

Introduction

Nathan Jun and Shane Wahl

So, although I refuse to indulge in idle chatter about “hope,” I trust that it will not be offensive to the many who are suffering if I conclude by reaffirming that the resources of the human spirit (art, philosophy in the broadest sense, the sciences, and in short all that is to be understood as culture), enhanced as they are now being by the developing new dimension of mind to which I have referred, are still available for those who retain the strength and courage to retain to transcend the new materialism that has supplanted the old and venerable societies to which this book has been dedicated.

—William L. McBride

Philosophical Reflections on the Changes in Eastern Europe, 1999

Abandon hope.

—William L. McBride

After George W. Bush’s second election, 2004

William Leon McBride was born on January 19, 1938, in New York City, the only son of successful, highly educated parents. His father, William Joseph McBride, was a pharmacist who completed his education at Columbia University. His mother, Irene Choffin McBride, was a high school English teacher who

graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Hunter College. Bill attended Iona Preparatory in New Rochelle, New York. From there he went to Georgetown University, where he served as editor of the college paper, *The Hoya*, and earned his Bachelor of Arts degree in 1959. Bill studied at the Université de Lille on a Fulbright Scholarship from 1959 to 1960 before enrolling in the graduate program in Philosophy at Yale, where he was Richard Bernstein's first Ph.D. student. He earned his Master of Arts in 1962 and his doctorate in 1964 with a dissertation on "The Concept of Fundamental Change in Law and Society."

Bill met Angela Barron at Yale while he was completing his Ph.D. and she was completing her master's degree in Psychiatric Nursing. Both were asked to stay on and teach at Yale; after their first year of doing so, they were married on June 12, 1965. Bill was hired as Assistant Professor at Yale in 1966; his and Angela's first daughter, Catherine (Cammie) Alexandra McBride, was born the following year. Cammie is currently Professor of Developmental Psychology and Associate Dean at Chinese University of Hong Kong. She has a son, Leeren (17), and a daughter, Claire (14). In 1970 Bill was promoted to Associate Professor at Yale and his and Angela's second daughter, Kara Angela McBride, was born. She is currently Assistant Professor and Director of the Master's Program in Spanish at Saint Louis University. Bill's first book, *Fundamental Change in Law and Society: Hart and Sartre on Revolution* (based on his Ph.D. dissertation) was published in the same year by Mouton and Company.

In 1972 Bill's bid for tenure, which had been unanimously approved by the Yale philosophy department, was overruled by the Executive Committee of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences.¹ In response, a group of undergraduate and graduate students circulated a petition protesting the decision,² but it was ultimately upheld several months later by the Senior Appointments Committee.³ The unexpected and seemingly arbitrary nature of the decision—coupled with the fact that two other Marxist philosophy professors, Kenley Dove and Kenneth Mills, were also denied promotion and forced to leave Yale around the same time—led some to suspect McBride was being purged on account of his radical politics, a notion his superiors firmly rejected.⁴

Bill himself, however, while not denying that his Marxist beliefs played a role in his dismissal, attributed it instead to resentment on the part of certain senior faculty. According to the *Yale Daily News*, "On one occasion in late 1969 he supported a very lenient decision of the Executive Committee concerning a group of students who had occupied the business office in Wright Hall in order to protest the firing of a dining hall employee. Several members of the faculty sharply criticized the committee for its leniency."⁵ On another occasion Bill penned a sharp rebuttal of "dean of American political scientists" Robert Dahl's *After the Revolution* (1970) which Yale University Press inexplicably refused to publish and which, apparently, alienated certain members of the Yale University Press committee; these same individuals subsequently served on the appointments committee which evaluated Bill's tenure case.⁶ Bill summarized the situa-

tion as follows: “At Yale a scholar is expected to maintain an attitude of detachment towards the outside world. This is impossible for a person like me... [The case] illustrates a trend toward pulling in the wagons, cutting down on courses that are innovative or controversial, a trend toward insisting on a certain kind of orthodoxy.”⁷

Although Bill was by no means a Noam Chomsky or Howard Zinn, he was apparently regarded as enough of a threat by COINTELPRO to have his phone tapped around the time of the New Haven Black Panther Trials in 1970. According to Angela McBride, this may have had something to do with Leonard Bernstein’s famous Black Panther fundraising party, which she and Bill attended—“largely because I wanted to see what Leonard Bernstein’s house looked like... [not] because we were great supporters of the Black Panthers.”⁸

In 1973 Bill was hired by Purdue University, where he has remained ever since, and was promoted to full professor three years later. In 1977 he published his second book, *The Philosophy of Marx* (St. Martin’s Press) and was elected Executive Co-Secretary of the Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy, a position he held for the next three years. In 1980 he published his third book, *Social Theory at a Crossroads* (Duchesne University Press) and, in 1983, co-edited the volume *Phenomenology in a Pluralistic Context* (SUNY Press) with Calvin Schrag. Two years later, in 1985, he co-founded the Sartre Society of North America with the late Phyllis Sutton Morris (1931-1997).

Bill’s fourth book, *Sartre’s Political Theory* (Indiana University Press) was published in 1991. The following year he joined the Board of Directors of the American Philosophical Association, serving until 1995. In 1994 he published *Social and Political Philosophy* (Paragon Press) and was elected President of the *Société Américaine de Philosophie de Langue Française*, serving until 1996. In 1997 he traveled to Bulgaria as a Fulbright Fellow; the magisterial 8-volume collection *Sartre and Existentialism* (Garland) was published in the same year.

In 1999 Bill published his sixth book, *Philosophical Reflections on the Changes in Eastern Europe* and his seventh, *From Yugoslav Praxis to Global Pathos*, two years later (both Rowman & Littlefield). In 2002 he co-edited *Calvin O. Schrag and the Task of Philosophy After Postmodernity* (Northwestern University Press) with Martin Beck Matušík. The following year he edited *The Idea of Values* (Philosophy Documentation Center); he was also elected Secretary General of the *Fédération Internationale des Sociétés de Philosophie*. Five years later, in 2008, he was elected president of FISP. He is the first American to have held both these positions.

In addition to authoring or editing a dozen books, lecturing around the world, and serving on countless university committees and national and international professional societies—often in leadership capacities—Bill has published more than sixty book chapters, seventy peer-reviewed articles, and ninety reviews. To say that he is prolific would be a gross understatement. Over the course of his career, he has achieved global acclaim as a scholar of Sartre and Marx, his writ-

ings in this area having attained the status of classics. As Joseph Catalano notes in his contribution to this volume, Bill is held in enormous esteem throughout Central and Eastern Europe as well as parts of Asia, where he has faithfully served as an intellectual diplomat and advocate for global philosophy for the past several decades. He has served as a friend and mentor to innumerable students, many of whom have gone on to prestigious careers of their own. He is a man of towering intellect and distinguished accomplishments—a paragon of academic, professional, and philosophical excellence.

Writing the introduction to a *festschrift* volume in honor of such a man—our mentor and former teacher, a man who, as the foregoing makes clear, very much deserves to be honored—is an extremely daunting task, especially since, compared to the pantheon of illustrious colleagues who have gathered to pay him homage in these pages, we are truly *hommes sans importance*. But as Rilke once wrote, “we must hold to what is difficult; everything alive holds to it, everything in Nature grows and defends itself in its own way and is characteristically and spontaneously itself, seeks at all costs to be so and against all opposition.” Those of us who have had the honor, privilege, and pleasure to know Bill McBride—whether as friends, students, or colleagues—know he easily could have penned those lines. Throughout his life he has taken the difficult path, perhaps—as the opening epigraphs suggest—because he is such a difficult (deep, complicated, even *contradictory*...) person. So, taking our cue from Rilke and McBride, we will hold fast to the challenging task at hand.

Bill is complex, yes, and so difficult to understand, but he is also preternaturally honest, self-aware, and, for this reason, very easy to listen to, learn from, befriend, and love. Sartre once described an intellectual as a person who recognizes the contradictions that constitute his or her life.⁹ Bill epitomizes this sort of intellectual; he is a man who is honest with and about himself, others, and the world. And although he is legendary for his sarcasm and dry, sardonic wit, he is neither a cynic nor a pessimist. Bill is a realist—an open-eyed, unsentimental, unflinching observer of the actual—but he is also an idealist, a dweller in possibilities. “I firmly believe,” he once wrote, “that no one can claim to possess a serious philosophical worldview without trying to take account, in an integrated way, of the enormous disparities between rich and poor nations and individuals and of the global institutions that reinforce them.”¹⁰ The “integration” of which Bill speaks is precisely the integration his work and worldview achieve; not content to describe the world in various ways, however rigorously, he *prescribes* how the world must be changed. And all of this presupposes the hope that change is possible, even if, for the time being at least, it is also improbable.

To be steadfastly honest with and about oneself, others, and the world, even when honesty leads to sobering conclusions—and yet, at the same time, to remain always committed on a deep, existential level to the possibility of change: this is the nature of Bill’s hope. It is not “idle chatter *about* hope,” but hope itself, *revolutionary hope*. This is one of the greatest gifts which Bill has brought

and continues to bring to the world, and one of the greatest achievements for which we honor him in this volume.

Those of us who studied under Bill in the dark times of the Bush years benefited enormously from his example and counsel. Here was a man, in his mid-sixties, who had lived through the Second World War, the Kennedy assassination, civil rights, Vietnam, Reagan, the fall of the Soviet Union... who had witnessed countless victories and defeats and yet, for all that, remained “resolutely a radical” (as he told one of us in 2005). One would not know this upon first talking to Bill since, as previously mentioned, he has a famously macabre sense of humor. Then again, he also has a famous love for fine wine which has a tendency to soften his mood and reveal to all the meaning behind the happy twinkle in his eyes. (At a Halloween party in 2004, Bill, dressed as Sartre—of course—regaled all present with a stirring rendition of the *Internationale* in his lovely, if slightly off-key Irish baritone.) What impressed us wasn’t so much that Bill seemed to know everything, or that he seemed to have done everything, or that he seemed to have travelled to every country on the globe, but that he had experienced so much of life and yet not abandoned hope. (“I remain resolutely a radical.”) That is what makes Bill revolutionary; it is what made him such a fantastic teacher and friend during otherwise terrible times.

Speaking of hope in the face of adversity, although we recognize that this humble volume cannot begin to adequately honor a person as larger-than-life as William Leon McBride, we nonetheless hope that it will bring some joy to him on the occasion of his seventy-fifth birthday. The contributors represented here-in are but a microscopic sample of friends, colleagues, and students around the world who love and respect him. In their collective name, we wish Professor McBride many more years of health, happiness, and—most importantly—*hope*.

Notes

1. *Yale Daily News*, No. 115, April 13, 1972, p. 1.
2. *Yale Daily News*, No. 116, April 14, 1972, p. 1.
3. *Yale Daily News*, No. 69, December 13, 1972, p. 1
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Yale Daily News*, No. 78, January 26, 1973, p. 1.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 1, 6.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
8. Angela McBride, personal correspondence with the authors, April 2012.
9. See Jean-Paul Sartre, “A Plea to Intellectuals,” in *Between Existentialism and Marxism*, trans. J. Matthews (London: Verson, 2008), pp. 228-85.
10. William L. McBride, *From Yugoslav Praxis to Global Pathos* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), p. 234.

