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Ideal Friendship, Actual Friends*

Introduction

Friendship, on George Santayana's account, is a form of human society made possible by consciousness of ideals while simultaneously rooted in the experience of embodied creatures spontaneously drawn to each other. It figures significantly in the Life of Reason, which Santayana examined in his 1905–1906 work of the same title, a five-book classic of philosophical naturalism.[1] Like ideals in the Life of Reason, friendship

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[1] George Santayana, *The Life of Reason: or the Phases of Human Progress*, five books, *The Works of George Santayana*, critical edition, ed. Marianne S. Wokeck, Martin A. Coleman, vol. 7 (Cambridge, Mass–London: The MIT Press, 2011–2016). Following the standard reference format for the critical edition, each of the five books of *The Life of Reason* (*Reason in Common Sense, Reason in Society*, *Reason in Religion*, *Reason in Art*, and *Reason in Science*) is cited with *LR* followed by the number of the book, a comma, a space, and then the page number. For example, "*LR5*, 156" refers to page 156 in *Reason in Science*, Book Five of *The Life of Reason*.

grows out of natural impulses; and like Santayana's inquiry into the Life of Reason, his assessment of friendship grows out of his experience and reflection. His philosophical reflections on friendship together with his autobiography and letters exemplify how he both surveyed and cultivated reason and sane living. His writing offers insights into the experience of friendship, and his example of inquiry and reflection suggests how we can come to understand our own actual friendships and the opportunities for self-knowledge and sanity in those experiences.

1. Friendship and the Life of Reason

Santayana wrote about friendship throughout his life, but his most sustained reflection on it appears in the context of his survey of the Life of Reason (in *Reason in Society*, Book 2 of *The Life of Reason*). The Life of Reason comes about with the union of impulse with ideation, when the fulfillment of impulse is represented by an ideal and reflection on that ideal modifies further impulses. Ideals, arising naturally with the impulses of a conscious creature and representing fulfillments of those impulses, relate symbolically to natural existences. Awareness of representative ideals brings the absent into experience and imputes values to things not immediately present to sense. In attending to representative ideals, reflection or memory, as existing things that "constitute a new complication in being,"[2] alter experience and modify impulse; this is reasoning. When an ideal of harmony pervades awareness and impulses are modified harmoniously, the result is the natural happiness that Santayana called the Life of Reason.[3]

Reasoning is not simply a means to fulfilling impulses and increasing the quantity or intensity of pleasures, rather it actualizes the potential of satisfied desires to reveal ideal objects; and ideals give a quality to experience steadier and more lucid than that of simple pleasures. Experience of ideal fulfillments brings a joy in addition to and different from the immediate pleasures of impulses fulfilled (which can be experienced without any reflection or reasoning). When we are conscious of ideals, the fulfillment of natural impulses rather than reenforcing a mechanical round of desire and satisfaction broadens and liberates experience by cultivating consciousness. Ideals illuminate natural impulses.

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[2] *LR1*, 2.
[3] *LR1*, 2.

Discriminating and harmonizing ideals, which represent fulfillments of impulses, further develop the Life of Reason.[4]

Santayana thought the Life of Reason identical with art, in the broad sense of the word. "Operations," he wrote, "become arts when their purpose is conscious and their method teachable" (*LR1*, 4). As reasoning, thought is practical in the modification of impulses that comes with experience of ideals, but Santayana was explicit that "thought is in no way instrumental or servile; it is an experience realised, not a force to be used" (*LR1*, 130). In other words, thought brings conscious understanding that can free experience from mechanical rounds and make possible harmonious living and human happiness. A teachable method of living well is not a recipe or infallible program; it does not mean that reason is a director of events and creator of the world. A teachable method is one that can be articulated in natural terms and understood.

The art of living well is what Santayana intended to present in *The Life of Reason* by surveying ideals representing the best human efforts to live reasonably and sanely. He characterized his work as a "biography of the human intellect"[5] and a collection of "materials for a utopia."[6] He knew the project of distinguishing better from worse efforts to live well required a standard of judgment, and he consciously rejected any "voluntary illusions" such as an eternal moral order or universal progress.[7] He relied on "a little experience, a little reflection, and a little candour" to determine what a reasonable and healthy life is;[8] and he took as a standard for the Life of Reason an ideal that directly supported the honest reflection on experience he cultivated, namely, an ideal of human happiness as harmonized fulfillment of natural impulses.

Santayana acknowledged that his standard for determining the Life of Reason is an ideal that itself arises from a natural impulse to harmony

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[4] *LR1*, 4.

[5] *LR1*, 184. Santayana remarked that in the moments of reason we are ourselves; and correspondingly we are not ourselves in our non-rational moments, that is, we are not differentiated by our ideals when our living is not informed by them (*LR1*, 3). To survey these moments in the history of humanity, as Santayana does in *The Life of Reason*, is to characterize human life and humane living.

[6] George Santayana, "Apologia Pro Mente Sua," in: *The Philosophy of George Santayana*, ed. P. A. Schilpp (Evanston–Chicago: Northwestern University, 1940), 557.

[7] *LR1*, 186.

[8] *LR1*, 186. Santayana further commented on his method: "To decipher the Life of Reason nothing is needed but an analytic spirit and a judicious love of man, a love quick to distinguish success from failure in his great and confused experiment of living" (*LR1*, 5).

and so has no intrinsic moral superiority. Since any ideal is fully desired and desirable from the perspective of its originating impulse, no ideal has an ultimate ground more or less legitimate or commendable than any other. Any ideal, being the fulfillment of a natural impulse, is as innocent in itself as the impulse it expresses; and any judgment passed on an ideal rests only on the authority of another natural impulse, and so can have no absolute moral authority. This leaves to you the question of what ideal represents your impulse to judge. If natural happiness as harmonious living appeals to you, then you may find value in Santayana's work. He examined attempts to realize reason in five areas of human activity: understanding, social life, religious tradition, artistic creation, and investigation of the natural world. Friendship is a way that the Life of Reason may be realized in social life.

In social life, Santayana distinguished *natural society* and *free society* as developments of harmonious living out of biological impulses. Natural society includes human love, family, industry, and government. Each of these associations, being represented by an ideal, moves beyond material constraints of instinctive reactions, increasing the power and scope of human living in material concerns of procreation, protection, and industry. This makes possible freer experiences including the experience of free society, in which consciousness previously attending to the aspects of social life that serve material needs can turn to the ideal or spiritual affinities in human associations. In free society the imposed relations of family, commerce, or government are no longer the focus; our associations follow ideal or spiritual affinities rather than being compelled by biology or business. Santayana wrote that the spiritual affinities of free society no longer have "those relations [of natural society] for their theme but rest on them merely as on a pedestal from which they look away to their own realm"; so, free society, established on the pedestal of natural society, can enjoy the realm of ideals.[9] Free society and friendship in particular entail consciousness of shared ideals and live "in the imagination," wrote Santayana.[10] But this does not exclude animal life, which is the necessary material basis for consciousness of ideals that unites free society.

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[9] *LR2*, 88–89.
[10] *LR2*, 89.

2. An Actual Friend

Friendship grows, like ideals, by chance out of material conditions and then may be appreciated for the contribution it makes to conscious living. Accordingly, Santayana's reflections on friendship correlate with experiences documented in his letters and autobiography. He does not begin his reflection with first principles like a universal legislator, but *in medias res* like, as he acknowledged, the epic poets; exemplifying his claim that he stood in philosophy exactly where he stood in daily life.[11] He begins with the various and changing conditions out of which he observed friendships arising, which is "as much at the beginning of things as [we] could possibly begin."[12]

The documented beginning of Santayana's written philosophical reflections on friendship may be a fragment of an undated letter most likely from September 1896, when he was in England about to begin a year-long intensive study of Plato at Oxford University. In the letter he characterized Greek friendship and wrote that it "is a subject on which I hope some day to write at length."[13] The letter, judging by the printed stationery, was probably composed at Amberley Cottage, Maidenhead, England. It is difficult to imagine a more significant setting for Santayana to declare his intention to inquire into friendship: This was the residence of the person Santayana regarded as "the most extraordinary of all [his] friends" in his long life in the United States and Europe:[14] John

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[11] George Santayana, *Scepticism and Animal Faith* (New York: Scribners' Sons, 1923), vi, 1.

[12] Ibidem, 2.

[13] Fragment of autograph letter from George Santayana, no recipient, no date, access 5.12.2022, https://digitalsantayana.iupui.edu/loeser/index.html. The letter fragment comes from a collection of letters from Santayana to his Harvard classmate and friend Charles A. Loeser (1864–1928), archived at the Houghton Library, Harvard University. A speculative date is suggested by the stationery from Amberley Cottage, where Santayana stayed for four weeks in September 1896 [*LGS1*, 513; see also Ruth Derham, *Bertrand's Brother* (Gloucestershire: Amberley Publishing, 2021), 177]. The fragment cannot be earlier than 5 February 1896, when Santayana read his essay "Platonism in the Italian Poets" to the "ladies in Buffalo" (referring to the Contemporary Club) mentioned in the fragment. The essay was revised and published in George Santayana, *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion* (New York: Charles Scribners' Sons, 1900), 118–146; and in: *The Works of George Santayana*, critical edition, ed. William G. Holzberger, Herman J. Saatkamp, vol. 3 (Cambridge, Massachusetts–London: The MIT Press, 1989), 73–89.

[14] George Santayana, *Persons and Places*, in: *The Works of George Santayana*, critical edition, ed. William G. Holzberger, Herman J. Saatkamp, vol. 1 (Cam-

Francis Stanley, 2nd Earl Russell, known as Frank (and remembered, in a reversal of the popularity he knew in his lifetime, as the brother of another friend of Santayana's, philosopher Bertrand Russell).

Frank and Santayana differed greatly in temperament, interests, and career; and in his autobiography, Santayana acknowledged that people often were puzzled at this friendship.[15] Santayana's letters, recollections, and philosophical reflections along with the recent work of Ruth Derham, Frank's biographer, help explain the puzzling relationship while providing a fuller understanding of friendship in the Life of Reason.

Friendship, wrote Santayana, "is nothing but the accidental confirming itself and generating its own standard,"[16] and it begins when chance conditions result to an actual meeting of two people. In 1885, Frank was touring the United States with a tutor after being sent down, unfairly he thought, from Oxford University. He visited Harvard when Santayana was an undergraduate there. In his autobiography Santayana listed the accidental factors that potentially contributed to Frank meeting him in his room at Harvard: the location of his room on a main path, his reputation as articulate and a writer of verses, his status as a foreigner, and perhaps his close friendship with Frank's host.[17]

Other preliminary, though not necessary, conditions of friendship that Santayana identified in *Reason in Society*[18] appeared fulfilled in his relationship with Frank: they were both males of about the same age (born within two years of each other), and having studied at university they shared a social status and occupation. Their social backgrounds differed greatly in some ways, Frank being an English aristocrat from a politically significant family and Santayana being a Spanish Catholic immigrant in Protestant New England. But as Derham has observed, they shared early formative experiences that brought them together: Both were uprooted from childhood homes at early ages, ending up in uncongenial circumstances.[19] Frank was orphaned at ten years old, going to live with his paternal grandparents whose religious-minded discipline differed greatly from the intellectual and physical freedom Frank had been used to. Santayana was five years old when his mother

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bridge, Massachusetts–London: The MIT Press, 1986), 290. Hereafter cited as *PP*.

[15] *PP*, 514–515.

[16] *LR2*, 93.

[17] *PP*, 291.

[18] *LR2*, 94–95.

[19] Ruth Derham, "Ideal Sympathy? The Unlikely Friendship of George Santayana Frank, 2nd Earl Russell," *Overheard in Seville: Bulletin of the Santayana Society* 36 (2018): 19.

took his half-siblings to Boston, the city of their father's family. Santayana remained in Spain with his father for three years before joining his mother and attending kindergarten as a nine-year-old to learn English.

Frank's experience left him feeling perpetually misunderstood, and Santayana recalled his own childhood as "solitary and unhappy."[20] The result, wrote Derham, was two misfits with a shared spiritual aloofness (though each was, at times, quite socially engaged: as an undergraduate Santayana was extremely active in student groups and campus activities; Frank enjoyed significant and formative friendships as a student and was recognized as an able politician later in life). Though Santayana might have appeared to be, as he wrote, a "normal doctor of philosophy"[21] while Frank rebelled almost predictably; they were similar in making professional and personal choices that tended to discount if not utterly dismiss social conventions and expectations.

In addition to preliminary shared traits and experiences, a necessary condition of any friendship is, unsurprisingly, personal affection, typically preceded by mutually "congenial rate[s] of vibration" and "sensuous affinity" that sets up "instinctive sympathy."[22] In his autobiography written decades after the fact, Santayana described the sensuous appeal of Frank at their first meeting:

> He was a tall young man of twenty, still lithe though large of bone, with abundant tawny hair, clear little steel-blue eyes, and a florid complexion. He moved deliberately, gracefully, stealthily, like a tiger well fed and with a broad margin of leisure for choosing his prey. There was precision in his indolence; and mild as he seemed, he suggested a latent capacity to leap, a latent astonishing celerity and strength, that could crush at one blow. Yet his speech was simple and suave, perfectly decided and strangely frank.[23]

Santayana identified voice as one of the various stimuli that can impress the senses and suffuse the idea of an appealing person with the felt sense of particular agreeable traits.[24] Santayana's idea of Frank took on such a felt sense when Frank, finding a book of Swinburne's poems on Santayana's shelf, read them, according to Santayana's description,

> rather liturgically, with a perfect precision and clearness, intoning them almost, in a sort of rhythmic chant, and letting the strong meaning shine

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[20] *PP*, 145.
[21] *PP*, 390.
[22] *LR2*, 96.
[23] PP, 291.
[24] *LR2*, 95.

> through the steady processional march of the words. It seemed the more inspired and oracular for not being brought out by any human change of tone or of emphasis. I had not heard poetry read in this way before. I had not known that the English language could become, like stained glass, an object and a delight in itself.[25]

Frank entered into Santayana's life as described in *Reason in Society*: "by awakening an inexpressible animal sympathy, by the contagion of emotions felt before the same objects."[26] The shared appreciation of poetry and a new ideal of language revealed in listening to Frank prefigured what must happen to move into friendship: after the initial liking, subsequent impressions not only deepen that initial interest but shift its focus from the senses.[27] And Santayana's letters indicate that within a year of this initial meeting, animal sympathy was mixed with conscious intellectual appreciation. Santayana wrote that:

> [Frank] 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, although I fancy I made too much of his heartlessness at first. But then both practically and intellectually he is really brilliant. Leaving the practical side apart in which direction you may say I am easily dazzled, he is up on every subject from Greek tragedy to common law and from smutty stories to Buddhism.[28]

In the same letter, Santayana acknowledged he was making a fool of himself in his effusive praise of Frank. This seemed to anticipate the observation in his autobiography about the friendship: "People always wondered how it could have happened."[29] There were the chance circumstances, the instinctive sympathy and personal liking, but what accounted for the endurance and unique significance of the friendship with a person Santayana himself observed could be selfish and cruel?

Santayana's biographer John McCormick speculated that an early consummation of physical attraction induced Santayana's loyalty to the

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[25] PP, 292.

[26] *LR2*, 97.

[27] *LR2*, 96.

[28] George Santayana, *The Letters of George Santayana, Book One [1896]–1909*, in: *The Works of George Santayana*, critical edition, ed. William G. Holzberger, Herman J. Saatkamp, vol. 5 (Cambridge, Massachusetts–London: The MIT Press, 2001), 76. Following the standard reference format for the critical edition, each of the eight books of letters is cited as *LGS* followed immediately by the book number. For example, the quotation footnoted here is cited as *LGS1*, 76.

[29] *PP*, 514–515.

"caddish" Frank.[30] Derham found another possibility for the enduring relationship in a 1912 letter from Santayana acknowledging that while Frank had suffered throughout his life for his courage, independence, and non-conformity, Santayana had gathered the fruits of those traits as, in Derham's words, "a collector of experiences."[31] On this view, Santayana gave Frank sympathetic friendship and in return for the dramatic spectacle of Frank's determined struggles and unconquerable will.[32]

Ultimately, Derham looks for an explanation beyond emotional transaction and sensuous appeal and in Santayana and Frank's spiritual affinities. Their friendship was not sustained by the spectacle of Frank's life or Santayana's support but by shared ideals, which augment or clarify instinctive sympathy and personal liking.[33] This is a shared conscious aspiration for the same fulfillment of impulses, which Santayana called *ideal sympathy*.[34] This moves the association beyond sensuous liking and instinctive sympathy and into true friendship.

Derham observed correctly that Frank and Santayana both valued ideals of sincerity, forthrightness, and freedom.[35] Santayana was per-

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[30] John McCormick, *George Santayana: A Biography* (New York: Knopf, 1986), 119.

[31] Derham, "Ideal Sympathy? The Unlikely Friendship of George Santayana Frank, 2nd Earl Russell,": 22.

[32] A 1912 letter Santayana wrote to Frank is cited as evidence: "I have come upon a lot of your letters and reread them all, being carried back to 1887 and the following years, when all that happened to you was so much a part of my life. I can see now how great an influence you had on me. It was an influence for good. It seems almost as if I had gathered the fruits of your courage and independence, while you have suffered the punishment which the world imposes always on those who refuse to conform to its ways." (*LGS*, 2:66). But Santayana clearly had a broader understanding of the friendship since he regarded it as "an influence for good." The good, for Santayana, goes beyond what is entertaining; he wrote in 1896, "Fun is a good thing, but only when it spoils nothing better" (George Santayana, *The Sense of Beauty*, in: *The Works of George Santayana*, critical edition, ed. Herman J. Saatkamp, William G. Holzberger, vol. 2 (Cambridge, Massachusetts–London: The MIT Press, 1986), 155.

[33] *LR2*, 98.

[34] Ideal sympathy is distinct from sympathy a decent person shows to another in need. This latter Santayana called "an embarrassment and a danger to friendship" because it establishes obligations inimical to free society. Friendship must be free and "assume no liability in matters below its liberal sphere" [George Santayana, "Friendship," in: *The Birth of Reason and Other Essays*, ed. Daniel Cory (New York–London: Columbia University Press, 1968), 84].

[35] Derham, "Ideal Sympathy? The Unlikely Friendship of George Santayana and Frank, 2nd Earl Russell": 19.

haps most explicit about the ideals he shared with Frank when he wrote of what he found to be best in Frank's character:

> His intellectual freedom or transcendental detachment. […] This heroic spirit […] was proud and brave enough not to be overwhelmed by any folly or any mischance. For this I admired him to the end […] not for what he did or thought, but for what he was.[36]

In Frank, Santayana appreciated "the inner man" with "transcendental rebellion […] at the bottom of his heart."[37] Frank himself recognized the transcendental liberty experienced in his youthful spiritual inquiry as "the real part of me" to be distinguished from "my very extensive external activities"[38] – the things that Santayana regarded as entanglements and trifles (political, business, and romantic) on which Frank squandered his strength.[39] Santayana wrote that Frank's transcendentalism was not easily discerned, overlooked even by his wives. But it was intelligible to Santayana as an ideal of freedom from intellectual and social conventions, and of heroic courage reflected in his rebellion. Here was the ideal sympathy that is "community in […] ideals."[40]

Ideal sympathy is not simply thinking about or liking the same subjects, as Santayana made clear in a 1939 letter remarking a conversation with a former Harvard classmate: "How little sympathy there is at bottom between people who don't like each other but like the same 'subjects.' […] These 'subjects' become different objects to two minds that have grown old and have grown apart in considering them."[41] Though two people like the same things, they still may diverge in consciousness of ideals. The same things are represented by different ideals in the two minds, and there is not ideal sympathy. The divergence in ideals indicates a difference in the individual lives: Santayana wrote that if ideal sympathy is genuine, then it "expresses a common disposition, and its roots are deeper and more physical than itself."[42] The shared ideals must grow out of compatible impulses, a compatibility apparent in the initial affinity. Ideal

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[36] *PP*, 474–475.
[37] *PP*, 308.
[38] *PP*, 307.
[39] *PP*, 518.
[40] George Santayana, *Soliloquies in England and Later Soliloquies* (New York: Charles Scribners' Sons, 1922), 55. Hereafter cited as *SELS*.
[41] *LGS6*, 277.
[42] *SELS*, 55.

sympathy must have biological roots, because friendship always is embodied, and the relationship always is with an actual person.

Shared ideals grow out of compatible impulses, and in friendship the same representations of fulfillments of impulses are conscious to, or enlighten, two different creatures. But how, then, could Santayana and Frank's strikingly different behaviors and careers be represented by the same ideals? Frank acknowledged their differences in an 1894 letter:

> We are opposed as entirely as possible. You are all for rest in the perfection of form with the negation of an end as either existent or important: I am all for the emotional strife and struggle, however vague and however formless, as being at least a reaching towards some end unknown, and seen only by faith as existing at all.[43]

Though Frank later denied loving strife for its own sake, rather finding it a means to expressing his best qualities, Santayana still thought they differed significantly in that Frank lacked a passion for harmony.

But Frank loved intellectual freedom and transcendent detachment, and this united the two friends. Though they had different occupations, they lived their freedom together. Santayana wrote:

> He respected my freedom unconditionally and gladly, as I respected his. This was one of the reasons why our friendship lasted for so many years, weathering all changes in our circumstances, in spite of the few points of contact between our characters and the utter diversity in our lives. Neither of us was ever a nuisance to the other.[44]

They were unanimous in their actions as they allowed each their own freedom. Frank could be selfish and sometimes cruel,[45] never understanding the feelings of others,[46] and Santayana would still unite with him in ideal sympathy and friendship. This community of ideals is the heart of friendship and explains how the two very different characters could be friends.[47]

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[43] *PP*, 474.
[44] *PP*, 298.
[45] *LGS1*, 76.
[46] *LGS4*, 133.
[47] "Friends need not agree in everything or go always together, or have no comparable other friendship of the same intimacy. On the contrary, in friendship union is more about ideal things" (*LGS8*, 211).

3. Ideal Friendship

Ideal friendship[48] is not materially perfect and does not depend on moral perfection of the friends involved. Rather, all true friendship is ideal in freeing human association from material accidents through consciousness of unanimity in ideals or ideal sympathy; and so, as a form of ideal society, friendship lives "in the imagination."[49] This is the sort of friendship Santayana experienced most powerfully and significantly with Frank Russell.

Santayana called friendship a "phase of freedom," and like freedom it is not the cause of anything but the result of favorable organization.[50] More specifically, friendship is not a *means* to ensuring security or gratifying desires for pleasure, rather it is the *result* of a harmony of natural impulses that kindle animal sympathy and create conditions for free society, culminating in consciousness of shared ideals.

As a phase of freedom, friendship is free of jealously and pretensions to possession of one friend by another. Though this was true of his friendship with Frank, Santayana observed the same was not true of Frank's relationships with his wives, which seemed characterized by possession. The women with whom Frank had significant romantic relationships exhibited a possessive willfulness, each thinking she was the special one that could give him a stable life of emotional security; yet each became Frank's captive.[51] Santayana knew well Frank's charms and powerful personality, but he wrote that "in friendship liability is limited; each preserves his privacy and freedom, and there is no occasion for jealousy or tyranny."[52] However, once Frank's wives "were enveigled into an unlimited partnership, Russell was a tyrant."[53] Santayana took no pleasure in Frank's impositions on his wives, with whom

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[48] The term appears once in *Reason in Society*, introducing the originating conditions and development of friendship (*LR2*, 93). It appears one other time in a letter from 1949 (*LGS* 8:211).

[49] *LR2*, 89.

[50] George Santayana, "Friendship," in: *The Birth of Reason*, ed. Daniel Cory (New York–London: Columbia University Press, 1968), 84, 85. Hereafter cited as *BR*.

[51] *PP*, 484.

[52] *PP*, 438. See also, *RB*, 789, where Santayana wrote, "A friend is not the keeper of his friends' souls; mutual liability is limited, but within the field of their common life and *virtù*, they feel sure of one another; and this confidence, when well tried, may be not untouched with admiration."

[53] *PP*, 483.

he often was sympathetic (which sometimes hurt Frank); but as a friend Santayana found the absurdity of Frank's "petty habits" and moralistic opinions amusing and harmless: "I knew them by heart; they were parts of his imperious personality, which I accepted merrily when I was with him. He never dreamt that I should accept them for myself. He left me abundantly alone."[54]

Possession and jealousy are not part of true friendship, which "dreams of more than mere possession; to conceive happiness, it must conceive a life to be shared in a varied world, full of events and activities, which shall be new and ideal bonds" between the friends.[55] For Santayana, friendship as community of ideals does not entail a shared fantasy or isolating indulgence in fancy. As a form of free society, friendship lives in the imagination but not in ignorance of the world. The ideals shared in friendship represent natural impulses that modify action in the world; and those ideals, such as freedom, harmonize in a life of reason. This distinguishes friendship from falling in love, in which the lovers turn away from the world and celebrate their love.[56] Friendship does not celebrate itself but rather the world "as a scene for action and an object of judgment."[57]

4. The Experience of Friendship

On Santayana's account, ideal friendship requires actual friends, that is, particular persons who like each other and share ideals that represent the aims of their conscious living. Friendship has a material basis and an ideal character; neither can be left out. The material basis of friendship makes it subject to the diversity and transience of material existence. This means, first, that every friendship is new; it cannot be scripted ahead of time and acted out according to a predetermined plan.[58] It must be lived to become the particular friendship that it is. Second, having a material basis also means that friendship comes to an end, and Santayana acknowledged "the cyclical character of all [his] friendships."[59] Even the best ones have only a limited time of existence.

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[54] *PP*, 483–484.

[55] George Santayana, *Three Philosophical Poets*, in: *The Works of George Santayana*, critical edition, ed. D. Spiech, K. Dawson, vol. 8 (Cambridge, Massachusetts–London: The MIT Press, 2019), 70–71.

[56] See also *LR2*, 97.

[57] *BR*, 81.

[58] *BR*, 82.

[59] *PP*, 514.

The ideal character of a friendship enables awareness of its novel character. With honest reflection on the experience of a friendship, you can articulate the shared ideals of that particular instance of free society. A shared ideal of freedom is necessary for friendship, but it is not determined ahead of time which other suitable ideals inform an actual friendship. In Santayana's friendship with Frank, it did not matter that Frank held to no ideal of harmony or integrity[60] and so did not, as Santayana did, value a life of reason. Of course, it is not the case that *any* ideals may unite friends; and true friendship excludes some ideals.

Chance material conditions and evolution may have led to natural society, but it is a society of human beings with determinate biological structures channeling impulsive energies that arise in our particular living bodies. It is "a collection of activities with determinate limits, relations, and ideals"[61] that conditions any reasonable living and free society. Living with consciousness of some ideals rather than others will alter experience to the favor or the detriment of free society. A shared ideal of possession cannot raise human association above the accidents of natural society; it is self-defeating and ill-suited to free society. Frank's marriages demonstrated that two people sharing an ideal of possession cannot be friends. The impulse represented by an ideal of possession binds us more tightly to fear and anxiety in the face of material change rather than freeing us to survey the world honestly and live freely. But freedom is conducive to free society and friendship, as are other ideals considered by Santayana in *The Life of Reason*, such as understanding, harmony, beauty, piety, spirituality, and truth; each of which harmonizes with freedom. Which ideals and how they harmonize is what cannot be scripted ahead of time, but it can be narrated on reflection; and a great benefit of Ruth Derham's biography of Frank Russell is that in tracing the challenges and struggles of his life it gives a rich account of an imperfect human being living a life informed by conscious ideals that Santayana valued: intelligence, independent thought, and in Santayana's words, "a most admirable courage."[62]

The ideal character of friendship also ensures the reality of friendships that appear to have failed and makes sense of claims to eternal friendship and undying love. Santayana thought that the disappointment that comes with the end of some friendships is attributable not to mistaking the reality of the feelings, sympathies, and unanimity in ide-

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[60] *PP*, 474.
[61] *LR1*, 167.
[62] *LGS1*, 182; quoted in Derham, *Bertrand's Brother*, 209.

als, but rather to ignoring what lies in store for all material existence, namely change. "False anticipations" are, Santayana thought, a source of the heartache and regret that may arise as a friendship changes and ends.[63] Furthermore, the limited existence of friendship does not deny the eternality of friendship. The ideal aspect of friendship makes it an "indelible truth,"[64] and professions of eternality in feelings and faith in a friend have a legitimate meaning, namely, that you have become conscious of and lived the ideal of a natural impulse of your animal self, making you more yourself than ever before; and the truth of your realization remains even after material conditions change.[65]

Conclusion: Self-Knowledge and Sanity

Friendship, on Santayana's account, is a distinctive and irreducibly valuable element of a reasonable human life. It is an experience of liberation in human association, enriching consciousness of ideals. Santayana's reflections on friendship, like his survey of the Life of Reason, are aspects of self-knowledge and sane living. In particular his understanding of friendship as both material and ideal indicates opportunities for enlightenment about your material constitution and ideal fulfillments.

Because friendship begins in impulsive attraction and instinctive sympathy, it reveals something about your material organization or *psyche*, as Santayana called it. Reflective awareness of sensuous attraction is an opportunity for what Santayana called "auscultation of the psyche," an acute listening to the sounds of your "natural mechanisms" or a close observation of the psyche's effects in the world as a means to trace the workings of psyche itself.[66] Santayana thought that for the keen observer the "sensuous premonitions of sympathy are seldom misleading."[67] They indicate the particular material things with which you vibrate congenially: a distinctive manner, a certain posture, a striking tone of voice. These are the ways the natural world touches the particular creature you are. When you are conscious of what brings pleasure, reasoning can reveal the ideal aims of your life; and if one of those aims is harmony,

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[63] *BR*, 82.
[64] *BR*, 83.
[65] *BR*, 83.
[66] George Santayana, *Realms of Being* (New Yorker: Charles Scribners' Sons, 1942), 335.
[67] *LR2*, 96.

that ideal can modify impulses according to the contribution of their particular fulfillments to human happiness.

This kind of sane living and friendship are mutually reinforcing. In one direction, harmonious ideals and a sane relationship to pleasure make it far more likely that initial liking can become friendship. In the other direction, the move beyond the immediate thrill of pleasant association to shared appreciation of ideals supports sanity in two ways: First, true friendship precludes attachment to an idealization confused with an actual existing friend or friendship. Ideal friendship, in moving beyond the chance conditions of natural society, places the center of the friendship in ideals, not a fantasy of the friend (which often is tempted by the initial liking). Second, friendship cultivates stronger relationships to reality. To be friends is to live according to ideals understood as symbolic representations of existence and not existences themselves. In friendship, we gain understanding of both our ideals and the world without mistaking one for the other, a mistake that is a fundamental insanity. Understanding friendship as both material and ideal invites the "binocular vision" that tempers allegiance to ideals by perception of their material ground and of the relativity of that allegiance.[68]

Santayana's reflections on friendship are, of course, not universal pronouncements deduced from first principles; they are the result of cultivating wisdom, which he took to be synonymous with the experience of living. Experience is, according to Santayana, not immersion of a passive animal in the environment or neutral undergoing of stimuli, but wisdom acquired in a life of purposeful action and intentional observation. We acquire this sort of experience through keen discrimination of what is perceived.[69] As material creatures we seek food, security, and society; and the ideals we become conscious of in that exploration open the possibility of refinement of actions and associations. Words are especially helpful in discriminating what we perceive, allowing us to remark benefits and harms and to discern better and worse according to ongoing experience. Interpreting experience, by distinguishing operative symbols and understanding their significance, will alter experience. This interpretation and understanding increase conscious living; raise human life above the mechanism that makes it possible; and, most significantly for freedom and happiness, suggest more effective resolution of conflicts among impulses or desires. This is a practice of living

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[68] George Santayana, *Winds of Doctrine* (New York: Charles Scribners' Sons, 1913), 115.

[69] See Santayana, *Scepticism*, 138–139.

a life of reason: discriminating among perceptions, presenting the world "as a scene for action and an object of judgment,"[70] and acquiring "a little experience, a little reflection, and a little candour" that allow us be good friends.

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[70] *BR*, 81.

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Summary

Friendship, on George Santayana's account, is a form of human society made possible by consciousness of ideals while simultaneously rooted in the experience of embodied creatures spontaneously drawn to each other. His philosophical and autobiographical writings on friendship (particularly his friendship with Frank Russell) exemplify a practice of cultivating wisdom and suggest how we can come to understand our own actual friendships and the opportunities for self-knowledge and sanity in them.

Keywords: George Santayana, friendship, John Francis Stanley – 2nd Earl Russell, American philosophy, self-knowledge, life of reason