Foreword

I am profoundly grateful to John Donnelly for bringing together this sampling of my writings, some of them from long ago and some very recent, and for the great time and labor he has spent doing it.

When I first learned of his wish to do this I was astonished, for we seem philosophically far apart. Dr. Donnelly is a faithful Roman Catholic, and I am a humanist. We have, nevertheless, a strong intellectual affinity, viewing the same things as problems, though not always arriving at the same answers. Dr. Donnelly is, moreover, the only person I have ever met who understands everything I have written. Some have found my analytical writings of interest, but have been bewildered by my reflections on the mystery and meaning of life. Others, apparently inspired by the latter, have scorned the former. John Donnelly understands it all.

Something should be said here concerning the theism that dwells so comfortably within my humanist philosophy. Many associate humanism with atheism, even considering them inseparable. In fact there is no connection. Spinoza, the father of biblical criticism and an outcast from established religion, considered God's existence a certainty. Socrates, disdainful of the pious pretensions of his contemporaries such as Euthyphro and Anytus, nevertheless had no doubts of the existence of the gods. William James, the leading enemy of absolutisms of every kind, had a strong affinity to the religious temperament. And J. S. Mill, the greatest defender of liberty in the history of philosophy, whose utilitarianism anticipated the situation ethics of most contemporary humanists, was also a theist, though a tepid one.

My own belief in God, without which I would feel inwardly impoverished, springs from my awareness of the profound mystery of nature and of life. I adhere to no church, affirm no creed, and abominate organized religious practice. These things are all merely human, and

represent, in my view, the corruption of a religious outlook, not its expression. The history of organized religion is the history of oppression, as real today as ever. This is because religion serves as a convenient instrument for the intolerant. It is not inherent in a religious outlook, or the sense of mystery to which I have alluded, but about which so little can be said. It was David Hume who said that religion rests not on reason, but on faith, and who had one of the characters in his dialogue on this subject say that there are times when the thought of our creator flows in upon us like a sensation. And that, I think, is the end of the matter, beyond which nothing more can be said. It is very much in order for philosophers to criticize religion and expose fallacies here, as elsewhere, but when I see a philosopher undertake to "prove the existence of God" I am reminded of children playing at being stock brokers and bankers: They have not the remotest idea what they are talking about. Nor will I regard it to the point that some arguments of this kind appeared over my name a quarter of a century ago. I was, philosophically, very young then.

The world and life are far less simple than even the best philosophers portray them they as being, and, equally to the point, they are less simple than religious zealots would have us believe. Possibly I have managed to express some of my sense of it in the pieces that follow, and I deeply hope that some readers, whether they agree with what is said here or not, will at least share my bewilderment and that this will nourish in them the spirit of tolerance and the sense of absurdity we all, as human beings, share.

Richard Taylor

Preface

This volume collects a number of Richard Taylor's writings, conveying his thinking on a range of issues that matter such as the philosophical search for wisdom; the meaning of life; reflections on self and world; liberty and the nature of government; the critique of various religious claims; assessing the ethical views of John Stuart Mill and Immanuel Kant; the nature of ethics; the defense of a virtues theory and the search for personal excellence and happiness; the analysis of love and friendship; reflections on the nature of marriage; and metaphysical views on materialism, fatalism, and a critique of polarized thinking.

Throughout the book, Taylor seeks to illuminate perennial questions about human existence. He offers a vision of philosophy as wonder and insight along with conceptual analysis—in short, philosophy as reflective wisdom. Meaningful human existence is ultimately located in human creativity, where persons aspire (despite Taylor's presumption of fatalism) to create their own lives as works of art, acting as veritable novelists of their own existence. The essays included, while by no means exhaustive of Taylor's philosophical work, are designed to convey a sense of the range of Taylor's views on a number of important ethico-religious and socio-political issues.

Richard Taylor and I have become and remained friends in spite of deep philosophical differences. Unlike Taylor, I am neither a fatalist nor a materialist. Instead, my own metaphysical sympathies are for a reasoned defense of human freedom within the framework of what philosophers refer to as "agency," coupled with an attempt to vindicate a form of dualism so that persons might be viewed as psycho-physical wholes. And, unlike Taylor, I have tried to support a philosophical case for postmortem, personal survival along the lines of Christian eschatology.

On the socio-political front, I am not a conservative like Taylor, but a liberal progressive in the classic democratic tradition. Ironically, though

Taylor is a political conservative, he supports a right of choice with respect to abortion, while I wrestle with the seemingly bizarre alliance of being both a liberal and one opposed to such choice.[1]

Taylor and I do seemingly meet philosophically on the matter of belief in God. However, while I am a classic theist, Taylor is more properly classified as a fideist with decided pantheistic proclivities. And, however one chooses to characterize Taylor's rather idiosyncratic religiosity, his basic belief in God seems to have no logical bearing on his moral or socio-political philosophy.[2]

Whereas Taylor appears to supplement his Aristotelian humanism with Nietzsche, I would supplement a humanistic ethics with Jesus. Clearly, any eudaimonistic ethic seeks to foster human flourishing or excellence, but unlike Taylor, I believe that an *imitatio Christi* offers a genuine path to the amelioration of the human condition. And for me, Jesus is more a role model to strive to emulate than an authoritarian figure (as depicted by Taylor) to obey blindly.

I offer these brief autobiographical comments to indicate that, while I admire Taylor's philosophical reflections, I do not always agree with them. My comments on the essays included here are for the purpose of clarifying Taylor's ideas and not necessarily endorsing them.

I have learned much from my study of Taylor's writings over the years. I suspect I have learned much more from my correspondence and conversations with him. Taylor is an excellent philosophical mentor and an esteemed friend.

I am grateful for the secretarial assistance of E. J. McDowell, the Philosophy Department secretary at the University of San Diego, in the preparation of this book.

And much as Taylor rejoices in the existence of his two young sons, Aristotle and Xeno, so, too, do I rejoice in the blessings afforded me by my two children, Colin and Maria Donnelly. May they all flourish in the years ahead.

NOTES

1. Taylor's thoughts on abortion can be found in "Abortion and Morality" (co-authored with Jeanne Caputo), *Free Inquiry* 2 (1982); and "Abortion and Public Policy," *Free Inquiry* 3 (1983).

2. See his latest book, *Ethics, Faith and Reason* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1985).

Introduction

Richard Taylor was born November 5, 1919, in Charlotte, Michigan, one of twin boys born to Marie Louise Taylor that day. He never knew his father, who died quite unexpectedly a few months before his birth, after having minor nose surgery. Taylor confesses that he has never regretted being raised without a father. His mother, who lived to be ninety-eight, died in 1985.

Richard's mother instructed him in the "small virtues," placing great emphasis on the appearance of probity, as might be expected in the Michigan heartland. Of course, he eventually learned to do things his own way. In a privately published book, *My Mother: A Memoir,* Taylor writes: "Eventually I adopted, as my substitute rule, that I should care nothing whatsoever what others might think of me, but only what I think of myself."

Richard Taylor has been thrice married, and his present wife is over forty years his junior. He is the father of two infant sons, Aristotle and Xeno; two grown sons, Christopher and Randall; and a stepdaughter, Molly, whom he helped raise. Taylor writes:

> My mother took the rules concerning the relations of the sexes to be inscribed in stone. Girls—or at least the right ones—were always referred to as "lovely," and I was exhorted to always treat them as I would want my own sister treated. That was perhaps the strangest precept of all, and yet its message was clear and it stuck. Its effect was that I did indeed come to think of female people as angel-like beings, and have ever since. . . . But along with this veneration for the fair sex went also a passionate desire which has been a bane to me as well as a powerful goad and inspiration.[1]

His mother also instructed him in health-management. Her nurturing love was expressed in preparing hot oatmeal, spinach, castor oil, and

cod liver oil for her son. His bedroom window was open at night, even in winter, so as to avoid tuberculosis. And for being the obedient son who dutifully ate his oatmeal, Richard would find a wrapped, clean penny at the bottom of his bowl. All early lessons in fortitude.

From his mother, Richard learned that idleness is to be shunned, and that "things worthwhile are not easily won." He learned to value thrift, and to avoid the "trivially frivolous." Overall, "life was not to be thought easy, and there would be no unearned blessings."

> We are what we have made of ourselves, for better or worse. But some parents seem to know how to encourage what may be worthwhile in their children, and to discourage the opposite through discipline and restrained but constant love. Other parents fail abysmally at this, having little awareness of their children's sometimes unexpected strengths. My mother was a paradigm of the former, and I am sure that it was from her that I learned whatever I may know of what it is to genuinely love a child, or indeed any person.[2]

Taylor did his undergraduate study at the University of Illinois, where he majored in zoology. He served several years as a wartime Naval Officer assigned to the Pacific Fleet. In that often lonely and difficult period he was inspired by his off-hours reading of Plato and Schopenhauer and fell in love with philosophy. After his naval service, he took an M.A. in philosophy from Oberlin College and then went on to Brown University for his Ph.D. He joined the faculty at Brown upon graduation and, eventually, became William Herbert Perry Faunce Professor of Philosophy there.

Taylor left Brown in 1963 to join the Philosophy Department at Columbia University. After only two years there, he moved to the University of Rochester where he taught for exactly twenty years. He has held visiting appointments at Princeton, Cornell, and Ohio State University, but his love of undergraduate teaching is shown by his visiting appointments at Swarthmore, Wells, Hamilton, Hobart and William Smith, Hartwick, and Union colleges. He currently serves as Leavitt-Spencer Professor of Philosophy at Union College.

Taylor is probably the most anthologized American philosopher still living. His essays appear not only in the usual expected places, such as innumerable philosophy texts, but also in popular magazines, such as *Cosmopolitan* and *Free Inquiry*. Astonishingly, selections from the "Index" of his widely used *Metaphysics* book have even surfaced in such periodicals as *The Christian Century, Mother Jones,* and *The Country Journal.* Consider these entries from *Metaphysics* as but a sample of his indexical whimsy:

Animals, as metaphysicians; *Ants,* as subjects of divine knowledge, and law of excluded middle; *Bicycles,* their relationship to their parts; *Chisholm,* as cartoonist; *Dentists,* how they cannot see toothaches; *Destiny,* how time carries us thereunto; *Diogenes,* his cup and how it rusted; *Doorknobs,* impersonality of; *Evangelists,* how they stupefy with vain promises; *Frogs,* how they feel; *Graveyards,* how we all sink thereinto; *Head,* how God counts the hairs thereon; *Men of Greatness,* how they are unappreciated by their mothers; *Mice,* difficulty of getting rid of; *Nothing,* its ineluctable approach; *Tourism,* as substitute for metaphysics.[3]

Around the late 1960s, Taylor began to rebel against the mainstream academic tradition of analytic philosophy in which he had made his own reputation. His break with the tradition was not over the "relevance issue," so much as Taylor's displeasure with that tradition's perceived lack of philosophic depth. The first expression of that revolt was probably found in his article "Dare to Be Wise," followed shortly after by his book *Good and Evil* that constituted the transition to a somewhat novel approach to "doing philosophy." A knowledgeable observer of the Zeitgeist of contemporary American philosophy could easily unearth in *Good and Evil* a defense of "virtue ethics," which has now become so much in vogue in professional philosophy.[4] Taylor subtitled the book "a new direction," although its roots firmly rest in ancient philosophy. Mysteriously, Taylor has never been acknowledged, much less applauded, as the harbinger of the "new" turn in moral philosophy.

In *Good and Evil,* Taylor avoided the fastidious puzzles that preoccupied moral philosophy some twenty years ago, such as John Searle's promising derivation, Max Black's analysis of *wants,* or the descriptivist/prescriptivist controversies surrounding the is-ought question. For Taylor, these fact/value issues were all "poor substitutes for what a wise person ought to think about things of human significance." Instead, Taylor sought "to get the problems of good and evil out of the lint-picking into which they have deteriorated and into the world in which we all live." It was an uncommon suggestion back then to claim that philosophy has no small contribution to make to problems involving personal excellence and the meaning of life.

Unlike so-called philosophical "pluralists" who have been rebelling for years in the American Philosophical Association, and in the last decade making significant political gains (substituting a conventionalism of their own making), Taylor has remained an intellectual maverick. Neither pluralist nor analyst, the iconoclastic Taylor subscribes to his own ideology.

Nietzsche spoke of the tasks confronting philosophical laborers and philosophers proper and questioned whether any philosopher could face up to the latter challenge and "apply the knife vivisectionally" to the

basic issues affecting the human condition. The early Taylor was a high-caliber philosophical laborer, utilizing the rigorous machinery of logical analysis. But he then turned his considerable dialectical acumen to the search for philosophical wisdom. In short, Taylor became a philosopher proper, even if his sagacious irreverence at times nullified his being a proper philosopher.

Philosophical probity notwithstanding, I dare say that any philosopher would be justifiably proud of Taylor's mainstream philosophical accomplishments. Indeed, in the period 1954–1963, six of Taylor's articles appeared in *The Philosophical Review,* a publication that is often viewed as the epitome of philosophical achievement. And in approximately the same time frame, he had nine articles published in the British journal *Analysis.* Taylor has also had four articles published in both the *American Philosophical Quarterly* and the *Review of Metaphysics,* three in both *The Journal of Philosophy* and *Philosophical Quarterly,* and two in both *Philosophy of Science* and *The Monist.* He has also published in *Mind, Inquiry,* the *Australasian Journal of Philosophy,* and *International Philosophical Quarterly.*

On the occasion of his sixtieth birthday, a Festschrift, edited by Peter Van Inwagen, was presented to Taylor. That book, *Time and Cause: Essays Presented to Richard Taylor,*[5] includes among its sixteen well-known contributors such pillars of the mainstream elite as J. J. C. Smart, Roderick Chisholm, D. M. Armstrong, Hector-Neri Castaneda, Sydney Shoemaker, Myles Brand, Keith Lehrer, and Joel Feinberg.

Taylor's influence, both directly and indirectly, on professional philosophy is considerable. Many of his former graduate students, whose doctoral dissertations he directed, have achieved prominent standing in academe. Some names that immediately come to mind are Keith Lehrer, Myles Brand, Peter Van Inwagen, Eric Mack, and Steven M. Cahn. Of course, incalculable is the extent of the influence his books, articles, and reprinted essays have had on students, especially undergraduates, over the past thirty-five years.

Taylor's books include the bestseller *Metaphysics,* now in its third edition (1983), which has been translated into many languages; *Action and Purpose* (1966); *Good and Evil: A New Direction* (1970); *Freedom, Anarchy, and the Law* (1973); *With Heart and Mind* (1973); *Having Love Affairs* (1982); and *Ethics, Faith and Reason* (1985).

He has edited and written introductory essays to a number of classic historical works in philosophy, for example, *The Empiricists* (1961), *Mill's Theism* (1957), *The Will to Live: Selected Essays of Arthur Schopenhauer* (1961), *The Basis of Morality* by Schopenhauer (1965), and *The Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason* by Schopenhauer (1974). His basic inspiration remains Greek philosophy, as is most evident in his latest book, *Ethics, Faith and Reason.*

Taylor is also a lifelong beekeeper, and author of *The Joys of Bee-*

keeping, The New Comb Honey Book, The How-To-Do-It Book of Beekeeping, and *Beekeeping for Gardeners;* he also has a regular column "Bee Talks" in *Gleanings in Bee Culture.* Indeed, his mother's dying words to him were "How are the bees?"

> Without bees my own existence would be a shadowy thing, like a world without flowers or without stars or without the songs of birds. The world of men is always uncertain, seldom inspiring, often a source of discouragement and dismay. But the keeper of bees, like anyone who has welded his life to the cycles and patterns of nature, can always turn to his tiny creatures and his craft.[6]

Although Taylor is a laureate of the Academy of Humanism and widely known in secular humanist circles, he is also a fideist. He has in his *Metaphysics* offered original and provocative defenses of both the cosmological and teleological arguments for God's existence. Nonetheless, Taylor insists that his belief in God has nothing to do with the enterprise of philosophical theology. He admits to having "a profound and unshakable belief in God," but he adheres to no particular religion or specific denomination. He is quite adamant about his religious convictions having no basis in philosophical argumentation. There is perhaps no philosophical argument about which doubt is impossible, and Taylor's belief in God rests, by his own testimony, on the impossibility of doubt. Ironically, like Hume, the idea of God flows in upon him like a sensation. Moreover, he is decidedly no supporter of organized religion and has some stinging, Nietzsche-like critiques of Christ and The Sermon on the Mount in *Ethics, Faith and Reason.*

His writing style is highly readable, largely jargon-free, and unfettered by footnoting. At times, he seems quite inconsistent (or, more charitably, engaged in philosophic *tours de force*), as witness his famous defense of fatalism in *The Philosophical Review,* coupled with his "I Can" article alongside the former that defends a version of agency-theory or metaphysical libertarianism.

Looking back at his days at Brown University, and offering "A Tribute" to his former mentor and colleague Roderick Chisholm, Taylor wrote:

> . . . I do not think I can now say that I ever actually *learned* one single philosophical truth in all those years of the most painstaking and laborious inquiry, assisted by what is surely one of the finest philosophical minds in the world. I came to know everything there is to know about the problem of free will, but did not learn, and never expect to learn, whether anyone has a free will. I came to know every argument that bears on this question, have never heard a new one since, and never expect to, but I never learned the answer to it. I am certain no one else has either, though many think they have. I came to know everything there is to know about the so-called

> mind-body problem, and about personal identity, but I never learned which of the many philosophical opinions on those matters is correct. Instead, I learned to express with the utmost precision certain commonplace presuppositions and, of course, I learned to detect what was arbitrary, inconsistent and false in the opinions of most philosophers, particularly those contemporary thinkers who deliver their opinions with the most unabashed confidence. And yet I know that it was these philosophical exercises that made me a philosopher, if indeed I can claim that name.[7]

Taylor has never been afraid to take up provocative, controversial topics, as in his oft-misunderstood and maligned book *Having Love Affairs*. He can also be quite adept at indirect communication, as in his sardonic essay "De Anima," where he seeks sarcastically to reject the notion of an incorporeal soul.

Whether he is being the hard-core analyst dissecting the mind-body problem or freedom versus determinism, or verging on the mystical (see the selections from *With Heart and Mind*), Taylor remains (in the words of Peter Van Inwagen) a "master dialectician." Those of us who are familiar with Taylor's philosophical styles, whether in his writings or his conversations, know how indescribably *sui generis* he is as a person.

Taylor is one of the definienda in the seventh edition of the satirical book *The Philosophical Lexicon,* edited by Daniel Dennett and Karel Lambert. There, "taylor" is a verb as in the idiom "to taylor the argument." And "to taylor" is defined as "to defend an absurd position or conclusion by inventing equally absurd premises or inferences, as in 'it's easy to get a proof of fatalism if you know how to taylor the argument.'" And to add acidity to satire, the *Lexicon* goes on to speak of the phrase "Taylor's dummy" as meaning "an absurd principle on which to hang bits of metaphysical nonsense." Of course, inclusion in the *Lexicon* is more or less coveted as a sign of recognition in one's profession; and the humor, while acerbic, is respectful. The distinguished entrants provide fodder for the in-house jokes of their colleagues.

This book will offer some specimens of *tayloring.* As editor, I may have tailored the selections included herein, but the volume remains Taylor-made throughout.

NOTES

1. *My Mother: A Memoir.*
2. Ibid.
3. *Metaphysics,* 3rd edition (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1983).
4. *Good and Evil.* (New York: Macmillan, 1970; Buffalo, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 1984).
5. Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1980.