



The Nature of Love

DIETRICH VON HILDEBRAND

PREFACE BY Kenneth L. Schmitz

TRANSLATED BY John F. Crosby with John Henry Crosby

The Nature of Love

Suavissimae ac dilectissimae conjugi Lily

“Che sola a me par donna”

– *Petrarch*

The Nature of Love

Dietrich von Hildebrand

Translated by
John F. Crosby with John Henry Crosby

Introductory Study by John F. Crosby

Preface by Kenneth L. Schmitz



ST. AUGUSTINE'S PRESS
South Bend, Indiana
2009

in association with the Dietrich von Hildebrand Legacy Project
www.hildebrandlegacy.org

Copyright © 2009 by Dietrich von Hildebrand Legacy Project

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior permission of St. Augustine's Press.

Manufactured in the United States of America.

1 2 3 4 5 6 14 13 12 11 10 09

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
new CIP data to be placed here

∞ The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of the American National Standard for Information Sciences – Permanence of Paper for Printed Materials, ANSI Z39.48-1984.

ST. AUGUSTINE'S PRESS
www.staugustine.net

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	ix
Preface by Kenneth L. Schmitz	xi
Introductory Study by John F. Crosby	xiii

The Nature of Love

Introduction	1
Chapter One: Love as Value- Response	15
Chapter Two: Love in Distinction to Other Value-Responses	41
Chapter Three: The “Gift” of Love	58
Chapter Four: Love and Transcendence	83
Chapter Five: Value and Happiness	101
Chapter Six: Intentio unionis	123
Chapter Seven: Intentio Benevolentiae, Value-Response, and Super Value-Response	147
Chapter Eight: The Different Kinds of “Mine”	180
Chapter Nine: Eigenleben and Transcendence	200
Chapter Ten: The Happiness of Love	221
Chapter Eleven: Caritas	235
Chapter Twelve: Love and Morality	274
Chapter Thirteen: Faithfulness	327
Chapter Fourteen: Ordo Amoris	349
Conclusion	373

Bibliography of the Philosophical Writings of Dietrich von Hildebrand	375
About the Author	377
About the Translators	379
Index	380

Acknowledgments

My work on this translation began in 2000 with a generous grant to me from Ave Maria University. Special thanks are due to Mr. Nicholas Healy, Jr., president of Ave Maria University. All of the other expenses of making and publishing the translation were covered by the Dietrich von Hildebrand Legacy Project, which for its part received support for this translation from several foundations, including the Dan Murphy Foundation, Our Sunday Visitor Institute, the Papal Foundation, and the Raskob Foundation for Catholic Activities. We also received support from individual donors, including Frank and Patricia Lynch, Michael and Suzanne Doherty, Lee and Margaret Matherne, Robert Luddy, Jules and Kathleen van Schaijik, and Robert and Joan Smith. My warmest thanks to all of them.

Towards the end of my translating labors my university, Franciscan University of Steubenville—more exactly Dr. Max Bonilla, Vice-President for Academic Affairs, and Dr. Mark Roberts, Director of M.A. Philosophy—helped me by reducing my teaching load in the fall of 2006 and by funding a student assistant in the person of Stephen Phelan. My thanks to my university for this support.

Besides thanking Mr. Phelan I also want to thank two other students of mine. Some of the early chapters were drafted by dictation, and Christina Lorin patiently transcribed the dictation. At the very end of this project, John Tutuska ably produced the index and did the work of proofreading the text.

I consulted with various persons on difficult points of translation, including my wife Pia Crosby, Alice von Hildebrand, Josef Seifert, Fritz Wenisch, and Stephen Schwarz. The translation has been improved in many ways by their counsel, and I thank each of them. Pia Crosby and Josef Seifert also provided helpful comments on my introductory study.

The cover jacket was attractively designed by Anthony C. Gualandri and Katharina Seifert. Prof. Kenneth Schmitz has enhanced the volume with a prefatory word, for which we are especially grateful.

Thanks of a different kind are due to our publisher, Mr. Bruce Fingerhut of St. Augustine Press, whose patience I taxed in an unusual way by making innumerable changes in the translation even after the typesetting process had begun. Though he had, he said, never worked with such a fickle author before, he bore with me.

I also acknowledge Alice von Hildebrand, the widow of the author and the person to whom this work is dedicated. She never lost an opportunity to give me encouragement, and in this way to give impetus to my work of translation. She could not quite understand why the translation was so long in coming, but she never stopped hoping that, as she said, she would live to hold the finished book in her hands.

But there is one person whose help deserves special mention and who in fact almost merits the title of co-translator. My son, John Henry Crosby, the founder of the Dietrich von Hildebrand Legacy Project, has not only provided through the Legacy Project much of the funding of this translation project; he also drafted for me the translation of the last three chapters, which form almost a third of the work. In addition he reviewed down to the last detail and with great precision my draft of the first chapters of the work and he made innumerable improvements. He has a keen sense of German—he spoke German before he spoke English—and he understands from within the philosophical world of von Hildebrand. But I have had the final responsibility for making the translation, and so all criticisms of it should be brought directly to me.

John F. Crosby
July 17, 2008

Preface

Kenneth L. Schmitz
University of Toronto

Among Catholic philosophers in the past century, there arose a remarkable set of diverse thinkers who shared in the new explorations in phenomenology and yet reunited these with the more traditional concern for metaphysics. One thinks of such varied philosophers as Edith Stein, Gabriel Marcel, and Karol Wojtyla. Among them, Dietrich von Hildebrand is distinguished by the breadth and intensity of his reflections on the affective dimension of our human nature. His works on the subject are manifold, but they come together in this present volume on the essence of love. Having noted the radical difference between the subjective satisfaction associated with pleasure and utility from the other modalities of value, he has presented a subtle reflection on the diverse forms of value-response. In a way that is unprecedented in philosophical literature in its depth and clarity, von Hildebrand spells out the character of affective value in an authentic presence that transcends our humanity, and calls for a value-response by which we are raised above our own capability in the realization of the very essence of love. Yet, while this carries us beyond ourselves, our experience with value does not end there. In his instructive introduction, Professor John F. Crosby draws our attention to a further relation that completes our experience of value. It is that whereby “a certain interior dimension of personal self-possession...comes to light,” and that constitutes “the objective good for a person,” and with it the fulfillment of the person in and through love. This recovery of the value of the person in and through love discloses a third kind of importance in the domain of love, a kind which is neither simply subjectively satisfying, nor important exclusively in itself, but a love that is the flourishing of the person in the supremely transcendent value of love.

In this work, von Hildebrand has made available to the English reader what—in my view—is an unprecedented reflection upon the role of love in its several forms, with especial attention to the love of man and woman. The several deformations of authentic love, such as purely selfless love and its opposite, self-centered love, are treated with understanding as forms that fail to realize ourselves as persons.

No doubt, in the long history of philosophical reflection on love the distinction between good for us and good in itself has been addressed, but I do not think that it has received such explicit and enlightening attention in other philosophers. In addition to its own intrinsic value as—in my judgment—the most significant contribution of the past century to the thematic of love, the present work with its helpful introduction may be taken as an invitation to further discussion with other philosophical traditions, such as those of Kantian, Augustinian and Thomistic provenance.

Toronto, Canada

July 24, 2008

Introductory Study

John F. Crosby

Relatively late in life, beginning around 1958, Dietrich von Hildebrand (1889-1977) began working on a book that had been growing in him all his life, a phenomenological study of love. Already in the 1920's he had received a great deal of attention in the Catholic world for his writings on man and woman, the love between them, and Christian marriage. He had caught the attention of the Catholic world by his exalted vision of the love between man and woman.¹ Through his meditation on this love he was led to argue—in fact he was one of the first Catholic writers to argue—that the marital act has a dual meaning, it has not only a procreative but also a unitive meaning, in other words, it not only transmits life but also expresses conjugal love. It is now generally acknowledged that von Hildebrand was a pioneer of the teaching on the dual meaning of the marital act that was articulated at Vatican II in the chapter on Christian marriage in *Gaudium et spes*. But what he envisioned later in life was a more comprehensive phenomenological study of love in all of its categories and not just in the category of conjugal love. When his book, *Das Wesen der Liebe*, appeared in 1971, it was arguably the most important phenomenological contribution to the subject since Max Scheler's treatment of love in his 1913 book, *Wesen und Formen der Sympathie* (*The Nature of Sympathy*).

Coming as it did at the end of a lifetime of philosophical research and writing, this treatise is embedded in his previous work in philosophy, and can be fully understood only on the background of this previous work. And so the first purpose of this introduction is to supply that background. Those who already know von Hildebrand's previous writings may find the following discussion to be of interest insofar as it makes a contribution towards placing *The Nature of Love* within the whole of his work. The second purpose of this introduction is to relate von Hildebrand's treatise to some recent phenomenological work on love, especially the work of Jean-Luc Marion.

1 He expressed this vision in his books *Reinheit und Jungfräulichkeit* (1927) and *Die Ehe* (1929). The former has been translated as *Purity* and the latter as *Marriage*. The full bibliographical reference for these and for all works of von Hildebrand cited by me in this introduction or by von Hildebrand himself in *The Nature of Love* can be found in the bibliography placed at the end of this book.

1. Value and value-response.

The first writings of von Hildebrand are in ethics, and this is in fact the area in which he made his most significant contributions to philosophy. In his ethical works he starts from Scheler's value philosophy and develops an original concept of good and bad; he explores the structure of motivation, moral value and disvalue, moral virtue and vice, and moral obligation. He also explores the structure of the human person, especially the self-transcendence that persons achieve in their moral existence; the Christian personalism that has been ascribed to von Hildebrand is established in large part in the ethical writings. My purpose here is not to survey the whole of the von Hildebrandian ethics, but simply to present those themes in it that are essential for understanding his work on love. We begin with the concept of *value* and the related concept of *value-response*: these are foundational for everything in von Hildebrand, including his philosophy of love.

It is often said that the term *value* expresses something entirely subjective, something relative to the person who places a value on a thing. While it is true that many do use value in this subjectivistic sense, the term (just like *Wert* in German) is capable of being used in a deeper and richer sense, as one can see from this occurrence of the term in Shakespeare:

But value dwells not in particular will;
It holds his estimate and dignity
As well where in 'tis precious of itself
As in the prizer. (*Troilus and Cressida*, II, 1)

Even in our time value can readily mean something like "precious of itself," as when Oscar Wilde defines the cynic as "the person who knows the price of everything and the value of nothing," or as when C. S. Lewis writing in *The Abolition of Man* embraces what he calls "the doctrine of objective value." Now von Hildebrand's use of value is situated within this rich potential of the word.

Take the character of Socrates; as we get acquainted with his wisdom, his irony, his courage, his passion for truth, we experience value in him. The value does not depend on us the prizers, but we experience it as altogether independent of us and our prizing; we experience in Socrates something "precious of itself." We are filled with admiration and veneration, and we understand why Plato and others could have venerated him as they did. Now in order to throw value into relief von Hildebrand brings in for contrast what he calls "the importance of the subjectively satisfying." Consider the importance that another cigarette has for a heavy smoker; the cigarette does not present itself to him as "precious of itself" but is rather important for him simply because it satisfies his craving. If the cigarette did not provide him with satisfaction he would pass it by in complete indifference; he detects no intrinsic excellence in it that would sustain his interest in it in the absence of

any subjective satisfaction. He takes another cigarette to consume it, not to revere it.

There is for von Hildebrand not only value but also disvalue, which would be that which is “odious of itself” and not just subjectively dissatisfying. When we condemn some violent and cruel crime, we do not just find it dissatisfying; we find that it is wicked with a wickedness that is entirely independent of our subjective dissatisfaction.

We can go deeper into von Hildebrand’s understanding of value when we understand why it is that all value bears beauty. It is not that he thinks that all value is specifically aesthetic value; on the contrary, in the first chapters of his *Aesthetik I* he distinguishes aesthetic values with precision from other value domains. But he means that even non-aesthetic value, such as the value we find in Socrates, is marked by a certain beauty. This is why the deep intuitive experience of a value always confers some delight on the experiencing person; it is the delight that only the beautiful can give. Recall the way in which Alcibiades was fascinated by Socrates; it must have been a value-based fascination, for he mentions the beauty that he saw in Socrates (a beauty that was not an aesthetic quality but rather a certain radiance of the character of Socrates). By contrast, I find no beauty in that which appeals to me as merely subjectively satisfying. When my subjective satisfaction is the sole determinant of the importance that something takes on for me, then that importance, much as it makes the thing attractive to me, is unable to make the thing radiant with beauty.

Von Hildebrand was convinced that—to vary the famous utterance of Thales—the world is full of values. He thinks that we have to do with value in more ways than we can count, and that our world, especially in its deepest dimensions, would be disfigured beyond recognition if we bracketed all value out of it. The expression, *die Welt der Werte*, or the world of values, expresses for him all the depth and plenitude of being, as well as the hierarchical structure that makes our world a cosmos. Value also has a religious dimension for him; the values of things reflect in different ways the divine glory, which for its part is also a value concept. Thus *value* for von Hildebrand was as metaphysically potent as *being*. He knew nothing of the Heideggerian aversion for value and value philosophy. Whereas Heidegger could conceive of value only as something subjectivistically superimposed on being, von Hildebrand conceived of value as nothing other than being in all its dignity, nobility, and beauty.²

But we are here concerned with the ethical and personalist use that von

2 I have written against this Heideggerian condemnation of value, giving special attention to the particular mode of inherence that is found in the relation of value to being. See my studies, “The Idea of Value and the Reform of the Traditional Metaphysics of *Bonum*” *Aletheia*, I no 2, (1978) 221–336 and “Are Good and Being Really Convertible?” in *The New Scholasticism*, 57 no. 4, (1983): 465–500.

Hildebrand makes of value. For this we have to explore a certain very revealing relation in which value stands to persons who know about it: every thing of value is worthy of a right response in virtue of its value. Thus Socrates is worthy of admiration and veneration; persons are worthy of respect; being is worthy of reverence; God is worthy of adoration. In each case some right response is due to a valuable being, or is merited by it; an elementary justice is fulfilled when the being that is in some way “precious of itself” receives the due response. Whoever admires a Socrates has the consciousness of Socrates being worthy of admiration, has the consciousness of one’s admiration not just being a psychological fact but the fulfillment of an ought. With the importance of the subjectively satisfying, by contrast, we have no consciousness of the important thing being worthy of any response. The cigarette is not experienced as worthy of the interest of the smoker.

The full personalist significance of what von Hildebrand calls value-response shows itself if we consider value-response not only from the side of value, which merits the response, but also from the side of the human person, who gives the response. Von Hildebrand often marvels at the way in which a person *transcends himself* in giving a value-response, and in fact throughout his ethical writings he holds that the real “signature” of the human person lies in this self-transcendence achieved in value-response. He speaks of self-transcendence because a person who is caught up in the value of something is stepping beyond his own needs and, instead of seeing the world only from the point of view of satisfying them, he sees it for what it is in its own right, according to its own value, and he approaches it with reverence, responding to it with a response that it is proportioned to and measured by the value. By contrast, in pursuing something as subjectively satisfying we bend the thing to the satisfaction of our needs, seeing it only under the aspect of satisfying our needs, taking no interest in what it is in its own right. In this we precisely do not transcend ourselves but remain locked in our immanence, and so we give less evidence of existing as persons.

Von Hildebrand does not just contrast *individual acts* of value-response with *individual acts* of being motivated by the subjectively satisfying; he also contrasts *two kinds of persons*. The one kind of person lives primarily by value-response; this person never lets his interest in the subjectively satisfying interfere with or curtail his reverence towards the world of value. He is still quite capable of experiencing things subjectively satisfying and of desiring them, but he never pursues them at the expense of the call of value. The other kind of person lives primarily for the subjectively satisfying; in the end he ceases even to care about what is “precious of itself.” Here for von Hildebrand lies the fundamental moral freedom of persons; here is the most radical self-determination of which we are capable, for here we choose between radically opposed forms of moral existence. Von Hildebrand offers here a value-based way of thinking about the two great loves distinguished by St. Augustine: the

love of God that leads even to the contempt of self,³ and the love of self that leads even to the contempt of God.

But von Hildebrand attempts to achieve greater precision regarding the two loves. He argues that it is a certain kind of value-response that stands at the center of the moral existence of the first kind of person. In speaking just now of the beauty of value we were taking value in its power of drawing and attracting us; but value sometimes also has the power, or rather authority, to bind me in the manner of moral obligation. If I am tempted to do some wrong, such as cast suspicion for a crime onto someone whom I know did not commit it, and if I am convicted in my conscience that I must not do this, then I experience certain values of the innocent person exercising this binding function. The values that exercise this function get a special name in the ethics of von Hildebrand; he calls them “morally relevant values,” a term that the reader will often encounter in the present work. He contrasts them with “morally irrelevant values,” which are things that indeed form a full contrast with the importance of the merely subjectively satisfying, but are not such as to bind me with obligation. A tree, for example, has von Hildebrandian value, a value that in fact, when strongly experienced, commands reverence; but if I want to cut one down for my use I do not find myself morally bound to let it stand. The tree is something “precious of itself,” but it does not have the power to bind that is the defining note of the morally relevant values.

Von Hildebrand takes very seriously this imperative power of the morally relevant values, for he thinks of it, just as Cardinal Newman thought of it, as being full of intimations of God. Only if this call is ultimately grounded in God, he says, can we make sense of the way in which these values pierce me with their unconditional call and energize my deepest freedom and elicit a kind of obedience from me in my response to them. In chapter 4 of the present work von Hildebrand explores further (beyond the previous ethical writings) the special transcendence that is achieved in relation to morally relevant values. He argues that the transcendence proper to all value-response is raised to a higher power in the case of the value-response given to morally relevant values. Here the implicit encounter with God calls me out of my immanence in a far more radical way. It follows that a more precise statement of the two opposite kinds of person and of the two opposite kinds of love would go like this: the one person gives absolute priority to all morally relevant values, never letting his interest in the subjectively satisfying divert him from the imperative call of these values, whereas the other person is willing to scorn even morally relevant values in the pursuit of his subjective satisfaction.

3 By appropriating this Augustinian formula von Hildebrand in no way means to deny the existence of a well-ordered self-love that coheres entirely with the love for God.

2. Value in relation to that which is objectively good for a person

The reader may be puzzled at the fact that in his ethical works as well as in the work on love von Hildebrand is frequently in debate with Thomistic philosophy. This is puzzling, since the Hildebrandian ethics as so far outlined would not seem to be controversial for Christian philosophers; it does not seem to say anything that they do not all say. But there is a reason for von Hildebrand's polemic, and it will come to light as soon as we see why he distinguishes a third kind of good, one different from either value or the importance of the subjectively satisfying.

Von Hildebrand thinks that a good such as being healthy, or being educated, is not just important for a person as a result of being subjectively satisfying for that person. When I take an interest in my education, and realize the importance of it, I quite understand that my subjective satisfaction is not the principle or cause of the importance; I understand that some other, stronger kind of importance is at stake. This is why I acknowledge a real moral fault in myself if, at some earlier time in my life, I neglected my education. If I *ought* to take an interest in my education—if in other words it is morally relevant—then there is more to the importance of education than its being just subjectively satisfying for me. But Hildebrand thinks that this more-than-subjective importance of my education is also not the importance of value, for my education is important *for me* in the sense that it is important for me *by being beneficial for me*. Thus the fact that it is my education and not yours enters into the importance that it has for me. But when some thing of value, such as the nobility of a generous person, has importance in my eyes, then I take an interest in it without having any thought of receiving a benefit. If I am filled with admiration for the generous person, I have no least thought of being enhanced in my being as a result of admiring him. The nobility of his character is important for me under the aspect of being good in its own right and not just beneficial for me. Thus the importance exemplified in the good of my education is importance of a third kind, reducible neither to the importance of the merely subjectively satisfying nor to the importance of value; von Hildebrand calls it the “objective good for the person,” or the beneficial good, against which stands, in the negative, all that is objectively harmful for the person.

There is a remarkable passage in Plato's *Gorgias* that lets us see the difference between the objective good for the person and value. Early on Socrates is trying to convince Polus that it is worse for a human being to commit injustice than to be the victim of it. What he means is that it is incomparably harmful for a human being to commit injustice; he is in effect making a claim in terms of von Hildebrand's third kind of good/bad. Since he is having little success in persuading Polus about this supreme harmfulness of wrongdoing, he decides to take a different approach; he asks Polus whether wrongdoing is not *uglier* than suffering it. By taking wrongdoing under a certain aesthetic aspect, Socrates takes it precisely as a disvalue in von Hildebrand's sense. Socrates must have switched to a different aspect of good/bad, for now Polus agrees

with him. It is easy to transpose this result into the positive; then we get the thesis that doing the just thing is supremely beneficial to the one who does it, and that, in addition, accomplishing justice also has its own beauty. In von Hildebrand's language: accomplishing justice is not only good for the person who accomplishes it, but also has value.

Now von Hildebrand thinks that the *bonum* of Thomistic philosophy centers largely around this third kind of good and does not take sufficient account of value and of value-response. He has in mind the Thomistic teaching that each being has a natural desire (*appetitus*) for the fullness of being proper to its kind, or in other words for the full actualization or perfection of its being, and that *bonum* or good simply expresses this perfection or actualization considered as desirable. *Bonum* thus seems to von Hildebrand to be defined in a way that is equivalent to his third kind of good—it seems to be good understood as that which is beneficial or fulfilling for some person. But if good is defined in this way, then little place is left for value and value-response. As a result, he says, the Thomistic ethics⁴ cannot do full justice to the transcendence that really characterizes the moral life; in place of a life centered around giving things of value their due and obeying the call of morally relevant values, we now have a life centered around the full flourishing of myself. And although such a life is never to be confused with a life centered around the merely subjectively satisfying,⁵ it is still deficient with respect to transcen-

4 Michael Waldstein has recently questioned this von Hildebrandian interpretation of Thomism in his study "Dietrich von Hildebrand and St. Thomas Aquinas on Goodness and Happiness," in *Nova et Vetera*, I, no. 2: (2003) 403–464. Waldstein is, I think, right in saying that St. Thomas himself does not have to be interpreted as holding the position summarized in this paragraph. Von Hildebrand was basing himself on what he often heard certain Thomists say and he stopped short of ascribing to St. Thomas himself this conception of good and *appetitus*. Waldstein suggests that the real target of von Hildebrand is not St. Thomas but a degenerate form of Thomism that Waldstein dubs "entelechiial Thomism." On the other hand, it can hardly be claimed, and Waldstein does not claim, that St. Thomas had the concept of value and of value-response and that he used these concepts, or equivalent concepts, at the level of his theoretical discourse on good and happiness. This means that St. Thomas does not capture the moment of transcendence in moral action with the precision with which von Hildebrand captures it.

5 Waldstein, *op. cit.*, especially pp. 404–414, does not avoid this confusion entirely. He speaks as if von Hildebrand were alleging that in Thomism the moral life is led at the level of the subjectively satisfying. In fact, von Hildebrand never thought that Thomism, or any school of Thomism, however degenerate, was inclined to an ethics based on the subjectively satisfying. He thought that he discerned, it is true, a defect of transcendence in the Thomistic account of the striving for good and for happiness, but he took this defect to derive from the place that the objective good for the person occupies in Thomism, which to his mind was a defect very different—utterly different—from the defect of advocating a life abandoned to the merely subjectively satisfying.

dence. Whenever von Hildebrand deplores *eudaemonism* in ethics, he is deploring a concern with my flourishing that compromises the spirit of value-response in which I ought to live.

When, for example, I defend an innocently accused person, I do so in the consciousness that I owe this in justice to the other; the thought that I flourish by defending the other is entirely in the background. Von Hildebrand is fiercely insistent on the fact that I defend the other for his or her sake, and not first of all for my sake. Of course I flourish and become happy as a result of defending the other, and in fact happy in a way in which people who do not live by value-response cannot be happy, but this experience of my flourishing for von Hildebrand flows superabundantly from my value-responding commitment to the other and functions as an entirely secondary motive, a motive entirely subordinate to the value-response to the other. Von Hildebrand makes a similar argument at the level of our religious existence. While we often approach God under the aspect of being supremely beneficial for us, as when we invoke Him as savior, protector, rock of refuge, comforter, we also approach Him under the aspect of value, as when we adore Him in the consciousness that He is worthy of adoration, or praise Him as one who is worthy of all praise. Our religious existence, he argues, becomes cramped if we always only approach Him in the first way; it has to be permeated by the transcendence that is achieved in value-responding adoration and praise.

In no way, however, does von Hildebrand aim at keeping out of the moral life all interest in things that are beneficial for me, as if the moral life were led exclusively in and through value-response and as if any interest in what is beneficial for me were an interest that falls outside of the moral life. He thinks in fact that objective goods for myself are frequently morally relevant for me (as we just saw in the example of neglecting my education) and that objective goods for other persons, so far as I am in a position to provide them for others, are always morally relevant for me. What distinguishes his ethics is the idea that the interest in objective goods for persons cannot be the whole of the moral life but must be situated within value-responding affirmations of value. In fact he makes a stronger claim: value-response should have a certain priority over all interest in what is beneficial for persons. Thus I should be more concerned that the innocent person be vindicated by my intervention than that I flourish and become happy by intervening on behalf of him or her. And I should be more concerned that God be exalted and praised than that I be blessed by Him and happy in Him.

But von Hildebrand also explores the interconnection, indeed interpenetration of the two kinds of interest, as when he claims that this priority of value-response is necessary for certain beneficial goods to be experienced in all of their beneficence for me. The act of intervening on the behalf of the innocent person is able fully to benefit me only if the will to be benefited is subordinate to the will to vindicate the innocent person. I can only be happy in God if I know how to adore Him and praise Him all for His own sake; if I do

not know Him as one who is worthy of adoration, then my union with Him will not confer all the beatitude of which it is capable. So in the end his objection to what he took to be the Thomistic ethics is not that it takes *bonum* seriously but that it lacks the idea of good in itself, and of serving what is good in itself for its own sake. This means that this ethics cannot do full justice to the transcendence proper to the moral life, and it means, in addition, that it cannot unlock all those goods for persons that depend on value and that can be sought only in conjunction with value-response.

We are about to see another aspect of this interpenetration of the two kinds of interest; we will see how for von Hildebrand the transcendence of value-response can be raised to a higher power when it is joined with a certain concern for objective goods for the person.

We have now surveyed the three kinds or categories of good/bad that von Hildebrand distinguishes: the importance of the subjectively satisfying/dissatisfying; the objective good/evil for a person; and value/disvalue. He gives his fullest account of these three categories in chapters 1-3 of his *Ethics*; these chapters form a kind of cornerstone of the entire philosophy of von Hildebrand. It presents a theory of value and of human motivation that structures the treatise of love from beginning to end.

3. Love as a value-response

If readers know no more about von Hildebrand's ethics than we have just sketched out, they will not be at all surprised at the first chapter of *The Nature of Love*; they could have almost predicted that he would open this work with a chapter on "Love as Value-Response." The first chapter of this work is in fact entirely devoted to showing that love is a value-response to the beloved person as beautiful. The Platonic account of love in the *Symposium*, 199c-204c, is exactly the kind of account that von Hildebrand wants to overcome. I do not, as Plato thought, love out of need, and I am not drawn to the beloved under the aspect of one who can fulfill my need. I am drawn to the beloved as one who is lovable in his or her own right, and I love the other for his or her own sake. Von Hildebrand fights against eudaemonism in the theory of love no less than in his ethics.

He considers the objection that my love is often awakened by the good that a person does for me, and that this seems to show that I after all love the other under the aspect of being good for me rather than under the aspect of value. Von Hildebrand responds that when the other is good to me, she shows me something good and beautiful in her person; it is this beauty—a genuine datum of value—that engenders my love, and not the fact that the other has done good to me. The way the other turns to me doing good to me, reveals to me the goodness of the other, but this is a goodness that is not reducible to being good to me, but it is something worthy and splendid in its own right; the person, thus revealed, stands before me as radiant and beautiful, and so awakens in me a value-responding love for her.

Von Hildebrand takes care to avoid the idea that the beloved person is just a specimen of some excellence or value, and is lovable only on the basis of instantiating some excellence or value. If this were so, I would love the value more than the person. So love is not just any value-response, but it is a very particular one in which the value to which I respond is one with the unrepeatable person of the other. It is a value in which the beloved person is, as he says, altogether “thematic” as this individual person. Only in this way can I really love the other for his or her own sake. The richest insights of von Hildebrand into the unrepeatable individuality of a person are to be found right here in chapter 3 of the present work, where he discusses the *Wertgegebenheit* that enkindles love. It is understandable that the study of love would draw him more deeply into the unrepeatable individuality of persons than the study of ethical existence did. When I intervene to protect the unjustly accused person, I need not be aware of or respond to the person as *this individual*, for I should be ready to intervene on behalf of any other similarly accused person: but if I love that person—love of neighbor is a separate case—I must be aware of and respond to him or her as this unrepeatable person and no other.

Von Hildebrand also deals with the objection that would reverse the relation between my love and the value of the beloved. According to this objection, I first love, and then I invest the other with all kinds of noble qualities; far from being grounded in the value that I have experienced in the other, my love is in fact the source of such value. Von Hildebrand argues that it is in fact other attitudes mixed in with but really foreign to love that lead me to endow the other with value. For instance, in the love between man and woman sexual desire can lead to value illusions; in the love of parents for their children, a certain parental pride can lead to illusions about the superiority of one’s own children over other people’s children. Once these attitudes are distinguished from love, he argues, it becomes apparent that love, while it sensitizes me to the value of the beloved person, is characterized by a deep reverence that inhibits value illusions.

Von Hildebrand also examines the fact that each person has a deep need to love and to be loved; this is why it is so deeply fulfilling to love and why a loveless existence is a crippled existence. This significant fact may incline us to think that the beloved person is loved under the aspect of fulfilling this need. But then love would after all be no real value-response. Von Hildebrand responds that there are many different kinds of needs, and some of them actually have a value-responding structure. Why should there not be a need to love another for his or her own sake? a need to be captivated in a value-responding way by the beauty of another?⁶ When Aristotle speaks of the natural desire of

6 I take “need” here in a broader sense than von Hildebrand usually takes it; whereas he usually means with this term something that arises in us on its own and bends to itself that which satisfies it, I use it here to mean anything in the human person that provides the basis for “fulfillment.”

all human beings to know, he means of course to know things as they really are; only knowledge in this sense could fulfill the desire. Why then should it be surprising that the need to love can only be fulfilled when I am moved by the inner splendor, the real worthiness and value of a person?⁷

The first thing we want to show, then, is that von Hildebrand in his treatise on love continues along the line of his earlier ethical work. Self-transcending value-response is in its own way just as important for his account of love as it was for his account of moral action and moral virtues. The resolute opposition to eudaemonism that began in his ethical works continues here in his treatise on love. We could say, using language that is not von Hildebrand's, that he wants the beloved person to appear in all his or her otherness; any intrusion of me and my needs and my desire for happiness must be excluded if I am to encounter the other so as really to love him or her.

4. Love as a "super value-response"

But at the same time von Hildebrand notices that the transcendence that he had studied in ethics is modified in the case of some kinds of love. As a master phenomenologist he would never simply transfer to love all the patterns of transcendence found in the moral life. He observes that the imperative moment that he studied in connection with morally relevant values is not found in the love between friends nor is it found in the love between man and woman, which he regards as the most eminent kind of love. For it is never a matter of strict moral obligation to enter into friendship with a certain person or to enter into a man-woman love relation with a certain person. The imperative moment is indeed found in two kinds of love, namely in love of neighbor and in love for God, but it is not found in the other categories of love. Thus a certain power of moral transcendence is not proper to them. On the other hand, these loves have certain perfections of transcendence that are not found in the moral life. In this book von Hildebrand is always tracking the ways in which persons transcend themselves and is always examining how the transcendence of love is both like and unlike the transcendence achieved in a well-ordered moral existence.

Thus he argues, building on his earlier study of human affectivity,⁸ that in loving another I take an *affective delight* in the other. If I exercise only my will, but not my heart, then however favorable to the other my willing may be, however beneficent, I do not really love the other. For this affective energy proper to all love—and he says that no other response is affective in the way that love is—lets me be fully present in my love, present with my whole self, with my real self, my intimate self; as a result it lets me give myself to the other in a way in which, exercising the will alone, I cannot give myself, and so it lets me

7 This train of thought, clearly, lends itself to serving as a bridge between the Thomistic ethics and the Hildebrandian ethics.

8 Dietrich von Hildebrand, *The Heart*, especially Part I, chapter 8.

transcend myself towards the other in a new way. This rich vein of thought on the affectivity of love is based in von Hildebrand on his value theory. For value, especially considered under the aspect of the beauty that it gives off, delights; value is revealed as value precisely through its capacity to delight, to affect, to move the heart. Thus the beloved person, appearing radiant with value, awakens my love by moving me affectively. Above we distinguished between the power of value to *attract or draw* a person, and the power of (morally relevant) value to *bind or oblige* a person. In love it is above all the former power that is at work. When value exercises its binding function, giving rise to an obligatory action, then it addresses my will; but insofar as it draws me to another in love, it addresses my heart. And though the will that bows before the obligation achieves a unique kind of transcendence, as we saw, the person who loves with affective plenitude achieves a different kind of transcendence towards the beloved person.

Von Hildebrand considers another form of transcendence that is proper to love; he gives it a special name, “super value-response,” a term that appears here for the first time in von Hildebrand’s corpus. It cannot be my goal here to offer a full discussion of “super value-response,” but simply—in accordance with the limited purpose of this introduction—to show how von Hildebrand employs the categories of his ethics in order to form this new concept.

Let us go back to good in the sense of that which is objectively good for some person. Good in this sense can be reduced neither to value nor to the importance of the merely subjectively satisfying, as we saw. This kind of good plays a major role in raising love from the status of value-response to the status of a “super value-response.” This seems surprising at first glance, since we explained value-response *in distinction to* an interest in what is beneficial for me: how then can this interest serve to raise value-response to a higher power of value-response?

I enter into a relation of love with someone. It would not be a relation of love if I did not stand in a value-responding relation to the other, as we saw, but my transcendence towards the other is not limited to value-response. For I am happy in loving the other and in being loved by the other—happy in the sense not just of being subjectively satisfied, but rather of being deeply, gratefully happy. This means that the beloved person, and our relationship, is an eminent case of something objectively good for me. At the same time I become something objectively good for the beloved person, who finds her happiness in her relation to me. Now von Hildebrand argues that I give myself to the beloved person in a unique way by willing to be the source of her happiness; he also argues that I give myself to the other by willing to receive from her my own deepest happiness. But this self-giving, though based on what is objectively good for a person, is a dimension of transcendence towards the other all its own; it is a transcendence that goes beyond the transcendence of value-response; it is that which makes love a “super value-response.”

It is true that, in the abstract, to take an interest in something objectively good for me lacks the transcendence of a value-responding affirmation of something in its own right. But if the objective good for me is *embedded in value-response*, as it is in the case of love, then my interest in this good can join with my value-response in such a way as to effect a self-giving that surpasses the value-response alone and that qualifies as a “super value-response.” The reader should give the closest attention to all that von Hildebrand writes about this embeddedness; he offers here a real dialectical feast of things interpenetrating each other despite the appearance of excluding each other.

It follows that even though love (apart from love of neighbor and love for God) lacks the transcendence achieved in relation to morally relevant values, it has its own singular transcendence, a transcendence that becomes intelligible, surprisingly, when we consider how the one who loves finds his own good and happiness in the beloved person.

5. The requital of love

But in his treatise on love von Hildebrand makes still more use of his concept of that which is objectively good for a person. He argues that the interest of the lover in what is good for himself not only enhances his love; von Hildebrand also argues that if the lover lacks this interest in his good—an interest always embedded in value-response, it goes without saying—then his love becomes disfigured, and in the end depersonalized in a certain way.

Let us suppose that someone is zealous for the selflessness and other-centeredness that characterize love, and that this person proceeds to propound a radically altruistic account of love, and to propound it in the terms of von Hildebrand’s ethics. Such a person might begin by saying that love should be lived exclusively as value-response—“exclusively” in the sense that the lover should renounce any and every interest in his own good and his own happiness. This altruist might add that one can, in presenting the altruistic ideal of love, also make use of von Hildebrand’s concept of the objective good for a person, but only in this way: the lover is concerned with all that is good for the beloved person, that is, he seeks out things for the other precisely under the aspect of them being good for the beloved person.⁹ But the good for himself that arises from loving—this he renounces. So his love is radically other-centered in two von Hildebrandian ways: he stands in a value-responding relation to the beloved person and he is committed to all that is good for him or her.

9 In chapter 7 of the present work von Hildebrand explores with precision and subtlety this “for the good of the other” that is proper to love. In the previous chapters he had explained (in connection with “super value-response”) how the other becomes an objective good for the one who loves; in chapter 7 he explains how the one who loves so enters into what is good for the other that this good becomes “indirectly” good for the one who loves.

The altruist thinks that by loving without any interest in acquiring some good or happiness for himself, he perfects this other-centered direction of love, and so perfects love itself.

We already know what one of von Hildebrand's responses to this altruistic proposal would be; he would say that it compromises the transcendence of love as "super value-response" and that it interferes with the self-giving proper to love. Let us now add another response that he would make; he would say that this interference leads to a caricature of love, as we can see if we imagine a man saying to a woman: "I love you for what you are, for your own sake, but whether you love me in return I don't care, and I don't care if our love is mutual and is a source of happiness for me; I want nothing for myself, I just want your good and your happiness." Such a man knows nothing about the love between man and woman; and far from raising his love to a high pitch of selflessness, he in fact insults the woman, as von Hildebrand observes. Thus altruism, while it poses as supreme love, in fact makes a mockery of love. It turns out, then, that the interest of the lover in his own happiness is not just an optional enhancement of love, but is an indispensable ingredient of love, without which love becomes severely deformed.

In his book von Hildebrand tries to explain why this deformation results. He takes very seriously this fact about the "genius" of love: in loving another I want to be loved in return by the other. This is obvious in the case of the love between man and woman, but it is hardly less obvious in the love between friends, or between parents and children. In all of these kinds, or categories, of love, I remain painfully "exposed" if I offer love to someone who does not return my love; I cannot fail to be disappointed by non-requital. If the other does return my love, then I am happy in being loved, and happy in the bond of mutual love that arises between us. So if I love the other I want this happiness of being united with the other; I cannot not want it. Von Hildebrand thus acknowledges that the issue of my happiness comes up in a different and more prominent way here in the case of love than it does in the case of moral action, and that as a result the debate with eudaemonism takes a different form with love than with moral action.

Now it is a huge mistake, von Hildebrand says, to see as in any way selfish this will to be loved in return and this will to be happy by being united with the beloved person: and it is just the mirror image of this mistake to think that my love is particularly selfless when I renounce any interest in being loved in return and when I renounce any interest in being happy in a mutual love, as if love became more truly love by taking on the altruistic form just described. Of course, if my offer of love were in some way conditional on the other person requiting my love—if I were proposing to the beloved person a kind of contract or exchange—then we would understandably detect something selfish in my will to be loved in return. But in fact nothing prevents me from loving the other unconditionally, even though I hope for a requital of my love. The

altruist who wants to suppress all interest in his happiness is trying to live beyond the reciprocity that belongs essentially to love, and for this reason he produces a deformation of love.

Von Hildebrand identifies one reason that draws us into the altruistic mistake. He examines throughout his book the various “categories” or kinds of love, such as the love between man and woman, the love between friends, the love of children for their parents, or parents for their children. Among these categories is love of neighbor, as exemplified by the Good Samaritan. Now love of neighbor seems to be rather different from the other categories of love with respect to the desire for a return of love. The Good Samaritan does not seem to be waiting for the injured man whom he helped to love him in return, nor will he go away disappointed if his love is not returned, or at least not go away disappointed in the way in which I am disappointed if someone to whom I offer friendship does not want to be my friend. It belongs to this category of love that the issue of my happiness, so prominent in the other categories, recedes into the background. This category of love really is other-centered in a special way. Now if we take love of neighbor as the pattern of all love, then we move towards the altruistic conception of love. Von Hildebrand argues that we should not take it as the pattern of all love; we should see it as one category of love among others. The love between friends, categorially very different from love of neighbor, is also love; it has the value-responding structure proper to all love; but it can be the kind of love that it is only if each friend is concerned with a return of the other’s love and with the happiness of being united with the other.

But if we are really to understand the disorder of the altruistic ideal of love, and to understand why it is indispensable for the lover to take an interest in his own happiness in loving, we have to follow von Hildebrand to a deeper level of analysis.

6. Love and *Eigenleben*

Von Hildebrand holds that the person who tries to love in this “selfless” way depersonalizes himself. He does not take himself seriously as person; he does not remain entirely intact as person as a result of his way of centering exclusively on the beloved person. Since von Hildebrand, as we saw, thinks of the person so much in terms of transcendence and value-response, it is natural to ask whether this selfless person seems to us depersonalized because of some defect of transcendence. But no sooner do we ask this than we see that it is not a defect of this transcendence at all; on the contrary, in this person we see self-transcendence grown monstrous. No, he is depersonalized as a result of an entirely different defect, namely a deficient relation to himself. This means that a human being is constituted as person not just in the moment of self-transcendence, but also in the moment of relating to himself. It is, then, a certain interior dimension of personal self-possession that comes to light at this point

in von Hildebrand's treatise on love and that completes all that he had said in his ethical writings about the self-transcending, "ecstatic" capacity of the person in value-response.

Von Hildebrand explores this interior dimension under the name of *Eigenleben*, a new term that appears here for the first time in his corpus. No German word in this work presented a greater challenge to me as translator than the word *Eigenleben*. I settled in the end for "subjectivity,"¹⁰ but sometimes I just keep the German term, and I will keep it in the present discussion. Of particular interest for us is that von Hildebrand characterizes *Eigenleben* in terms of good in the sense of the objective good for a person: "The defining trait of *Eigenleben* is the realm of all those things that are of concern to me as this unrepeatably individual, that stand in some relation to my happiness, that address me—this in contrast to all that belongs to the *Eigenleben* of another person whom I do not know" (203). If in transcending myself in value-response I give myself over to what is other than myself, in my *Eigenleben* I have to do with what is my own. The pronouns I and me and mine belong to my *Eigenleben*.

It is important for us to consider with von Hildebrand how central the place of *Eigenleben* is in the existence of a person. He says: "To have an *Eigenleben* in this sense...is a deeply significant characteristic of the human being as spiritual person and is profoundly associated with human dignity and with the metaphysical condition of human beings" (201). And in the following he contrasts this aspect of the dignity of persons with that other aspect that, as we saw above, is disclosed in the capacity for value-responding self-transcendence:

Whoever does not acknowledge the transcendence of human beings [in value-response] fails to understand what distinguishes them as persons from all impersonal creatures. But whoever smells something egocentric in the fact that I desire an objective good for myself, whoever thinks that the ideal of human life is for me to lose all interest in things good for myself, fails to understand the character of the human person as subject. Such a one fails to see the mysterious center to which everything in my life as person is referred, the center that is addressed by beneficial goods and that is inseparably bound up with the dignity of a person. If the first error locks me in myself and in this way distorts my ultimate relation to the world...the second error deprives me of my character as a full self. The first error reduces me to the biological, taking me according to the model of a plant or animal. The second error robs me of my character as a full subject and

10 For my justification of this translation, see my note at the beginning of chapter 9, p. 200.

destroys the personal in me by exaggerating the objective to the point of dissolving that which makes me subject (206).

This depreciation of the *Eigenleben* of the human person is for von Hildebrand the root of the extreme altruistic ideal of love. In renouncing all interest in being loved and in being happy by being loved, the altruist neglects this mysterious center in himself, neglects himself as subject, and for this reason he neglects his dignity as person. Von Hildebrand gives many interesting examples of what he calls “withered” *Eigenleben*, and some of them represent vintage altruism. Thus in one place he speaks of “a type of person who lives with a family as an old servant of the lady of the house, or perhaps as a friend of hers, and who shares the life of the family and has her whole life in caring for the children and the household. These are usually persons who do not feel up to having a full *Eigenleben* of their own, whose aspirations for happiness are weak and modest, whose primary relation to the great goods of life is weak and who therefore incline to attach themselves to the lives of others...” (204) This altruistic person does not in the first place lack transcendence, for she may be extremely devoted to the family members; but she lacks *Eigenleben*; she lacks the desire for her own happiness that belongs to being a fully awakened person. It is of course also true that her transcendence towards the members of the family is impaired; she would be able to turn to them in a more radically other-centered way if she acquired a stronger *Eigenleben*. But von Hildebrand does not think of *Eigenleben* as existing exclusively for the sake of enhancing transcendence; it has a meaning of its own, existing also for the sake of the person whose *Eigenleben* it is.

Von Hildebrand is also well aware that there is a way of invoking religion to discredit the *Eigenleben* of persons and to present self-transcendence as the only thing that really matters before God. In the following he considers this religiously driven altruism and then he rejects it:

Now one might think that the possession of *Eigenleben* in our earthly existence belongs to the things that are *allowed*, but that it is more perfect to give it up in the sense of desiring no personal objective good for myself and remaining in an exclusively value-responding attitude. Is not the attitude of seeking *only* the kingdom of God simply an augmentation of the attitude of seeking *first* the kingdom of God?... By no means. *Eigenleben* belongs to the nature of the human person... This becomes clear in thinking about the sacred humanity of Christ. Even the Son of Man wept at the death of Lazarus... We cannot stress this enough: *Eigenleben* belongs to the meaning and nature of a human being... (215)

In a much earlier work (*Transformation in Christ*) von Hildebrand dealt with the structure of Christian humility, in the course of which he distinguished

certain forms of pseudo-humility, such as thinking of oneself in terms of a quantitative smallness, as if each human being were just an insignificant speck in an immense universe. If he had had *Eigenleben* on his mind when he wrote that earlier work, he would certainly have identified the religiously motivated depreciation of *Eigenleben* as a form of pseudo-humility, and he would have argued that even before God, or rather *most of all* before God, my *Eigenleben* is something important and refuses to be relativized into insignificance.

Von Hildebrand acknowledges, then, that the objective good for a person plays a different and larger role in love than in moral action. It not only underlies that new dimension of transcendence in love that he calls “super value-response,” as we saw above; it also underlies an interior dimension of personal existence—*Eigenleben*—that shows itself in love in an eminent way. Von Hildebrand’s image of the human person is fundamentally enlarged in this work; the earlier stress on transcendence is here developed into a polarity of transcendence and *Eigenleben*. And the category of the objective good for the person is the basic conceptual tool by which von Hildebrand thinks through this enlargement of his personalism.

Von Hildebrand often uses these results to bring clarity to the question of what counts as the *selflessness* that we admire in love, and what counts as the *selfishness* that disfigures love. Thus he argues that it is not selfish to want to have an *Eigenleben*; it is not selfish to want to be loved in return; it is not selfish to want to be happy in loving—as long, of course, as these desires are embedded in the value-responding affirmation of the beloved person. In other words, selflessness does not require indifference to one’s *Eigenleben*, indifference to being loved in return, or indifference to being happy in loving. Far from promoting a morally admirable selflessness, such indifference undermines one’s dignity as a personal self. What is condemned as selfish is commonly nothing other than the care of one’s *Eigenleben*, which in itself is morally praiseworthy.

The reader will notice that these important distinctions can hardly be made if one does not distinguish with von Hildebrand between the merely subjectively satisfying and the objective good for a person. If one collapses the latter into the former, then one is sure to think of a strong *Eigenleben* in terms of selfishness. And one will never attain to the concept of a “super value-response,” since one will have depreciated the very factor—the well-ordered concern for one’s own happiness—that makes for a “super value-response.”

7. Von Hildebrand and recent phenomenological work on love

I said above that a second purpose of this introduction is to set von Hildebrand in relation to some recent phenomenological work on the nature of love.

If von Hildebrand were alive today and were to examine this recent work, he would be struck by the fact that eudaemonism in the philosophy of love is no longer strongly represented, whereas altruism is dominant. He would see to

his surprise that the task is not so much to refute eudaemonism as rather to defend against extreme forms of altruism the interest of the lover in being loved, and in being happy in being loved. This altruism is perhaps nowhere so much in evidence as in the work of Emmanuel Levinas. Here we encounter the contrast between love that fulfills the need of the lover, also called concupiscence and sometimes eros, and love that is based on the imperious claim of my neighbor, the “absolutely Other,” also called love without concupiscence, and sometimes agape.¹¹ This latter love is presented in radically other-centered terms—so radical that it seems to many of Levinas’s critics to be impossible to achieve in action. Thus John Caputo calls Levinasian love of neighbor “an impossible dream.”¹²

Certainly von Hildebrand would welcome the anti-eudaemonism that is found in Levinas’s account of love of neighbor. Levinas for his part, one would think, would welcome the strong stress on “for the sake of the other” found in von Hildebrand. He would presumably also welcome much that von Hildebrand says about the transcendence proper to the moral life. But von Hildebrand would wonder whether the other-centeredness of the one who loves is allowed by Levinas to be penetrated by the interest that this person might take in his own good and happiness. He would wonder whether Levinas acknowledges a self-giving that is precisely enhanced by the way in which the good of the lover enters into the self-giving; whether Levinas is open to the polarity of *Eigenleben* and transcendence; whether Levinas has what von Hildebrand regards as the true concept of selfishness/selflessness. He would look closely to see whether Levinas saw the need of moving *beyond both eudaemonism and altruism*. These questions coming from von Hildebrand reach into the heart of what Levinas has been doing. They show that the two philosophers have much to say to each other and many ways of challenging each other.

The encounter between von Hildebrand and Levinas is a project waiting to be carried out. Another such project is the encounter between von Hildebrand and Karol Wojtyła. One could focus this project not around the altruism/eudaemonism issue, but around the role of affectivity in love. Following Max Scheler, von Hildebrand lays great stress on the *affective character* of love, as we saw. If one does not take delight in the other, he says, one does not love the other. Perhaps no one has ever explored and affirmed the affectivity of loving in the way von Hildebrand has. Now Wojtyła, too, is greatly indebted to Scheler, and his work shows many of the excellences of phenomenology; but in his account of love Wojtyła seems to make more of the will than von Hildebrand does. If one comes from reading what von Hildebrand

11 On these two kinds of love in Levinas see Corey Beals, *Levinas and the Wisdom of Love* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007), chapters 2 and 3.

12 John Caputo, *Against Ethics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 82.

writes on love as the most affective of all value-responses (see especially chapters 2, 4, and 10), one is bound to be perplexed on reading this in Wojtyła: “The emotions themselves [of sympathy and liking for the other] can commit the will, but only in a passive and somewhat superficial fashion, with a certain admixture of subjectivism. Friendship, however, demands a sincere commitment of the will with the fullest possible objective justification.”¹³ The question to be explored is whether the two thinkers are focusing on different aspects of the one truth about love, or whether there is a debate between them that needs to be worked through.

I turn now to a project that I do not just propose to others but actually try to initiate myself. I turn to Jean-Luc Marion and to his recent book, *The Erotic Phenomenon*. Marion gives us here a rich phenomenology of love that has many points of contact with von Hildebrand’s work. And while there are many respects in which Marion and von Hildebrand converge, I would like to call attention to an apparent point of tension between them, not so as to be quarrelsome but so as to give an example of the fruitful dialogue that is possible between von Hildebrand and contemporary phenomenologists writing on love.

Von Hildebrand claims that love is a value-response, as we saw. Now Marion posits a relation between love and knowledge that puts into question the response-character of love. He writes in one place: “Properly speaking, she (the lover) does not know that which she loves, because what one loves does not appear before one loves it. It is up to the lover to make visible what is at issue—the other as beloved... Knowledge does not make love possible, because knowledge flows from love. The lover makes visible what she loves and, without this love, nothing would appear to her. Thus, strictly speaking, the lover does not know what she loves—except insofar as she loves it.”¹⁴ Marion does not mean, of course, that the lover *invests* the beloved with a splendor that the beloved does not really have; he seems to mean that the lover *reveals* the splendor really there in the beloved. But on his view the lover does not begin to love by responding to the splendor of the beloved person, for it is his love that first makes the beloved person appear in all her splendor.

Von Hildebrand holds that the lover loves because he has caught a glimpse of the beauty of the beloved. This beauty affects the lover and fascinates him in such a way as to awaken his love. As a result he holds that the love initiated by the lover is responsive to some beauty in the beloved person. He would certainly have invoked the unforgettable account of love in the middle of Plato’s *Phaedrus*. For von Hildebrand, as for Plato, it is the sight of beauty in the beloved person that stirs up the “madness” of love in the lover. But Marion

13 Karol Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility* (New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux Inc., 1981), 92.

14 Jean-Luc Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, trans. Stephen Lewis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 87.

seems to exclude from his account of love this engendering power of the beauty glimpsed by the lover in the beloved person, for he wants love to precede all that one apprehends in the beloved person, and to bring it to light for the first time. This is why, as I understand him, he introduces the “principle of insufficient reason” in explaining the initiative of the lover. Since the lover loves without the support of any apprehended beauty in the beloved person, he loves without sufficient reason.

Of course, von Hildebrand would grant that the beauty of a person does not show itself equally to every kind of looking. Marion speaks several times of the act of “sizing up” a person’s qualities, the strong and weak points of the person, and he says quite rightly that this “objective” way of looking cannot lead me to love this person. For this is a kind of looking at another that yields only an object, a composite of qualities, and not a beloved person. It is not difficult to understand that it takes a loving way of looking at another in order to catch sight of the beauty of the person. This means that love does indeed in some sense precede and make possible the appearance of the other as beautiful and lovable, just as Marion says.

But von Hildebrand would say that the relation between love and knowledge is a mutual relation. He would say that once the beauty of the other is disclosed to the lover by virtue of his loving approach to the other, this beauty engenders love in the lover and motivates him to love the other. In other words, the priority of love over knowledge would seem quickly to yield to a certain priority of knowledge over love. Of course, once his love is engendered by apprehended beauty, the lover would seem to be empowered thereby to see more deeply into the beauty of the beloved. So the priority of love over knowledge would reassert itself—only to yield again to the priority of the now more visible beauty over the love that it elicits now more deeply than before. The principle at work in this mutuality is familiar to every student of the Aristotelian account of virtue. On the one hand, virtuous character is built up by morally worthy actions, but on the other hand, virtuous character also facilitates these actions. Virtuous character is, in relation to action, both cause and effect. This would mean that Marion’s statement, just cited, “Knowledge does not make love possible, because knowledge flows from love,” captures only part of the truth about knowledge and love as they exist in the one who initiates love. This would also mean that the lover is not as lacking in some “sufficient reason” for his initiative of love as Marion says.

Let us try to understand Marion’s position better by inquiring into his reason for holding it. If I read him correctly, his position is based on his conception of love as gift. Marion claims, echoing Derrida as well as his own earlier analysis of the structure of the gift, that the one who loves steps out of any and every framework of exchange and commercial reciprocity. The lover does not love *on the condition that* he receive something in return from the beloved person, but he loves unconditionally; he loves whether he is loved in return or

hated in return. It is in the course of zealously contending for this unconditionality of the lover's initiative that Marion affirms his principle of the priority of love over knowledge. He fears perhaps that if love is awakened by something about the beloved, if love constitutes itself as love through the experience of and in response to the beloved person, then the lover may start seeking some *quid pro quo* in loving and may thus lose the unconditionality that makes love to be love. He may see his fear confirmed by the fact that von Hildebrand lays great stress on the lover hoping for some requital of his love. So Marion is trying to secure this unconditionality by affirming the principle of insufficient reason for the lover and by making the love of the lover always only precede the knowledge of the beloved person but never follow upon this knowledge.

To this von Hildebrand would respond that there is no good reason why the lover, just by being drawn by the beauty of the beloved person, has to fall away from his love into some kind of justice-based exchange. It all depends on the concept of value that is brought to your phenomenological examination of the beloved. If you think, in the vein of the Aristotelian-Thomistic doctrine of *bonum*, that whatever attracts me attracts me under the aspect of perfecting me and actualizing my nature, then there is indeed some cause for concern; I may really forfeit the unconditionality that is so important to Marion if a concern for my perfection controls my interest in the other. If Marion sees no alternative to such an interest, then we understand entirely the move he makes, namely holding that love arises independently of and prior to any acquaintance with and attraction to the beloved person. But what if there is an alternative? What if von Hildebrand is right that the beauty that engenders love is a beauty born of value, and that the lover is first of all drawn to the beloved not as one who is "beneficial for me" or "perfective of me" but rather of "worthy in herself" or "precious of herself"? In this case my value-based interest in the other coheres entirely with a radically other-centered approach to the other. Von Hildebrandian value-response is just as foreign to the economy of *quid pro quo* as anything that Marion says about the advance of the lover.

As for the concern that Marion would likely have regarding von Hildebrand's strong stress on desiring requital, we have already tried to explain why the lover desiring requital does not have to make receiving requital a condition for his loving.

But perhaps Marion will say that by stressing the response-character of love we conceive of love as too reactive. Even if the love of the lover does not decline into some kind of *quid pro quo*, it is still deprived of its gesture of taking the initiative and giving a gift; for now it simply registers what is given in the beloved and reacts in proportion to the excellence of the beloved. It is as if the lover by loving just gives to the beloved what is due to her in justice. We can capture the freedom of the lover's gift, Marion will say, only if we cut the advance of the lover loose from any beauty that elicits his love, only if we place the entire source of his advance in his free initiative.

In response, von Hildebrand acknowledges that the beauty seen in the beloved person does not have the effect of strictly obliging the lover to love the beloved, as we saw; his initiative to love remains a free spontaneous act, beyond all obligation. But why should beauty not awaken love and motivate love without interfering with the free initiative to love? Consider this parallel, taken indeed from an entirely different order of being, yet relevant to our question. It seems that the goodness of creation in some way motivated God to create, for He repeatedly says (*Genesis* 1) as He goes through the days of creation that the works of His hands are good, very good. And yet His initiative to create was absolutely free. So a motive of value or beauty need not interfere with the free initiative of the act that is motivated.

But there is another reservation that Marion possibly has about invoking value for the purpose of understanding the initiative of the lover. Perhaps he would say that this recourse to value is entirely inappropriate to what he calls the “phenomenality” of the beloved, who after all appears to the lover as unsubstitutable, unrepeatable. The idea behind this response is that if one invokes value for thinking about the beloved, then the beloved becomes a mere instance or specimen of the value invoked; but in becoming a mere instance the beloved is lost as unsubstitutable and so is lost as beloved, and the lover ends up loving the value more than the person.

Marion is absolutely right about the beloved appearing as unsubstitutable, and in fact he expresses this important truth forcefully and convincingly in his book, especially when he develops the contrast between the unsubstitutable beloved and the anonymous other as encountered in transactions of commercial exchange.¹⁵ On this point von Hildebrand is in complete agreement with him. We have already examined his idea, developed in chapter 3 of the present work, that the value to which love responds must be a value in which the beloved person is entirely “thematic”; in other words, it must be a value that the beloved person has *as this unrepeatable person*. Von Hildebrand would respond to Marion’s concern by asking: what is the difficulty here? Why does a value have to begin as some general quality, so that a valuable being only instantiates the value? Why should not the radiance of value and beauty found in the beloved person be unsubstitutable just as the beloved person is unsubstitutable?

Let us return to Marion’s claim that the lover has no sufficient reason for loving. Von Hildebrand might also acknowledge a certain kind of insufficient reason for loving, but he would explain it in terms of the ineffability of the beauty of the beloved person. For von Hildebrand the insufficiency would be an insufficiency of reasons that the lover can formulate for loving this person, but it would not be an insufficiency of beauty appearing in the beloved person and eliciting the love of the lover. Von Hildebrand’s insufficiency is, then,

15 *Ibid.* pp. 77–78

different from, and less than, Marion's. And if von Hildebrand were asked to explain the way in which the lover chooses the beloved without making comparisons with other possible recipients of love, he would say that this mysterious choosing or "election" of the beloved is not made understandable by the absence of any knowledge of the beloved, but by the presence of a kind of knowledge of the incommunicable preciousness of the beloved. At the level of incommunicable persons, comparisons cannot be meaningfully made; at this level persons are incommensurable with each other and so are incomparable with each other. Thus the knowledge on the basis of which the lover loves cannot be gained or enhanced by making comparisons with other persons—but a kind of knowledge it really is, and a kind of reason for loving it really is.

We conclude by observing that it would seem to be of no little importance for the phenomenology of love to acknowledge with von Hildebrand this role of the beauty of the beloved in awakening love. For one could well wonder if the beloved person will really feel loved if the lover advances towards her entirely on his own initiative and is already fully constituted as lover prior to being drawn by her. Will she not feel that his love shoots over her head, as it were, and is not sufficiently a love *for her*? Will she not feel somehow ignored as person if she provides no part of the reason for the advance of the lover? It is one thing for the Good Samaritan to approach the wounded man knowing nothing about him, to take an initiative of love without knowing anything about him beyond the fact of his being injured and in urgent need of help. But it is something else, and something far more problematic, for man and woman, or for friends, to love each other without knowing each other and without being drawn to each other by what they know. If, on the other hand, von Hildebrand is right about love being engendered by the beauty of the beloved person, then there is no danger of the beloved person feeling bypassed by the lover.

And this leads to another question. As Marion shows convincingly, I am empowered to love myself only by being loved. Left to myself I end in self-hatred, he argues. But if I am loved entirely on the initiative of the lover, providing through myself nothing that might awaken his love, does his love, von Hildebrand would ask, have the power to enable me to love even myself? Can his love really mediate to me the goodness of my existence if his love arises without in any way being motivated by the goodness of my existence?

We do not mean to offer here a finished von Hildebrandian critique of Marion. After all, we have not dealt with Marion's philosophical project as a whole. Marion might well make some response that would continue the dialogue. We have only wanted to start the dialogue with Marion so as to show the great fruitfulness of von Hildebrand's treatise on love. We have wanted to show that von Hildebrand addresses the concerns of philosophers and theologians like Levinas, Wojtyła, and Marion, and challenges them in various ways. He speaks with a powerful and original voice that has been neglected for too long in the discussions and debates of our time about the nature of love.

“In this work, von Hildebrand has given us what—in my view—is an unprecedented reflection upon the role of love in its several forms, with especial attention to the love of man and woman.... In addition to its own intrinsic value as—in my judgment—the most significant contribution of the past century to the thematic of love, the present work with its helpful introduction may be taken as an invitation to further discussion with other philosophical traditions, such as those of Kantian, Augustinian and Thomistic provenance.”

From the *Preface* by **Kenneth L. Schmitz**

“When the intellectual history of the Catholic Church in the twentieth century is written, the name of Dietrich von Hildebrand will be most prominent among the figures of our time.”

Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger

“I would almost say that the [artistic] genius of Adolf von Hildebrand has been inherited by his son, the author, in the form of a philosophical genius. In fact in this work the author gives evidence of a rare talent to draw from the deep sources of phenomenological intuition, to analyze with intelligence and precision what he has seen, and to express it conceptually in a most rigorous way.... We are simply astonished at the incomparably intimate knowledge that the author has of the various formations of affective consciousness and of the objective correlates of affective consciousness.”

Edmund Husserl on Dietrich von Hildebrand's
doctoral dissertation

Of Dietrich von Hildebrand: “I have always been impressed with the fullness of his Christian wisdom, his profound philosophical intelligence, and his rich culture.”

Fr. W. Norris Clarke, S.J.

“Dietrich von Hildebrand was the most important Catholic philosopher in Europe between the two world wars.”

Louis Bouyer

ST. AUGUSTINE'S PRESS

South Bend, Indiana
www.staugustine.net

ISBN-13: 978-1-58731-560-2 US \$40.00
ISBN-10: 1-58731-560-2

