

Book Review of Hildebrand, D. (2021), *What is Philosophy?*, (Steubenville, Ohio: Hildebrand Press).

Introduction

Any philosopher's epistemology will exert a considerable influence on his or her attitude toward the place and significance of religion in human life. Even for non-philosophers, and those of us who may not be academically inclined, our openness and receptiveness toward religion will be implicitly influenced by numerous general epistemological considerations. These might include our understanding of what kinds of things are amenable to being known, the possible modalities of their disclosure, and the appropriate criteria for confirming the validity of any ostensible discovery.

Dietrich von Hildebrand attaches particular significance to the place of religion in our lives, and to the kind of philosophical enquiry that can be conducive toward religious conviction and commitment. He thinks not only that philosophical knowledge has its climax in its knowledge of the existence and attributes of God, but that philosophy itself is the fundamental activity of the mind turned toward God, and that the proximity of an object's relation to God is the yardstick by which philosophers ought to rate the importance of the objects of philosophical knowledge. He maintains that religious convictions count as knowledge, and that God is able to disclose Himself to, and communicate with ordinary religious practitioners who may not themselves have the requisite intellectual capacities for critical philosophical enquiry.

Impartial readers of *What is Philosophy?* are entitled to ask themselves whether Hildebrand's epistemology has the resources to warrant such a trenchant affirmation of the importance of religion. Of particular relevance here is Hildebrand's response to Kant's revolutionary claim that human knowledge about the universe is

necessarily delimited by subjective *a priori* features of the mind. An important part of Hildebrand's reply centres on the idea that synthetic *a priori* truths can be discovered during metaphysical enquiry because at least some objects are capable of being given to us in their essential being. Let us examine closely how Hildebrand develops his position, before trying to assess its strengths and weaknesses.

Knowledge in General

An important starting point for Hildebrand lies in the anthropological question concerning the distinction between humans and animals. Hildebrand observes that humans, unlike animals, are inclined to wonder about the meaning of life, and the destiny of their own species. This is part of what it means to say that humans are "ordered toward eternity". Philosophical *questioning* of this kind is an intrinsic part of being human. For this reason, Hildebrand regards epistemology as first philosophy, and begins the book with an account of knowledge in general. As the book proceeds, the epistemological enquiry narrows its focus to seek to clarify the true nature of *a priori* knowledge.

When Hildebrand accords knowing the status of a foundational phenomenological datum, he means that knowing as such is an act of consciousness that cannot be reduced to anything else. He seeks to investigate the phenomenology of knowing: to consider "what it is like" to know something, and to bring to light the essential structures of this fundamental act. For Hildebrand, knowing is an intentional participation in the world. In the first instance, knowing is essentially receptive: it is a receiving, not a producing. Yet this is not the whole story, for if knowing is receptive, it is not purely passive. Knowing has an active element, in that there is a mental "going with" the object. This "going with" the object is an intellectual penetration of it. It is a "making common cause" with the object. We find, then, that while it is true

that the object discloses itself to the subject, there is an active cooperation on the part of consciousness with the self-disclosure of the object. Knowing is in this sense a mental possessing of the object, an intentional participation in the object's being. I note *en passant* that there is a connection between Hildebrand's "going with" account of knowledge and the topic of empathy.

The subject's response to the object may be an affective one, such as love. On the other hand, a response could be theoretical, like conviction or conjecture. Hence an important difference between conviction and knowing is that knowing is a receiving, whilst conviction is a response to that receiving. In other words, conviction is secondary with respect to knowing. Conviction posits not only the existence of the object, but a state-of-affairs pertaining to the object. The question of the metaphysical positing of the object of knowledge over against merely affirming that there is a fact of the matter about the object's properties turns out to be an important theme in Hildebrand's epistemology as the book proceeds.

Taking cognizance of something is predominantly passive, but judging and asserting are more active. A precondition of judging and asserting is a prior act of taking cognizance. The object of an act of judging is a state-of-affairs, i.e. a putative fact. Asserting objectifies knowing (taking cognizance) into a proposition.

Basic Forms of Knowledge

We find, then, that there are different kinds of knowledge, which can take place in different ways, and with different possible kinds of object being known. One kind of knowing involves the epistemic state of knowing about something, or knowing a fact, a set of facts, or a body of information. This kind of knowing can have varying levels of certitude. It is said to be *superactual* in the sense that I might happen to know [*wissen*], for example, that the capital of China is Beijing, regardless

of whether I am thinking about this fact at the present time. Superactual knowing is possible due to the conserving power of the human mind. Superactual knowledge can influence my understanding of a given situation in an implicit manner, i.e. a manner which is not consciously foregrounded. Hildebrand wants to include religious convictions in this kind of knowing.

An important distinction that Hildebrand wishes to emphasise is between a static knowing and a dynamic coming to know something. An episode of taking cognizance is said to be (epistemically) *dynamic* because the subject *comes to know* something during the episode, something s/he did not know before. Static cases of knowing are normally the outcome of a dynamic episode of taking cognizance, or of multiple such episodes. An epistemological theme that Hildebrand develops is this idea of a dynamic taking cognizance “giving birth” to a static possessing.

The Nature of Philosophical Knowledge

In Chapter 3, Hildebrand elaborates in more detail upon his taxonomy of different types of knowledge. Two key distinctions that he draws attention to are (a) the distinction between pre-systematic and philosophical enquiry; and (b) the distinction between naïve and theoretical pre-systematic enquiry. As far as (a) is concerned, pre-systematic enquiry is the kind of enquiry we often undertake that falls short of the rigorous requirements of philosophy. As far as (b) is concerned, theoretical pre-systematic enquiry involves reflection, whilst naïve pre-systematic enquiry does not.

When Hildebrand looks more closely at instances of naïve pre-systematic enquiry, he discovers that they come in several different types. Some instances are completely unthematic, whilst others are tacitly thematic. Some instances are what Hildebrand calls “pragmatic”, such as a cook checking to see if a pan of water is

boiling. Pragmatic object thematicity sees the object in instrumental terms. There is a particularly important form of non-pragmatic enquiry, which Hildebrand calls "special naïve taking cognizance". When special naïve taking cognizance takes place, an object becomes "crystal clear [...] in its deepest nature" to the observer. An example of this is suddenly seeing the true nature of someone's personality.

Theoretical knowledge is knowledge that stems from reflection, over against knowledge that stems from perception. This is to say that in the transition from naïve enquiry to a theoretical attitude, something is gained, namely reflection, but something is also lost, namely proximity to the object. So-called "organic" theoretical knowledge grows "organically" out of episodes of naïve taking cognizance. It is a kind of condensation of episodes of naïve taking cognizance.

The foregoing discussion of non-systematic enquiry positions Hildebrand to specify some of the distinctive characteristics of a truly *philosophical* form of enquiry. In philosophical enquiry, the degree of certitude attached to a state-of-affairs is always commensurate with its level of givenness. Philosophical taking cognizance seeks to penetrate to an even deeper level of the concrete givenness of the object than naïve taking cognizance. Philosophical knowledge is always self-critical in the sense of examining its own (a) well-foundedness of premises; (b) stringency of arguments. (It is interesting to note in this context that notwithstanding the stress Hildebrand places on self-criticality and rigour in philosophy, he also maintains that there is a place under certain conditions for the transmission of philosophical truths by tradition.) A particularly high degree of knowledge thematicity is present during philosophical enquiry. Yet philosophical cognizance very often also foregrounds enquiry into the object in its own right. So there is in operation in philosophical enquiry both thematicity of enquiry and thematicity of the object. Sometimes the

thematicity of enquiry predominates, and sometimes the thematicity of the object predominates. In all cases, however, there needs to be an organic stemming of philosophical conclusions from episodes of naïve taking cognizance.

We might say that Hildebrand perceives a “snake in the grass” threatening the philosophical project. He places this threat under the rubric of “superficial thinking”. Superficial thinking can be unself-critical, unsystematic, and liable to lose all authentic contact with the object. Hildebrand discusses a variety of possible causes of superficial thinking. Superficial thinking may rely on arguments that one has learned unquestioningly from someone else. It may involve an unjustified generalisation taken from a single perceptual episode. It may involve the unconscious acceptance of premises that are mistakenly presumed to be self-evident. Another mistake is to import a statement from science into philosophy and then treat the statement as metaphysical. An example of this would be claiming that miracles are impossible. The outcome of such lapses is often a prejudicing, impairment, or interruption of the accuracy of attempts at naïve taking cognizance. The superficial thinker’s enquiry fails to penetrate to the concrete givenness of the object.

The Object of Philosophical Knowledge

In Hildebrand’s phenomenology, there emerges an alignment of truth with being. One example of this alignment is to be found in Hildebrand’s view that the principle of non-contradiction is true not by virtue of being a tautology, but instead on the grounds that it is established by rational intuition. Hildebrand’s justification here is that when an existent object is brought to givenness, its existence is intuitively self-evident. In this context, one sees that it is not possible for something to both be and not be. This renders the principle of non-contradiction synthetic (i.e. not analytic) in the Kantian terminology. Hildebrand thus upholds Kant’s synthetic/analytic

distinction, even though he may on occasion use the term “tautological” in the place of analytic, and “non-tautological” in the place of synthetic.

In Hildebrand's view, one of the most important aims of philosophy is to discover *a priori* states-of-affairs. But what exactly does Hildebrand mean by *a priori*? An *a priori* state-of-affairs is one which is intrinsically necessary. This does not mean that all *a priori* states-of-affairs are restricted to logic and mathematics. On the contrary, Hildebrand considers propositions like “Moral values presuppose a person as bearer”, “Love includes a desire for union”, “Moral guilt presupposes responsibility”, and “It is not possible for an object to both be and not be” to be synthetic *a priori*. When it is discovered, an *a priori* state-of-affairs is known with certainty. This view of *a priori* knowledge is strongly influenced by that of Plato in *Meno*. It is distinct from another sense of the *a priori* that is common in philosophy, which is that of a formal prerequisite.

For Hildebrand, it is certainly not the case that all *a priori* knowledge is obvious at first sight. Instead, *a priori* knowledge can be acquired by intuitional contact with the object, or by logical deduction, or by some combination of the two. Yet philosophers should be able to explain their *a priori* findings to others in such a way that they can become either self-evident or strictly proved by deduction. Deduction itself is ultimately founded upon an intuitional grasping of the truth of the laws of logic.

A priori givenness is completely different from empirical givenness. Ascertaining an essentially necessary state-of-affairs does not depend upon empirical evidence. It depends only upon the givenness of a necessary essence. A necessary essence could be given in a dream or in an act of the imagination. The foundation of

the possibility of synthetic *a priori* knowledge is the faculty of the intuition of a necessary essence. So experience is involved here, but not empirical experience.

There are different types of unity. A heap of trash is an accidental unity. Secondly, the essence of gold, and of the lion species are known as morphic unities. Thirdly, in Hildebrand's terminology, there are necessary essential unities, which are the same as intrinsically necessary unities. Hildebrand also refers to these as genuine essences. Examples of genuine essences are love, triangle, person, number, moral value.

This brings us to Hildebrand's notion of intelligibility. The heap of trash mentioned above is intelligible as a unity, but only just. It is lacking in meaningfulness. It has the character of being accidental or contingent. Of greater intelligibility are the morphic unities and the regularities in nature that can be discovered by science. These entities and patterns have a kind of necessity to them, but it is a natural necessity as opposed to an intrinsic necessity. We might say that they are naturally intelligible. Hildebrand reserves the highest level of intelligibility, which he calls incomparable intelligibility, for entities and states-of-affairs that are intrinsically necessary. Entities and states-of-affairs having the property of being incomparably intelligible are capable of being known with certainty. They become self-evident in the course of phenomenological enquiry. An example of an incomparably intelligible state-of-affairs is "Moral values presuppose a person as bearer."

Having intuitional access to a genuine essence is not the same as being able to define it. The essence of love, for example, is amenable to phenomenological investigation, but it is not amenable to being defined. In Hildebrand's view, it is a mistake to think that the intuition of genuine essences is somehow less

philosophically respectable than (a) finding a definition; (b) formulating a concept; or (c) deductive reasoning. A genuine essence, by virtue of its incomparable intelligibility, can be known with certainty by philosophers. This, however, is not the same as indefeasibility on the part of the knower. This is to say that philosophers are justified in attributing certainty to their knowledge of a genuine essence in the case that it becomes self-evident to them, but the findings of philosophers always remain defeasible. Hildebrand regards it as an absolutely certain philosophical discovery that genuine essences have their own autonomous being in their own ideal metaphysical sphere.

Hildebrand understands metaphysics to be the philosophy of real being, both possible and actually existing. The metaphysical picture that he sets out involves a concrete sphere of individual objects and an ideal sphere of essences. Both the concrete and the ideal spheres count as real in Hildebrand's metaphysics. Hildebrand's main criticism of Kant is that Kant was wrong to think that metaphysical enquiry could not disclose synthetic *a priori* truths about the noumenal world. Hildebrand argues that he has disproven this key Kantian tenet, by showing that it is possible to acquire *a priori* knowledge of genuine essences. Statements affirming what we intuit about genuine essences are synthetic *a priori* truths about the way things are in themselves, which will hold true in any universe.

Hildebrand admits that he does not provide a very detailed explication of how the ideal and concrete spheres interact with each other, saying that this is a very mysterious problem. What he is prepared to say on this matter is that the two spheres are “bonded” very closely, and that there is significant variation between such things as numbers, colours, moral values, and persons, in their modes of existence, and in the modes of “bonding” that can take place between the concrete and ideal spheres. The

relation between the concrete sphere and the ideal sphere is one of “partaking”.

Hildebrand also maintains that it is plausible to hypothesise that genuine essences exist “in God” in some sense or senses that remain to be clarified.

This brings us to the question of the place and significance of God in Hildebrand's philosophy. Hildebrand's concept of God is that of an infinite person who is the ground and source of all existence. Hildebrand believes the Cosmological Argument validly shows the existence of such a God. This God has a *sui generis* mode of existence that Hildebrand calls “necessary real existence”, which is a different mode of existence from that possessed by genuine essences.

Objectivity and Independence from the Human Mind

One of the main questions considered in Chapter 5 concerns the relation between electromagnetic waves and colours. Are they the same kind of thing? Is one more real than the other? Are colours fully objective? This discussion helps to illuminate Hildebrand's metaphysics, clarifying his view of which entities can be regarded as metaphysically real, and the place of the objects of science in this metaphysical picture.

Hildebrand's investigation into the phenomenology of perceiving a colour concludes that colours are different from the objects of science, on the grounds that something cannot be such-and-such a colour mind independently, but instead can only be such-and-such a colour for a perceiving consciousness. Colours, then, cannot be said to be mind independent, because truth claims about the colour of objects presuppose the cooperation of the human mind. Hildebrand notes that the term “subjective” has many possible senses in philosophy, and that it is for this reason ambiguous to assert that colours are subjective. However, if “subjective” is taken strictly and solely in the sense of presupposing the cooperation of the human mind,

then propositions of the form “X is subjectively such-and-such a colour” are capable of being objectively true or false, with the proviso that such statements do not belong to science. This is sufficient, in Hildebrand’s view, to make colours objectively real. An important corollary of this latter conclusion is that some things are objectively real without being mind independent. Colours and electromagnetic waves are on different “levels” of being, because electromagnetic waves are mind independent whilst colours are not.

One of the most distinctive and unusual features of Hildebrand’s account of our perception of the natural world lies in his view that some (and only some) phenomenal properties are capable of bearing a “message” character. The message characteristic consists in the relevant phenomenal property appearing as if it were a message, ostensibly from God. Colours are capable of bearing this characteristic. For a believer in God, this message character amounts to “God-willed”. If something is “God-willed” it is thereby meaningful. Possessing a message character is evidence for the observer that an object is real. An example of this message character could be an apprehension by an observer that a blue sky is intended by God to look blue to humans. This gives the blueness of the sky an objective validity.

Hildebrand's account of the message characteristic of certain phenomenal properties is bound up with his view that God created the world, and that humans are intended by God to be masters of creation. The manner in which an object appears to humans is held to be pertinent to its objective meaning, on the grounds that God created this world for humans. This line of reasoning supports Hildebrand’s conclusion that colour has an objective meaning for humans. According to this view, one of the reasons God created electromagnetic waves was to make colours visible to

humans. The red colour of a rose is no mere illusion. Instead, if a rose looks red, it does so because it is intended to look like that by God.

The Two Basic Themes of Knowledge

The title of Chapter 6 turns out to be somewhat ambiguous, since it could refer either to the distinction between perceptual and non-perceptual knowledge or to the distinction between cognitive and contemplative knowing, both of which are relevant to what is discussed. Perceptual knowledge is more foundational than its non-perceptual counterpart, in Hildebrand's view, on the grounds that during perception [*Wahrnehmung*] the object is given presentationally to consciousness. Perceptual knowledge is what preoccupies Hildebrand in this chapter, and his main finding is that perception can contain both cognitive and contemplative moments. These are supplementary to the moment of "taking cognizance" that is discussed earlier in the book. Intellectual intuition supports both the cognitive and the contemplative parts of knowing an essence. Cognitive knowing, which precedes contemplative knowing, is a grasping or apprehension of the object for what it is. Cognitive knowing, in Hildebrand's terminology, is "notional", enabling the subject to "appropriate" the object. Contemplative knowing, by contrast, is more intimate, involving a "dwelling within" the object by consciousness. Contemplation is only appropriate in relation to certain kinds of "spiritual" object, such as an artwork, a personality, or a value. Taken collectively, Hildebrand proposes that the three perceptual moments of taking cognizance, cognition, and contemplation are able to "fecundate" the subject's mind in an especially "intimate" and "plentiful" way.

Characteristic Features of Philosophical Knowledge and Enquiry

When it comes to the question of philosophical method, Hildebrand sets great store on rigour. This is what Hildebrand means when he says that philosophical

enquiry must always be “critical”. Premises must be justified; intuitions must be evident; arguments must be stringent. There can be no place for whimsical or fanciful thoughts. Indeed, philosophy, in Hildebrand’s view, should be no less rigorous than science. However, Hildebrand does recognise that there is a difference between scientific rigour and philosophical rigour. Science and philosophy go about their business in different ways, and have differing methods. When it comes to valuing scientific and philosophical rigour, Hildebrand regards the form of exactness to be found in philosophy to be superior to that of science.

Hildebrand recognises that this attitude toward rigour in philosophy raises a problem. If the highest quality philosophy really does proceed in such a rigorous way, why do so many philosophical questions remain mired in controversy? One would have thought that if the kind of rigour Hildebrand aspires to were attainable, then the field of philosophical knowledge would be expanding in much the same fashion, and with as little controversy, as mathematical and scientific knowledge. To be sure, controversies do arise from time to time in mathematics and science, but they are normally resolved relatively quickly. The situation is quite different in philosophy.

In the course of Chapter 7, Hildebrand indicates three ways of defending himself against this objection. The first way is to argue that the view that philosophical debates seem to be intractably mired in controversy is excessively bleak. He contends that many important philosophical insights are completely uncontroversial. Examples of these are Augustine’s “*Si fallor, sum*”, Plato’s distinction between *a priori* and empirical knowledge, and Kant’s distinction between synthetic and analytic propositions. Such great philosophical discoveries are never “dethroned”. This claim leads Hildebrand to suppose that there is no reason *in principle* why philosophical controversies should not be resolved satisfactorily, even

if the time it might take for such controversies to be resolved should happen to be *de facto* longer than is the norm in mathematics and science.

Hildebrand's second line of response is to argue that there are two special reasons peculiar to the way humans carry out philosophical activity that are conducive to controversies arising. Firstly, not everyone develops the requisite philosophical capacities properly. This can result in some so-called "philosophers" departing from the strict requirements of critical philosophy. Secondly, some philosophical truths are opposed because people have a subconscious reluctance to accept the implications of such truths for their personal and moral life.

Hildebrand's third line of response is to suggest that science is more controversial than we might think. From an historical perspective, we find that science continually replaces one theory with another. So science is "controversial" in that sense. Hildebrand fails to note, however, that mathematics is not "controversial" in this sense.

The Meaning of Philosophy for the Human Person

In the concluding chapter of *What is Philosophy?*, Hildebrand makes the case for an especially central role for philosophy in human life, by arguing that philosophical knowledge has its climax in our knowledge of the existence and attributes of God. Philosophy is continuous with the pre-scientific view of the world, which is a naïve living contact. This means that instead of pulling the rug away from under the naïve understanding of the world, as science often seems to do, philosophy starts from, and clarifies what is already given in, our naïve living contact with the world. Philosophical enquiry is for this reason a more fundamental "position" of the human mind than the scientific attitude, and is able, furthermore, to grant the subject a participation in the being of its objects.

Only from the philosophical standpoint does the real meaning of things become clear. This affects our understanding of their relative value and consequently shapes the human personality in accordance with philosophical truth. Grasping philosophical truth, or coming into contact in some way with others who have themselves grasped philosophical truth, helps the individual to maintain and deepen his living contact with the world. The complaint that philosophy may seem abstruse and disconnected from real life is therefore mistaken.

Not everyone can be a philosopher. Hildebrand considers some ways in which the enormous benefits flowing from philosophical knowledge might be shared with those who lack the intellectual wherewithal to grasp it directly. The answer is to begin at the level of naïve living contact and then distil out of it the philosophical principle. Ordinary people rooted in a naïve living contact with reality are endowed with a latent sense for truth. Such non-philosophers have a “receptivity” to philosophical truth since it is continuous with their own naïve experience. This receptivity makes possible an encounter between the ordinary person and genuine philosophical findings. The bringing of philosophical truth to ordinary people is important in Hildebrand’s eyes, since he regards philosophy as constituting the proper foundation for the formation of people's political views, and the foundation of a society's culture, art, and literature. Philosophy is thus capable of exerting a pervasive influence on the lives of ordinary people.

The most important role that Hildebrand assigns to philosophy, however, is that it should be a preamble to faith. It orientates the mind toward the eternal, and prepares the soul for God's revelation. Yet it is worth noting that for a book stressing the foundational importance of philosophy for human life, the final chapter has a surprising claim embedded within it, for Hildebrand maintains that that which “[...] is

disclosed by revelation remains beyond what is accessible to philosophy.” This raises the problem of epistemological justification for what is putatively disclosed by revelation.

Objection 1: The Question of Philosophical Rigour

In support of his claim that philosophy is in the process of building up a generally accepted and uncontroversial body of knowledge, Hildebrand cites a number of important philosophical findings that attract few objections. This line of reasoning is not compelling for two reasons. Firstly, I note that the list of uncontroversial philosophical discoveries that Hildebrand cites is very short. Secondly, the premise that there exists a set of core philosophical discoveries that all or most philosophers can agree upon does not imply that the philosophers involved are working in a highly rigorous fashion. A group of art critics may agree, for example, that Shakespeare's *King Lear* and Mozart's *The Magic Flute* are indisputably great works of art, but it does not follow from this that the activity of art criticism is proceeding in a manner capable of building up a generally accepted and uncontroversial body of knowledge.

One of the drawbacks of Hildebrand's intuitionism is that it can in itself be conducive toward philosophical controversy arising. If one philosopher affirms the intuitional self-evidence of X and another denies it, it is difficult to see how the matter can be settled, either by empirical evidence or the evidence of rational argumentation. Hildebrand's claim that some philosophers may be disinclined to accept self-evident moral truths due to a subconscious reluctance to accept the implications of such truths for their personal life seems speculative and unverifiable. It would have been more prudent of Hildebrand to investigate the reasons that such dissenters have provided for doubting the truth of such allegedly “self-evident” claims.

Objection 2: Existence of God

An important part of Hildebrand's overall philosophical system is the view that there are good grounds for believing in the existence of God, understood as an infinite person who is the ground and source of all existence. This premise is not treated as a given by Hildebrand, but instead is found to be amenable to investigation and justification by philosophical activity itself. This is why Hildebrand inserts into Chapter 4 a brief two page discussion supporting the validity of the Cosmological Argument for the existence of God [136-7]. I wish to suggest that Hildebrand's discussion of the Cosmological Argument is inadequate for a number of reasons.

Firstly, I would have expected some response from Hildebrand to Kant's objection to the cosmological proof of God contained in his First Critique. Kant argues that the cosmological proof relies on an ill-founded concept, namely that of an absolutely necessary being. Kant also objects that the cosmological proof applies the category of causation beyond the realm of possible experience. More generally, Hildebrand must have been aware of the significant philosophical controversy that has built up over many centuries surrounding the Cosmological Argument. A twentieth-century philosopher whose system relies heavily on the presumed existence of God cannot simply wind back the clock and pretend he is writing in the Middle Ages.

Secondly, the God that Hildebrand believes in is a personal God, and the Cosmological Argument, even if valid, does not purport to show the existence of a personal God, merely a first cause. This is another reason why Hildebrand's decision to cite the Cosmological Argument in Chapter 4 is slightly puzzling, when alternative philosophical arguments exist in favour of the existence of a personal God.

Thirdly, if there were a personal God, one would have thought that such a God would wish to make Himself accessible to us in the expressly intuitional fashion that

Hildebrand places so much emphasis upon. I would have expected Hildebrand's argumentation in support of the existence of God to be intuitional and phenomenological, as opposed to cosmological.

Objection 3: Colour

The phenomenology of colour perception is a topic Hildebrand returns to on numerous occasions throughout this book. It is, however, not essential to the book's main theme, which is the perception of genuine essences. Hildebrand thinks colour in general, and individual colours, count as examples of genuine essences. I find Hildebrand's discussion of colour problematic for the following reasons.

Firstly, there is the claim that one of the reasons God created electromagnetic waves was to make colours visible to humans. This is a speculative claim about the content of God's thoughts. No evidence, be it phenomenological, empirical, or rational, is provided to support it. The claim is philosophically baseless.

Secondly, there is the claim that colours are among the phenomenal properties of an object capable of bearing the so-called "message" character, which consists in a colour appearing as if it were a message, ostensibly from God. This, in contrast to the claim about electromagnetic waves just discussed, is a phenomenological claim, but one which I believe is mistaken. I do not concur with it, on the grounds that an investigation into the phenomenology of colour perception could at best make the case for colours possessing an expressive quality, as opposed to a communicative quality. Communication is distinct from expression. Hence Hildebrand's claim about the communicative quality, or message characteristic, *qua* phenomenological claim, is in my opinion at odds with the descriptive facts.

Objection 4: Ideal and Concrete Spheres

One way of objecting to a metaphysical position is to point out that it raises a new problem, one which would not have arisen if a different metaphysical approach had been adopted. Hildebrand's metaphysical position is susceptible to this line of objection, for it raises the question of how the ideal realm of essences and the concrete realm of individuals are supposed to interact. If the essence of the colour red is metaphysically real, and a red rose is metaphysically real, then the nature of their interaction also becomes a metaphysical question. Hildebrand registers his awareness of this problem in at least two ways. One way is to claim that he wishes to avoid a two-world metaphysics. Another way is to concede that the nature of the interaction between the ideal and concrete spheres must be very mysterious, and that he is unable, in this book at least, to make much headway in explicating it.

Objection 5: Purely Subjective Transcendence

According to Hildebrand, there is an essence not only of triangle as such, but an essence of every triangle. I have a worry, however, that Hildebrand is overlooking the distinction between the existence of an essence of a triangle T, and there being a fact of the matter about the properties of the triangle T. Suppose T is the triangle whose vertices are at the points (2,1), (5,9), and (17,3) in the plane. Mathematicians are able to investigate and meaningfully discuss the properties of T because T is fully defined and there is a fact of the matter about its properties, such as the length of its sides, and the internal angles at its vertices. I am not free to imagine the properties of T being anything I like, but am instead constrained by the facts of the matter. This is to say that T is subjectively transcendent to my mind, or any other mind. There is no obvious reason to commit ourselves to the claim that T exists metaphysically or that the essence of T exists metaphysically. T is a construct of the mind, a purely notional thing. T is an idea, and hence *ideal*, but not real. There is no obvious reason to think

that ideal things such as T are real. On the contrary, T is what Husserl would term *irreal*, that is, something that can be the object of meaningful intersubjective discussion and investigation, but which need not exist metaphysically. This line of reasoning seems to suggest that to assert that a genuine essence is real is metaphysically inflationary.

Objection 6: Relation between philosophy and religion

In Chapter 8, Hildebrand concludes his book's discussion by sharing with us his understanding of the relation between philosophy and religion. Man has an innate orientation toward God and the eternal. The overarching mission of philosophy is to be a "preamble to faith", by cultivating this orientation. This is what Hildebrand means when he refers to philosophy's obligation to prepare our souls "for the acceptance of the revelation of God". Yet what is disclosed by revelation remains "beyond what is accessible to philosophy." By this Hildebrand means that the contents of such revelation are not amenable to discovery by the modalities of enquiry discussed in earlier chapters of his book.

There is a problem here. The truth of such putative revelation is treated by Hildebrand as a given. Revelation from God is held to be true on the grounds that God is the source of all truth. Yet even in theological circles, there is legitimacy in a discussion concerning how any putative revelation can be confirmed as genuine. It is not clear why Hildebrand would regard such a discussion as non-philosophical, and why he chooses not to include the premises and constraints of any such discussion within the parameters of his epistemology. This leads the reader to conclude, in particular, that the account of knowledge *in general* that is contained in Chapter 1 is incomplete.

Conclusion

From an historical perspective, Hildebrand's *What is Philosophy?* can be situated within the context of a twentieth-century realism-idealism controversy sparked by Husserl's turn toward a version of transcendental idealism. Realists like Hildebrand had previously seen Husserl's early phenomenology as offering a potential way of returning to a form of enquiry that might overcome the constraints placed by Kant upon the limits of metaphysical knowledge. Unfortunately Hildebrand's attempt to break out of the Kantian epistemological constraints turns out to be susceptible to the objections that I have detailed: (1) Hildebrand's advocacy of philosophical rigour is undermined by the conduciveness of his intuitionism toward controversy; (2) Hildebrand does not make a convincing philosophical case for the existence of a personal God; (3) Hildebrand's phenomenological claim about the communicative quality of colour is at odds with the descriptive facts; (4) Hildebrand does not provide an adequate metaphysical account of the supposed interaction between the ideal realm of essences and the concrete realm of individuals; (5) It is metaphysically inflationary to think that it follows from there being a fact of the matter about the properties of X that X exists metaphysically; (6) Any putative revelation from God remains liable to a confirmation condition, and Hildebrand fails to include a discussion of such a confirmation condition within his epistemology.