PREFACE

As a human being, I am endowed with the capacity, as well as an occasional urge, to ponder important occurrences in the world around me, with a view to understanding them. Such pondering includes evaluating disputed theories about how things go in the world, how things ought to go, and why people behave as they do, plus alternative techniques for achieving what we seek. These evaluations, if done seriously, can lead in the long run to wisdom, which nearly everybody agrees is a boon.

Curiously, the tendency of human beings to reflect in this way on their lives, and on the world in general, has led some observers to say that all of us are philosophers, whether we realize it or not. If this insight surprises you, remember the surprise of the character in a play by Molière (seventeenth century), when he was told that he had been speaking prose unwittingly all his life.

The American philosopher William E. Hocking (twentieth century) was one of those who held that, whether consciously or not, we are actually all philosophers.1 (1) He often pointed out that everybody has a philosophy, and that the differences between one person and another are chiefly philosophical differences.

Another American philosopher, Edgar A. Singer, Jr., who was Hocking's contemporary, wrote tellingly, along the same line: (2) "[N]one who thinks at all can escape facing at some time or other the fateful question, How shall I live if I would have of life the best it has to offer?"

If we hope to have of life the best it has to offer, we may well need to become philosophers to a greater extent than we are now. In that spirit, I suggest that you peruse and savor some or all of the chapters of this book, which deal respectively with the good, the morally right, and the lovely, plus the real, the true, and human knowledge, including the question "What does it all mean?"

W.G.

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1 The sources not only of quotations from other writers which appear in this book, but also of summaries of what they have said, are shown by boldface numbers, printed in parentheses, in the text. These numbers correspond to the numbered source citations included in the Source References. For an explanation of the system, see the "Note to the Reader" on page xiii.)