

Harold, James. *An Introduction to the Love of Wisdom: An Essential and Existential Approach to Philosophy*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004. 365 pp. \$49.00 softcover.

James Harold's new book makes an important contribution to introductory philosophy textbooks. He offers in one book a model of philosophical exploration based on early phenomenological principles. Harold guides the reader through a series of philosophical questions: why study philosophy, what are differing methodologies; what is a human person, a divine person; can we know objective truth; is human life morally significant? Ultimately, he asks: how is philosophy linked to our moral lives? He answers that philosophy is important because it leads us to what is true and eternal. For Harold, to ask philosophical questions is to ask about the quality of human life: its intellectual transcendence, its spiritual centeredness, and its moral richness. Phenomenology as an historical philosophical style seeks to describe our experiential world. The phenomenology of essences necessarily takes us to objective truth, transcendent reality, and spiritual centeredness. Our experiential world includes transcendent ideas (such as value) and non-human presences (such as the divine). Harold's book adds to a contemporary body of knowledge that has either rejected or just ignored these philosophical concerns. Ultimately, this book captures a particular philosophical *Weltanschauung*, that of metaphysical transcendence, epistemological certainty, and ethical personhood. I am delighted that he has written an excellent introduction to these frequently overlooked philosophical topics.

Harold's book divides into two thematic parts: Chapters 1-6, setting the metaphysical and epistemological foundations for philosophical study, and Chapters 7-11, exploring connections between moral response and value.

Once he has established the reasonableness of objective truth and apriori essences, he demonstrates the fullness of the moral center of the individual. Because of value in reality, each of us is called to respond to this ethical realm and take seriously our responses. If our knowledge of the world did not include truth, certainty, or transcendence, then our moral life would not be as demanding. But, with the clarity of epistemological and metaphysical exploration, we begin to see the link between our intellectual life and our personal ethical responses. In Harold's philosophical world are: the search for truth and the status of human reason; the phenomenological method of insight and apriori essences; an unchanging reality and God; intellectual

clarity linked to moral responsibility; kinds of value and value response; an affirmation of the human spirit and the significance of moral virtue; moral growth and an inner centeredness; the gift of an affective life; and the presence of eternity in human life.

Harold's work is a valuable teaching tool because it brings to popular light the philosophical vision and technical terms of Dietrich von Hildebrand (1889-1977). Von Hildebrand's philosophical work has been lost to the general public because of contemporary philosophical biases and his link to theological issues. Through Harold's book, two works in particular should gain some interest: *Ethics* (1953) and *What is Philosophy?* (1973). These two works by von Hildebrand are the backbone of Harold's *An Introduction to the Love of Wisdom*.

The methodological concern for a priori essences is characteristic of the early phenomenologists in general and von Hildebrand specifically. Interest in a priori essences also links Harold to the Platonic tradition that affirms knowable, unchanging, metaphysical truths. Concerning ethical issues, Harold utilizes key technical terms from von Hildebrand's *Ethics* to explore the nature of our moral life: superactual consciousness, moral blindness, kinds of value. *Love of Wisdom* clearly affirms a metaphysical seriousness and a phenomenological reflection of ethical issues as basic foundations for the general philosophy student.

The focus of chapter 4 is the human person, specifically a spiritual being with an interior consciousness, with free control of his/her body, and with self-identify over time. These may be familiar philosophical issues to some, but few textbooks actually mention such topics. Harold effectively criticizes a narrowly materialist view of the self whereby the body is the dominant object of study, making the soul a mere activity or function of the body. Our knowledge of ourselves as individuals is possible because of intellectual and personal transcendence. Human beings are not just another structure within the physical world; we are self-aware and self-identifying. We have more than bodily instincts; we have a spiritual life.

Chapter 6 focuses on God. Many philosophers today lack interest in whether God exists or not and what philosophy can say about God. To talk about God, about proofs for God, about human life linked to God is often considered antiquated or worse, just irrelevant in the contemporary world. For Harold, God is of central importance to the philosopher. He entitles chapter 6, "God, the Supreme Being." If nothing else, the existence of a divine being grounds the objectivity of philosophical truth. Truth given to the human mind is not arbitrary, accidental, or insignificant. It is stable, purposeful, and meaningful.

Simply on the basis of the objectivity of human knowledge in itself, the reasonability of a supreme being is evident.

For Harold, though, the topic of God has a much more important basis: the relationship of the divine being to the human moral life. Even Nietzsche recognizes that without an eternal moral order, no moral order exists. Finitude of human life is enriched with hints of eternity, and these have their source in the divine. Thus, logical proofs, philosophical reflection, and observation of the world around us—all point to the significance of God in a philosophical text.

Chapters 10 & 11 highlight our intellectual awakening as having a personal impact on our life. Objective truth and value are our links to eternity. As Harold says, in a religious “conversion” we turn to eternity in faith. In a philosophical “conversion,” we reach beyond our psychological limits: we transcend our limited goals and perceptions because we can see beyond illusion, doubt, and falsehoods. The philosophical journey is both an intellectual one and a moral one. As Harold promises in the beginning of the book: he convincingly argues that philosophical knowledge is important to ethical life.

In the spirit of intellectual friendship, I highly recommend *An Introduction to the Love of Wisdom* as a textbook which embodies a needed philosophical vision: an exploration of metaphysical truth and ethical value.

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