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Quotes by Santayana, George

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George Santayana

Advertising is the modern substitute for argument; its function is to make the worse appear the better.

- Santayana, George

There is no cure for birth and death save to enjoy the interval. The dark background which death supplies brings out the tender colors of life in all their purity.

- Santayana, George

Perhaps the only true dignity of man is his capacity to despise himself.

- Santayana, George

Our dignity is not in what we do, but what we understand.

- Santayana, George

The diseases which destroy a man are no less natural than the instincts which preserve him.

- Santayana, George

The great difficulty in education is to get experience out of ideas.

- Santayana, George

The young man who has not wept is a savage, and the old man who will not laugh is a fool.

- Santayana, George

Emotion is primarily about nothing and much of it remains about nothing to the end.

- Santayana, George

The highest form of vanity is love of fame.

- Santayana, George

The family is an early expedient and in many ways irrational. If the race had developed a special sexless class to be nurses, pedagogues, and slaves, like the workers among ants and bees, then the family would have been unnecessary. Such a division of labor would doubtless have involved evils of its own, but it would have obviated some drags and vexations proper to the family.

- Santayana, George

The family is one of nature's masterpieces.

- Santayana, George

Fanaticism consists in redoubling your efforts when you have forgotten your aim.

- Santayana, George

Fashion is something barbarous, for it produces innovation without reason and imitation without benefit.

- Santayana, George

That fear first created the gods is perhaps as true as anything so brief could be on so great a subject.

- Santayana, George

The human mind is not rich enough to drive many horses abreast and wants one general scheme, under which it strives to bring everything.

- Santayana, George

There is nothing to which men, while they have food and drink, cannot reconcile themselves.

- Santayana, George

A man is morally free when, in full possession of his living humanity, he judges the world, and judges other men, with uncompromising sincerity.

- Santayana, George

Friendship is almost always the union of a part of one mind with the part of another;
people are friends in spots.

- Santayana, George

Fun is a good thing but only when it spoils nothing better.

- Santayana, George

To knock a thing down, especially if it is cocked at an arrogant angle, is a deep delight to
the blood.

- Santayana, George

It is veneer, rouge, aestheticism, art museums, new theaters, etc. that make America
impotent. The good things are football, kindness, and jazz bands.

- Santayana, George

America is a young country with an old mentality.

- Santayana, George

Habit is stronger than reason.

- Santayana, George

Knowledge of what is possible is the beginning of happiness.

- Santayana, George

Happiness is the only sanction of life; where happiness fails, existence remains a mad and lamentable experience.

- Santayana, George

History is always written wrong, and so always needs to be rewritten.

- Santayana, George

The Difficult is that which can be done immediately; the Impossible that which takes a little longer.

- Santayana, George

Let a man once overcome his selfish terror at his own infinitude, and his infinitude is, in one sense, overcome.

- Santayana, George

The more rational an institution is the less it suffers by making concessions to others.

- Santayana, George

Intolerance is a form of egotism, and to condemn egotism intolerantly is to share it.

- Santayana, George

Knowledge is recognition of something absent; it is a salutation, not an embrace.

- Santayana, George

I like to walk about among the beautiful things that adorn the world; but private wealth I should decline, or any sort of personal possessions, because they would take away my liberty.

- Santayana, George

Life is not a spectacle or a feast; it is a predicament.

- Santayana, George

The aim of life is some way of living, as flexible and gentle as human nature; so that ambition may stoop to kindness, and philosophy to candor and humor. Neither prosperity nor empire nor heaven can be worth winning at the price of a virulent temper, bloody hands, an anguished spirit, and a vain hatred of the rest of the world.

- Santayana, George

Nothing can be meaner than the anxiety to live on, to live on anyhow and in any shape; a spirit with any honor is not willing to live except in its own way, and a spirit with any wisdom is not over-eager to live at all.

- Santayana, George

The lover knows much more about absolute good and universal beauty than any logician or theologian, unless the latter, too, be lovers in disguise.

- Santayana, George

In endowing us with memory, nature has revealed to us a truth utterly unimaginable to the unreflective creation, the truth of immortality. The most ideal human passion is love, which is also the most absolute and animal and one of the most ephemeral.

- Santayana, George

When men and women agree, it is only in their conclusions; their reasons are always different.

- Santayana, George

Music is essentially useless, as life is.

- Santayana, George

Nonsense is good only because common sense is so limited.

- Santayana, George

If pain could have cured us we should long ago have been saved.

- Santayana, George

Parents lend children their experience and a vicarious memory; children endow their parents with a vicarious immortality.

- Santayana, George

Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.

- Santayana, George

A man's feet must be planted in his country, but his eyes should survey the world.

- Santayana, George

The effort of art is to keep what is interesting in existence, to recreate it in the eternal.

- Santayana, George

Many possessions, if they do not make a man better, are at least expected to make his children happier; and this pathetic hope is behind many exertions.

- Santayana, George

Man is as full of potential as he is of importance.

- Santayana, George

Prayer, among sane people, has never superseded practical efforts to secure the desired end.

- Santayana, George

The passions grafted on wounded pride are the most inveterate; they are green and vigorous in old age.

- Santayana, George

Progress, far from consisting in change, depends on retentiveness. When change is absolute there remains no being to improve and no direction is set for possible improvement: and when experience is not retained, as among savages, infancy is perpetual.

- Santayana, George

Almost every wise saying has an opposite one, no less wise, to balance it.

- Santayana, George

By nature's kindly disposition most questions which it is beyond a man's power to answer do not occur to him at all.

- Santayana, George

The irrational in the human has something about it altogether repulsive and terrible, as we see in the maniac, the miser, the drunkard or the ape.

- Santayana, George

Nothing so much enhances a good as to make sacrifices for it.

- Santayana, George

It is easier to make a saint out of a libertine than out of a prig.

- Santayana, George

Sanity is a madness put to good uses; waking life is a dream controlled.

- Santayana, George

Science is nothing but developed perception, interpreted intent, common sense rounded out and minutely articulated.

- Santayana, George

To be interested in the changing seasons is, in this middling zone, a happier state of mind than to be hopelessly in love with spring.

- Santayana, George

Skepticism is the chastity of the intellect.

- Santayana, George

There is a kind of courtesy in skepticism. It would be an offense against polite conventions to press our doubts too far.

- Santayana, George

The empiricist... thinks he believes only what he sees, but he is much better at believing than at seeing.

- Santayana, George

Society is like the air, necessary to breathe but insufficient to live on.

- Santayana, George

The universe, as far as we can observe it, is a wonderful and immense engine.

- Santayana, George

The spirit's foe in man has not been simplicity, but sophistication.

- Santayana, George

Beauty as we feel it is something indescribable; what it is or what it means can never be said.

- Santayana, George

The body is an instrument, the mind its function, the witness and reward of its operation.

- Santayana, George

Chaos is a name for any order that produces confusion in our minds.

- Santayana, George

Character is the basis of happiness and happiness the sanction of character.

- Santayana, George

Men become superstitious, not because they have too much imagination, but because

they are not aware that they have any.

- Santayana, George

Oaths are the fossils of piety.

- Santayana, George

There is nothing sweeter than to be sympathized with.

- Santayana, George

The theatre, for all its artifices, depicts life in a sense more truly than history, because the medium has a kindred movement to that of real life, though an artificial setting and form.

- Santayana, George

A conception not reducible to the small change of daily experience is like a currency not exchangeable for articles of consumption; it is not a symbol, but a fraud.

- Santayana, George

All thought is naught but a footnote to Plato.

- Santayana, George

The little word is has its tragedies: it marries and identifies different things with the greatest innocence; and yet no two are ever identical, and if therein lies the charm of wedding them and calling them one, therein too lies the danger.

- Santayana, George

It takes patience to appreciate domestic bliss; volatile spirits prefer unhappiness.

- Santayana, George

To delight in war is a merit in the soldier, a dangerous quality in the captain, and a positive crime in the statesman.

- Santayana, George

Wisdom comes by disillusionment.

- Santayana, George

The philosophy of the common man is an old wife that gives him no pleasure, yet he cannot live without her, and resents any aspersions that strangers may cast on her character.

- Santayana, George

To be brief is almost a condition of being inspired.

- Santayana, George

Wealth, religion, military victory have more rhetorical than efficacious worth.

- Santayana, George

It is a great advantage for a system of philosophy to be substantially true.

- Santayana, George

Boston is a moral and intellectual nursery always busy applying first principals to trifles.

- Santayana, George

Oxford, the paradise of dead philosophies.

- Santayana, George

The loftiest edifices need the deepest foundations.

- Santayana, George

Religions are the great fairy tales of conscience.

- Santayana, George

The primary use of conversation is to satisfy the impulse to talk.

- Santayana, George

Progress, far from consisting in change, depends on retentiveness. when experience is not retained, as among savages, infancy is perpetual. Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it. This is the condition of children and barbarians, in whom instinct has learned nothing from experience.

- Santayana, George

Every actual animal is somewhat dull and somewhat mad. He will at times miss his signals and stare vacantly when he might well act, while at other times he will run off into convulsions and raise a dust in his own brain to no purpose. These imperfections are so human that we should hardly recognise ourselves if we could shake them off altogether. Not to retain any dulness would mean to possess untiring attention and universal interests, thus realising the boast about deeming nothing human alien to us; while to be absolutely without folly would involve perfect self-knowledge and self-control. The intelligent man known to history flourishes within a dullard and holds a lunatic in leash. He is encased in a protective shell of ignorance and insensibility which keeps him from being exhausted and confused by this too complicated world; but that integument blinds him at the same time to many of his nearest and highest interests. He is amused by the antics of the brute dreaming within his breast; he gloats on his passionate reveries, an amusement which sometimes costs him very dear. Thus the best human intelligence is still decidedly barbarous; it fights in heavy armour and keeps a fool at court.

- Santayana, George



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