Editor's Introduction

DT Sheffler
Guest Editor

This volume brings together a number of scholars working on topics ranging from contemporary ethics to the history of philosophy. This wide scope reflects the comprehensive nature of Dietrich von Hildebrand's philosophic vision, including foundational works on ethics, philosophical method, aesthetics, and the nature of love. Hildebrand managed to fit his extensive scholarly writing into a heroic life of anti-Nazi political activism during World War II. Within his corpus of works are a number of important philosophical problems that beg for further development, such as his conception of personal existence, his rich and pluralistic conception of beauty, and his distinction between person and personality. In several places, however, the development of Hildebrand's thought must involve a correction or even an outright challenge to his reasoning. Each of these papers does just this, applying the insights of Hildebrand to a number of diverse philosophical problems while also advancing and challenging his thought in various ways. Despite the wide diversity of problems, three central areas appear in this volume, which represent some of Hildebrand's most important contributions to philosophy: (1) his method of phenomenological realism, (2) his conception of value and value-response, and (3) his personalism. In the following sections, I provide a brief sketch of these three areas in order to provide a background for the papers in this volume.

Phenomenological Realism

Hildebrand remained committed to two strands of philosophical method that are sometimes seen to be in tension: metaphysical realism and phenomenology. Like his teacher Husserl, Hildebrand sought to ground philosophical argument in that which is given to us in experience rather than rely at the outset on abstractions or theories that distance us from what is given. Unlike Husserl (at least as he is frequently interpreted), however, Hildebrand remained committed to a metaphysically realist version of this phenomenological approach. According to Hildebrand, the reality that we investigate

when we do philosophy is a reality beyond us, transcending our subjective experience of it. This reality is revealed in our subjective experience, but it is not constituted by it. Hence the aim of philosophy must be a faithfulness to that which is real. This means that we must strive to grasp reality as it discloses itself and to find suitable terms to accurately express what we have grasped while minimizing any distortion in our understanding or misleading characterizations in our language. Hildebrand typically proceeds by describing in detail an ideal type or essence, attempting to isolate this datum in its purity. He often attempts to preserve this purity by enumerating a set of perversions, distortions, or alternatives to the datum so that our minds can understand the ideal by contrast with what it is not.

At times, this procedure may at first appear similar to the process of conceptual analysis in the analytic tradition. Admittedly, one finds a great deal of variety and development within the analytic tradition on the methods and aims of conceptual analysis. Nevertheless, the primary object of analysis tends to be our own concepts or words. Hildebrand, however, understands his own method to run directly contrary to this because he takes the object of analysis to be the objective, intelligible structure of reality rather than a subjective structure selected from among our own concepts. Hildebrand's goal is the conformity of our concepts to what is given rather than an analysis of our concepts themselves as we happen to find them. I hasten to add, however, an ecumenical qualification. Analytic philosophy begins as a revolt against British idealism and subjectivisms of all sorts by its return to rigorous logical analysis, just as Husserl himself begins with a return to logical analysis. Frege's mathematical Platonism stands as a precursor to both traditions, and it is logic that is hailed as the harbinger of a new objectivism in both phenomenology and analytic philosophy. Ironically, both traditions soon fall back into various forms of the very subjectivism and idealism from which they originally tried to escape. Nevertheless, in both traditions, realism has survived and is alive and well.

This theme of realism runs, in some way, through all the papers in this collection, but it comes out with special force in Justin Keena's comparison between Hildebrand's account of necessary truth and Plato's theory of the Forms. According to Keena, Hildebrand's realism preserves the core insights in Plato's theory of the Forms, while it avoids much of the unnecessary metaphysical baggage, such as metempsychosis and the doctrine of recollection.

Value and Value-Response

Hildebrand is well known for his philosophy of value and value-response, which grounds many of his most important philosophical insights and

appears in nearly all his works. Value, according to Hildebrand, is a basic datum of experience that divides into three types: the "important in itself," the "merely subjectively satisfying," and the "objective good for the person." For example, suppose I see a case of moral excellence, such as a person forgiving an enemy under difficult circumstances. The encounter with this excellence presents itself as something more than merely neutral, something that demands a kind of respect even though it may not hold any element of subjective pleasure for me or involve a benefit to me at all. This second aspect of Hildebrand's philosophy interacts with his phenomenological realism because the revelation of something as important in itself leads us on to inquire into the ways that reality must be structured such that it could contain this dimension of value. Since we can discern in experience a clear distinction between the sense that something is important in itself and the sense that something is important because of a particular connection to us, reality contains a type of value that is not a mere projection of personal preference.

His treatment of value is pluralistic in the sense that he does not reduce what appears as important in itself to some single type of value such as moral or aesthetic value. Instead, he welcomes into his analysis a great variety of different kinds of value. For example, the kind of value present in a living organism is distinct from the kind of value present in a beautiful symphony, which in turn is distinct from the kind of value present in the act of forgiveness. Throughout Hildebrand's work, we see a systematic attempt to catalogue all these various kinds of value and understand the distinctions between very specific subvarieties within these. Hildebrand is not a pluralist, however, in the sense that he would consider all these various kinds of value to be on an equal footing. Instead, moral goodness holds for Hildebrand a kind of preeminence among the values. Further, within this sphere, as within others, different kinds of moral goodness ought to be prioritized above others.

Characteristic of all his ethical writings, Hildebrand understands our experience of value to include the sense that values call for some fitting response on our part. This response varies according to the kind of value and our circumstances: for example, when I observe a heroic act of forgiveness, I may be called upon to imitate it by forgiving my own enemies. In an experience of aesthetic value, however, such as my encounter with the terrible grandeur of a mountain vista, I may be called upon to appreciate the vista's magnificence in humble admiration. This understanding of value and value-response establishes a balance between a thorough analysis of the phenomena on the object side and a thorough analysis on the subject side. Metaphysical realists sometimes focus so heavily on an analysis of the object that our subjective response is left underdeveloped, whereas Hildebrand devotes a great deal of

his thinking to an inquiry into the inner workings of the subject. He does this, however, without lapsing into any form of subjectivism.

Two papers in this collection focus on this idea of value and value-response. First, Martin Cajthaml provides a valuable survey of Hildebrand's theory of value and offers a number of helpful critiques. Cajthaml especially challenges the idea that Hildebrand's account of value stands in as radical a contrast as Hildebrand thought to Plato and Aristotle's understanding of the good. Second, Mark Spencer argues that Hildebrand's own account of aesthetic value gives him reason to hold a more favorable view of modern art than that found in the negative pronouncements he makes about modern art in several places. This follows from the pluralism mentioned earlier: Spencer argues that there are aesthetic values that Hildebrand acknowledges besides beauty, and these values are often present in modern art even when it is ugly.

We see an especially important case of value-response in Hildebrand's analysis of affectivity. When he investigates this dimension of our response, we see at work the importance of the balance between an analysis of the object and an analysis of the subject. In much of his writing but especially in *The Heart*, Hildebrand seeks to rehabilitate our understanding of the affective dimension in our response to value, which remains underdeveloped, he claims, in the philosophical tradition. It is not enough, he contends, to see an act of forgiveness and then will to act in a similar manner. We certainly ought to will thus, but we ought also to be moved in our affectivity. In this volume, Arthur Martin focuses on this importance of affectivity in our response to value and draws an important parallel between Hildebrand's position and that taken by C. S. Lewis in *The Abolition of Man*. He argues that the affective dimension of our response can be rational, although it is distinct from the activity of our intellect since our affectivity can be rooted in a reasonable apprehension of the true nature of things.

Personalism

Hildebrand is known for the strong current of personalism that runs through all his thinking, and he is one of the central figures in the twentieth-century Christian personalist movement, which also includes such thinkers as Gabriel Marcel, Hildebrand's friend Max Scheler, Edith Stein, and Karol Wojtyła. The particulars of these thinkers differ, but they are all united in placing a special emphasis on the person. This emphasis can take several forms: with respect to metaphysics, personalists tend to emphasize the radical distinction between person and thing and the richer mode of being realized in the former; with respect to ethics, personalists tend to emphasize the special dignity

and worth of the person in contrast to mere utility and the special responsibility involved in free agency; with respect to political philosophy, personalists tend to emphasize both the relational dependence of the person in community and the proper freedom of the person from totalitarian claims of the state; with respect to epistemology and phenomenology, personalists tend to emphasize the dimension of interiority that we discover in self-consciousness. In some ways, Hildebrand is not a typical representative of this movement because he never wrote a complete study devoted to the topic of personhood alone. Nevertheless, the central themes of this movement can be seen as holding an abiding interest for him in all his work, and many of his central arguments depend on a personalist understanding of these themes. Hildebrand makes several important contributions to the thought of this movement, but three stand out in particular: his understanding of our "free personal center," his understanding of *Eigenleben*, and his understanding of the irreplaceable value of each person.

As I examine in my own article, Hildebrand makes an important contribution to ethics with his notion of "sanctioning." According to Hildebrand, the inner life of our personal existence is not to be understood solely in terms of drives, impulses, or psychological processes happening *to* us. For us to be able to say, "This is something *I* do," we must be capable of recognizing these impulses or thoughts and either adopting them as truly our own or rejecting them. Hildebrand explains this as giving an inner "yes" or "no." When we refuse something, it does not automatically disappear, and we may need to take responsibility for previously developing our character in such a way that we are now the kind of person to have these thoughts or impulses. Nevertheless, Hildebrand explains that our inmost refusal has the power to deeply mitigate the influence of these impulses in our psychology. Conversely, even a good impulse that we know we should act on is not truly our own until we give our inner "yes" to it, or "sanction" it, as Hildebrand says. This capacity for sanctioning points to a deep core of the person, which Hildebrand calls our "free personal center." As I argue in my own essay, this free personal center cannot be reduced to the dimension of nature, which characterizes us as things in the world, but rather indicates a radically distinct dimension whereby we exist also as persons.

As Hrvoje Vargić explains in his piece, *Eigenleben* could be translated literally as "one's own life" or "the life proper to oneself," although the philosophical meaning comes closer to "subjectivity" as John F. Crosby chooses to translate the term in *The Nature of Love*.

This choice is a difficult one because Hildebrand does not mean by *Eigenleben* that which I happen to find subjectively satisfying, which we contrasted earlier with the important in itself. Instead, *Eigenleben* refers to all that matters for my objective happiness or that touches upon my real concerns as a being

with an unrepeatable personal existence. Hildebrand's contribution is to see that this concern with the objective good of my own personal being is not the same as the inward-turning narcissism involved in the egocentric attitude. As Michael Grasinski points out, Hildebrand brings together in his philosophy of love the poles represented by the classical *intentio benevolentiae* (desire for the good of the beloved) and *intentio unionis* (desire for union with the beloved). We may be tempted to think that we should sacrifice the latter entirely for the former because we are drawn to the conception of love as sheer altruism. Hildebrand, however, stresses that our concern for our own objective good need not be understood exclusively by the categories of altruism and egoism. This is especially true because our own personal existence is intrinsically ordered toward the surpassing of itself in love.

Throughout Hildebrand's work, one can see a deep appreciation for the unique and irreplaceable value of each person. He emphasizes again and again in his *Ethics*, for example, the importance of assigning a special value to personal existence and to each person in particular. In *Liturgy and Personality*, he understands our development as persons in terms of growing into a full-bodied "personality," which for each person is ideally "the original unduplicable thought of God which He embodies." In his article for this volume, Alexander Montes examines this issue in depth, examining the way we use names to indicate the unrepeatable significance of each person. He argues that Hildebrand's analysis of love gives us a phenomenology that helps address certain shortcomings in Levinas's understanding of alterity (i.e., the "otherness" of the person we encounter in relationship).

The Work Left to Do

Hildebrand's philosophy touches upon several critical areas of live inquiry. In many places, Hildebrand's thought prompts the thoughtful student toward the continuation of analyses that Hildebrand began. In this regard, much work remains still to be done. In other places, however, Hildebrand leaves certain conceptions ambiguous or overstates certain points. This gives the admirers of Hildebrand a chance to improve upon or correct his thought rather than slavishly repeating his insights. In his survey of the work that lies before us, Josef Seifert argues that Hildebrand himself would have welcomed gladly both development and correction.