

The overwhelming acceleration rate of civilization at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, along with an ever growing complexity of socio-cultural reality, found their reflection in philosophical attempts to describe and criticize this dynamics - from Friedrich Nietzsche, through Henri Bergson, to Charles Taylor. The recurrent circle of questions included those about the relation between human being and culture, whether we are its creators or rather its products, the cultural entanglement of our identities and the possibility of the reduction of ourselves to socio-cultural factors. Some asked about the deeper mechanisms hidden behind history and the political activity of humans. The situation and evolutionary trends of democracies were put under scrutiny and we were warned of the totalitarian threats. Many of these questions remain without a definite answer and are still being asked. My aim is to analyze the critique of Western culture and the implicit philosophy of human being in the thought of one of the most neglected figures of the 20th century philosophy – George Santayana.

What seems particularly appealing in Santayana's way of philosophizing to a contemporary scholar is its interdisciplinary and multidimensional character, its being constantly engaged in negotiations between the languages of myth and science, philosophy and religion, tradition and the actual, as well as its unceasing confrontation with memory and experience. The fact that until now no scholar has undertaken the task of a comprehensive take on his philosophy of culture and politics (implicitly of human being) has been a major motivation to engage in the research outlined in this project.

The project involves extraction of the language used by the philosopher in his cultural analyses and prognoses as well as unveiling the implicit assumptions about the nature of existence and human condition. The next step will be reinterpretation of the emerging conception via the lenses of the concept of *necessity*, which I assume to be key to the model of understanding human being in culture, sought by this project. Since it was not until Santayana's final book *Dominations and Powers* that the concept gained a prominent position, let me call it a retrospective reading.

The meaning that we attach to the ambiguous concept of "necessity" will require attention. It is neither about logical necessity nor the necessity of which speaks scientific determinism. It is about the meaning of fate, inspired by the Greek *ananke* and translated into modern terms of the fact and experience of finitude. As finite beings, we share an irremovable margin of ignorance and helplessness in the face of circumstances. Culture, including religion and politics, according to Santayana, is an expression of human coping with necessity and of the attempts to name and manage it. The research will answer the question about the stakes of this struggle and the prerogatives which are our disposal individually and collectively. It will take a closer look at the unique doctrine of spirit as a form of life and the related model of vital-spiritual freedom, and inquire into the perspectives open thereby to humans entangled in necessity. Finally, Santayana's diagnoses of the dangers and threats implicit in liberal democracies will also be confronted with contemporary situation. I will attempt to assess its relevance in the debate about the horizons of humanity in the time which forces us to account for certain ideas about ourselves in the face of the dynamic, global changes.