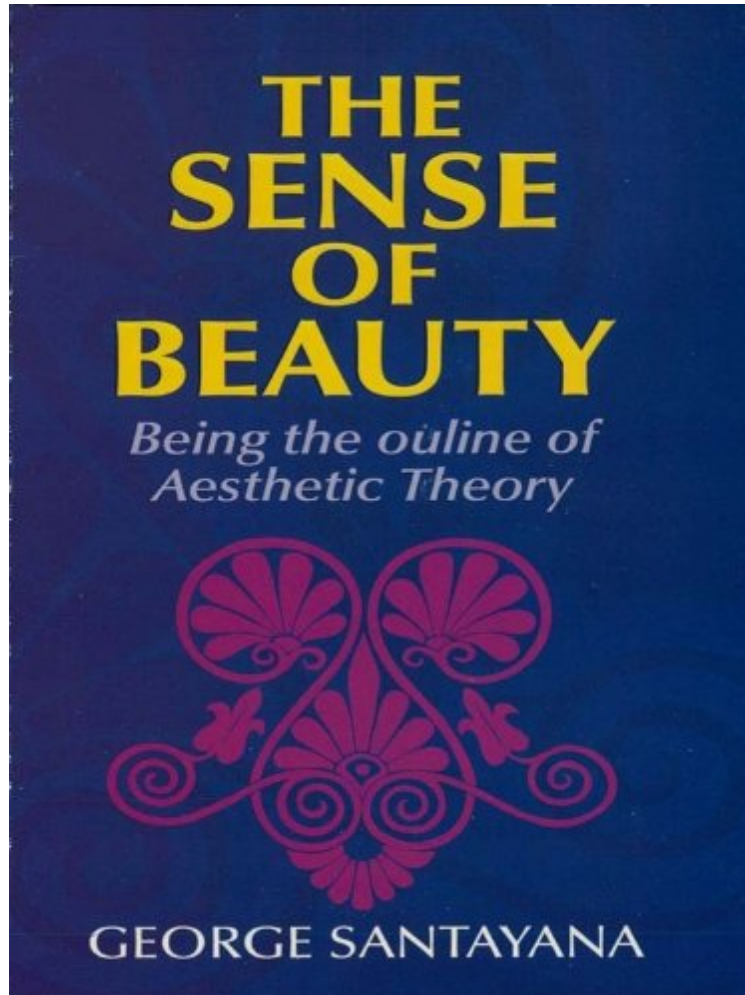


## The Sense of Beauty

*George Santayana*

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**George Santayana : The Sense of Beauty** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Sense of Beauty:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. THE POPULAR WRITER/PHILOSOPHER LOOKS AT ART, DRAMA, AND BEAUTY By Steven H Propp Jorge Agustiacute;n Nicolaacute;s Ruiz de Santayana y Borraacute;s (but known as ldquo;George Santayanardquo;; 1863ndash;1952), was a philosopher, essayist, poet, and novelist. His most famous books are The Life of Reason---which includes Reason in Society, Reason in Religion, Reason in Art, Reason in Science, etc.He wrote in the Preface to this 1896 book, ldquo;This little book contains the chief ideas gathered together for a course of lectures on the theory and history of aesthetics given at Harvard College from 1882 to 1895. The only originality I can claim is that which may result from the attempt to put together the scattered commonplaces of criticism into a system, under the inspiration of a naturalistic psychology. I have studied sincerity rather than novelty, and if any subject, as for instance the excellence of tragedy, is presented in a new light, the change

consists only in the stricter application to a complex subject of the principles acknowledged to obtain in our simpler judgments. My effort throughout has been to recall those fundamental aesthetic feelings the orderly expression of which yields sanity of judgment and distinction of taste. He suggests, "There is no explanation, for instance, in calling beauty an adumbration of divine attributes. Such a relation, if it were actual, would not help us at all to understand why the symbols of divinity pleased. But in certain moments of contemplation, when much emotional experience lies behind us, and we have reached very general ideas both of nature and of life, our delight in any particular object may consist in nothing but the thought that this object is a manifestation of universal principles; this expressiveness of the sky is due to certain qualities of the sensation, which bind it to all things happy and pure, and, in a mind in which the essence of purity and happiness is embodied in an idea of God, bind it also to that idea. So it may happen that the most arbitrary and unreal theories, which must be rejected as general explanations of aesthetic life, may be reinstated as particular moments of it." (Pg. 7) He acknowledges, "To feel beauty is a better thing than to understand how we come to feel it. To have imagination and taste, to love the best, to be carried by the contemplation of nature to a vivid faith in the ideal, all this is more, a great deal more, than any science can hope to be." (Pg. 8-9) He states, "By play we are designating, no longer what is done fruitlessly, but whatever is done spontaneously and for its own sake, whether it have or not an ulterior utility. Play, in this sense, may be our most useful occupation." (Pg. 19) He argues, "It is unmeaning to say that what is beautiful to one man OUGHT to be beautiful to another. If their senses are the same, their associations and dispositions similar, then the same thing will certainly be beautiful to both. If their natures are different, the form which to one will be entrancing will be to another even invisible, because his classifications and discriminations in perception will be different, and he may see a hideous detached fragment or a shapeless aggregate of things, in what to another is a perfect whole---so entirely are the unities of objects unities of function and use. It is absurd to say that what is invisible to a given being OUGHT to seem beautiful to him. Evidently this obligation of recognizing the same qualities is conditioned by the possession of the same faculties. But no two men have exactly the same faculties, nor can things have for any two exactly the same values." (Pg. 27) He says, "We have no reached our definition of beauty, which, in the terms of our successive analysis and narrowing of the conception, is value positive, intrinsic, and objectified. Or, in less technical language, Beauty is pleasure regarded as the quality of a thing." (Pg. 31) He contends, "The capacity to love gives our contemplation that glow without which it might often fail to manifest beauty; and the whole sentimental side of our aesthetic sensibility---without which it would be perceptive and mathematical rather than aesthetic---is due to our sexual organization remotely stirred. The attraction of sex could not become efficient unless the senses were first attracted. The eye must be fascinated and the ear charmed by the object which nature intends should be pursued." (Pg. 38) He notes, "We have, therefore, to study the various aesthetic, intellectual, and moral compensations by which the mind can be brought to contemplate with pleasure a thing which, if experienced alone, would be the cause of pain. There is, to be sure, a way of avoiding this inquiry. We might assert that since all moderate excitement is pleasant, there is nothing strange in the fact that the representation of evil should please; for the experience is evil by virtue of the pain that it gives; but it gives pain only when felt with great intensity. Observed from afar, it is a pleasing impression; it is vivid enough to interest, but not acute enough to wound. This simple explanation is possible in all those cases where aesthetic effect is gained by the inhibition of sympathy." (Pg. 137) He asserts, "no aesthetic value is really founded on the experience or the suggestion of evil. This conclusion will doubtless seem the more interesting if we think of its possible extension to the field of ethics and of the implied vindication of the ideals of moral perfection as something essentially definable and attainable; Expressiveness may be found in any one thing that suggests another, or draws from association with that other any of its emotional colouring. There may, therefore, of course, be an expressiveness of evil; but this expressiveness will not have any aesthetic value. The description or suggestion of suffering may have a worth as science or discipline, but can never in itself enhance any beauty." (Pg. 158) He concludes the book with the statement, "Beauty therefore seems to be the clearest manifestation of perfection, and the best evidence of its possibility. If perfection is, as it should be, the ultimate justification of being, we may understand the ground of the moral dignity of beauty. Beauty is a pledge of the possible conformity between the soul and nature, and consequently a ground of faith in the supremacy of the good." (Pg. 164) This book will be of great interest to anyone studying the philosophy of aesthetics.

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3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Oh, all the email I get asking for these reviews. By J. R. Murphy delivered as promised. Looks good or I would not have bought it it is somewhere in a stack of books I also bought on beauty which I plan to be through on, or about, my 85th birthday. I really do hope I live that long because being 65 I somewhat curious if the way I feel now is really the way one feels when they're 85.

It is remarkably appropriate that this work on aesthetics should have been written by George Santayana, who is probably the most brilliant philosophic writer and the philosopher with the strongest sense of beauty since Plato. It is not a dry metaphysical treatise, as works on aesthetics so often are, but is itself a fascinating document: as much a revelation of the beauty of language as of the concept of beauty. This unabridged reproduction of the 1896 edition of lectures delivered at Harvard College is a study of "why, when, and how beauty appears, what conditions an object must fulfill to be beautiful, what elements of our nature make us sensible of beauty, and what the relation is between

the constitution of the object and the excitement of our susceptibility." Santayana first analyzes the nature of beauty, finding it irrational, "pleasure regarded as the quality of a thing." He then proceeds to the materials of beauty, showing what all human functions can contribute: love, social instincts, senses, etc. Beauty of form is then analyzed, and finally the author discusses the expression of beauty. Literature, religion, values, evil, wit, humor, and the possibility of finite perfection are all examined. Presentation throughout the work is concrete and easy to follow, with examples drawn from art, history, anthropology, psychology, and similar areas.

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