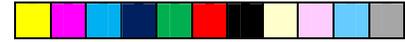




4A

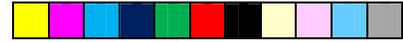
Some Remarks on the Philosophy of Love in Dietrich  
von Hildebrand and Karol Wojtyła

Jarosław MERECKI



# BSTRACT RESUMO ABSTRACT RESUMO ABSTRACT

Abstract	<p>First of all I would like to thank the organizers of this conference for the invitation. The translation of the book of Dietrich von Hildebrand <i>Das Wesen der Liebe</i> (The Essence of Love) is an important event, because one of the most original works dedicated to the phenomenon of love is now available to the English reader. For me the opportunity to speak today about the philosophy of Hildebrand and Wojtyla constitutes at the same time an occasion to recall the years of my formation at the Catholic University of Lublin in Poland and at the International Academy of Philosophy in the Principality of Liechtenstein, where I could study the philosophy of these two great thinkers, all the while benefiting from the wisdom of such professors as Tadeusz Styczen, Rocco Buttiglione, Josef Seifert, John Crosby and others. I see this contribution also as an expression of the gratitude I owe them.</p> <p>In my paper I do not intend to offer a historical analysis of the mutual relation between Hildebrand and Wojtyla. As far as I can tell in the works of Wojtyla we do not find any direct reference to Hildebrand and viceversa. I do not want to say that Wojtyla did not know the thought of von Hildebrand. On the contrary, it is quite possible that he knew at least some of the philosophical works of Hildebrand, since – as we know – he studied the ethics of Max Scheler, and in general was interested in the phenomenological movement. On the other hand, in the works of Tadeusz Styczen, who was one of the closest collaborators of Wojtyla and his successor in the chair of ethics at the Catholic University of Lublin, we frequently find references to the works of von Hildebrand. So it seems to me that we can speculate that Wojtyla knew the philosophy of von Hildebrand, but he did not belong to the group of his direct interlocutors. It is also interesting to note that in the encyclical <i>Veritatis splendor</i> of John Paul II we find terminology – which I will try to show later – that is very similar to that of von Hildebrand, so at least in this case we might be justified in assuming some direct influence of Hildebrand on Wojtyla. At the same time, for methodological reasons, the works of John Paul II cannot be seen as a simple continuation of the reflections of the philosopher Karol Wojtyla.</p>
Keywords	Intuition, experience, Hildebrand, Wojtyla



Nevertheless, independently of the historical considerations we can state one thing for sure. It is not difficult to note a profound affinity between these two philosophers' approaches, especially as the philosophy of love is concerned. Both thinkers recognize love as the only adequate response to the value of the person, and in this sense, both of them are ethical personalists. As far as I can see, this affinity can be explained simply as a result of the use of the phenomenological method adopted by both of them, that is, as the result of the careful analysis of human experience. Hildebrand and Wojtyła follow the program of the founder of phenomenology, Edmund Husserl, as expressed in his famous adage: "*zurück zu Sachen selbst*" (back to things in themselves). Von Hildebrand and Wojtyła would certainly subscribe to that postulate of Husserl: "*Nicht von den Philosophen, sondern von den Sachen und Problemen muss der Antrieb zur Forschung ausgehen*" ("The impulse to investigation should not come from philosophers, but from things and problems.")<sup>72</sup>. In his paper on the ethics and anthropology of Wojtyła, Tadeusz Styczeń refers to the priority of "intuition" (German: *Einsicht*, which can be translated also as "insight") over "opinion" (German: *Ansicht*). Styczeń says:

"The anthropological reflection of Karol Wojtyła is characterized by the fact that the author does not know **how his** definitive opinions on the human person will be; he only knows that they have to be subordinated without restriction to the experience of man. At the beginning counts only experience, only intuition, that is the experience of the world and at the same time the experience of my own person in this world."<sup>73</sup>

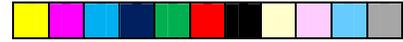
Hildebrand certainly shares this conviction about the priority of experience in the philosophical investigation; he uses this method of philosophizing in his numerous works and in his book *The Essence of Love* see a case of its masterful application.

As I already mentioned, ethical personalism constitutes another point of encounter between Hildebrand and Wojtyła. In their view the person constitutes the highest epiphany of being, and for this reason deserves to be affirmed for his/her own sake. This is the first point I would like to emphasize in my reflection.

According to von Hildebrand, every value calls for the response adequate to its position in the hierarchy of values. Therefore there are proper responses to the values of inanimate

<sup>72</sup> E. Husserl, *Philosophie als Strenge Wissenschaft*, Klostermann, Frankfurt a.M. 1965, p. 71.

<sup>73</sup> "La riflessione antropologica di Karol Wojtyła si distingue per il fatto che all'inizio l'autore è come se non sapesse quali saranno le sue opinioni definitive sull'uomo; egli sa soltanto che esse devono essere subordinate senza riserve all'esperienza dell'uomo. All'inizio conta soltanto esperienza, soltanto intuizione, cioè l'esperienza del mondo e, nel contempo, di me stesso in esso", T. Styczeń, *Comprendere l'uomo*, Lateran University Press, Città del Vaticano 2005, p. 148.



things, e.g. we admire the beauty of a landscape or of a work of art. Animals call for another type of response, since – as sentient beings – they cannot be treated in the same way as non-sentient things (in this respect the traditional juridical division between persons and things appears to be inadequate, since animals are neither persons nor things). However, from the moral point of view human persons are superior to all other values which we encounter in the visible world. Kant has defined these values as “ends in themselves” (*Selbstzwecke*). While all other things in the world under certain circumstances may be used as a means to ends not their own, persons in all circumstances can be treated only instrumentally. They can never be seen merely as means. In his book *Love and Responsibility* Karol Wojtyła – after having criticized utilitarianism in ethics – proposes his own formulation of the Kantian principle:

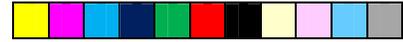
“Every time when the object of an action is the person you should not forget that you are not dealing only with a means, an instrument, but that a person is always an end in him/herself.”<sup>74</sup>

According to Wojtyła this norm – called by him “the personalistic norm” – constitutes the foundation of the whole moral order. We should understand this norm well. It does not preclude any sort of “using” of the person. In his commentary on the Kantian formula, prof. Robert Spaemann stresses the importance of the word “only”. While living in community we cannot avoid the reciprocal “use” of each other, but this does not necessarily go against the personalistic norm. This norm forbids us from reducing the other only to the status of object, excluding any reciprocity, as happens for example in the case of slavery, or when one person is treated only as a source of tissues or organs for others (and while slavery is generally illegal, the second case of instrumentalization is widespread today).

In the Lublin school of ethics the personalistic norm was expressed by prof. Tadeusz Styczen in the formula, inspired by Wojtyła himself, “*persona est affirmanda per seipsam*”. This formula emphasizes that, for an action to be morally good, the object of the action, that is, the good of the person, ought to stand in the first place. In stressing this personalism differs from various forms of eudemonism which see the happiness of the subject as the principal motive of the moral action. It seems to me, that the critique of eudemonism developed by the Lublin school of personalistic ethics is very

---

<sup>74</sup> K. Wojtyła, *Amore e responsabilità*, in: id., *Metafisica della persona. Tutte le opere filosofiche e saggi integrativi*, Bompiani 2003, p. 479 (my translation).



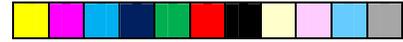
close to the critique of the Thomistic concept of *bonum*, which we find in the works of von Hildebrand. We may summarize it as follows: If our perception of the good is totally determined by natural desire, understood as *appetitus*, then there is only one possible motivation for action: something is good in as much as it satisfies the desire of the subject. On the basis of this concept of good, the other person is a good only insofar as he/she contributes to the happiness of the subject, but not as a good which merits to be affirmed for its own sake. In other words, we distinguish two kinds of good: a good as *appetibile* (and this type of good is conceptualized in the Thomistic notion) and a good as *affirmabile*. In Thomism it is this second type of good which can be found in the notion of *bonum honestum*, however, it seems not to be integrated in Thomas' general conception of the good. These two types of goodness require two different responses from the subject: in the case of the good as *appetibile* the response is motivated by my own good, whereas in the case of the good as *affirmabile* the response is motivated by the good of the object of my action. This requires a reformulation of the Thomistic philosophy of the will. In the context of this discussion it is interesting to note that, already in the Middle Ages, Duns Scotus – who gave the philosophical complement to the theological speculation of Anselm of Aosta – distinguished two different movements of the will: the *affection commode*, that is, to put it in the terminology of von Hildebrand, the tendency of the subject to choose what is subjectively satisfying, while the *affection iustitae* is the natural tendency to render justice to what merits affirmation for its own sake. In this second tendency, Duns Scotus saw the actual expression of human freedom.<sup>75</sup> Therefore, we can say that, in fact, love, understood in its ethical sense, *means* “to render justice to what merits to be affirmed for its own sake”. Another name for love is “to render justice to what merits to be affirmed for its own sake”.

At this point of our reflection we take up the question: What is the proper content of the personalistic norm? The content of the personalistic norm is love. According to Karol Wojtyła “The person is such a good that the only love constitutes the adequate and valid attitude in front of him/her.”<sup>76</sup> In other words, the good that the person is (*the good of the person*) calls forth a specific response and the content of this response is love.

---

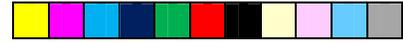
<sup>75</sup> “Secundum autem affectionem commodi nihil potest velle nisi in ordine ad se, et hanc haberet si praecise esset appetitus intellectivus sine libertate sequens cognitionem intellectivam, sicut appetitus sensitivus sequitur cognitionem sensitivam. Ex hoc volo habere tantum quod, cum amare aliquid in se sit actus liberior et magis communicativus quam desiderare illud sibi et conveniens magis voluntati in quantum habet affectionem iustitae saltem innatae”, Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio* III, suppl. dist. 26; in: *Duns Scotus on the Will and Morality*, A.B. Wolter OFM (ed.), Washington 1986, p. 178.

<sup>76</sup> Wojtyła, *Metafisica della persona*, op. Cit., p. 495 (my translation).



But – we may ask – what is the nature of love, what type of response is it? Is love an emotional phenomenon or is it, instead, a stance of the will? At the beginning of his book on love von Hildebrand poses this question. He answers that love is an affective response to value. On the other hand, with the criticism of the Schelerian ethics developed by Wojtyla in his postdoctoral thesis, one of his main objections was so-called “emotionalism”, that is, the reduction of the cognitive contact/content of with the realm of values to the emotional sphere. In the context of our reflection it is worthwhile to ask if Wojtyla’s criticism can also be applied to von Hildebrand? My answer is negative. While it is true that for von Hildebrand love is an emotional response, in our case, it is an emotional response to the value of the person. He does not thereby maintain that this response is independent of reason and freedom. On the contrary, when emotions present values in a way that is existentially vivid and attractive, the task of reason is to assess whether a given value is right for me in this concrete situation, while the task of the will consists in sanctioning or not sanctioning the emotions I feel in a given moment. While Scheler reduces the role of the will in order not to compromise the authenticity of the human response to values, von Hildebrand rightly underscored the importance of the judgment of reason and the stance of the will.

We can consider another point of encounter of von Hildebrand and Wojtyla in their respective philosophies of love. I have already indicated that for both of them only love is the adequate response to the value of the person. However, this response cannot be limited to the subjective stance. The other person is not merely to be admired or theoretically affirmed, but in any concrete situation he/she calls for the affirmation understood as “practical attitude”. Consider, for instance, the priest and the Levite in parable of the Good Samaritan: both apparently had deep admiration for the dignity of the person of the traveler left for dead. The problem consisted in the fact that their admiration remained ineffective in front of *this man* encountered on the way to Jerusalem. Generally speaking we can say that the dignity of any person, in most cases, is not affirmed directly, but is, rather, affirmed by addressing those goods which the person needs: if somebody is hungry, his dignity is affirmed through the food we give him, if somebody is thirsty, it is not enough that we only admire his personal dignity, we have to give him something to drink. Here von Hildebrand makes a very helpful distinction between values; those goods that are subjectively satisfying and those that satisfy the objective needs of the person. In Hildebrand’s terminology we can say that effective affirmation of the good of the person is mediated through those objective goods for the person. This principle is also valid when it comes to my own person. There are goods which are merely subjectively

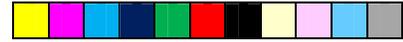


satisfying for me, and there are goods which objectively serve the flourishing of my person. Similarly Wojtyła distinguishes between “what I feel like doing” and “what I really want.” We know that not all those goods which attract us consciously are identical with those that we desire at a deeper level of our personal self. In Hildebrand’s terminology: a subjectively satisfying good is not always the objective good for the person. Thus we may say that the good of the person (that is, his or her personal dignity) is affirmed through the (objective) goods for that person. It is interesting to note that very similar terminology can be found in the encyclical *Veritatis splendor* of John Paul II. I cannot say if in this case we can claim a direct influence of von Hildebrand on John Paul II. However, in number 79 of the encyclical, we read that the natural law is an “ordered complex of ‘personal goods’ which serve the ‘good of the person’: the good which is the person himself and his perfection.” The distinction here between the “good of the person” and “personal goods” allows for a personalistic interpretation of the traditional concept of natural law. The value of the person, which constitutes the basis of the whole moral order, is affirmed through various goods which serve the person and belong to his nature. Thus the so-called natural inclinations attain moral significance insofar as they pertain to what is objectively good for the person<sup>77</sup>. Here we can see more clearly the necessary relation between ethics and anthropology. For both von Hildebrand and Wojtyła ethics is not deduced from anthropology (from the very beginning they thereby avoid the Humean objection of naturalistic fallacy). Ethics is deduced from neither anthropology nor from metaphysics. Its original point of departure is moral experience. On the other hand, ethics needs to be informed by anthropology: we have to know the nature of the person if we are to affirm him/her effectively.

Another important point of encounter between von Hildebrand and Wojtyła. It concerns the nature of spousal love. We consider: What is the specificity of spousal love within the vision of love as the adequate response to the value of the person? Although they use different terminology, both von Hildebrand and Wojtyła see this specificity as the unconditional giving of one’s own person to the other. Von Hildebrand points to the fact that love refers always to an individual person. Wojtyła, on the other hand, says that in falling in love with a person of the opposite sex one discovers the uniqueness of one’s own person among all other persons. Whereas, in its ethical sense, love responds to the unique value of the person among all things (a disciple of Wojtyła, prof. Tadeusz Styczen, would say that the mode of personal existence is ontologically different and axiologically higher

---

<sup>77</sup> Cfr. L. Melina, “*Bene della persona*” e “*beni per la persona*”, “Lateranum” LXXVII, 1 (2011), p. 89-113.



than all non-personal existence). Spousal love responds to the unique value that *this* concrete person has for me above all other persons. Hence the question: How do I and how should I respond to this unique value? An adequate response is nothing less than an unconditional gift of oneself to the other. Only persons are capable of such giving, because only persons have the characteristic structure of self-possession. Only a being that possesses himself is able to give himself. Spousal love says: “I want to belong to you and I want you to belong to me.” In von Hildebrand we find a concept that describes this experience. It is the concept of *intentio unionis*. In spousal love the *intentio unionis* reaches its highest intensity, because by the reciprocal gift is created the bond of mutual belonging. According to von Hildebrand “Reciprocal love includes a reciprocal ‘unitive intention’ and this in its turn implies that this union is the source of happiness for both sides.”<sup>78</sup> Significantly, von Hildebrand points out that the experience of belonging to another person contributes in turn to the self-realization of the subject. Although each person belongs to himself first of all [n.b.: in *The Acting Person* Wojtyla refers to the structure of self-possession for the person; while in *The Essence of Love* von Hildebrand reminds us that the person cannot be an object of possession], in spousal love each person wants to give himself/herself away in order to belong to the other. Paradoxically, by giving oneself to the other, neither person loses his/her subjectivity; on the contrary, precisely by self-gift the subjectivity of each person finds its highest realization. In our contemporary culture we tend to understand freedom as complete independence, thinking that we are only really free when we can do everything “our way.” The experience of spousal love turns this idea on its head. The natural dynamics of such love can help us understand better the words that Christians repeat every day: “Thy will be done.”

## BIBLIOGRAFIA

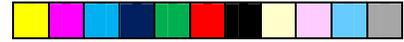
Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio* III, suppl. dist. 26; in: *Duns Scotus on the Will and Morality*, A.B. Wolter OFM (ed.), Washington 1986.

Husserl, E., *Philosophie als Strenge Wissenschaft*, Klostermann, Frankfurt a.M. 1965.

K. Wojtyla, *Amore e responsabilità*, in: id., *Metafisica della persona. Tutte le opere filosofiche e saggi integrativi*, Bompiani 2003.

---

<sup>78</sup> D. Von Hildebrand, *Essenza dell'amore*, Bompiani 2003, p. 381 (my translation).



Styczeń, T., *Comprendere l'uomo*, Lateran University Press, Città del Vaticano 2005.

D. Von Hildebrand, *Essenza dell'amore*, Bompiani 2003.