

“It doesn’t . . . matter where you begin”: Pound and Santayana on Education

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I. Introduction

American poet Ezra Pound wrote a letter on February 6, 1940, inviting American philosopher George Santayana to join poet T. S. Eliot and himself in writing “a volume . . . on the Ideal University, or The Proper Curriculum, or how it would be possible to educate and/or (mostly *or*) civilize the university stewood-dent.”¹ Santayana declined the invitation and claimed to have no ideas on the subject of education. Participation would have been morally impossible, he wrote, because unlike Pound and Eliot, whom he regarded as “reformers, full of prophetic zeal and faith in the Advent of the Lord,” Santayana was “cynically content to let people educate or neglect themselves as they may prefer.”²

This supports the approach of commentators who emphasize the differences between Pound and Santayana. Anthony Woodward has emphasized the “deep gap . . . between their temperaments.”³ Santayana’s biographer, John McCormick, has emphasized Pound’s lifelong misapprehension of Santayana, a position that seems seconded by Pound scholar Noel Stock.⁴

Pound and Santayana were temperamentally quite distinct, but this does not justify neglect of common concerns and possible similarities. I propose to take seriously Pound’s invitation to Santayana and to trust Pound’s sense that Santayana may have something to say about education. In this speculative, rather than historical, essay, I want to read Santayana with an eye to what *conceivably* could have appealed to Pound. I want to use Pound’s views as a stalking horse to track ideas on education in Santayana’s thought.⁵ I hope to suggest deeper connections between the two thinkers than have previously been noted⁶ and to consider how their responses to shared concerns can benefit a reader concerned with pedagogy.

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II. Pound's Aims of Education

For Pound education should broaden one's connections to the natural and social worlds,⁷ as well as connections among ideas. Establishing such connections is central to human vitality, and it is the teacher's mission to maintain this vitality or health of the mind.⁸ Such health thrives in the clarity and vigor of language, which Pound called "the health of the very matter of thought itself." When language becomes "slushy and inexact," both society and the individual suffer, and culture declines.⁹ Education amounts to learning how to read and write because, according to Pound, "the purpose of writing is to reveal the subject,"¹⁰ to reveal the concrete thing instead of a disconnected abstraction. Corrupt writing deceives and conceals, and education as health "consists," wrote Pound, "in 'getting wise' in the rawest and hardest boiled sense of that bit of argot."¹¹

But education is not merely evading deception; it is "active, instant and present awareness,"¹² an understanding of process rather than merely retaining information. This awareness can tell the difference between a painting by Goya and one by Velázquez and does not merely memorize a list of names and dates from an encyclopedia. It distinguishes between live ideas and dead ones.

Distinguishing live ideas is important if one aims to "get hold of ideas, in the sense that [one] will know where they 'weigh in.'"¹³ Grasping ideas and sensing their heft enables one to wield them as one makes one's way through the world, and real knowledge is a way of living rather than a collection of information: it informs perception and directs one's relations to the world.¹⁴ This is the way to really do and make things. Education is creative, and the aim of learning is to make it new.¹⁵

But why enlist Santayana? Pound wrote in his letter to Santayana that the idea for a book was prompted by Santayana's anecdote about Henry Adams. According to Santayana's autobiography (published in the years after his correspondence with Pound), Adams said to Santayana, "So you are trying to teach philosophy at Harvard. . . . I once tried to teach history there, but it can't be done. It isn't really possible to teach anything."¹⁶ Pound believed that Santayana further remarked, "It doesn't matter *what* so long as they all read the *same* things."¹⁷ Pound claims it was this anecdote that initiated his effort to write the new textbook and recruit Santayana's help.

Pound suggested that Santayana could "regard curriculum or method as arising from a philosophic root, a scheme of values . . . and attach a paragraph to that effect to whatever you happen to be writing."¹⁸ This suggests the possibility that Pound detected in Santayana's philosophy the basis for ideas that countered mainstream educational outlooks and practices.

But in Santayana's reply to Pound he not only declined the invitation but also indicated that the response to Adams was misattributed. Santayana wrote, "I don't remember my Henry Adams anecdote further than that he

said history couldn't be taught. If I have embroidered on that, you or Eliot are welcome to use my fancy-work as a text."¹⁹ Clearly, Santayana wanted nothing to do with Pound's plans. But still there seem good reasons for Pound to at least consider Santayana as a colleague in his efforts.

III. The Connections

Despite significant differences between Pound and Santayana, there are points of contact in their thought. These are not seamless connections of perfectly compatible ideas; rather, they are points of common interest where both agreement and disagreement seem likely to enlighten. These common concerns or perspectives suggest that Pound might not have been as out of touch or insensible as some commentators claim. Furthermore, the connections provide a framework in which others might think about education.

A. Beginnings and endings

For Pound, there are not first principles from which education begins. He could be fiercely antidogmatic and advised readers to "never consider anything as dogma."²⁰ When he offered "A Few Don'ts" for poets, he presented them not as fixed doctrines but as fruits of long contemplation and as points of departure.²¹

Similarly, the past is valued not merely for its own sake but as it serves new discoveries: "All the past that is vital, all the past that is capable of living into the future, is pregnant in the vortex, NOW."²² Past writers whom Pound thought vital to education made real discoveries, and the student proceeds "by a study of discoveries."²³ But learning begins in actuality—right now—and good writers have something to say to this very moment: "Literature is news that STAYS news."²⁴

Hence, learning begins where you are. Pound wrote, "It doesn't . . . matter where you begin the examination of a subject, so long as you keep on until you get round again to your starting point. As it were, you start on a sphere, or a cube; you must keep on until you have seen it from all sides."²⁵ There is no danger of starting in the wrong place if you keep moving, enlarging your sense of the present moment.

This approach echoes Santayana, who wrote, "A philosopher is compelled to follow the maxim of epic poets and to plunge *in media res*."²⁶ Things may have no origin and consist of an endless succession, or if they have an origin it is unavailable at the outset of inquiry. In either case, "nothing would be lost by joining the procession wherever one happens to come upon it, and following it as long as one's legs hold out."²⁷ There is no first principle of criticism.

The philosophic root, as Pound would have called it, of this view appears in Santayana's account of how human consciousness comes to distinguish

natural objects—a capacity basic to any education. When we call something “reality” we employ a term of discourse; that is, we necessarily use words and ideas to conceive the very notion of reality. The particular idea of reality justifies—allows the recognition of—the groupings of sensations that cohere in space and recur in time. But it is the actual coherence and recurrence of sensations that lead the mind to frame an idea of reality. This appears circular; one wonders which comes first: the idea of reality or the real sensation. On Santayana’s account, neither the idea nor the sensation comes first because neither can be conceived without the other. This circular account is vindicated by our living practice, and this suggests that education has its only basis in actual living.²⁸

B. Method

For Pound the methods of learning were, in part, the methods of reading—hence, his titles *How to Read* and *ABC of Reading*. He sought a method for wading through “the heteroclitite mass of undigested information hurled at [one] daily and monthly.”²⁹ In his first philosophical book, *The Sense of Beauty*, Santayana analyzed the situation that calls for a method of awakening attention amid monotony.

Considering beauty of form, Santayana noted the case of uniform multiplicity—a striking example being the celestial beauty of the stars³⁰—and then considered the limitations of this form. Monotony can be impressive but it cannot “hold us with that depth of developing interest, with which we might study a crowd or a forest of trees.”³¹ It has a twofold deleterious effect on the perceiver. When monotonous impressions are acute, they hurt (perhaps the repetition of an extremely bright light); when they are not acute, they numb (as with the ticking of a clock). In this second case, beauty or hideousness apparently drops out of consciousness altogether, but Santayana thought that while one becomes unaware of the particular object making the monotonous impression, its presence remains either vaguely irritating or subtly delightful.

On Santayana’s view, the particular is lost to consciousness, and this would explain Pound’s observation that “[p]eople find ideas a bore because they do not distinguish between live ones and stuffed ones on a shelf.”³² Overwhelmed by a monotonous parade of information, people become numb to ideas and notice only irritation or delight. If this still seems too remote from Pound’s pedagogic concerns, consider Santayana’s discussion of the consequences of monotony for art: monotonous form restricts association and inhibits diverse relations. Hence, for Pound, education ceases.

Santayana observed that artworks composed of an endless repetition of elements have a hardness and definiteness that leave them with few affinities or relational ties: “they are not fit for many uses, nor capable of expressing many ideas. The heroic couplet, now too much derided, is a form of this kind. Its compactness and inevitableness make it excellent for an epigram

and adequate for a satire, but its perpetual snap and unvarying rhythm are thin for an epic, and impossible for a song."³³

Pound sought to combat the deadening effects of monotony by drawing attention to the Luminous Detail, which is the aim of good reading. The method of good reading is the method of contemporary science,³⁴ and Pound credited Ernest Fenollosa, Harvard-educated philosophy professor and Asian culture enthusiast, with articulating how scientific method applies to literature.³⁵

Fenollosa demonstrated how the Chinese ideogram discourages abstraction and can bring "language close to *things*."³⁶ The pictographic nature of the Chinese language as well as its reliance on verbs maintains a direct connection between language and nature. By contrast, European logic isolates and abstracts ideas like bricks "baked into little hard units or concepts."³⁷ The abstract character of the system cannot represent change or growth or handle interaction. But the lessons of the ideogram can be applied to English: Fenollosa wrote, "we must use words highly charged, words whose vital suggestion shall interplay as nature interplays. Sentences must be like the mingling of the fringes of feathered banners, or as the colors of many flowers blended into the single sheen of a meadow."³⁸

Pound's employment of the ideogrammic method in writing recalls why it does not matter where a student begins examining a subject: "The ideogrammic method consists of presenting one facet and then another until at some point one gets off the dead and desensitized surface of the reader's mind, onto a part that will register."³⁹ Pound rejected first principles in communication and education in favor of continual presentation or inspection until the bigger picture takes shape, or until one hits on the fact that provokes realization of the whole. The methods of writing and reading, unsurprisingly, reflect each other in their circular appearance, and both aim for an enlightening detail that creates new knowledge.

The ideogrammic method illustrates Pound's New Method of Scholarship, which he characterized as "the method of Luminous Detail, a method most vigorously hostile to the prevailing mode of today—that is, the method of multitudinous detail, and to the method of yesterday, the method of sentiment and generalisation. The latter is too inexact and the former too cumbersome to be of much use."⁴⁰ The significant detail that gives "sudden insight into circumjacent conditions" becomes the material out of which an ideogram can be constructed⁴¹; likewise, it can be the detail that illuminates and is illuminated by related details, and this would amount to genuine education.⁴²

C. Obstacles

Monotonous and desensitizing information seem at least susceptible to a method, but Pound observed other obstacles that seem opposed to any

creative learning. "Universities," claimed Pound, have "no provision whatever for the fostering of the creative energies."⁴³ He derided such institutions as beaneries shaped by business and bureaucracy. Santayana himself had experienced firsthand the business mentality of the American university in an encounter with the president of Harvard, Charles William Eliot, who "seeing me once by chance soon after the beginning of the term, inquired how my classes were getting on; and when I replied that I thought they were getting on well, that my men seemed to be keen and intelligent, he stopped me as if I was about to waste his time. 'I meant,' said he, '*what is the number of students in your classes?*'"⁴⁴

Pound noted that business deformed the institution so that the main interest of scholars has become getting a job and holding onto it. This leads "many scholars to write under a terror" and "maintain a pretence of omniscience."⁴⁵ The pressure to know everything leads to a narrowing of fields. One becomes a master by restricting one's scope.⁴⁶ Santayana also observed the pressure a business-minded university put on the young academic, who through social pressure and his or her own eagerness is burdened with committee work and forced to publish too soon and lecture too much: "He has no peace in himself, no window open to a calm horizon, and in his heart perhaps little taste for mere scholarship or pure speculation."⁴⁷

The narrowness and careerism of the university leads not to real knowledge but something abstracted from a thin experience of dead ideas. "Go in fear of abstractions," Pound advised.⁴⁸ Do not redo what has already been done. Pound's pedagogy and art aimed at direct contact with real things of the world. Pound wrote, "As far as the 'living art' goes, I should like to break up *cliché*, to disintegrate these magnetized groups that stand between the reader of poetry and the drive of it."⁴⁹

Santayana was committed to breaking up received understandings of philosophic traditions in order to gain a more honest understanding of the world. He revitalized in idiosyncratic ways terms like "reason," "universal," and "essence." He also reconsidered skepticism and challenged the centuries-old conception descended from the French philosopher René Descartes.

Descartes wanted to establish a solid foundation for knowledge by doubting everything until he found one certain and indubitable piece of information—namely, that I exist as a thinking thing, a fact supposedly entailed by the very act of doubting. Santayana found Cartesian skepticism disingenuous and lacking in rigor. Skepticism in this tradition leaves favored conventions untouched by doubt: the Romantic solipsist retains "personal history and destiny" and a mystic retains "the feeling of existence."⁵⁰ The result of this wayward skepticism is an abstracted conception of knowledge that ignores actual experience in favor of unavowed presumptions. This gives rise to an implausible conception of knowledge as something

certain and impervious to doubt, which can be had only by smuggling in something already given a free pass from skeptical scrutiny.

In his book *Scepticism and Animal Faith*, Santayana sought to break through the conventional notions of skepticism and take it to its honest conclusion. The thoroughgoing skeptic would have no occasion to remark a self or history and no knowledge of existence. Santayana wrote, “[s]kepticism may thus be carried to the point of denying change and memory, and the reality of all facts.”⁵¹ Yet even this conclusion taken as fact would be struck down. One is left with ambiguity and contradiction.

Santayana did not aim to destroy all intellectual life but rather to demonstrate that the traditional philosophical conception of knowledge is insincere in its establishment and impossible in practice. This results from a deceptive employment of skepticism. Skepticism, wrote Santayana, is an exercise, not a life.⁵² It eradicates prejudices, including those that declare knowledge must be literal and certain.⁵³ We cannot live with such a conception of knowledge, and we do not. Actual living is impervious to skepticism and can discount its philosophical products. This counter to skepticism Santayana called “animal faith”: “a faith not founded on reason but precipitated in action, and in that intent, which is virtual action, involved in perception.”⁵⁴ It does not eliminate skepticism; rather, it restores the roots of actual life after their denial by modern epistemology.

D. Poetry

A further point of contact for Pound and Santayana relevant to education concerns the function of poetry. On Pound’s view poetry is indispensable for education. He took it as a social and political truth that “people need poetry; that prose is NOT education but the outer course of the same.”⁵⁵

Poetry is important for the reasons that all good writing is important. Good writing keeps language efficient, accurate, and clear, while sloppy writing undermines the social aims of education by breeding deception and estrangement from actual living.⁵⁶ Pound compares the importance of good writing to the importance of sanitary conditions in surgery: an infection in the dressing can undo all that the surgeon set out to do in the first place.⁵⁷ With sharp and clean tools of language, the good writer can direct and shape the energy of the vortex rather than merely observe and reflect it. Language becomes a means to having new, concrete experiences.

Poetry in particular is vital because of the structuring function it plays in human living. Pound wrote in 1915 that “the essential thing in a poet is that he builds us his world.”⁵⁸ Ira Nadel writes of Pound following Dante in taking “the fragments of his culture and put[ting] them back in order.”⁵⁹ On this view Pound’s *Cantos* are an attempt to create a paradiso. But Gail McDonald, responding to the denial that Modernist Poetry made “poems to hold together when nothing in the world seemed to,” argues that “Pound’s

aim is to present education as an experience of navigation by periplus. . . . We and Pound are not, as it were, outside the poem observing its shape in overview, but inside it, mapping its shape as we encounter it."⁶⁰ This view seems consistent with the idea that the poet builds us his world rather than the world; whether and how we come together in a world as a cohesive society is a further task.

Seemingly sympathetic to Pound's views about the role of the poet, Santayana wrote in a 1900 essay entitled "The Elements and Function of Poetry" that

[t]he great function of poetry is precisely this: to repair to the material of experience, seizing hold of the reality of sensation and fancy beneath the surface of conventional ideas, and then out of that living but indefinite material to build new structures, richer, finer, fitter to the primary tendencies of our nature, truer to the ultimate possibilities of the soul. . . . we destroy conventions only to construct ideals.⁶¹

Thirteen years later, Pound wrote, "It is in art the highest business to create the beautiful image; to create order and profusion of images that we may furnish the life of our minds with a noble surrounding."⁶² Both thinkers are concerned with the order that art creates and the possibility it offers for what might be called the ideal or spiritual life.⁶³ They share the idea that the highest calling of the poet is to create an order out of the materials of experience, but the creation is no fantasy. For Santayana, the highest poetry is a guide to life and so cannot abdicate its responsibility to observe the facts of the universe. Poetry aims at "idealism become the interpretation of the reality it leaves behind."⁶⁴

The importance to both Santayana and Pound that poetry not float detached from reality is expressed in their ideas about the future of poetry. Pound expected poetry to "move against poppy-cock" and "be harder and saner," "'nearer to the bone.' It will be as much like granite as it can be, its force will lie in its truth, its interpretative power."⁶⁵ Writing twelve years earlier, Santayana had imagined the nature of poetry after "a better mastery of experience" and expulsion of metaphysical entities and mythological illusion. He expected poetry to eventually reject discredited metaphysics—that is, to become disillusioned and so more honest about nature. He wrote,

The poet himself will soon prefer to describe nature in natural terms and to represent human emotions in their pathetic humility, not extended beyond their actual sphere nor fantastically uprooted from their necessary soil and occasions. He will sing the power of nature over the soul, the joys of the soul in the bosom of nature, the beauty visible in things, and the steady march of natural processes, so rich in momentous incidents and collocations. The precision of such a picture will accentuate its majesty, as precision does in the poems of Lucretius and Dante, while its pathos and dramatic interest will be redoubled by its truth.⁶⁶

This extensive quotation suggests differences that led Santayana to reject Pound's invitation to reform education. For Santayana, disillusion and honesty about nature meant acknowledging the limited sphere of influence of human consciousness: thought has no influence on matter. Santayana's poet will exhibit the humility appropriate to human emotions and acknowledge the insignificance of the human soul in the universe, but not in a despairing romantic fashion and not in a way that abandons the beauty that human consciousness can appreciate.

Just as Santayana's ideal poet does not pretend that the human spirit can control matter, so the philosopher must be equally humble before the universe. For Santayana, this entails that the philosopher is not a reformer after the fashion of Pound and Eliot. Santayana's explicit comments on education make clearer the differences between him and Pound, and these differences are considered in the next section.

IV. Differences

In spite of agreements between Pound and Santayana on problems in education, it is undeniable that they differed greatly in their response to these problems. Their correspondence sets out the differences clearly and indicates both were aware of them. Pound, in his letter inviting Santayana to join his education reform effort, wrote, "I plead the missionary spirit: GUILTY!!" as if he were pre-empting the charge from Santayana.⁶⁷ And Santayana did not disappoint when, as already noted, he characterized Pound and Eliot as "full of prophetic zeal."

Consistent with this characterization, Pound makes clear in the preface to *Guide to Kulchur* that his book is an attack on stupidity and a struggle to preserve values, and a subsequent commentator characterized the book as "written with a sense of urgency."⁶⁸ By contrast, Santayana writes to Robert Lowell that his "philosophy is not urgent or 'militant': you can manage perfectly without it."⁶⁹ Hence, it is not surprising that Santayana claimed he was content to let people educate themselves or not according to their inclination and went on to deny having any ideas on education.⁷⁰

In fact, Santayana did make explicit statements about education both before and after corresponding with Pound. But Santayana's aims of education are modest enough that they do not seem terribly inconsistent with the *laissez-faire* attitude displayed in his exchange with Pound. For Santayana, education is concerned mainly with the transmission of a moral and intellectual tradition that includes religion, manners, and other cultural allegiances. Because education aims at conveying the morals and sentiments of the students' culture, it cannot seek to upset students by demolishing their familiar beliefs. In a letter to a former student who was then a professor at the University of Wisconsin, Santayana advised the young teacher that he may guide the students in whatever direction he thought best, "but for their

own sake, and starting from their actual condition; it must not be a haughty display of your own sentiments such as might wound and perplex them. It is not their faith that you must be considerate of, but their innocence and their desire to work together and improve themselves in the process."⁷¹

Indeed, cooperation and progress are at the heart of the moral tradition that Santayana observed in America. He did not think American education to be a matter of particular academic subjects or canonical texts. These things as they appear in America are relics of alien cultures, and though they may appeal to individuals, they cannot express the vital traditions of American life. Based on what he had seen and experienced, Santayana concluded that in America "what matters is the tradition of alacrity, inquisitiveness, self-trust, spontaneous co-operation and club-spirit; all of which can ripen, in the better minds, into openness to light and fidelity to duty."⁷² American education does not aim at enlightenment, for that is not the American intellectual and moral tradition. Rather, American education is required "in order to instil into the entire community capacity for initiative, love of work, optimism, and respect for success."⁷³ This is how education serves the living traditions of American culture.

This view of education suggests that while Pound and Santayana certainly agreed in their observations of American culture, the upshot of their critiques differed greatly. American culture did not provide the intellectual and moral environment that Santayana preferred, but this was no ground for condemning American culture. Writing to a sympathetic correspondent about American culture, Santayana asked, "why need all the tribes of men sacrifice at our altar?"⁷⁴ Ten years later Santayana asked again, "Why be dissatisfied?" with the "pensive agnosticism" that centuries of humanistic culture have bequeathed on a vital and materially wealthy American culture. It is problematic, he argued, only for those who long for supernatural assurances of values and the absolute hegemony of reason: "But is there anything compulsory in reason? Is there not still liberty for fools? Can reason reasonably forbid them to exist? Certain not, if they like to be fools."⁷⁵

Though he is sanguine in characterizing American "[b]ig business [as] an amiable monster,"⁷⁶ Santayana does recognize the threat to spiritual life posed by American culture: "What irony there would be in having learned to control matter, if we thereby forgot the purposes of the soul in controlling it, and disowned the natural furniture of the mind, our senses, fancy, and pictorial knowledge!"⁷⁷ He worried that the human effort that has concocted modern culture may in the end undermine the intellect and reason that material wealth at first seemed to liberate. But this did not alter his view that the life of reason, appreciation for imagination, and a rich spiritual life could not be imposed by education or any other means.

Perhaps the most positive comments Santayana offered about learning can be found in his discussions of docility, which occur throughout his

works. In an early work, Santayana reflected on the conditions of thought. Allowing that neuroscience will discover more exact conditions, he noted that the obvious conditions for thought consist of an organic body and adaptable habits. These comprise intelligence, and “docility is the observable half of reason.”⁷⁸ This means that what we can observe about thinking is the contact with the environment—the suffering of blows, the receiving of caresses, the blocking of activity, the being swept along by forces—and the subsequent response of the creature to environmental factors. Intelligence registers these events through the establishment of habits and memories, and the organism adapts to the conditions. Santayana contrasted this with “the idiot” for whom “a new process . . . does not modify structure” and “the fool” for whom “stretches of linked experience are short and their connections insecure.”⁷⁹

For the student, docility could mean trusting a teaching or trusting that a teacher can instruct in *some* way (even if it be a way unintended by the teacher). This may work as advice to the student, but Santayana did not believe a teacher could make the student docile. What could it mean to impose docility on another? It suggests the aversion therapy of the Ludovico Technique in Anthony Burgess’s *A Clockwork Orange* and would appear viable only if one believed that the thoughts and intentions of the teacher could influence not only the teacher’s own body, but also the material organism of the student. Santayana denied that thought could influence *any* body.

In his last published major work, Santayana observed that “If you wish to practice a mechanical art, the expert mechanic can rationally teach you how to do it; but if you wish to think or to practice a liberal art, another man, because he is self-satisfied, must not run up unasked and tell you to do it otherwise than as your vital liberty directs.”⁸⁰ So just as the poet of the future “will sing the power of nature over the soul,” Santayana recognized that only one’s vital liberty, not the good intentions or better lights of others, can lead one to the life of reason and intellectual growth.

“Vital liberty” refers to the conditions of concrete life that make possible the liberation of ideas from intent—that is, the conditions that make contemplation and intellectual life possible. The conditions of an actual individual life go beyond the air and nourishment that all humans require and include the history and habits of the organism. Santayana did not believe the reformer could intelligently override these conditions. These conditions delivered the individual in their own time and their own way, which is consistent with the idiosyncratic ways we learn our most meaningful and important lessons.

In his view of education and intellectual life, Santayana maintained that thought could not influence matter: mind is not a factor in the material flux. This has bearing on education understood as the influence of one person over another. It raises questions of how a teacher’s ideas and intentions could guide students and influence the intellectual lives of students.

Can the appreciation for arts, the use of imagination, or the value of a rich intellectual life be conveyed or communicated to one who does not already have such inclinations?

Pound seemed aware of the tension but not overly concerned with it. In his letter to Santayana, he characterized the education reform project as an inquiry into “how it would be possible to educate and/or (mostly *or*) civilize the university steward.”⁸¹ A distinction between educating and civilizing is noted, but it seems unimportant for the task at hand. It is as if a lively intellectual life would be a desirable outcome, but so would a society ordered according to some civilized standard. For Pound, the distinction appears not to make a difference to the reform of education.

V. Conclusion

Considering the differences between Pound and Santayana seems to suggest that the two thinkers were radically distinct. One might characterize Pound as neglecting finer analyses in his rush to reform, while one could regard Santayana as given over to inertia. The temptation arises to distinguish Pound and Santayana according to dichotomous categories such as action and contemplation, recklessness and caution, or involvement and detachment. Choosing a pair of categories then seems to depend on one’s preferences, and any conclusion seems to be influenced more by pre-existing inclinations than the actual inquiry. When considering the views of Pound and Santayana on education, readers seem led to pick sides or perhaps to drop altogether the considered problems as insoluble or even nonsensical (seeing as how the different views seem to lead to contradictory approaches). Could it be otherwise?

I believe so, and that is why I have suggested considering the similarities of Pound and Santayana. My aim has not been to cover up the differences between them or to issue a bland call for moderation or a middle way. My intention is to see how their views—both shared and conflicting—might be suggestive to those concerned with actual teaching.

Pound recognized that different artists have different excellences, and “[h]aving discovered his own virtue the artist will be more likely to discern and allow for a peculiar *virtú* in others.”⁸² This is not merely courtesy. In a letter to a young writer, Pound wrote, “elucidate thine own bloody damn point of view by its contrast to others, not by trying to make the others conform.”⁸³ This suggests that self-definition requires resistance, and that eschewing conformity entails neither conforming oneself nor forcing others to conform. Santayana would not disagree. He wrote, “I do not ask any one to think in my terms if he prefers others. Let him clean better, if he can, the windows of his soul, that the variety and beauty of the prospect may spread more brightly before him.”⁸⁴

I am not blithely suggesting Pound was a pluralist, but his educational ideas seem to invite some sort of pluralism. Education for Pound requires both tradition and critique, setting up a perpetual tension that drives learning. What is the vortex of his artistic theory but an opportunity to turn energy to new directions rather than being passively shaped by it? Perhaps he sensed in Santayana an opposite that in collaboration could generate something new and so invited his assistance.⁸⁵ Even if this was not Pound's motive, it suggests a fruitful way to read the opposing views of the two thinkers.

One can take the points of contact between Pound and Santayana as indicators of important issues in education: the agreements of those who disagree radically might make good starting points for one's own inquiries, and this postpones judgment about the issues in dispute. In this way it does not matter where one begins in terms of biases or preference for one thinker or another.

If the reader holds the conflicting responses in tension, he or she may gain sensitivity to the sorts of concrete problems that prompted these responses. In particular, educators might be prompted to consider the words we use to communicate to students, the methods of presentation, the stories we tell. We might consider our positions in an environment of continuous streams of information and academic professionalization. We might question our relationship to narratives that would give structure to our minds and the minds of our students. These are not new questions, of course, but Pound and Santayana give them vitality that perhaps we should take seriously by questioning ourselves. The points of contact between Pound and Santayana regarding education can be taken as cues to self-knowledge, cues to ask, What are we doing as teachers? What should education accomplish? What determines successes? What conventions of professional life block these inquiries?

I have no tidy answers for these questions that will neatly conclude this essay, but the work of Pound and Santayana encourage me to take them seriously. Their differing responses suggest these questions really are difficult, and their extreme responses suggest these questions really are worth asking and the answers really matter. While not conclusive, I find this more satisfying than staging a contest between two serious and influential thinkers.

Beyond my own satisfaction, resisting partisanship in deciding between the two thinkers is in keeping with their shared ideas about beginnings and endings. The value of a fixed and final judgment about Pound and Santayana on education depends on the status of beginnings and endings. If these are eternally separated, then the final verdict on Pound's misapprehension and "missionary sperrit," on Santayana's detachment and cynicism, or on the gap between their temperaments is the end of the question. Yet both Pound and Santayana acknowledge that there are no first principles, no eternal standards of practice, and that vital activity is an undeniable condition for the learning creature.

This suggests that their diverging responses, as vital human responses, require acknowledgment of differences even as they attest to the pressing need of the individual to make a definite decision. They both attempt to make a place for order and beauty in the face of flux and relativity of value, and they both, to some degree, acknowledge that the attempt demands genuine individuality. Even though Pound and Santayana value different ideals and ground poetry in different understandings of the relation of matter and spirit, they agree that poetry and ideals matter. Similarly, the good teacher, without dictating particular ideals to students, must take ideals seriously, particularly his or her own.

NOTES

1. Ezra Pound, *The Letters of Ezra Pound, 1907-1941*, ed. D. D. Paige (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1950), 338. Though the aim of the present essay is to look beyond the obvious differences between Pound and Santayana, it seems worth pointing out the irony of recruiting Santayana to work with Eliot on education reform. According to Santayana's biographer, John McCormick, Eliot was the only former student of Santayana's to register dissatisfaction with Santayana's teaching. Eliot characterized Santayana's lectures as "soporific." John McCormick, *George Santayana: A Biography* (New York: Knopf, 1987), 99.
2. George Santayana, *The Letters of George Santayana, Book Six*, ed. Herman J. Saatkamp Jr. and William G. Holzberger (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), 335-36.
3. Anthony Woodward, "Pound and Santayana," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 83 (1984): 87.
4. McCormick, *George Santayana*, 406; Noel Stock, *Poet in Exile: Ezra Pound* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1964), 250-51. An interesting counter to Stock's interpretation of Pound's use of Santayana in *Canto XCV* is found in P. Liebrechts, *Ezra Pound and Neoplatonism* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2004), 326. I should also note that Woodward is aware of exaggerating the differences between the two thinkers, qualifies it for the purpose of his essay, and goes on to suggest the beginning of a nuanced comparison of Pound and Santayana with regard to their religious thought.
5. Though he made comments and observations regarding education, Santayana never articulated any systematic philosophy of education. This is discussed in James Gouinlock's introduction to Santayana's *The Life of Reason*, forthcoming from MIT Press.
6. Concluding a recent review essay looking at parallels in the work of Willa Cather and Santayana, James Seaton writes, "It is meant to suggest that a vision of the world of the quality and depth found in the work of Willa Cather is perhaps best understood when interrogated with the assistance of minds—like Santayana's—whose works reveal a similar quality and depth." James Seaton, "Woman of Letters," review of *The Cambridge Companion to Willa Cather*, ed. Marilee Lindemann, *Weekly Standard*, September 17, 2007, 38-41, <http://www.proquest.com/> (accessed May 26, 2010). Perhaps Santayana and Pound can mutually illuminate each other in a similar way.
7. Ezra Pound, *Selected Prose, 1909-1965*, ed. William Cookson (New York: New Directions, 1973), 21.
8. Ezra Pound, *Literary Essays*, ed. T. S. Eliot (New York: New Directions, 1954), 59.
9. *Ibid.*, 21.
10. Ezra Pound, *Guide to Kulchur* (New York: New Directions, 1952), 51.
11. *Ibid.*, 52.

12. Ibid.
13. Ibid., 44; see also 74 and 307.
14. Ibid., 28.
15. See also Gail McDonald, *Learning to Be Modern: Pound, Eliot, and the American University* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 11.
16. *George Santayana, Persons and Places: Critical Edition*, ed. Herman J. Saatkamp Jr. and William G. Holzberger (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987), 224. In Santayana's account he describes Adams's words as being "somewhat in the gentle but sad tone that we knew in Professor Norton" (224). Charles Eliot Norton (1827-1908) was a professor of art history at Harvard and a Dante scholar. Santayana had been his pupil as an undergraduate. The comparison of Adams to Norton suggests that Santayana regarded Adams as a sort of purveyor of the genteel tradition. See Santayana's 1931 essay "The Genteel Tradition at Bay" (in *The Genteel Tradition: Nine Essays by George Santayana*, ed. Douglas L. Wilson [Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998], 151-96, esp. 155) for the significant characterization of Professor Norton. The comparison and more specifically the essay is significant in the present context because in it Santayana criticizes the New Humanists without explicitly siding with the opposing modernists.
17. Pound, *The Letters of Ezra Pound*, 338.
18. Ibid.
19. Santayana, *The Letters of George Santayana: Book Six*, 336.
20. Pound, *Literary Essays*, 4.
21. Ibid., 4-5.
22. Ezra Pound, *Ezra Pound's Poetry and Prose: Contributions to Periodicals, Vol. I, 1902-1914* (New York: Garland, 1991), 259.
23. Pound, *Literary Essays*, 15; quote at 18-19.
24. Ezra Pound, *ABC of Reading* (New York: New Directions, 1960), 31; quote at 29.
25. Ibid., 29.
26. George Santayana, *Scepticism and Animal Faith: Introduction to a System of Philosophy* (New York: Dover, 1955), 1.
27. Ibid.
28. George Santayana, *Reason in Common Sense: The Life of Reason, Vol. 1* (New York: Dover, 1980), 82-83.
29. Pound, *Guide to Kulchur*, 23.
30. George Santayana, *The Sense of Beauty: Being the Outline of Aesthetic Theory* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988), 64-66.
31. Ibid., 69.
32. Pound, *Guide to Kulchur*, 56.
33. Santayana, *The Sense of Beauty*, 70.
34. Pound, *ABC of Reading*, 17; *Literary Essays*, 18-19. But "such method has nothing to do with those allegedly scientific methods which approach literature as if it were something *not literature*, or with scientists' attempts to sub-divide the elements in literatures according to some non-literary categoric division" (*Literary Essays*, 19).
35. Pound, *ABC of Reading*, 18.
36. Ezra Pound, *Instigations of Ezra Pound, Together with an Essay on the Chinese Written Character* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1920), 367.
37. Ibid., 380.
38. Ibid., 386.
39. Pound, *Guide to Kulchur*, 51.
40. Ezra Pound, *Selected Prose, 1909-1965*, ed. William Cookson (New York: New Directions, 1973), 21.
41. Ibid., 22.
42. Christopher Beach, *ABC of Influence: Ezra Pound and the Remaking of American Poetic Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 51-52; McDonald, *Learning to Be Modern*, 152; see also Pound, *Literary Essays*, 24-25. Beyond method, Pound also recognized a kind of sympathy animating education. As Gail McDonald points out, Pound was not opposed to scholarship, research, and the

- acquisition of facts, but he did oppose dead facts and sought ways to energize the tradition he found himself in (*Learning to Be Modern*, 23). Sympathy played a role in this energizing of tradition. For Pound, the tradition lives through "Apostolic Succession," through "contact with men of genius" (*Ezra Pound's Poetry and Prose: Contributions to Periodicals, Vol. I, 1902-1914*, 147). Likewise, Santayana recognized that sympathetic contact does more to further mutual understanding of nature than general propositions about past experience. He characterized true education as "taking one another frankly by the hand and walking together along the outskirts of real knowledge, pointing to the material facts which we all can see" (*Reason in Common Sense*, 130).
43. Pound, *Selected Prose, 1909-1965*, 132.
 44. George Santayana, *Character and Opinion in the United States* (New York: George Braziller, 1955), 105. Santayana was also conscious of other academic pressures: "I had disregarded or defied public opinion by not becoming a specialist, but writing pessimistic old-fashioned verse, continuing to range superficially over literature and philosophy, being indiscernibly a Catholic or an atheist, attacking Robert Browning, prophet of the half-educated and half-believing, avoiding administrative duties, neglecting the Intelligentsia, frequenting the society of undergraduates and fashionable ladies, spending my holidays abroad, and even appearing as a witness in the disreputable Russell trial" (*Persons and Places*, 395). Presumably Pound would not be surprised at the odd figure Santayana would make in the American university since he had already noted with displeasure that "the University is not here for the unusual man" (*Ezra Pound's Poetry and Prose: Contributions to Periodicals, Vol. I, 1902-1914*, 147).
 45. Pound, *Guide to Kulchur*, 70.
 46. Intellectual narrowness came into play when Pound suggested a thesis topic that was not included in the established curriculum. One professor rejected Pound's idea, saying "And besides, Mr Pound, we shd. have to do so much work ourselves to verify your results" (*Guide to Kulchur*, 215). To avoid such work, to remain in a narrow well-trodden field, kills curiosity and restricts contact with the world. But "the real educator," according to Pound, "arouses your CURIOSITY," and the aim of the university should be preparing the student to live in the social order, not stake out a narrow intellectual claim (*Ezra Pound's Poetry and Prose: Contributions to Periodicals, Vol. VII: 1936-1939* [New York: Garland, 1991], 387).
 47. Santayana, *Character and Opinion*, 82. Both Santayana and Pound noticed the paradoxical nature of American democratic education. Pound lamented that in spite of their talk of democracy, universities seemed to "breed snobbishness" (*Selected Prose, 1909-1965*, 131). Santayana, commenting in a letter on a proposal for general education, noted the totalitarian view of society the proposal assumed. He explained that democracy was supposed to be the standard for all education as an "orthodox system of life and thought" (*The Letters of George Santayana, Book Seven*, ed. Herman J. Saatkamp Jr. and William G. Holzberger [Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006], 227).
 48. Pound, *Literary Essays*, 5.
 49. Pound, *Selected Prose, 1909-1965*, 41.
 50. Santayana, *Scepticism and Animal Faith*, 33; 18-19.
 51. *Ibid.*, 40.
 52. *Ibid.*, 69.
 53. *Ibid.*, 101-2.
 54. *Ibid.*, 106.
 55. Pound, *Guide to Kulchur*, 144.
 56. Pound, *ABC of Reading*, 32.
 57. Pound, *Literary Essays*, 22.
 58. Pound, *Selected Prose, 1909-1965*, 19; William Cookson, *A Guide to the Cantos of Ezra Pound* (New York: Persea Books, 1985), xv.
 59. Ira Bruce Nadel, *Ezra Pound: A Literary Life* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 97.
 60. McDonald, *Learning to Be Modern*, 41, 145.

61. George Santayana, *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), 161.
62. Pound, *Ezra Pound's Poetry and Prose: Contributions to Periodicals, Vol. I, 1902-1914*, 203.
63. Both recognized Dante as an exemplary poet in constructing an ideal world. Santayana judged Dante as "the type of supreme poet" who "poetized all life and nature as he found them. His imagination dominated and focused the whole world" (*Three Philosophical Poets: Lucretius, Dante, Goethe* [New York: Doubleday, 1953], 121). But just as Pound's claim that a poet builds us his world and not the world, Santayana claimed that his praise of Dante should not imply "that he is the 'greatest' of poets. The relative merit of poets is a barren thing to wrangle about. . . . But Dante gives a successful example of the highest species of poetry" (121). It is the greatest task of the poet "to give imaginative value to all things, and to the system which things compose" (122). When comparing poets who are capable of this greatest task, the point is not to decide which is best: "Each is best in his way, and none is the best in every way. To express a preference is not so much a criticism as a personal confession" (180).
64. Santayana, *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion*, 172.
65. Pound, *Literary Essays*, 12.
66. Santayana, *Reason in Common Sense*, 148-49.
67. Pound, *The Letters of Ezra Pound, 1907-1941*, 338.
68. Demetres P. Tryphonopoulos and Stephen J. Adams, eds., *The Ezra Pound Encyclopedia* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2005), 139.
69. Letter to Robert Traill Spence Lowell Jr., January 14, 1949, George Santayana Papers, Houghton Library, Harvard University.
70. Santayana, *The Letters of George Santayana, Book Six*, 335-36.
71. George Santayana, *The Letters of George Santayana, Book Two*, ed. Herman J. Saatkamp, Jr. and William G. Holzberger (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 42.
72. Richard Lyon, ed., *Santayana on America: Essays, Notes, and Letters on American Life, Literature, and Philosophy* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1968), 191.
73. *Ibid.*, 205.
74. George Santayana, *The Letters of George Santayana, Book Three*, ed. Herman J. Saatkamp Jr. and William G. Holzberger (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 44.
75. Lyon, *Santayana on America*, 152.
76. *Ibid.*, 136.
77. *Ibid.*, 214. This quotation does not contradict the earlier claim that spirit or thought cannot control matter. For Santayana, soul and spirit are distinct. Soul is the persisting organization of the live creature, the collection of habits and vital processes. Spirit is consciousness.
78. Santayana, *Reason in Common Sense*, 209.
79. George Santayana, *Reason in Art: The Life of Reason, Vol. 4* (New York: Dover, 1982), 12.
80. Lyon, *Santayana on America*, 221.
81. Pound, *The Letters of Ezra Pound, 1907-1941*, 338.
82. Pound, *Selected Prose, 1909-1965*, 29.
83. Pound, *The Letters of Ezra Pound, 1907-1941*, 235.
84. Santayana, *Scepticism and Animal Faith*, vi-vii.
85. Additionally, Pound seemed genuinely fond of Santayana. In a letter to Eliot dated January 18, 1940, Pound wrote, "Had a lot of jaw with Geo. Santayana in Venice, and like him. Never met anyone who seems to me to fake less. In fact, I gave him a clean bill" (*The Letters of Ezra Pound, 1907-1941*, 334). In conversation with Charles Olson, Pound said, "Santayana—at least he's got to the point where he don't lie—he has no ethics—enlightened self-interest the closest (*Charles Olson and Ezra Pound: An Encounter at St. Elizabeth's* [New York: Grossman, 1975], 110). And Mary de Rachewiltz reported these words of Pound: "A relief to talk philosophy with someone completely honest—a nice mind" (*Discretions* [Boston: Little, Brown, 1971], 128).