



*Photograph by Drummond Young, Edinburgh*

ALFRED EDWARD TAYLOR

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1869-1945

ALFRED EDWARD TAYLOR was born at Oundle on 22 December 1869, the elder son of the Rev. A. Taylor, a Wesleyan minister who had formerly been a missionary on the Gold Coast. Taylor's mother died at an early age, and the family in which he was brought up was that of a father, two sons, and a daughter. Little is on record about his childhood and boyhood, but two things that are prophetic of his later width of knowledge and fluency in expression may be mentioned. One is that he was an insatiable reader; he could not remember the time when he could not read, and he would hide under a table with a book to avoid being sent out to play. The other is that he was an admirable composer of long and intricate stories which he would relate to his brother and sister to their delight. As became the son of a Wesleyan minister, he was sent to Kingswood School, Bath, to which he later showed his affection by dedicating his *Socrates* to its masters and boys. From there he went as a Scholar to New College, Oxford, where he took first classes in Classical Moderations and in Greats, and vastly impressed both his teachers and his fellow-undergraduates by the range of his knowledge and of his interests. He was elected a Fellow of Merton in 1891, held his Fellowship for the full seven years of a Prize Fellowship, and was re-elected in 1901. He outlived all his Merton contemporaries, and little remains on record from that time, except that he became an intimate friend of F. H. Bradley and was one of the very few people who could induce Bradley to talk about philosophy. In 1896 Professor Alexander, always alert to discover the coming men in philosophy, secured him as Lecturer in Greek and Philosophy at Owen's College, Manchester, where he remained until 1903. In 1899 he won the Green Moral Philosophy Prize at Oxford. In 1900 he married Lydia Jutsum Passmore, daughter of Edmund Passmore, of Ruggs, Somerset, herself an authoress, and they had one son, now a Civil Servant in India. From 1903 to 1908 Taylor was Professor of Philosophy at McGill University, Montreal.

In 1908 he succeeded Bosanquet as Professor of Moral Philosophy at St. Andrews, and there he remained till 1924, having as his colleague in the chair of Logic and Metaphysics

throughout that time Stout, who did much to modify Taylor's earlier devotion to Bradley's philosophy. Professor Laird, who was his assistant for part of that time, and after Taylor's death undertook to write the Academy memoir of him, did not live to fulfil that task, but I am allowed to quote a characteristically lively sketch of Taylor which he wrote during his own last illness.

When I was his assistant, Taylor had abandoned his excursions into general philosophy, where his *Elements of Metaphysics*—a sort of Bradley-for-the-Million combined with much informative vivacity about contemporary scientific philosophy—had earned its unusual success. He had turned to the main interest of his irrepressible literary career, the re-discovery (as he thought) of the historical Plato and of the historical Socrates, of the Platonic tradition, and of the unconscious Platonism of the modern world. Here he out-Burneted Burnet, but without very much active discussion with Burnet.

*More suo*, he imposed a certain strain upon his interlocutors, who were expected to make intelligent remarks about Greek dowries, or any other sweeping from the Platonic epistles. But even if one couldn't help, one could admire and be excited. I had never met, or at any rate had never known, a philosopher to whom the Greek or any other past philosophy had been the burning heart of present existence, fresher than the morning's news. A traditionalism of that kind, especially when combined with such a range and versatility of application, would stir the intellectual pulses of the humblest.

Besides, Taylor was much more than a Grecian with a darting eye for all the Atticisms of the modern world. He refreshed himself continually from many other wells in the philosophical and cultural tradition, and, at the time I am recording, had become engrossed in another of his major interests, St. Thomas Aquinas. There we did not try, or pretend to try, to follow him; but he seemed to assume, quite undaunted, that we were respectable mediaevalists as well as passable Grecians. He always spoke as if his own enthusiasms extended over all the literate earth. We, for our parts, thought that Taylor's excitement about St. Thomas was just an aspect of his attitude towards Christian theology and the Christian religion. . . . He had become a High-Church Episcopalian, a member of the Church Catholic though never a Roman Catholic. In our eyes that was an eccentricity. I dare say that our eyes were holden. We were not greatly moved by Taylor's new scholasticism.

I shall never forget those days of my assistantship. On any given afternoon, and there were very few afternoons when Taylor did not walk and talk with his assistant as a matter of kindly course, the odds were that one discussed Greek medicine, Dante's genius, the character of Bishop Bonner, and the delight that was Max Beerbohm. Mrs.

Taylor would join us at tea-time and conduct a cross-conversation about Dickens and Anthony Trollope. Some quick thinking was necessary to keep both streams of conversation going, and I fear I did not always mix my 'Yes's and 'No's quite accurately. In that case there was a lull, sometimes a surprised lull, but not for long. For self-protection I read rather widely at that time.

In 1924 Taylor was called to the chair of Moral Philosophy at Edinburgh, where Professor Kemp Smith was his colleague until Taylor's retirement in 1941. It was towards the end of this time, in 1938, that Taylor suffered the greatest sorrow of his life, by the death of Mrs. Taylor. His son had already been many years in India; after his wife's death he was a lonely man, and his vitality never recovered from the blow. He died in his sleep, in his house in Edinburgh, on 31 October 1945. He had received many honours, but no more than his due; he was a Doctor of Literature of St. Andrews and of Manchester, an LL.D. of Aberdeen and of St. Andrews, an Honorary Fellow of New College, a Foreign Member of the Accademia dei Lincei, a Corresponding Member of the Prussian Academy of Sciences, and had been Gifford Lecturer at St. Andrews.

It might be supposed that a man whose literary output was so great must have found the routine of lecturing rather tedious. Nothing could be farther from the truth. He never neglected his lectures for his books, and he put a great deal of his books into his lectures. Towards the end of his life he developed some little eccentricities; the following account of these by one of his junior colleagues will help to complete the picture of him as he was.

When I first went to Edinburgh I used to attend his Honours Class lectures on the *Republic*. He extracted his notes from the attaché case he always carried, quite often spilling the contents on the floor as he did so. Then he read them word for word, sitting in his heavy coat. He was very apologetic to me about the reading of his lectures, and said he always used to lecture with no notes at all, but his memory was no longer good enough. These lectures were at midday, and he had little sense of time; we stopped him if we could at 1.15, but I have more than once done so, firmly, well after 1.30. He was very absent-minded, and I think must have been unselfconscious. At any rate, one day as I walked with him along the street we met one of his pupils who was 6 feet 7 inches or so in height. Taylor gazed skyward and greeted him, then said to me 'It's a dreadful misfortune for a man to be as tall as that'—apparently quite unconscious of the exceptional contrast with himself. There was one famous occasion when he entered his ordinary class with the tassel of his square (which he was wearing)

burning merrily, having caught fire from his pipe. He was quite unconscious of it, and the story goes that there was a general rush to 'put the Professor out'. With this class too he was loath to stop, and I have often been told how he regularly lectured on as he made his way to the door, and only stopped as he went through it.

He was very proud of his prose style. I forget the context of his remark, but I fancy it relates somehow to Shorey (whom he couldn't abide)—'Why, I am famous for my style'.

He was full of wisdom and humanity, and yet oddly cross-tempered. He was fond of children, though he can have known few. He was a great novel-reader, but I don't know his tastes here. One of his two or three favourite poets was Aeschylus.

An instance of his pungency, and characteristic of his colloquial vocabulary, is his remark on a new appointment in Edinburgh University—'another damned plumber'. There are various stories of his impatience in church. The only one I remember is that he was rebuked from the pulpit with the words: 'Will Professor Taylor please stop rustling his raincoat?'

But with some amusement at such oddities there was joined, in the minds of his students, a vast respect for Taylor both as a man and as a philosopher. They recognized, as they were bound to do, that they were being taught by one of the greatest scholars in the country, and many caught the infection of his enthusiasm for philosophy and for literature.

The history of Taylor's mental development may best be given in his own words, written in his contribution to *Contemporary British Philosophy* (1925):

I could not say precisely when and how my interest in philosophical questions was first aroused. I remember as a very small child being worried by the solipsistic doubt whether the whole choir and furniture of heaven and earth (including my own parents!) might not be the fancies of a dream, and I myself the only real existent. Later on, as a schoolboy, I suffered acute distress for a time from a similar doubt whether all recognized distinctions between good and bad might not be unfounded and subjective prejudices. When I went up to the University of Oxford in 1887 I had already some acquaintance with the philosophy of Berkeley, was fascinated by what I had read of Plato (especially the *Phaedo*), and curious about Kant, of whom I had learned something vaguely in my schooldays from sundry essays of De Quincey. Like most thoughtful lads of my time I had been distressed by what I had learned of the conflict between the theology I had been taught and the supposed results of evolutionary science and Biblical criticism. What I looked for in philosophy was some sane defence of convictions which I felt were essential for the conduct of life against what seemed to be the disintegrating influences of scholarship and biological science.

When I began to read philosophy seriously in 1889, the influence of T. H. Green's work was still predominant in Oxford. My attention was directed by my tutors primarily to Green and Bradley and to Kant as interpreted by Green and Caird; on my own account I also made further study of Plato and Aristotle and, to a lesser degree, of Kant and, as best I could, of Hegel. For the time I was carried off my feet by Bradley (particularly by the *Ethical Studies*), though I found an insoluble puzzle from the first in what seemed to be T. H. Green's conception of a world composed of relations between terms of which we could say nothing, except that they were the terms of the relation. On the whole, however, I seemed to have found what I was in search of, a view of things which would protect the realities of religion and ethics against all danger from 'naturalistic' attacks. I was then not alive to what I now think the great danger of the whole Hegelian way of regarding things, that it dissevers the 'eternal verities' from all contact with historical 'actuality'. Metaphysics seemed, for the time, to absorb all interest in the given and historical. When I became a Fellow of Merton in 1891 I had the opportunity for a few years of steady and uninterrupted study, chiefly given to the attempt to understand Hegel and Aristotle as well as my old 'master' Plato. Above all I had the advantage of daily intercourse with Bradley, whose influence, exercised in many ways, must count for the most potent to which my own thinking has been subjected and the most beneficial. Among the many debts I owe to Bradley, not the least were the recommendation he early gave me to study Herbart as a wholesome corrective of undue absorption in Hegelian ways of thinking, and his repeated exhortations to take empirical psychology in earnest. Those studies in the end led to a natural reaction against what now seemed to me the unhistorical character of the philosophy on which I had been feeding myself. The reaction towards the empirical and given continued, along with a new interest in the principles of physical science, provoked by the writings of E. Mach and others, during the years in which I was associated at Manchester with Professor Alexander (1896-1903), a period also fruitful for me in leading to a serious study of the great seventeenth-century thinkers, Galileo, Descartes, Leibniz. The 'pan-mathematism' of Leibniz, like that of Plato, fascinated me deeply; even now that I am convinced that pan-mathematism, like absolute Idealism, is incompatible with a full sense of the 'historical', I am keenly conscious of the attraction and cannot avoid thinking it the right and proper goal of the sciences of physical nature. I suppose that at this time of my life I was not far from developing into a kind of 'Positivist', though it was at the end of the years to which I have referred that I came for the first time strongly under the influence of the work of Professor James Ward, to whom I owe a great debt of thankfulness for teaching me to appreciate more fully the meaning of 'history', and from whom, in particular, I learned the impossibility of eliminating contingency from

Nature. By the end of these seven years I began to discover that a change was coming over my way of looking at things. I read Plato again, in the light of Leibniz, and found the tendency to empiricism and positivism passing away without any loss of the interest I had acquired in the empirical and the ideas and methods of the sciences.

For some years, while I was at McGill University, Montreal (1903-1908), this process was gradually working itself out. I think I may date almost from my return to Great Britain in 1908 my arrival at certain convictions which had slowly been shaping themselves and which still remain with me very definitely. One is the conviction that the business of metaphysical philosophy is, in a way, a modest one. It has to be content to recognize that in the sciences, in history, in morality and religion it is dealing with a reality which is in the end simply 'given' and not to be explained away. Its concern is with the various intellectual interpretations of the 'given', and its supreme task is not, as I once used to suppose, the 'unification of the sciences', but the necessarily imperfect and tentative reconciliation of the exigences of scientific thinking with the imperative moral and religious demands of life. It has not to invent an improved substitute for historically real religion and morality, but to fathom as much as it can of their significance. There is no special infallibility about metaphysics and its methods are necessarily 'dialectical' in the Aristotelian sense. It seems to follow that there can be no final 'metaphysics', and that the temptation of all others which a student of the subject should avoid as he grows older is the temptation to have a 'system' which leaves no unexplained mystery at the root of things. And it becomes a question whether, after all, the main service of metaphysical study to the mind is not to 'liberate it from prejudices' and thus to prepare it to receive illumination from sources outside metaphysics. Whether this mental attitude is the right one or not, I only mention as influential in leading me to adopt it, besides the Neo-Platonists and the great medieval philosophers to whom I have been led so late by study of the Neo-Platonists, in particular the writings of Baron F. von Hügel. I should be ungrateful to the memory of a profound thinker if I did not add that the influence of Reid's writings has come late into my life, but is not the less felt for that. And I am glad to record the benefit which, like others who have been in touch with him, I owe, in more ways than I can enumerate, to stimulation received from contact with the unwearied thought of Professor Alexander. I would also specially acknowledge my indebtedness to the work of Bernardino Varisco. But indeed I hope I may (with all becoming modesty) copy one utterance of Leibniz. There is perhaps none of my associates and contemporaries from whom I have not learned much, and often most from those whose conclusions I am least able to accept.

The extent and the variety of Taylor's writings are so great that it would be unsuitable, even if the task were within my

power, to attempt any assessment of them all. I must content myself with giving an account and an estimate of some of the most significant of his writings. The earliest (so far as I can discover) and also the latest of his writings were concerned with Spinoza, and to Spinoza he also turned in two articles published in 1937. But his first considerable published work was devoted to what became one of the two prevailing interests of Taylor's life (the other being the philosophy of the Christian religion). This work was the series of essays on Plato's *Parmenides*, published when he was 26. He returned to this topic many years later in an article on Parmenides, Zeno, and Socrates, and in his great book, *Plato, the Man and his Work*; and later still he published a fine translation of this, one of the most difficult of all Plato's works. His opinion on the intention of this puzzling dialogue did not remain always the same. To take, for instance, the second part of the dialogue—the 'hypotheses'—in the early articles he adopted what Mr. Hardie (in *A Study in Plato*) has called the idealist view, that the first hypothesis is 'the refutation of an abstract and merely eristic view of "The One"'. In *Plato, the Man and his Work*, under the influence of Burnet, he adopted the eristic view, that the hypotheses are merely logical exercises aimed at showing how with the aid of fallacies of which the Eleatics were themselves guilty the Eleatic (i.e. the absolutely monistic) hypothesis can be refuted. It cannot be said that the riddle of the *Parmenides* has yet been solved, but it may be suggested that the hypothetical arguments are carried through not from the desire to commend any one metaphysical view, but simply as affording useful training (*γυμνασία*; *Parm.* 135 d 7, cf. c 5, d 4, 136 a 2) to any aspirant to philosophy.

Taylor's first book was *The Problem of Conduct*, published in 1901, a long book which was in substance identical with the essay 'On the reciprocal relations between Ethics and Metaphysics' which had won the Green Prize at Oxford in 1899. In the preface he claims little originality for his views, and says that he owes almost everything that is of value in the book to Bradley's *Ethical Studies* and *Appearance and Reality*. The influence of Bradley is indeed manifest throughout, but the book displays the wide knowledge and the vigour and ingenuity in presentation which were to characterize everything that Taylor wrote. What emerges most clearly from his discussion is that he wishes to dissociate ethics from metaphysics understood as the generalized study of the nature of all that is (to use Aristotle's phrase) or of all experience (to which, following Bradley, Taylor reduces



all that is), and to make it rest on a study of the moral consciousness in particular. In this reaction from Green's metaphysical ethics Taylor's book, while it does not seem to have influenced later ethical thinking very deeply, is prophetic of the trend which, in this country at least, ethics has followed in the last forty years. In one respect, too, it is prophetic of much of Taylor's later work—in his absorption, towards the end of the book, in the problem of the relation between ethics and religion—though his conception of religion as simply a complete devotion to any object, good or bad ('There may be also . . . a peace of the devil which passeth all understanding') is very different from that which he later reached.

Taylor's first book was a controversial one. His second, *Elements of Metaphysics* (1903) is rather a manual or text-book. Like *The Problem of Conduct*, it is Bradleian in its general outlook, but it shows also the influence of other writers of that date, notably Avenarius, Royce, and Ward. For several years, indeed, it was the most useful handbook that a teacher of philosophy could put into the hands of pupils as an up-to-date account of the state of philosophical thought, and many teachers must have blessed Taylor for that. (I say 'philosophical' rather than 'metaphysical', because much of the book is occupied with topics that are not usually classed as metaphysical—cosmology and 'rational psychology'.) The doctrine of degrees of reality, the relation of the Absolute to its particular manifestations, the nature of causation, the relation of soul to body, the nature of infinity—these are some of the leading topics which are discussed at length in these pages. The scope of the book, dealing as it does with almost all the main questions of philosophy, may perhaps be deemed too ambitious, and the solution of problems is sometimes too facile; but to have treated them at all in a manner so ingenious and interesting was a very remarkable performance.

Between *Elements of Metaphysics* and *The Faith of a Moralist* (1930) Taylor wrote no major book on any subject other than Plato, though he threw off many articles and minor books with the ease and versatility which always characterized him. It was in the book called simply *Plato* (1908) that he first essayed a comprehensive survey of Plato's philosophy, and an admirable survey it is, from the point of view which then characterized all Platonic scholars. But in the same year he came from Montreal to St. Andrews, and renewed the friendship with John Burnet which they had already enjoyed as fellow-Merton-

ians; and his views on Plato underwent a radical change. Burnet seems to have been the moving spirit. The two books in which the new gospel was first preached—Burnet's edition of the *Phaedo* and Taylor's *Varia Socratica*—appeared in the same year, 1911. But in his memoir of Burnet, Taylor treats the new interpretation of the dialogues as Burnet's discovery, and there is no doubt that he is right in this. His own part was to apply the new view to dialogues on which Burnet had not touched and to support it by arguments that Burnet had not thought of. The one department of Plato's thought in which Burnet was not at home and Taylor was very much so was the theory of Idea-Numbers which in Plato's maturity and age followed upon his theory of Ideas; this subject is treated of with great care and insight in Taylor's article on 'Forms and Numbers' (1926).

The new view was the view that not only in the early 'Socratic' dialogues but in all the dialogues Plato puts into the mouth of Socrates only views which the historic Socrates actually held. It is not clear that Burnet ever went so far as this, but Taylor did, and capped it by holding in his edition of the *Timaeus* that similarly Plato puts into Timaeus' mouth only views which Timaeus held or at least could have held.

This interpretation runs contrary to the indications given by Aristotle in the *Metaphysics* and elsewhere, e.g. to his remark that what we can attribute to Socrates is 'inductive arguments and general definition', which implies that what we know as the Theory of Ideas was Plato's metaphysical superstructure on Socrates' logical foundation. In some of his writing on the subject Taylor treated Aristotle's evidence rather cavalierly. For this, however, he makes partial amends in his little book on Aristotle and in his articles on 'Forms' and 'Numbers'; for, though a partisan, he was essentially fair-minded.

Taylor states the new view in the preface to *Varia Socratica*, in the following words:

It is that the portrait drawn in the Platonic dialogues of the personal and philosophical individuality of Socrates is in all its main points strictly historical, and capable of being shown to be so. In other words, the demonstrably Orphic and Pythagorean peculiarities of Plato's hero, his conception of φιλοσοφία as an ascetic discipline in the proper meaning of the word, leading through sainthood to the attainment of everlasting life, the stress laid on the μαθήματα as a vehicle of spiritual purification, and the doctrine of the eternal things, the ἀσώματα καὶ νοητὰ εἶδη, as the true objects of knowledge, are no inventions of the

idealising imagination of Plato, but belong in very truth, as their common faith, to the Pythagorean or semi-Pythagorean group whose central figure twice over receives something like formal canonisation from the head of the Academy.

Our chief original authorities for the life and personality of Socrates are Plato, Xenophon, Aristophanes, and Aristotle, and it is a task of the greatest delicacy to frame a picture of Socrates which reconciles, so far as they can be reconciled, the testimony of these writers. My own impression is that much of what Taylor claims in the sentences quoted above is true, but that the degree of Socrates' connexion with a semi-Orphic, semi-Pythagorean group is overstated, and that the final claim, that the actual theory of ideas was the work of Socrates and not of Plato, is irreconcilable with Aristotle's plain statements; and further, that Aristotle, who was a member, and for many years a leading member, of the Platonic school, during Plato's lifetime, cannot have failed to know Plato's own mind on the subject. On the whole, scholars have not accepted this final claim of Taylor's; but they owe a great debt to him for having opened up the question and driven them to re-read their Plato. And even if this final claim does not hold good, the rest of Taylor's statement probably presents a picture of Socrates much truer than the jejune one which Xenophon presents and many scholars had accepted. The centre of interest in *Varia Socratica* is not Plato, but Socrates, and perhaps the most interesting chapter is that on the *φροντιστήριον*, in which he tries, with (as I believe) much success, to recover the truth that lies behind the caricature in Aristophanes' *Clouds*. The most solid contribution to learning which the book contains is the exhaustive study of the earlier history of the words *εἶδος* and *ἰδέα*, with special reference to the Hippocratic writings.

The theme with which *Varia Socratica* closes, that of the linkage between the Socratic-Platonic philosophy and Christian theology, was admirably treated by Taylor in *Platonism and its Influence* (1925). No one else could have written so excellent an introduction to the later history of Platonism. In successive chapters he treats of the Platonic Tradition, the Principles of Science, the Rule of Life, and Plato the Theologian, and shows how time after time philosophy and theology have had new life breathed into them by the revival of some element of Platonism; the influence of Platonism on pure letters—a subject which Taylor (whom Alexander described as the best-read man in these islands) could have dealt with admirably, is omitted

for reasons of space. Taylor's own view of the relation of Plato to Socrates is not obtruded, and indeed much is treated as Platonism which on that view is more properly Socratism. But it is, at any rate, what the world has agreed to call Platonism, and what has reached the world only through Plato's golden pages. The only real blemish on the book is a tendency to treat the teaching of Aristotle as a watered down or vulgarized Platonism; a truer view would, in my opinion, recognize the transcendent merit and the great originality of both thinkers.

Other contributions of Taylor's at this period to the study of Platonism are the articles on the Analysis of Ἐπιστήμη in the Seventh Epistle (1914) and on the Philosophy of Proclus (1918). There were also two other writings of Taylor's at this period which illustrate well the variety of his knowledge. One was his lecture on Plato's Biography of Socrates (1918), a veritable *tour de force* of learning and ingenuity in which the characters of the dialogues, the degrees of their connexion with Socrates, and their genealogical and social relations with each other, are depicted with all the skill that Trollope shows in dealing with the characters of his novels. The other was his article on 'Forms and Numbers' (1926), in which he brought his knowledge of modern mathematical logic to the elucidation of the perplexing problem of Plato's transformation of the Theory of Ideas into a Theory of Numbers.

I come now to what is the most important, though not the most exciting, of Taylor's writings on Plato—*Plato, the Man and his Work* (1926). It has two features for which every student must be unfeignedly thankful to Taylor. One is his careful study of the date of writing of the several dialogues. In this he makes full and careful use of all the data—the stylistic data which have proved the most convincing of all, the allusions to historical events, the allusions in one dialogue to another; and with one great exception Taylor's conclusions are likely to be generally accepted. The exception is the large gap which he supposes, on rather insufficient grounds, to exist between the date of the *Republic*, which he places about 387 and assigns to the Socratic group of dialogues, and the *Theaetetus*, which he places about 368 and considers to be the first dialogue in which Plato begins to write as an original philosopher and not a biographer. This is not the place for argument against this view; it is perhaps enough to suggest that there are strong reasons that can be brought against it. The other welcome line of discussion, which Taylor has followed more thoroughly,

I think, than any other Platonic scholar, is the discussion of the dramatic date of each dialogue, accompanied with a summary of what is known or may fairly be conjectured about the *dramatis personae*. To this discussion of the date of writing and the dramatic date, Taylor adds a careful summary of the main contents of each dialogue. These summaries are of the greatest service to any one who desires guidance through any particular dialogue; but one may express the wish that, with such excellent data as we have for the relative dates of writing of the dialogues—more cogent data than any we have for the dating of most of Aristotle's works, for instance—Taylor did not devote some additional chapters to tracing the gradual development of the theory of Ideas from dialogue to dialogue. Such chapters would have made a great book into a still greater.

There remains one more major contribution of Taylor's to Platonic scholarship—his *Commentary on Plato's Timaeus* (1928). It would be difficult to overpraise the thoroughness, the learning, and the ingenuity displayed in this work. No difficulty in this very difficult dialogue is overlooked, and on many of the problems Taylor has said the last word. Yet the main thesis of the book has not been very well received. It is, that the *Timaeus* is not Plato's expression of his own views on cosmology, but a reconstruction of views current in the Pythagorean school in the fifth century, at least sixty years before the time of writing of the dialogue. This is, of course, in keeping with Taylor's thesis that Plato's object in most of his dialogues was to expound not his own views but those of Socrates. But the theory is much less probable when *Timaeus* takes the place of Socrates. Plato might have thought it worth his while to devote dialogue after dialogue to expounding the views of his own revered master; but it is difficult to see any reason that could have induced him to spend so much effort in stating the views of a Pythagorean who lived many years before his own time. It puts some strain on our belief to suppose that Plato was content, till his sixtieth year or thereabouts, to be the biographer and expositor of Socrates and not exercise in writing his own transcendent gifts as an original thinker; but his reverence for Socrates might be thought to make that possible. There is no similar reason to explain why he should have thought it worth his while to spend such effort in an imaginative reconstruction of Pythagorean views which had been left far behind by the science of his own time. To this consideration we must add the fact that the later Greek writers, from Aristotle onwards, treat

the views expressed in the *Timaeus* as the views of none other than Plato himself.

The tale of Taylor's contributions to Platonic study is completed by his translations of the *Timaeus* and *Critias* (1929), of the *Laws* (1934), and of the *Parmenides* (1934). In particular, the translation of the *Laws*, prefaced as it is by a long introduction, is valuable because of the small amount of attention which this book has received from most Platonic scholars.

A glance at the bibliography which follows this memoir will show the variety of topics on which Taylor wrote, always interestingly and always with the whole history of European philosophy as a background to the particular subject he happens to be writing about. I have not included his reviews in the bibliography; but many readers of *Mind* and of the *Classical Review* must have shared my admiration of him as a reviewer. I have, over and over again, turned to his reviews first among all the contents of the numbers in which they appeared, and rarely have I been disappointed.

Little space remains for dealing with the series of writings on the philosophy of religion which, apart from his work on Plato, formed Taylor's most massive contribution to philosophical thought. He was brought up in a devout Wesleyan Methodist family. His deep interest in religion was already apparent in *The Problem of Conduct*. To quote words used elsewhere<sup>1</sup> by Professor Webb:

Taylor would probably at the time have maintained that there was no inconsistency, as regards the root of the matter, between Christian piety and a metaphysical theory which, like Bradley's, could allow that 'there is nothing more real than what comes in religion', however it might subject to damaging criticism some of the symbolic language in which that piety was wont to express itself. So, when, after moving away from Bradley's philosophy of religion to one more consonant with historical Christianity, he subsequently exchanged his original ecclesiastical allegiance for another, and became a devout and loyal member of the Scottish Episcopal Church, he was not conscious of having departed, as regards fundamentals, from the religion in which he had been brought up by Methodists who (one gathered) had preserved with perhaps less change than others the traditions of the Anglicanism which had been Wesley's own. The movement of his thought to which I have referred was one away from what may be called the 'immanentism' of the idealistic mode of thinking common, among many differences, to the philosophers whose teaching was most influen-

<sup>1</sup> In the *Guardian*, 16 Nov. 1945.

tial in the Oxford of the eighties and nineties of the last century to the conviction which eventually took shape in the reconstructed 'cosmological argument' so clearly and impressively stated in the 'Vindication of Religion', contributed in 1926 to *Essays Catholic and Critical*. This argument turns upon the point that 'nature', as conceived by the man of science, can only be understood by the philosopher as dependent upon a Being which transcends it, and to which the 'personality' requisite in an object of religious worship can be ascribed with less difficulty than to the God of Green's philosophy (whatever may have been Green's personal faith), to the Absolute of Bosanquet's, or even to the God who in Bradley's is the correlative of the religious experience of man but of whom, since he is to be distinguished from 'the Absolute', ultimate reality cannot be predicated.

The two thinkers to whom Taylor owed most in his theological thinking were St. Thomas Aquinas, on whose importance as a philosopher he delivered in 1924 a lecture that is reprinted in *Philosophical Studies*, and Immanuel Kant. To the former he owed the cosmological argument which he restated, with alterations of his own, in 'The Vindication of Religion'. To the latter he owed his sense of the fundamental importance of the Categorical Imperative, and the argument for theism which, again with differences, was restated in *The Faith of a Moralist* (1930), and occupies great part of the first of its two volumes. The strength of his argument will be very differently estimated by those who start with a disposition to agree and by those who start with a disposition to disagree. This at least may be said, that the argument for theism has rarely been stated more persuasively, or with a wider range of philosophical and theological learning.

The second volume is occupied in the main with a discussion of the historical element in religion, and particularly in the Christian religion, which as he points out is more closely bound up than any other of the great religions with a belief in the occurrence of certain historical events. In particular, reference may be made to his contention that a belief in the occurrence of special revelation and of miracles is at least consonant with, if not demanded by, theistic belief. But it is impossible in a brief memoir to attempt any detailed account of the wide range of subjects that is dealt with in a book which has been hailed as one of the most interesting and suggestive of all recent contributions to Christian apologetics.

Taylor's last considerable contribution to the philosophy of religion is the little book *Does God Exist?* (1945), which consists

in the main of a restatement of the argument for the existence of design in the world which is not the design of any finite being and must therefore be the design of an infinite being. The argument is an old one, but it is stated by Taylor with his accustomed originality.

This memoir may fittingly be concluded by quoting two passages which indicate as well, perhaps, as any from his works his general outlook and the close connexion which existed in his mind between the two main objects of his interest—the Platonic philosophy and the theology of Christianity. In the epilogue to *Varia Socratica* he wrote as follows:

Our task, be our success in it what it may, is to restore Socrates to his rightful place as the first thoroughly intelligible figure in the great line of succession by which Greek Philosophy is indissolubly linked with Christianity on the one side and modern science on the other. It must be honestly said that even the fullest execution of such a plan only rolls the darkness a little farther back. Here, as in all our researches, *omnia abeunt in mysterium*. Behind Socrates, if the main ideas of these studies contain substantial truth, we dimly discern the half-obliterated features of Pythagoras of Samos, and behind Pythagoras we can only just descry the mists which enclose whatever may be hidden under the name of Orpheus. And behind Orpheus, for us at least, there is only the impenetrable night. But it is a night in which, as we can hardly fail to recognize, the Church, the University, the organization of science, all have their remote and unknown beginnings. They are all 'houses' of the soul that, by what devious route soever, has come by the faith that she is a pilgrim to a country that does not appear, a creature made to seek not the things which are seen but the things which are eternal. And this is why I have chosen as a second motto for these pages the Scriptural command to lay fast hold on eternal life. Philosophy, as the history of her name shows, began as the quest for the road that leads to the city of God, and she has never numbered many true lovers among those who 'forget the way'. It was precisely because it held out the prospect of the life everlasting to be won by converse with unseen things that Platonism, even apart from its baptism into Christ, had inherent strength to outlast all the other 'philosophies', and to grow up again into a new and profound metaphysic and ethics in the evil times of the third century of our era when the whole system of visible things seemed sinking into the 'gulf of Non-being' before men's eyes. For if the things which are seen are shaken, it is that the things which are not seen may remain. And, if I am not merely mistaken in my main contention, no small part of this inextinguishable vitality which has made the Platonic philosophy, in the favourite image of Plotinus, a spring of the water of life in the deserts of 'becoming', is directly due to the teaching as much as to the life of the thinker whose last



word was the message of immortal hope, καλὸν τὸ ἄθλον καὶ ἡ ἐλπίς μεγάλη.

This passage is echoed, nineteen years later, by one in *The Faith of a Moralist*:<sup>1</sup>

Would successful prosecution of all the varied activities possible to man, simply as one temporal and mutable being among others, suffice to constitute the 'condition' which, in Plato's words, 'will make any man's life happy'? Or have we to confess that, at the heart of all our moral effort, there is always the aspiration towards a good which is strictly speaking 'eternal', outside the temporal order and incommensurable with anything falling within that order? Is the world where we play a part for our three-score years and ten what Wordsworth called it, to Shelley's disgust, 'the home of all of us', where we must 'find our happiness, or not at all', or is it, as others have told us, a far country from which we have to make a tedious pilgrimage to our genuine *patria*?

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