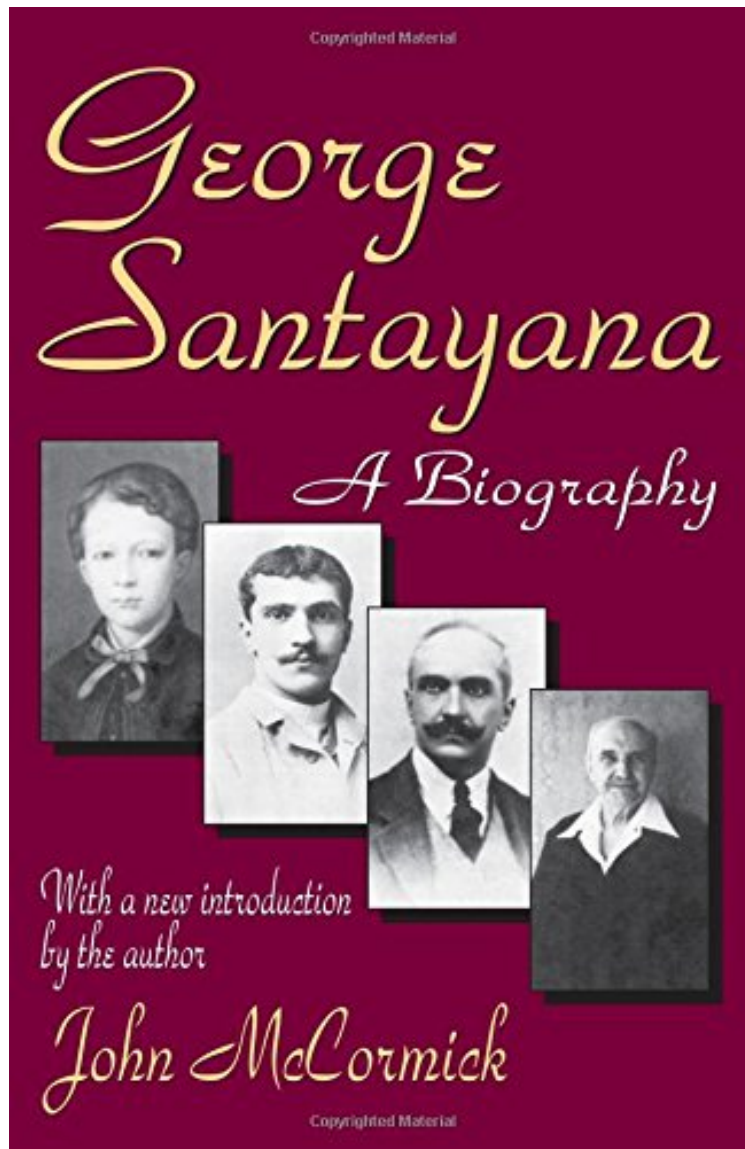


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George Santayana: A Biography

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John Rodden : George Santayana: A Biography before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised George Santayana: A Biography:

12 of 13 people found the following review helpful. Not just a biography By Geoff Puterbaugh This book is an excellent biography of George Santayana, but it's also more than that. Whenever George Santayana publishes a book, the biographer includes an overview, analysis, and critique of the book. It's like reading a biography of Shakespeare which includes a thorough analysis of each play as it was written. So, in a way, this book is also a "Santayana

Companion."It's highly welcome, in an era which needs many more people like George Santayana. Comparing this titan of a man to pipsqueaks like Norman Mailer and William Burroughs is indeed an education in itself. Very highly recommended!

From the late nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth, George Santayana was a highly esteemed and widely read writer of philosophy, poetry, essays, memoirs, and even a best-selling novel, *The Last Puritan*. After a period of relative neglect, interest in his work has revived. A complete edited edition of his works is in progress and he has become the object of renewed scholarly activity. Contributing significantly to the renewal was John McCormick's 1987 biography, the first full-scale volume to treat an elusive figure's life and thought in the detail they deserve. Santayana's life was rich in its interior and outer associations. There was his birth and early childhood in Spain followed by a move to Boston, where he came under the influence of William James at Harvard. This led to his career at Harvard as a professor, where Wallace Stevens, Robert Frost, Conrad Aiken, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Walter Lippmann were among his devoted students. We see Santayana in correspondence and conversation with Bertrand Russell, G.E. Moore, Ezra Pound, and Robert Lowell. Predominant in Santayana's life was his philosophical work. Hostile to the dominant empiricism of Anglo-American philosophy, he left the academy and remained detached from both the political and ideological movements of early decades of the twentieth century. McCormick relates his skepticism and materialism to a form of idealism deriving from his classical education in Plato and Aristotle, together with his readings in Descartes and Spinoza. He presents Santayana as a supreme stylist in English, who lived a long life always consistent with his stoic epicureanism.

From Publishers Weekly Calling the current neglect of Santayana a scandal, McCormick wants us to see him not only as a great philosopher but as an important novelist, poet, literary critic and master of the epigram. Born in Madrid in 1863, Santayana became a leading figure at Harvard where he tired of academic politics; his disdain for Americans' worship of "material achievement, good humor and football" drove him back to Europe. This Jamesian personality lived his own philosophy of serene detachment. He saw religion, art and science as a harmonious whole and tried to synthesize Plato and Lao-tsu. His idealistic philosophy upheld concepts like soul and psyche in the age of Einstein without invoking mysticism. *The Last Puritan*, his only novel, charts the inevitable decline and extinction of its hero with tragic force. What are we to make of Santayana's sympathies with Italian Fascism, his anti-Semitism, total opposition to liberalism and ultra-traditionalism in art, which led him to brand Shakespeare and Browning as barbarians? McCormick, author of four scholarly books, spends much of this intimate 608-page biography acting as an apologist, yet he succeeds in engaging the reader in an active dialogue with Santayana's thought. Photos not seen by PW. Copyright 1986 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Library Journal George Santayana (1863-1950), elegant, rather prissy, and the great philosopher of "naturalism" and skepticism, taught at Harvard until 1912 and spent the rest of his life writing some of his most important books and traveling. This thorough biography covers Santayana's long life and contains useful and often detailed discussions of his works. McCormick's treatment of some of Santayana's less attractive qualities (his conservatism, detachment, and racism) is sometimes intrusive, as is his tendency to plead for Santayana's greatness and for the relevance of his thought to an age that's largely forgotten him (though the recent publication of the first of a 19-volume set of his complete works *Persons and Places*, LJ 8/86 may indicate new interest). But these are small shortcomings in an excellent piece of highly readable scholarship. Richard Kuczkowski, *Dir.*, Continuing Education, Dominican Coll., Blauvelt, N.Y. Copyright 1987 Reed Business Information, Inc. "By the end of McCormick's biography, I had recalled what I knew of Santayana and had learned much more than I knew before. I appreciated again the urbanity, the erudition, the critique of intellectual pretensions, the sardonic and still pertinent observations on our genteel tradition." Richard John Neuhaus, *First Things* The fullest and most informed biography of Santayana to date. No other study of Santayana blends so perceptively the facts of his life with his intellectual divagations. Daniel Aaron, *New Republic* McCormick's biography is true to Santayana's tragic vision. Paul G. Kuntz, *American Historical* McCormick lucidly, intelligently reclaims for our time one of the most original minds of this century. Charles P. Corn, *San Francisco Examiner* Do we need a biography when Santayana himself, a master of English style, has provided us with three volumes of autobiography. . . . The answer is an emphatic yes; and let it be said that John McCormick has accomplished his task with distinction. Thomas N. Munson, *The New England Quarterly* [There are] many valuable insights that stud McCormick's book, and. . . promising leads it supplies for future inquiry. It has given a flesh-and-blood reality to a significant thinker whose persona has hitherto been remote and misty, and whose disciplined renunciations seemed to be those of some atheist monk. Indeed, McCormick's labors should cause us to revise our sense of Santayana's character, and of his relations with others. Wilfred M. McClay, *s in American History* "To write a biography of a philosopher who was also a literary critic, political essayist, and novelist, one needs to be well versed in literature, philosophy, and history. McCormick has the skills to do the job well. His biography will remain indispensable to the study of Santayana for a long time." Steven Miller, *Arts and Letters*