Iris Murdoch and Alasdair MacIntyre: Parallels

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ABSTRACT

The philosophical and intellectual trajectories of Iris Murdoch and Alasdair MacIntyre run parallel although no apparent convergence. Sometimes A. MacIntyre refers to I. Murdoch, but there is not an explicit recognition of Murdoch's ideas in his work. Despite this, one can find some ideological parallels between the two authors. The paper tries to highlight the thematic similarities between the philosophical theses of Iris Murdoch and Alasdair MacIntyre leaving aside whether such points held in common may be explained by Murdoch's influence on the Scottish writer.

KEYWORDS

Iris Murdoch, Alasdair MacIntyre, ethics

0.   Introduction

Little is known or written about the relationship between the philosophy of Iris Murdoch and the philosophy of Alasdair MacIntyre. They are separated by ten years and attended different universities for their academic training in philosophy. While we have some texts by MacIntyre in which reference is made to Murdoch, no reference to the Scottish writer appears in Murdoch's writings.

A consideration of the philosophical relationship between the two thinkers leads us to a first question: are the affinities between their philosophical approaches the product of following a parallel path that brought them to philosophical conclusions that are similar in a number of aspects; or do we see that Murdoch exercised some influence on MacIntyre's thought? The texts of MacIntyre that make reference to Murdoch demonstrate his sound knowledge of her literary and philosophical work, but he acknowledges no philosophical influence, unless that is the intention of his general remark: "Iris Murdoch has once again put us all in her debt."[1] The lack of such an acknowledgement from

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1A. MacIntyre, *Which World do you See?*, "The New York Times Book Review", January 1993, 3, p. 9.

MacIntyre does not stop Michael Schwartz, for example, from openly declaring some influence: "I argue that Murdoch has been a formative influence upon MacIntyre both with her philosophical work and her expressed ambitions for the novel."[2]. Heather Widdows concurs: "Key thinkers that cite her moral philosophy as influential on their own work include Alasdair MacIntyre, Charles Taylor, John MacDowell and Stanley Hauerwas"[3]. Widdows's text refers the reader to statements of acknowledgement made by Hauerwas, Taylor and MacDowell, but none from MacIntyre, despite the remark in the text. We must suppose that Widdows is convinced of the influence of Murdoch's philosophy on MacIntyre, but she cites no text by MacIntyre that explicitly supports her claim. Starting from this point, the most fitting approach would appear to be showing the points of convergence between Murdoch and MacIntyre, while leaving aside whether such points held in common may be explained by Murdoch's influence on the Scottish writer.

All philosophical ideas developed by an author are contained within a theoretical frame of reference from which they gain meaning; the framework precedes the ideas. The theoretical frame of reference comes to be the perspective adopted by the author, a perspective that affects all of her appraisals. One could say that, behind the explicit expression of an author's philosophical thought, there is a position taken with respect to how we have become who we are, what we now have, and what would be desirable in the future.

When we examine the relationship between two authors, we can focus on the philosophical perspectives they adopt, the development of their philosophical ideas, or both matters. This third choice is the path adopted here to examine Murdoch and MacIntyre. The aim of the paper is to draw out points of affinity between the two philosophers in terms of the philosophical perspectives they adopt when doing philosophy and in terms of the ideas they develop within the framework of their adopted perspectives. Our intention is to indicate the points of philosophical relation between Murdoch and MacIntyre without completing an exhaustive exploration of each and every one of these points.

2M. SCHWARTZ, *Moral Vision: Iris Murdoch and Alasdair MacIntyre*, "Journal of Business Ethics", 90 (2009), p. 316.

3H. WIDDOWS, *The Moral Vision of Iris Murdoch*, Aldesrhot, Ashgate 2005, p. 17.

1. *Affinities in their perspectives*

The perspective adopted by each author in doing philosophy can refer to their appraisal of the past as a cause of the present, of the present itself, and also of the future, understood as the direction toward which the present should be headed and with the experience of the present point out the paths to be followed in the future.

Murdoch and MacIntyre are interested in contemporary moral philosophy, but they both find that a sound way to understand its characteristics is to analyse the historical periods that have led to the present moment. At the beginning of *The Sovereignty of Good* (*SG*), Murdoch writes:

> I wish in this discussion to attempt a movement of return, a retracing of our steps to see how a certain position was reached. The position in question, in current moral philosophy, is one which seems to me unsatisfactory (...)[4].

And in the second chapter of *After Virtue* (*AV*), MacIntyre states:

> (…) I am not merely contending that morality is not what it once was, but also and more importantly that what once was morality has to some large degree disappeared –and that this marks a degeneration, a grave cultural loss. I am therefore committed to two distinct but related tasks.

The first is that of identifying and describing the lost morality of the past and of evaluating its claims to objectivity and authority; this is a task partly historical and partly philosophical."[5].

Murdoch's intention is to go back in time in order to see the paths that have led to the current situation, in which the reigning moral theory ignores certain facts and prevails without any relation to other moral theories. In "Metaphysics and Ethics" she states "To understand current moral philosophy it is necessary to understand its history"[6].

MacIntyre's starting point is to analyze the moral emotivism that characterizes Western society and the question to which he seeks an answer in

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4I. MURDOCH, *The Sovereignty of Good*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980, p. 2.
5A. MACINTYRE, *After Virtue. A Study in Moral Theory*, Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, p. 22.
6I. MURDOCH, *Metaphysics and Ethics*, in: *Existentialists and Mystics*, New York, Penguin Books 1999, p. 59.

the pages of *AV* is how we have arrived at this situation. In search of a reason, he turns to the past:

> What I am going to suggest is that the key episodes in the social history which transformed, fragmented and (...) largely displaced morality (...) were episodes inthe history of philosophy, that it is only in the light of *that* history that we can understand how the idiosyncrasies of everyday contemporary moral discourse came to be and thus how the emotivist self was able to find a means of expression[7].

The point that brings Murdoch and MacIntyre closer is not the historical moment to which they turn to explain the present. Neither is it the present which they are analyzing[8], rather, it is their conviction that the key to understanding the present is to retrace the historical steps that have served to produce it.

Contemporary moral philosophy speaks of a self that has last the foundations that historically supported it. For Murdoch:

> It is significant that the idea of goodness (and of virtue) has been largely superseded in Western moral philosophy by the idea of rightness, supported perhaps by some conception of sincerity. This is to some extent a natural outcome of the disappearance of a permanent background: a permanent background, whether provided by God, by Reason, by History or by the self[9].

Further:

> From Moore to Wittgenstein, the I has become a will, an isolated I. On the one hand, Moore's question 'What does good mean'- concerned the will, and, secondly, Wittgenstein's criticisms of Cartesian ego presented the moral agent as an isolated will "(...) operating with the concepts of 'ordinary language'[10]

MacIntyre attributes the existence of this self to a different cause:

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7 *AV*, p.36.
8 Coincidence also appears partly in their assessment of the present.
9 *SG*, p.53.
10 *SG*, p. 48.

The problems of modern moral theory emerge clearly as the product of the failure of the Enlightenment project. On the one hand the individual moral agent, freed from hierarchy and teleology, conceives of himself and is conceived of by moral philosophers as sovereign in his moral authority[11].

For MacIntyre, the failure of the ethics of Kant, for whom moral choices had their foundation in reason, gave way to Kierkegaard's thesis, which holds that moral choices act as their own foundation[12].

The idea that emotions could provide a basis for moral choice receives a negative appraisal from both authors. When Jo Brans interviews Murdoch, she asks her how philosophy could become corrupted and she responds:

(...) [V]arious kinds of existentialist philosophy and Oxford philosophy, which attempted to explain value judgments as emotive statements or arbitrary acts of the will. This has distorted moral philosophy in recent years by suggesting that one has got to make a sharp decision between fact and value; and if something isn't factual, in the sense of scientific fact, and so presentable in some way, it belongs to a shadowy world, of private will and emotion, so that moral attitudes would simply be private emotional attitudes of one sort or another (...)[13].

By comparison, MacIntyre says:

The appearance of emotivism in this variety of philosophical guises suggest strongly that it is indeed in terms of a confrontation with emotivism that my own thesis must be defined. For one way of framing my contention that morality is not what it once was is just to say that to a large degree people now think, talk and act *as if* emotivism were true, no matter what their avowed theoretical standpoint may be[14].

If we understand Murdoch's ethical-philosophical project as Jessy E.G. Jordan does, in terms of "an anti-Enlightenment genealogical narrative"(V), the affinity between Murdoch and MacIntyre becomes even closer. Jordan links the interpretative narratives of Gadamer, Murdoch and MacIntyre:

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11 *AV*, p.62.
12 *AV*, p. 49.
13 G. Dooley, *From a Tiny Corner in the House of Fiction*, University of South Carolina Press, Columbia 2003, p. 157.
14 *AV*, p. 22.

Thus, the three narratives toward which I have been repeatedly drawn are those written by Hans-Georg Gadamer, Alasdair MacIntyre, and Iris Murdoch. Each of these narratives is unique. They use different casts of characters, diagnose different problems, and suggest different solutions. (…) MacIntyre highlights the tragic consequences of the loss of a teleological framework; and Murdoch emphasizes the dangers inherent in the eclipse of consciousness and the vanishing of the philosophical self. Whereas MacIntyre posits a neo-Aristotelian account as the solution to our moral woes(...) and Murdoch offers a neo-Platonic account, (...)Yet, even with the many differences between these accounts, their projects are not entirely incompatible[15].

The diagnosis of the situation is the same. Although Murdoch and MacIntyre may stress different aspects, their theses follow a certain parallelism, for example, in their references to the impoverishment of moral language. Heather Widdows also highlights it: "Murdoch prefigures MacIntyre, as in 1958 she declared that 'a religious and moral vocabulary is the possession now of a few'"[16].

For both Murdoch and MacIntyre, moral language reflects the way in which we think about reality. The empire of empiricist philosophy has led to thinking about human beings in terms that leave our inner lives reduced, placing stress on what can be observed and quantified in such a way that moral language is affected:"We have suffered a general loss of concepts, the loss of a moral and political vocabulary"[17].

MacIntyre starts *After Virtue* with a fictitious situation in which words remain but the references that give them significance have disappeared:

The hypothesis which I wish to advance is that in the actual world which we inhabit the language of morality is in the same state of disorder as the language of natural science in the imaginary world which I described. (…) We possess indeed simulacra of morality, we continue to use many of the

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15 J.E.G. JORDAN, *Iris Murdoch's Genealogy of the Modern Self: Retrieving Consciousness Beyond the Linguistic Turn*. PhD Dissertation, Baylor University, 2008, https://beardocs.baylor.edu/xmlui/bitstream/handle/2104/5240/Jessy_Jordan_phd.pdf?sequence=1.

16 WIDDOWS,*The Moral Vision of Iris Murdoch*, p. 167

17 *EM*, p. 290

key expressions. But we have (...) lost our comprehension, both theoretical and practical, of morality[18].

Murdoch is a great champion of the use of metaphor as a vehicle for showing what is difficult to understand, and MacIntyre follows suit, in practice. As Edward T. Oakes observes, "(...) MacIntyre has come up with a metaphor to explain exactly why it is that moral debate in today's society is so shrill and so rarely leads to consensus—why, in other words, society seems utterly incapable of coming to enough basic agreement in matters of ethics to enable it to deal with the moral chaos that surrounds us"[19].

The coincidence between Murdoch and MacIntyre affects their writings on the loss of language but, because their writings derive from different philosophical approaches, they are, as a consequence, different as well. While MacIntyre relates the depleted meaning of concepts to the loss of the social fabric that made them comprehensible, Murdoch, who does not enter into the social realm in her reflections, links the depletion of concepts to the image of human beings offered in contemporary philosophy. Cora Diamond compares the writings of the two philosophers to highlight that their appreciation of the loss of concepts is different: "Iris Murdoch is not saying, as MacIntyre is, that we lack the kind of life within which such concepts as we need could be intelligibly applied. He says that we are naked irrational wills disguised as moral reasoners; she (...) says that what goes with our present depleted moral vocabulary is that we appear to be such wills"[20].Both speak of humans today in terms of a subjective, naked will, but both also recognize that ordinary people have a different experience of what philosophy attempts to explain in an alternative manner. The example of the daughter-in-law and mother-in-law analyses by Murdoch in *SG*, a situation that can be found in daily life, is hard to explain using the image of human beings found in contemporary philosophy. Murdoch draws a clear distinction between the concept of humans offered by philosophy and the way real people live and feel:"The ordinary person does not, unless corrupted by philosophy, believe that he creates values by choices. He thinks that some things really are better than others and that he is capable of getting it wrong. We are not usually in doubt about the direction in which Good lies"[21]. We move in two worlds, the one offered by philosophical explanations and the

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18 *AV*, p. 2.
19 T.E. OAKES, *The Achievement of Alasdair MacIntyre*, "First Things", 65 (1996), p.22.
20 C. DIAMOND, (1988). *Losing your Concepts*, "Ethics" 98 (1988), p. 262.
21 *SG*, p. 97.

other one of real people who, as Murdoch puts it, do not correspond with the ones in philosophy. This dualism, however, must be bridged by setting aside the philosophical explanations that do not reflect the real essence of ordinary humans: "(...) [I]f a moral philosophy does not give a satisfactory or sufficiently rich account of what we unphilosophically know to be goodness, then away with it."[22].

At the beginning of "Plain Persons and Moral Philosophy: Rules, Virtues and Goods" MacIntyre also refers to the relationship between everyday life and philosophy to make clear that, while there are philosophies that respond to issues of everyday life, there are others that completely separate these two activities:

> What is the relationship between the moral philosopher's judgments about the life of practice and the every plain person's moral questions and judgments? Moral philosophers are of course themselves in most of their lives everyday plain persons, but on some views what they do and judge *qua* moral philosopher is very different from what they do and judge *qua* plain person. Some analytic philosophers, for example, have envisaged the relationship between moral philosophy and every day moral judgments as analogous to that between the philosophy of science and the judgments and activity of the natural scientist or that between the philosophy of law and legal practice. In each such case the philosophy is to be understood as detached second-order commentary upon first-order judgments and activity[23]

2. *Affinities in their ideas: Narrativity[24]*

For MacIntyre, each life is a story, a narration in which the protagonist is author and actor, the main actor in his own story and a secondary actor in the narration of other lives. A person's actions fit and are intelligible within the

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22 *EM*, p. 205.
23 MacIntyre, *Plain Persons*, p. 3.
24 An article by Pamela M. Hall, *Limits of the Story: Tragedy in Recent Virtue Ethics*, "Studies in Christian Ethics", 17(2004)1, examines "(...) how tragedy, in narrative as in the world, functions within the ethics of MacIntyre and Murdoch", p. 2, and concludes that the meaning of tragedy in human life is different for Murdoch and MacIntyre.

narration of his own life[25]because the human being is an animal that tells stories:"(...) man is in his actions and practice, as well as in his fictions, essentially a story-telling animal. He is not essentially, but becomes through his history, a teller of stories that aspire to truth"[26].

For Murdoch, the reflective activity of the mind serves to internalize the events and circumstances of a life and these events and circumstances become personal through such reflection. What we experience we explain to ourselves and to others in the form of a story that takes on meaning. We are, as Murdoch says, story-tellers who use stories to create reality: "The story is a way of thinking, it is a fundamental mode of consciousness, or self-being"[27].It is not only that we tell stories to others, but also to ourselves, because stories enable us to make judgments, evaluate and make sense of the world and our role in it: "My life is experienced by me as a narration, in the course of which I appropriate its 'accidents' (...)"[28].

Story-telling is at the heart of literature, which Murdoch calls a way to seek and reveal the truth: "(...) philosophy and literature are both truth-seeking and truth-revealing activities."[29]. The article by Michael Schwartz refers to this parallelism.

Tradition

At the very beginning of *SG*, when Murdoch considers the characteristics of philosophy today, she makes reference to the difficulty of understanding philosophies that are distant from our own tradition, as well as philosophies that rival it in their ability to explain the phenomenon of morality:

> The position (...) in current moral philosophy is one which seems to me unsatisfactory in two related ways, in that it ignores certain facts and at the same time imposes a single theory which admits of no communication with or escape into rival theories. (...) [I]n an attempt to enlarge our field of vision we turn for a moment to philosophical theories outside our own

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25 However, while MacIntyre sees teleology as part of life, as in unpredictability (*After Virtue* 215), Murdoch explicitly denies that a human life can have a teleological meaning (*The Sovereignty of Good* 79).
26 *AV*, p.216.
27 *EM*, p. 252.
28 *EM*, p. 127.
29 *EM*, p. 11.

tradition and we find it very difficult to establish any illuminating connection[30].

Murdoch goes on to remark on the most notable traits of the philosophy of George Edward Moore to reach what truly interests her, the concept of human beings employed by Stuart Hampshire in his works. Although Murdoch does not develop the concept of "tradition" or "rivalry" as subsequently developed broadly in texts by MacIntyre, she does certainly make use of them. MacIntyre defines tradition as "(...) an historically extended, socially embodied argument, and an argument precisely in part about the goods which constitute that tradition"[31].Rivalry between traditions arises from their desire to explain the same reality through different concepts and ideas. MacIntyre refers to the conceptual incommensurability of rival argumentation. Each argument is or can be logically valid, but it is not possible to establish which of the premises underpinning each argument has a greater claim to validity. As a result, all dialogue between incommensurable argumentations is non-viable. As Murdoch puts it, philosophical debates, in order to be fruitful, need for the debaters to share some principles or criteria from which they can set out their opposing viewpoints. Otherwise, the confrontation is doomed to failure:"Moral arguments will be difficult or impossible where the differences are differences of criteria"[32].

Authority

Focusing on the notion of "authority" in the two authors, we find that it is used in the same sense, but applied to different fields. In the texts of Murdoch and MacIntyre, the term "authority" is used in the sense of commanding respect in exchange for progress or knowledge. For Murdoch, it is very clear that acknowledging what lies beyond us and prevails on us is the only path toward gaining knowledge of it. The recognition of authority goes hand-in-hand with an attitude of self-abnegation and trust, which is repaid with knowledge. Murdoch uses the example of learning a language: "If I am learning, for instance, Russian, I am confronted by an authoritative structure which

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30 *SG*, p. 1-2.
31 *AV*, p. 222.
32 *EM*, p. 81.

commands my respect. (...) My work is a progressive revelation of something which exists independently of me"[33].

MacIntyre speaks of authority as one of the elements necessary to learning a practice[34]because obedience to the rules defining a practice is fundamental: "To enter into a practice is to accept the authority of those standards and the inadequacy of my own performance as judged by them. It is to subject my own attitudes, choices, preferences and tastes to the standards which currently and partially define the practice"[35].This is the case with research, for which acknowledging the authorityof a number of texts is the first, essential step toward understanding them. The credibility of the texts is granted to them by whoever wishes to study them and understand them; at the same time, this is the necessary requirement for their intellection. Learning a language may also be understood as a practice with rules to which the learner must yield in order to gain mastery. What the concepts of authority used by Murdoch and MacIntyre have in common is that they rest on the trust, respect and obedience of learning as an indispensable condition for the attainment of knowledge. At the same time, acknowledging the authority of that which lies beyond me and which I must accept, leads me to see everything which is different from me and which I am forced to accept. From the outset, it is evident to the learner that there are degrees in the mastery of an art or practice that range from the learner's situation to standards of excellence, which comprise the authority of that art or practice: "An understanding of any art involves a recognition of hierarchy and authority. There are very evident degrees of merit, there are heights and distances (...)"[36]. The standards of excellence are independent of the subjectivity of the learner, as MacIntyre notes: "In the realm of practices the authority of both goods and standards operates in such a way as to rule out all subjectivist and emotivist analyses of judgment"[37].

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33 *SG,* p. 89.
34 "By 'practice' I am going to mean any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended." (*After Virtue* 187).
35*AV,* p. 190.
36 *SG,* p. 88.
37*AV,* p.190.

In relation to practices and the "open" definition of the standards that inspire them, Jordan points to the affinity that can be found between Murdoch and MacIntyre. In MacIntyre's view, the standards are subject to critique and refinement in function of the progress of the practice when mastery has been achieved. This, however, is not that case of the learner who, while still developing in the practice, must accept the authority of the standard before being able to question it;the standards of a practice are only subject to innovation from the perspective of correct judgment. On this point, concerning the possibility of refining the standards, Jordan sees a parallelism between Murdoch and MacIntyre:

> MacIntyre's account here is importantly similar to Murdoch's in this regard. He, like Murdoch, works in a dynamism to standards by which these standards can be refined and made better. (…)Murdoch argues that, just as we can see a conception of perfection (although not fully defined) generating hierarchies within everyday human practices—hierarchies that we experience as authoritative—so we can see that the conception of moral perfection (i.e., the Good) works in the same way. A conception of perfection generates hierarchies of moral value to which we are subject, but these hierarchies are also in the process of being deepened[38].

Humility

The recognition of authority supposes an attitude of humility that is indispensable for learning. Against humility stands pride, which we must understand as the act of putting oneself before what is other. Murdoch refers to humility in speaking of the artist and the artist's relationship to reality. The Artist (upper-case) is someone who bows to the superiority of reality to express not so much what he sees as what is there. Humility is a virtue, and for the artist, just as for a person who is not an artist, it is difficult to renounce the creative I and be left (only) with a recreating I. The artist is a student of reality:"The honesty and humility required of the student –not to pretend to know what one does not know –is the preparation for the honesty and humility of the scholar who does not even feeltempted to suppress the fact which damns

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38 JORDAN, *Iris Murdoch's Genealogy of the Modern Self*, p. 198.

his theory. (...)[S]tudying is normally an exercise of virtue as well as of talent, and shows us a fundamental way in which virtue is related to the real world"[39].

The humility to which MacIntyre refers is the humility of the learner who is interested in discovering the truth:"And hence the acquisition of that virtue which the will requires to be so guided, humility, is the necessary first step in education or in self-education"[40].

In both authors, humility is a virtue that becomes a prerequisite to knowledge of the truth.

Moral use of literature

Murdoch and MacIntyre both defend the use of literature to achieve moral aims. In Murdoch's view, the limitation of language often makes stories more effective at illuminating reality than rational explanations: "We may consider here the importance of parables and stories as moral guides"[41].The moral truth suggested by some literary stories, such as the story of the prodigal son, is easier to capture than it would be if one were to attempt explanation through rational concepts. Murdoch adds: "Literature tells us things and teaches us things"[42].A portion of Murdoch's writings are dedicated to clarifying what makes a work of art a great work of art, and what role a great work of art has in morality. The constant characteristic of human beings, Murdoch says, is egoism, the human capacity to see reality through the filter of one's I. Self-centeredness prevents humans from understanding their surroundings and leads them to see reality with themselves at its center, a perspective that is tantamount to seeing all reality outside themselves only in terms of their own self-interest. Murdoch's view is that egoism is the first and greatest enemy of morality. The interest of a great work of art stems from its ability to stir the individual, if only for a moment, to consider reality from a decentred perspective. Murdoch grants great art the force of removing an individual from the smallness of his world, shaped by the personal *ego*, in order to come face-to-face with a reality in which others can be appreciated in their own uniqueness. What makes a work of art great is its ability to reflect the truth; that is the source of its magnetism. The capacity of a work of art comes out of the disposition of the artist himself. What the

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39 *SG*, p. 89.

40 A. MACINTYRE, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Inquiry. Encyclopaedia, Genealogy, and Tradition*, London, Duckworth 1990, p.44.

41 *EM*, p. 90.

42 *EM,*p. 257.

work of art achieves in the spectator or reader is found first in the artist who has been able to transcend his personal I in order to see reality in its accurate dimension,a dimension that the work of art offers to the public and that is transformative for anyone capable of being transformed.

In MacIntyre's view, the stories told to children as tales introduce them to the world of the meaning of things, and further, they are tools for learning virtues:

> Deprive children of stories and you leave them unscripted, anxious stutterers in their actions as in their words. Hence there is no way to give us an understanding of any society, including our own, except though the stock of stories which constitute its initial dramatic resources. (...) [T]he telling of stories has a key part in educating us into the virtues[43].

Virtue

Murdoch has been identified as one of the authors who have opened the way to the contemporary recuperation of the concept of virtue. Her repeated complaints against the tilt toward a moral philosophy inspired only by duty and moral rules brought about a reaction to reclaim the concepts of the Good, virtue and moral character. MacIntyre's moral philosophy is an example of this reaction. Murdoch has the merit of rescuing the importance of virtue in moral life from obscurity, while MacIntyre went on to develop these theses. However, when their two definitions are compared, it can be seen that the points of reflection and interest that inspire their concepts of virtue are different.

Here is Murdoch:

> Of course virtue is good habit and dutiful action. But the background condition of such habit and such action, in human beings, is a just mode of vision and a good quality of consciousness. It is a *task* to come to see the world as it is[44].

Now compare MacIntyre:

> A virtue is an acquired human quality the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices

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43*AV*, p. 216.
44*SG*, p. 91; original emphasis

and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such goods[45].

Murdoch takes greater interest in analyzing the prerequisites of virtue than in explaining how dutiful action corresponds to a given virtue. The notion of "habit" in the sense of *habitus* was fundamental for thinkers like Aristotle and St Thomas Aquinas, whom Philippa Foot[46]says are necessary for any student wishing to know more about virtue, but "habit" does not appear to be a central concern of Murdoch's approach. Therefore, the conditions of virtue often serve Murdoch to define virtue itself. For example, the correct "vision" of my surroundings is a condition of virtue, but it is also the way to define it: "(...) [V]irtue is the attempt to pierce the veil of selfish consciousness and join the world as it really is."[47]. As MacIntyre remarks in response to Murdoch's thinking:"To be virtuous, according to her, is not to exhibit a collection of traits, it is to be moving with a certain kind of directedness"[48].

By contrast, MacIntyre links virtue, both its acquisition and its exercise, to a collaborative activity and emphasizes the community aspect of virtue. Yet he does support Murdoch when she singles out disposition in morality:

> The moral agent's tasks do not and cannot begin only after questions of fact have been settled. For, as both Simone Weil and Iris Murdoch have insisted, one sine qua non of human goodness is the ability to see things as they are; and to see things as they are is a morally difficult task. (...) A part of moral philosophy and moral psychology must therefore be concerned with how we come to see things as they are, the variety of ways in which we may fail, the variety of causes of failure, and the kind of discipline that can overcome these obstacles[49].

45*AV*, p. 91; original emphasis.

46P. Foot, *Virtues and Vices and Other Essays in Moral Philosophy*, Berkeley, University of California Press 1978, p. 1.

47*SG*, p.93

48I. Murdoch,*Good for Nothing*, "London Review of Books", June 1982, p.15.

49A. MacIntyre, *Revisions: Changing Perspectives in Moral Philosophy*, Notre Dame, Indiana, University of Notre Dame Press 1983, pp.12-13.

3. Conclusion

Although we have two authors who differ in their way of conceiving and doing philosophy, we could say that what appear to be only intuitions in Murdoch become extended theoretical explanations in the works of MacIntyre.Taken as wholes, the philosophies of the two writers respond to different concerns and draw on the past indifferentways. They coincide in analyzing the present, but even as they rummage in the present, they highlight different elements. Murdoch is interested in combating an image of human beings inherited from the Enlightenment, Romanticism and the liberal tradition[50]and stresses the importance of the inner life in moral life. MacIntyre in contrast develops his philosophy by seeking the social, historical and philosophical origins of moral emotivism. While Murdoch's concern is the individual, MacIntyre focuses on the individual immersed in the community[51].If Murdoch's historical reference is Plato[52],MacIntyre resorts to a tradition that dates from Aristotle.

I do not concur with Edward T. Oakes, who describes the two philosophies as rivals and suggests that MacIntyre had difficulties in responding to the theses in Murdoch's philosophy: "His work [MacIntyre's] is not necessarily the best moral philosophy now being written –Iris Murdoch, for one, may offer a rival philosophy he would find difficult to answer(...)"[53].However, the remarks of Michael Schwartz also strike me as exaggerated, when he states that the two philosophies are equal and that MacIntyre's philosophy might not exist without Murdoch's: "to argue against the claim of rival philosophy and assert that MacIntyre's philosophy is analogous to Murdoch's, and furthermore could not exist without Murdoch's"[54].More fitting seem the remarks of Jordan who holds that one of the affinities between Murdoch and MacIntyre is found in their search for an alternative to the reigning philosophy of the day:

50*EM*, p.287

51 It is characteristic of Iris Murdoch's later novels that all goodness referring to the Form of Good seems to entail that there is no such thing as a good way or life or a good form of human community. Good is an object only of individual aspiration." MACINTYRE, *Which World Do You See?*, p. 9.

52 In fact, MacIntyre identifies himself as a neo-Platonist: "(...) the revival of an essentially Neoplatonic view of Plato, in one version by John Findley, in another by Iris Murdoch.", MACINTYRE, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*. London: Duckworth, 1988, p.94.

53OAKES, *The Achievement of Alasdair MacIntyre*, p. 22.

54 SCHWARTZ, *Moral Vision: Iris Murdoch and Alasdair MacIntyre*, p.323.

Like Murdoch, Alasdair MacIntyre argues that for all their apparent differences, analytic moral philosophy and the continental philosophy of Nietzsche and Sartre share a deeper, and more important, commonality. MacIntyre analyzes this commonality in terms of emotivism, whereas Murdoch seeks to cast it in terms of Existentialism. But it is clear that both Murdoch and MacIntrye are united in their efforts to provide an alternative moral philosophy to one where the will is the creator of value[55].

Based on the reference to the concept of "rival philosophies" developed by MacIntyre, we have here two different focuses within the same Western tradition. Being different, the two thinkers' philosophies disagree on some questions, even in how the problems are framed. However, by virtue of belonging to the same tradition, they were able to carry on a philosophical dialogue supported by a common grounding in shared fundamental beliefs.

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55 JORDAN, *Iris Murdoch's Genealogy of the Modern Self*, pp. 45-46.