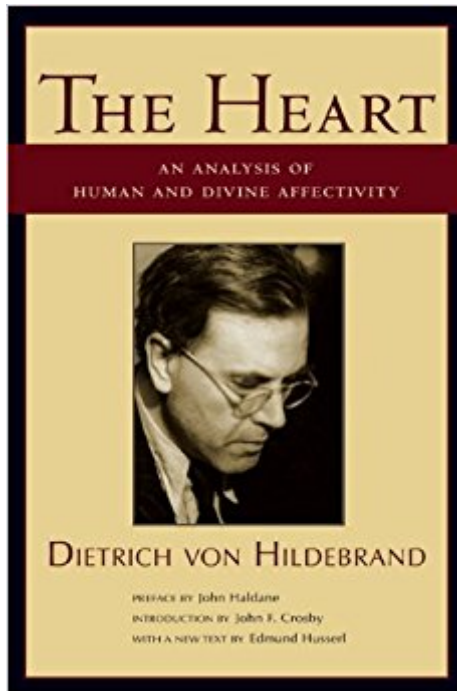




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The Heart: An Analysis Of Human And Divine Affectation



Synopsis

I am personally convinced that, when, at some time in the future, 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 • Von Hildebrand’s concept of affective response, essential to his ethics and to his meaning of the heart, was the wake-up call that mainstream philosophy and social neuroscience are finally recognizing and accepting. We are all in his debt. • “ Andrew Tallon, Author of *Head & Heart: Affection, Cognition, Volition as Triune Consciousness* • Von Hildebrand’s book is a remarkably rich and illuminating exploration of that much neglected area of philosophical investigation, the affective life of the human person, symbolized by the human heart. • First, the fundamental philosophical point is made that the affective life is not just a set of feelings, • basically all on the same level. Rather, the affective life stretches over a wide spectrum of levels, from the lowest sensible to the highest spiritual, depending on the level of values to which it is responding. Secondly, he lays out a very insightful, perhaps unique, phenomenological description of the various kinds of affective responses, both healthy and unhealthy. • “ W. Norris Clarke, s.j., Fordham University • The notion of the heart has not been at the center of attention in the philosophical tradition, though it is front and center in Augustine and it plays a larger than expected role in Hegel. Dietrich von Hildebrand’s book, *The Heart*, is a welcome recovery of this core notion. • “ Robert E. Wood, University of Dallas

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Dietrich von Hildebrand wrote his doctoral dissertation under Edmund Husserl and earned high praise from this founder of the philosophical approach of phenomenology. Also from this tradition come Karol Wojtyla and Saint Edith Stein. This later short work on von Hildebrand's philosophy of Love is both accessible and profound.

Excellent analysis of this "third faculty" of the human soul that is often ignored or relegated to simple a subdivision of the will. Necessary reading for all those interested in Christian Anthropology.

A deeply life changing book, that is spiritual, practical and academic and steeped in Catholic tradition.

Excellent evaluation of what the human person should be

This is the official translation and is accurate to the original text.

This book is the basic text for an on-line class I am taking. It is, according to some sources, the "definitive book on love of the 20th century." I have only read parts of it, but it seems very comprehensive and insightful.

Dietrich von Hildebrand was a man of great courage and deep intellect. I had already read his "Liturgy and Personality" and the biography "My Battle Against Hitler: Faith, Truth, and Defiance in the Shadow of the Third Reich" by John Henry Crosby and thought highly of Hildebrand, another man of courage who stood in opposition to Nazism and Hitler and who had to flee Europe to save his life. At a new job I came across this book in my office, and was introduced to a profound reflection and analysis of the heart in man and the Sacred Heart of Jesus. This is a book to be read slowly and with a prayerful attitude and given time for contemplation both of what Hildebrand writes of the human heart and especially of the Sacred Heart. Hildebrand's purpose, as he writes in the Introduction (which in this edition is placed at the back as an Appendix), is three-fold: 1) "to expound the nature of the heart in an attempt to do full justice to the depth and spiritual plenitude of this center of man's soul"; 2) "to shed some light on some aspects of the mystery of the Sacred Heart so that our eyes may be opened to the inexhaustible riches and glorious beauty of this mystery"; 3) and to assist "the transformation to which our heart is called" (p. 136). Von Hildebrand accomplishes

these three goals magnificently. You will likely be amazed at his insights. This book is a perfect companion for a silent retreat or for extended reading and prayer. I found it is best read slowly.

This is a very fine essay on the role of affectivity in man - how the emotive sphere must not be undervalued in the trio of intellect, will and heart. "Let us admit that in man there exists a triad of spiritual centres - intellect, will and heart which are ordained to cooperate and to fecundate one another (page 19) Von Hildebrand notes that the affective sphere of man has been to date more or less ignored in philosophical thought. Von Hildebrand notes that affectivity has often been castigated because of distortions, such as where the emotive sphere is disfigured by, for example, mawkish sentimentality. But, for von Hildebrand, the affective sphere to be true to itself must be activated by a response to objective value. This motif was key to his book: "Transformation in Christ". "Real joy necessarily implies not only the consciousness of an object about which we are rejoicing, but also an awareness that it is this object which is the reason for this joy". (page 26). He compares this real joy to psychic states (high spirits) activated by alcoholic beverages. Pausing here, if I may give potential examples of my own for what I perceive to be inauthentic affectivity: prolonged mourning where the mourning becomes after a time not so much a mourning over the loved one but a kind of entering into and delighting in (in a kind of masochistic way) in the psychic feelings associated with deep mourning. In other words, there may come a time, when the intellect needs to step in and re-direct the heart so that it is not consuming itself. A second example may be the hyper affective person, who goes to operas, not primarily to enjoy being moved by a great artwork but to wallow in their own internal psychic feelings - there is a subtle line which can be crossed, where one is no longer reacting to value, but instead, one has begun to consume oneself. Von Hildebrand alludes in page 31 and 32 to a very important point about the spiritual life; namely that completely and dissimilar spiritual states can potentially give rise to effects which, at first sight, appear similar. He cites St Augustine, who notes that a paralyzed limb and a transfigured body are insensible to pain, but for antithetical reasons: "The paralysed body is below the level of the healthy one while the transfigured is above this level". In his chapter of "tender affectivity", von Hildebrand's writing can be beautifully poetic; "The more the lover wants to dwell in his love; the more he aspires to experience the full depth of his love; the more he wants to recollect himself and to allow his love to unfold itself in a deep contemplative rhythm; the more he longs for the interpenetration of his soul with the soul of his beloved; "heart speaks to heart". (page 44) He then gets to a key point: "The true affective experience implies that one is convinced of its objective validity. An effective experience which is not justified by reality has no validity for the truly affective

man. As soon as such a man realises that his joy, his happiness, his enthusiasm, or his sorrow is based on an illusion, the experience collapses. Thus what matters primarily is not the question; "Do we feel happiness? but rather, "Is this objective situations such that we have reason to be happy". (page 47) Thus, for von Hildebrand, the affective response must not lose sight of the Logos. And, in defence of affectivity, he notes: "It is thus a deplorable error to see the spiritual affective sphere in the light of subjectivism, or to believe that the cool, "reasonable" type or the merely energised affective type in whom the heart plays a minor role, is more objective." (page 47). But, von Hildebrand fires a warning shot when he warns against the heart being pressed into the service of an activity which belongs to the domain of the intellect: "If, for example, a man who wants to ascertain a fact does not consult his intellect, but instead claims that his heart tells him what the fact is, he has opened the door to all kinds of illusions". "In such a case, instead of letting his intellect decide, whether a deed is morally wrong, he relies on his "feeling guilty" or "feeling not guilty". He supposes the affective experience of feeling to be a univocal criterion for an objective fact". (page 51) This is a key point for a spiritual person to be aware of when dealing with difficult moral issues. Am I letting my heart taking the place of my intellect or indeed vice versa. The last part of the book moves into light christology, namely the affective sphere of Christ, as evidenced by various parts of the gospel: for example, the famous: "Jesus wept" before raising Lazarus. There are beautiful quotes from, I think, the Sacred Heart Litany. Finally, I am very thankful for Von Hildebrand "hearty" defence of the affective sphere in man - perhaps, in the current age, this is less an issue, but his warning about the heart taking the role properly belonging to the intellect is one that needs to be heeded in this age where subjectivism has become ingrained in our culture.

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