

confidence from me, and my position became untenable' (p. 105). Here, we see a great educationalist in action and we see a great saint growing in holiness through the mundane challenges of human relationships, achievements, and disappointments. 'It is the rule of God's Providence that we should succeed by failure', Newman wrote many years later, placing this Pauline paradox within the hope he had expressed immediately after his resignation from the university, that 'when I am gone, something may come of what I have done in Dublin' (p. cxiv).

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What is Philosophy? By Dietrich von Hildebrand, [Hildebrand Project], Steubenville, Ohio, 2021, pp. xxx + 254, £15.99, pbk

Readers of von Hildebrand's philosophical works (such as *Ethics* and *Aesthetics*) might still be surprised by the way the question in the title of this text is put. Instead of hearkening back to the history of philosophy and to some of the basic questions of philosophy in a piecemeal manner and in its manifold fields, Hildebrand turns to phenomenology and to its epistemological motif, in ways that partially remind one of Edmund Husserl's work – one of Hildebrand's main philosophical influences, at least as far as the former's *Realist* period is concerned. The reason for this strategy is that, in Hildebrand's view, philosophy in its Modern context is in crisis and falls into disrepair whenever philosophers lose sight of 'the true nature of philosophical knowledge, its epistemological dignity and its existential vitality' together with its 'true object'. There is no way around philosophizing itself – attentively, courageously, and evidentially – as the best practice to learn what philosophy *really* is.

The first chapters are thus devoted to knowing (*Erkennen*), broadly understood as the irreducible contact between the object and the subject of knowing, one in which the subject (and not the object) is impacted and changed. From the get-go, knowing is neither productive nor constructive of its object but receptive: a way of allowing the object to disclose and unfold itself in its being before our intellectual regard. The act of knowing, of course, allows manifold distinctions before we arrive at the peculiarity of philosophical knowing, and thus Hildebrand elaborates these distinctions, often in a plentiful manner, in a way that respects the complexity and inexhaustibility of cognition. For instance, in chapter 2, Hildebrand distinguishes between simple knowing (*Wissen*) and the act of taking cognizance (*Kenntnisnehmen*) – the first being a static possessing of knowledge, while the second is the very dynamism that makes us acquainted with objects of knowing. Hildebrand convincingly shows that these are not just two stages in the process of knowing (the acquiring of knowledge vs. knowledge as an acquisition) but two different forms of knowing. In turn, Hildebrand

distinguishes – quite usefully – between (a) the sort of simple knowing that, as an acquisition, becomes sedimented and needs an act of remembrance to become actual and (b) a form of super-actual knowledge (*überaktuelles Wissen*) that amounts to an implicit awareness of only certain objects of knowledge, including objects whose meta-physical importance and high existential value colour our horizons. It will not be difficult to place religious knowing about the things of God precisely as operating in the person of faith super-actually.

Hildebrand goes on to focus our attention on the essence of philosophical knowing as *thematic, methodological, and critical*: unlike in the sciences and other forms of taking cognizance, philosophical knowing takes full stock of the tension between a thing's 'being so' and 'how it is so'. But Hildebrand does not just claim this on behalf of philosophical knowing; he proves it in chapter 4 – the longest and arguably most important section of this book – by presenting the object of philosophical knowledge as having the nature of an *a priori*. In brief, *a priori* knowledge differs from a *posteriori* knowledge in the sense that it is not justified purely empirically. *A priori* knowledge is true, prior to experience without being tautological (or true by the predicate being explicitly contained in the subject of a proposition). Thus, Hildebrand departs from Kant, who limits *a priori* knowledge chiefly to mathematics, and returns partly to the more capacious understanding of *a priori* knowledge already intimated by Plato in *Meno*, which also includes the ethical. By an *a priori*, Hildebrand will also mean judgments such as 'Justice cannot be attributed to impersonal beings' and the principle of identity and non-contradiction: these are objects of knowledge that (a) show strict, intrinsic necessity; (b) offer incomparable intelligibility (so that of them we know both 'that so' and 'how so' they are); and (c) are absolutely certain. In every case of *a priori* knowing, there is a new insight and an increase in knowledge, even if this progress does not necessarily amount to the acquisition of new facts. Rather, states-of-affairs with which we are already familiar become known *essentially*.

In ways that deserve further study, Hildebrand shows that the attainment of essential knowledge of *a priori* states-of-affairs comes about neither by mere 'bracketing' of existence (Husserl), nor by abstraction (Aquinas), nor by anamnesis (Plato), but always by genuine, intuitive encounters with the things themselves. And while both the reception of the object of knowledge and the acquisition of said knowledge seem to be one-way relationships, in truth there is a compenetrating of the subject and the object of knowledge. As Hildebrand declares in a critical passage in chapter 7, philosophical *eros* aims not only at the intellectual possession of the world of knowledge, including knowledge of moral values, but also at a 'spiritual wedding of the mind with this world'. This marital metaphor proves quite enlightening to grapple with how philosophical knowing is not a stale, ready-made, once-and-for-all accomplishment, but rather an on-going encounter where the mind is ever-renewed and made fecund by the plenitude of intelligible essences.

Hildebrand's text ends with a short but exquisite meditation on the meaning of philosophy for the human person. In it, Hildebrand defends the self-transcendence of the human person as the subject of knowing, together with the many ways in which philosophical knowing is closer to life than, e.g., pragmatic or empirical, scientific ways of knowing. One could read this chapter as Hildebrand's attempt to pick up the

Husserlian motif of a 'return to the lifeworld' without abandoning realism. This closing chapter also strikes the reader as a response to Nietzsche's critique of philosophy as escapism, the denial of life, and a revenge upon reality. Hence the fact that Hildebrand speaks about the power of philosophical knowing – one which still does not surrender philosophy to Utilitarian, will-to-power, or realpolitik enterprises. Hildebrand also admits that philosophy involves not only philosophers but also other agents of philosophical knowledge called mediators. Philosophy even pertains to non-philosophers, who are nevertheless existentially impacted by the depth and dignity of philosophical knowing. For Hildebrand, there is something Catholic about philosophy – both in the etymological and confessional sense of term, since philosophy not only pertains to everyone (albeit in different ways) but also prepares the soul for the acceptance of revelation: still today, philosophy at its best is a preamble to Christian faith.

The present edition not only includes editorial footnotes and clarifications from past editions but also adds new ones, thanks to the meticulous preparation of the text by John F. Crosby. The book also comes with an eloquent and clear introduction by Robert Sokolowski, which takes Hildebrand on his own terms, while sidelining the polemic between Hildebrand and Husserl on essences and the realism/idealism question. This edition also includes as an appendix parts of Josef Seifert's Introductory Essay to the 1991 edition, which is quite fitting, not only because Hildebrand dedicated this work to Seifert but also because Seifert's introduction is quite comprehensive. Unfortunately, only part of this introduction is included in the appendix; for the remainder, we are referred to the website of the Hildebrand project. While one understands that in the age of virtual media, the invitation to continue reading a part of this edition online is not overly taxing, still, an integral version of this essay in printed form would also have been fitting. All in all, the publishers are to be commended for reissuing a text whose message remains as much as needed today as when it was first published and is just as appealing for experts as well as for interested readers of philosophy wishing to become re-acquainted with realism.

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The Dominicans in the British Isles and Beyond: A New History of the English Province of the Friars Preachers Edited by Richard Finn, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2023, pp. xix + 387, £90.00, hbk

Reviewing a book that covers 800 years of the life of a multi-faceted and complex human organization is a daunting task. It is, however, nothing compared to the