuroscience research seems to confirm Santayana's view that our awareness of decisions comes after the material causes.¹⁹

¹⁸ More information may be found in "Santayana: Biography and the Future of Philosophy," *Pragmatism Today* 11(2) (2020): 125–136.

¹⁹ Stephen Hawking in 2016 (Burton), for example, emphasized this view. He cited neurologist Ben Libet of the University of California, San Francisco,

And one does not have to look far to see that Dewey's naturalism was engaged with issues relating to our nervous system when he writes:

To see the organism in nature, the nervous system in the organism, the brain in the nervous system, the cortex in the brain is the answer to the problems which haunt philosophy. And when thus seen they will be seen to be in, not as marbles are in a box but as events are in history, in a moving, growing never finished process.²⁰

Today there are neuroscientists dealing with issues of human actions and activities resulting in many beneficial applications. Restoring stroke victims' connections to their natural limbs is now possible in some cases, and amputees can move artificial limbs after their brain neurons are connected to electrical impulses that move the limbs when the person wants them to move. Interventions controlling human impulses are on the rise. Experiments controlling obesity in mice resulted from research into Parkinson's disease.²¹ Other impulse-control experiments are underway relating to alcoholism, aggression, depression, and more. And, of course, some are suggesting such experiments may lead to enhancing one's mathematical abilities, the ability to concentrate, and other aspects of human personality.

And now there is research that enables us, on a limited basis, to determine what a person is seeing or thinking by examining parts of the brain. Jack Gallant²² has suggested that in the future there may be something called the "Google Cap" through which we can tell what a person is thinking, even if that person is not aware of it. These possibilities have led Dr. Rafael Yuste,²³ Professor of Biological Sciences and Director of

who found that there are brain processes that occur nearly half a second before a person is aware of the decision to act. In other words, there are action-specific electrical activities in the brain that precede any awareness of a decision being made to act. This seems consistent with Santayana's non-scientific view that consciousness, thought, reason are aftereffects of physical activities that precede them. Robert A. Burton, "The Life of Meaning (Reason not Required)," *New York Times*, 5 September 2016.

²⁰ John Dewey, "Nature, Life and Body-Mind," in: *The Later Works*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston, Patricia Baysinger, Barbara Levine, vol. 1: 1925 (Carbondale-Edwardsville: The Southern Illinois Press, 1988), 224.

²¹ Denise Chow, "Brain & Obesity: Neural Implant Could Curb Overeating, Mouse Study Suggests," *Life Science* (26 April 2013).

²² Jack L. Gallant, "Reconstructing Visual Experiences from Brain Activity Evoked by Natural Movies," *Current Biology* (11 October 2011): 1641-1646.

²³ See the following website for more information: <https://neurorightsfoundation.org/>.

Neurotechnology Center at Columbia University, and twenty-four other signatories to call for “neurorights” as a protection against threats posed by machines to read our brains and our thoughts.

The philosophical implication of such research is extraordinary, and at no previous time in history have philosophers been so challenged by the repercussions of scientific research relating to the causes of human action and of human thought. The new generation of scholars has much to look forward to in collaborating with the natural scientists regarding human nature, the causes of our actions, and the role of consciousness in human activity.

V. Conclusion

These alternative approaches that philosophers could take only scratch the surface of what is possible. Despite all the difficulties and possible fates of philosophy and liberal arts programs, I am hopeful that the depth of philosophical inquiry remains captivating and important for the twenty-first century and beyond. One should remember that philosophy was not always an academic discipline and once again may become a part of public interests rather than simply being isolated to a small department in universities. Philosophy may become rooted in other disciplines as well as in the public interest.

With all these options, how should one evaluate them? What criteria might one use to determine if one option is better than another or more important to cultivating individual and societal life? One should turn to Santayana who provides two criteria for determining whether a philosophical approach is worthwhile, and I will add two more.

First, does the philosopher “like Spinoza, understand the natural basis of morality, or is he confused and superstitious on the subject?”²⁴ That is to say, is the philosopher a complete naturalist allowing science to determine the causes of all events including human actions, or does the philosopher imagine non-natural explanations without material causality?

And second, “how humane and representative is his sense of the good, and how far, by his disposition or sympathetic intelligence, does he appreciate all the types of excellence toward which life may be direc-

²⁴ George Santayana, *Persons and Places: Fragments of Autobiography*, ed. William G. Holzberger, Herman J. Saatkamp, Jr. (Cambridge, Massachusetts–London, England: The MIT Press, 1986), 235.

ted? [...] The complete moralist must not only be sound in physics, but must be inwardly inspired by a normal human soul and an adequate human tradition; he must be a complete humanist in a complete naturalist."²⁵ For Santayana, there were many forms of excellence in human existence, not all are sympathetic to each other, but recognizing the great variety and honoring it for each individual is an essential criterion of philosophical work.

I suggest two additional criteria.

Third, in addition to the *good*, the naturalist should recognize the *bad*. One might rephrase Santayana's second criterion: How humane and representative is the philosopher's sense of the *bad*, and how far, by disposition or sympathetic intelligence, does she or he appreciate all the types of *atrocities* toward which life may be directed? Certainly, the current growth of authoritarianism and the atrocities paralleling it should be acknowledged by naturalists as well as the understanding that both *good* and *bad* are possible realities.

And fourth, one should recognize that one may not achieve the good or win in our endeavors. I was a part of the Civil Rights Movement, sometimes a part of what Dr. King called the ground crew. He often noted when we were facing significant opposition (in areas of equal rights, open housing, guaranteed annual incomes, medical care for all, and more) that we may not win, but we should do our best even if we lose.

So, let's do our best.

Regardless of the direction taken by philosophy in the future, whether it exists inside and/or outside of academia, collaborates with neurological sciences or takes on any other form, these four tests remain important criteria for judging the value of philosophical endeavors.

²⁵ Ibidem.

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Summary

Philosophy as a discipline is facing new challenges that will determine its future. The challenges include the historic ones relating to economic conditions and administrative leadership that focuses on preparation for employment in a way that lessens the intellectual development of students. But the new challenges occur in a worldwide democratic recession and in political leadership that seems to be moving toward greater censorship and less academic freedom. In America, this is also occurring with a decline in student enrollment that negatively impacts the liberal arts and particularly philosophy. This article examines the way two forms of American naturalism may respond. John Dewey's cultural naturalism and George Santayana's thorough, non-reductive naturalism provide an array of alternatives. I explore alternatives open to philosophers that include abandoning philosophy by leaving the university or becoming an administrator, as well as alternatives available if one remains in the university. Finally, I offer four criteria for judging the viability of choosing any of the alternatives.

Keywords: American philosophy, naturalism, George Santayana, John Dewey