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Ethics and Aesthetics Intersections in Iris Murdoch's Philosophy

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List of Publications

- I “Sielun hyvyys ja hahmon kauneus. 1700-luvun tulkintoja *kalo-kagathiasta*”. *Ajatus, Suomen Filosofisen Yhdistyksen vuosikirja* 52, Helsinki, 1996, pp. 147–162.
- II “Tuulihaukan tarkkailua. Kauneuden merkityksestä Iris Murdochin moraalifilosofiassa”. *Ajatus, Suomen Filosofisen Yhdistyksen vuosikirja* 56, Helsinki, 1999, pp. 161–178.
- III “Iris Murdoch on Love and the Sublime”. In: *Philosophical Aspects on Emotions*, Åsa Carlson (ed.), Thales, Stockholm, 2005, pp. 83–95.
- IV “Good, Self, and Unselfing. Reflections on Iris Murdoch’s Moral Philosophy”. In: *Personen. Ein Interdisziplinärer Dialog, Beiträge des 25. Internationalen Wittgenstein Symposiums*, Band X, Christian Kanzian, Josef Quitterer & Edmund Runggaldier (eds.), Beiträge der Österreichischen Ludwig Wittgenstein Gesellschaft, Wien, 2002, pp. 211–213.
- V “Käytännön kokemuksesta kohti hyvää Iris Murdochin moraalifilosofiassa”. In *Käytäntö*, Suomen Filosofisen Yhdistyksen Käytäntö-kollokvion esitelmät, Sami Pihlström, Kristina Rolin & Floora Ruokonen (eds.), Yliopistopaino, Helsinki, 2002, pp. 145–154.
- VI “Iris Murdoch and the Extraordinary Ambiguity of Art”. *The Journal of Value Inquiry*, Vol. 42, No. 1, 2008, pp. 77–90.
- VII “Building Trust: A Fairly Honourable Defeat”. *Sats – Nordic Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 9, No. 1, 2008, pp. 46–68.

Abbreviations of Works by Iris Murdoch

ME	Metaphysics and Ethics
MGM	Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals
NP	Nostalgia for the Particular
S	The Sovereignty of Good
SB	The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited
SG	The Sublime and the Good
TL	Thinking and Language
VC	Vision and Choice in Morality

Introduction

1. Preface

This thesis addresses the question concerning the relationship between the values goodness and beauty, and, consequently, between aesthetics and ethics. It discusses the various ways in which ethical and aesthetic themes intersect in the work of one philosopher, Iris Murdoch. The thesis consists of seven previously published articles and an introduction. The introduction provides a historical and systematic background to the subject of the study and summaries of the publications.

One can find many conceptualisations of the intersections of ethics and aesthetics in the history of philosophy. Lord Shaftesbury's concept of "*virtuoso*" and Friedrich Schiller's concept of "*eine schöne Seele*" are mentioned in this thesis. They are discussed as eighteenth century interpretations of the ancient Greek notion of *kalokagathia*. All these notions refer to ideals where a person's character is judged as valuable both ethically and aesthetically. Both Shaftesbury and Schiller presented their ideals as alternative conceptions of the nature of moral life. Shaftesbury posed his Neoplatonist moral theory against theories which were based on the idea of human beings as egoists seeking gratification and fearing punishment. Schiller challenged the Kantian notion of morality as following of duty and disregarding inclination.

A scrutiny of Shaftesbury's and Schiller's thought reveals many affinities between their efforts to redefine the sphere of morality and some strong currents in today's moral philosophy. Strikingly, many contemporary philosophers have been turning to aesthetics when trying to articulate ethical ideas that could replace those dominant today, which they find inaccurate or impotent for various reasons. Thus, there has been much discussion concerning the connections between ethics and aesthetics of late. In the later part of the twentieth century, continental postmodern philosophy experienced what has been called "an ethical turn". After a

period of fierce criticism of substantial notions of humanity and of the ethics coming with such notions, there emerged a counter-movement within postmodern philosophy seeking to establish an ethics compatible with the postmodern suspicion about universal claims based on the standards of reason, nature, or law (cf. Voloshin 1998, 69). This turn was fused with aesthetic components. Aesthetic ideals applied to life can also be found in different forms within virtue ethical theory which by the 1990s had established itself alongside deontology and consequentialism as one of the three great variants of normative moral theory. In general, dissatisfaction with the traditional view of moral philosophy, and especially its narrow focus, seems to loom up in various quarters of the philosophical field. Many philosophers have believed that turning to art and aesthetics could be of help in correcting the situation.

These observations give rise to both a historical and systematic link to Iris Murdoch's philosophy. She strongly believes that there is more than a contingent connection between the three great values of goodness, beauty, and truth. Her discussion of this theme is based on a criticism of her contemporary ethics. She is especially discontent with emotivist and prescriptivist meta-ethical theories and the way they imply, in her opinion, an ethics that is concerned with isolated acts of persons. Like Shaftesbury, she turns to Plato in order to find an alternative conception of ethical life. In this conception, sensibility rather than principles and vision rather than will is emphasised. Ethical progress and aesthetic experiences are discussed as interwoven phenomena.

Murdoch's own career both as a philosopher and renowned novelist – she published 26 novels during her life – gives an interesting background to her thoughts on the intersections of ethics and aesthetics. Her insights into the relations of the two fields might have been influenced by this twofold position. Her talent as a writer shows itself also in the literary style of her philosophy. This is why it has been a challenge to form a picture of her philosophy which can genuinely add to one's understanding of it, not just paraphrase her own, always much more expressive and beautiful formulations. I believe this challenge has been worthwhile. From the perspective of the relationship of ethics and aesthetics, Murdoch's philosophy is clearly an important contribution to contemporary

discussion. The aim of this thesis is to justify this conviction in addition to proving that for an accurate understanding of Murdoch's philosophy one needs to be clear on how she sees the relationship between ethics and aesthetics.

2. Ethics and Aesthetics

Murdoch's philosophy has received surprisingly little attention in the discussion on the relationship between ethics and aesthetics. Even though she is often mentioned as one of the first writers to discuss the impact of literature on ethics, there are very few detailed accounts commenting on her views on this matter. Even rarer are comments on her view on the intersections of ethics and aesthetics in general.

The main reason for this lack of attention is, I believe, the nature of Murdoch's moral philosophy. Murdoch is a Neoplatonist thinker, and this implies a commitment to non-naturalist moral realism, in the sense of "non-naturalism" most common in contemporary meta-ethical discussion. Platonist non-naturalist moral realism does not mix well with the main potential candidates for an aesthetic-ethical theory, that is, post-modernism and neo-Aristotelianism. Moral realism by itself is an impossible match with the postmodern line of the aesthetic-ethical turn. A salient feature of this turn is that aesthetic considerations are offered as a replacement for realistic moral theories. The claim is that it is impossible to justify any shared criteria for comparing ethical arguments. Thus, ethics should be seen as an individual creative endeavour. Moral realism also distinguishes Murdoch from those neo-Aristotelian virtue ethicists who locate the criteria for virtue and good life within particular historical societies. Platonist non-naturalist realism distinguishes her in turn from those more realist virtue ethicists who emphasise human nature and human capabilities as the criteria of virtue. Thus, there is no ready-made niche for her within the field of aesthetic-ethical philosophical theories. A good example is Joseph Früchtl's thorough and systematic exploration of this field in his *Ästhetische Erfahrung und Moralisches Urteil* (1996). With an index of nearly 400 names and a four-place taxonomy of the main strands of contemporary aesthetic ethics, the book does not mention Iris Murdoch.

Again, the reason for her exclusion seems clear: all contemporary philosophers advocating more than a marginal connection between ethics and aesthetic are, according to Früchtl, decidedly post-metaphysical. In Früchtl's definition, this means that they (1) emphasise in their theory of rationality the plurality of forms of reasoning, (2) acknowledge in their epistemology categories such as "sensibility" as against "pure" reason, and (3) stick in their ontology to the sensory as against the supersensory (Früchtl 1996, 17). Although Murdoch's philosophy fits the description when it comes to the first two of these features, she is clearly a metaphysical thinker in the best Platonic tradition. She gives in her philosophy a central place to a "sovereign", "mystical" and "magnetic" Good, which unifies and organises human moral experience.

It is because of such discrepancies with the most prominent forms of aesthetic-ethical theories that Murdoch's views on the connections between ethics and aesthetics have suffered from the lack of careful attention. This is a serious omission. Her philosophy offers an interesting alternative to the above mentioned forms of aesthetic-ethical theories. A look at how Murdoch could be placed within Früchtl's taxonomy serves as a preliminary introduction to this alternative.

Früchtl's first division is between stances that deny that the aesthetic and the ethical have any overlap whatsoever and those that allow that they have at least something to do with each other. He calls the first position "anti-aesthetic ethics". As an example of someone holding this position he points to Karl-Otto Apel with his transcendental-pragmatist view of moral justification, but other examples could be found, for example, among contemporary contractarians. The other possibility is to adopt a "partial-aesthetic" position, which allows for aesthetics to contribute to ethics. The partial-aesthetic position is divided further into four branches: (1) "Fundamental aesthetic ethics" makes aesthetics the ground on which ethics rests. Jean-François Lyotard and Wolfgang Iser are mentioned as representatives of this approach. (2) "Marginal-aesthetic ethics" assigns aesthetic considerations a marginal role in the use of practical reason. Here utilitarianism is an example. (3) "Parallel-aesthetic ethics" gives aesthetics a role equal to that of ethical considerations in the "play of practical reason". Martin Heidegger and Albrecht Wellmer are examples of this posi-

tion. (4) “Perfection-aesthetic ethics” sees aesthetics not as the grounding for but as the consummation of ethics. Here, Foucault, Nussbaum, and Rorty are mentioned as examples. (Früchtl 1996, 21–22.)

It is clear that Murdoch’s philosophy is of the partial-aesthetic rather than the anti-aesthetic kind. Moreover, with her unyielding interest in the relationship of aesthetics and ethics, as well as her high appreciation of the relevance of aesthetics to ethics, she definitively cannot be categorised as a “marginal-aesthetic” ethicist. She does not, however, succumb to the “fundamental-aesthetic” approach where aesthetics is made the ground on which ethics rests. As I show in the second article of the thesis, Murdoch does not collapse ethics and aesthetics into each other, but differentiates clearly between moral and aesthetic experience. Moreover, morality is seen by her as infinitely more important than aesthetic experience.

If Murdoch is not a marginal-aesthetic, nor a fundamental-aesthetic moral philosopher, the options left in Früchtl’s taxonomy are the “parallel-aesthetic” and the “perfection-aesthetic” positions. Früchtl quickly dismisses the parallel-aesthetic position as a possibility, since, depending on the criteria used to evaluate the relative weights of aesthetic and ethical considerations in practical reasoning, and finding that they are on a par with each other, the position is destined to collapse back into either marginal-aesthetic or fundamental-aesthetic ethics, as the criteria used will be either of ethical or aesthetic kind (Früchtl 1996, 26). Thus, the last option to consider is the perfection-aesthetic position. Früchtl thinks that this is the most promising stand for the question of the relationship between aesthetics and ethics. It does not suffer from the lack of discernment which leads fundamental-aesthetic ethics to overlook the particularities of ethical and aesthetic judgement, but it does take aesthetics seriously enough to let it have a crucial role within the inquiry concerning human life as an ethical project. As noted, Früchtl mentions Foucault, Rorty, and Nussbaum among others as philosophers who can be interpreted as exemplifying this position. Foucault suggests that the Enlightenment ideal of autonomy has reached a point where it can be ethically, that is, with radical potential, carried out by living a life of stylistic self-formation (Früchtl 1996, 184; Foucault 1983, 236–237). Also Rorty exalts the idea of self-creation, but regards in addition aesthetic sensibility as the most im-

portant instrument of good, when this good is defined minimally as responsiveness to suffering (Früchtl 1996, 235; Rorty 1989, 141–42). Nussbaum in turn emphasizes the value of literature in forming the modes of sensibility and perception needed to grasp the manifold goods in particular situations. Moreover, a good life makes a narrative which can be compared to a work of literature: “the novel is itself a moral achievement, and the well-lived life is a literary work of art” (Nussbaum 1992, 148).

In Früchtl’s taxonomy Murdoch’s position would also be within the perfection-aesthetic branch. As will be shown in this thesis, she defines the morally ideal way of relating to the world in terms of the attitude typically connected with the aesthetic experience. She also analyses the moral experience of recognizing another person as an independent source of meaning in terms of the Kantian semi-aesthetic notion of the sublime. Moreover, she refers to the nature of good literature as proof for her view of the nature of morality. However, there are notable differences between her version and each of the positions mentioned above. Only a few can be considered here.

It is common to object to an ethics of self-creation, such as suggested by Foucault and Rorty, on the grounds of its asocial and apolitical nature. The objection is justified even if Foucault succeeds in building an ethical as well as a political dimension to his aesthetics of existence by way of his idea of radical autonomy realized in individual choices, and regardless of Rorty’s appeals to the reduction of suffering as a historically contingent yet morally motivating aspiration. For someone who thinks ethical life is more than contingently a life lived in relation to other people, an ethics of self-styling will not be enough. Murdoch offers an account of the role of aesthetics in ethical life that is almost diametrically opposed to the post-modern model of self-creation. She takes aesthetic experiences as the most important way of practicing “unselfing”. By this term she refers to activity that can free one from the egoistic, instinct driven psyche directed at self-preservation. Beauty is for her “the convenient and traditional name of something which art and nature share, and which gives a fairly clear sense to the idea of quality of experience and change of consciousness” (Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good*, form now on S, 84). In the history of aesthetics, one of the features of aesthetic experiences has sometimes

been thought to be the blurring of the boundary between the perceiving subject and her object. It is precisely this that Murdoch sees as the strength of “beauty”. It can make us better by making us less self-centred, regardless of whether the self is understood in terms of the old substantial self or the postmodern self-created subject.

The most prominent difference between Nussbaum and Murdoch is that between an Aristotelian’s and a Platonist’s view of tragedy. According to Nussbaum’s analysis, the most relevant question ethically in a comparison between Aristotelianism and Platonism concerns tragedy as an essential part of human life (Nussbaum, 1995/1986). Ancient tragedies and modern novels know how to deal with this feature of human life, and so does Aristotelian ethics. Platonist ethics does not, and this is its failure.

Nussbaum’s conviction that tragedy is an inextricable feature of human life arises out of her ethical theory. She holds that a good life consists of incommensurable goods realized in the exercise of various virtues. These goods can at times conflict in particular situations. As we learn from great novels and Greek tragedies, even the most virtuous person can find herself in a situation where there are only bad options to choose from, that is, whatever she chooses to do, she has to sacrifice one good in favour of another. In such situations the virtuous person shows the quality of her character in her regret and sorrow for having had to make the sacrifice.

Murdoch recognizes something she calls tragic freedom as part of life. Tragic freedom is “an exercise of the imagination in an unreconciled conflict of dissimilar beings” (SG, 217). But tragedy as such is not, according to Murdoch, a part of real life. It is the name of a very high form of poetic art which displays the horrors of human life in a dramatic form (MGM, 116). The term is ambiguous in the sense that all great art is: it displays formless things, such as infinite suffering within an orderly form. Real life is not tragic since the truly terrible in it – mainly death – cannot be expressed in artistic form.

The difference between Nussbaum’s and Murdoch’s view on tragedy is that the phenomenon which Nussbaum sees as the essence of tragedy in both art and life, that is, the irreconcilable conflict between goods does not appear in Murdoch’s philosophy. The idea of a distant but magnetic

Good brings unity to virtues and organizes human experience. Moral improvement is gradual increase of our knowledge of the world. Thus one who would truly “see” the situation also knows how to act in it. Wrong choices and moral conflicts are in Murdoch’s ethics caused by failures in knowledge, not by an inherent feature of the system of values.

Nussbaum and Murdoch do agree that literature is a vehicle for moral improvement. They both believe that literature performs this function mainly by enhancing imaginative activity and by inculcating a sensitivity to subtleties, details, and differences. Yet the vista opened up by moral improvement is, again, pictured differently by the two. Although the views are not incompatible, they clearly differ in emphasis. Nussbaum is interested in a decidedly *human* good in the sense that a good life consisting of various forms of excellent activities is, although fragile and prone to tragedies, in principle within the reach of any “average” person in the right circumstances. Human standards of excellence reflect the limitations of human beings such as aging, mortality, and limited understanding. For such beings the best life is a rich, varied, flourishing existence – *eudaimonia* – within the limits set by the human condition. (Cf. Nussbaum 1992.) “Happiness” and perfection in the above sense are equivalent with the ethical life. For Murdoch, morality holds no promise of happiness, not even in the ancient sense of a flourishing life of the soul. Rather, morality is about both facing up to the frailty and transience of the human condition and aspiring to comprehend something transcending that condition. She visions the idea of the Good which brings unity to virtues and human experience as ultimately undefinable and thus unreachable. The Good is a motivating, transcendent principle which compels to try to do and to be good. Yet as limited beings we are doomed to fail in attending perfection. The attempt to be virtuous is without reward, and the idea of Good should not be used as a consolation. Indeed, the most important difference between the aesthetic and the moral experience is, according to Murdoch, in that aesthetic experiences cannot but console in some sense: there is an inherent pleasure in perceiving something as a unified meaningful object, and this is a part of aesthetic experiences. This is precisely what makes art, and especially literature, such a good “clue to morality”. It can present in a rewarding form what otherwise could be psychologically

too difficult to embrace, that is, the endless, formless, and inexhaustible variety of human life.

The articles of this thesis discuss Murdoch's position on the relationship between aesthetics and ethics in further detail. So far it has only been suggested that Murdoch's rather idiosyncratic view may be of interest if one is looking for alternatives to the postmodern or neo-Aristotelian forms of aesthetic ethics. The aim of this thesis is to show that one can find here a theory that is able to account for the importance of aesthetic values for moral life without lapsing into an amoral aestheticism. It captures common intuitions concerning the need for harmony and unity in human life together with a realistic view of its contingency and pointlessness.

3. Earlier Studies of Murdoch's Philosophy and the Method of This Study

Although Murdoch has not received the attention she deserves in the discussion on the relationship between aesthetics and ethics, her thinking as such has been increasingly acknowledged in the recent years. She is often mentioned as a pioneer of many prominent currents of contemporary ethical debate. She presented a virtue ethical and realistic account of morality already in the 1950s, when neither virtue ethics nor moral realism was among the most popular strands in moral philosophy. Since then both stands have become more respectable. She also studied the relationship between personal identity and values, and emphasised the role that emotions play in moral deliberation. Many philosophers active in discussions concerning the above topics have mentioned Murdoch as an important influence on them. Sabina Lovibond, Alisdair McIntyre, John McDowell, Mark Platts, and Charles Taylor can be mentioned. Martha Nussbaum's attitude has been more ambivalent, but she too has expressed her admiration of Murdoch.

There are three general introductions to Murdoch's philosophical thought: Patricia O'Connor's *To Love the Good. The Moral Philosophy of Iris Murdoch* (1996), Maria Antonaccio's *Picturing the Human. The Moral Thought*

of Iris Murdoch (2000), and Heather Widdows' *The Moral Vision of Iris Murdoch: A New Ethics?* (2005). In addition, there is a growing number of articles that comment on Murdoch's philosophy. For example, Finnish philosophical circles were introduced to Murdoch as a philosopher around the turn of the millennium by Katri Kaalikoski in a series of articles that concentrated especially on Murdoch's moral realism (e.g., Kaalikoski 1994, 1996, 2001, 2002).

In addition to philosophical studies of Murdoch's thinking there is a large body of literary studies on her novels. These studies often mention her philosophical career and comment on the philosophical themes that appear in her novels (e.g., Conradi 1986; Dipple 1982; Byatt 1970). Such studies provide some illumination on the intersection of literature and philosophy in Murdoch's work from the perspective of her fictional writing. It is the lack of research on the role of literary and other aesthetic themes in her philosophy that this thesis seeks to correct. I argue in the sixth article of the thesis that an analysis of the nature of fictional literature plays a far more profound part in Murdoch's philosophical argumentation than Antonaccio and O'Connor recognize in their presentations of Murdoch's philosophy. The same argument applies to Widdows' book. Furthermore, the other articles of the thesis show that ethics and aesthetics do not intersect in Murdoch's philosophy only when it comes to her discussions of literature. Rather, her philosophy is fundamentally infused with aesthetic considerations.

The method of the study can be described as one of reconstructive interpretation. The idea is to lift forth and analyse the structure of those of Murdoch's arguments which rely on parallels, analogies, or examples drawn from the field of art and aesthetic experience. Given that a large part of her philosophical work is published in the form of individual articles, the reconstruction of some of her arguments involves some comparative work, where earlier claims are related to later ones, and themes only mentioned in some articles are explicated in terms of their more elaborate discussion in others. Furthermore, it must be recognized that Murdoch develops her ideas in a continuous dialogue with other philosophers. Many of her views can only be understood when read as comments on the philosophical ideas of other philosophers, even if she does

not always explicitly bring this forth herself. Plato and Kant stand out as the two most central figures among the numerous philosophers whose views Murdoch comments on. With regard to the subject matter of this thesis it is particularly important to understand that many of Murdoch's views are developed in dialogue with Plato's and Kant's theories of art and aesthetic experience. I comment on these dialogues especially in the third and sixth articles of the thesis.

The reading I propose of Murdoch's arguments is a charitable one. The emphasis is not on pointing out shortcomings or inconsistencies in her writing. Some general problems with the type of argumentation Murdoch employs are taken up in the fifth article of the thesis. There is no doubt, however, that a much more critical reading of Murdoch's philosophy could have been offered. Yet, as the aim of this thesis is to lay out the main structures of her philosophy so as to point out the intersections of ethics and aesthetics in it as clearly as possible, a detailed discussion of some issues that might be the subject of criticism will have to await a future study. My aim here has been to be true to the spirit of Murdoch's thinking in the sense that philosophical thinking is not solely about reaching conclusive arguments. Rather, one should perhaps consider the possibility of alternative approaches to philosophical questions.

The above observation leads to perhaps the most important methodological question for a study of Murdoch's philosophy: her style of writing. She exclaimed in an interview that "there is an ideal philosophical style which has a special unambiguous plainness and hardness about it, an austere unselfish candid style", and "the literary writer deliberately leaves space for his reader to play in. The philosopher must not leave any space" (Murdoch 1978, 4, 5). Her own philosophy does not fulfil these requirements, at least if "not leaving any space" is understood as simple unity of structure and unambiguity of terms. In this case her philosophy would seem to leave considerable room for the imagination of the reader to play in. As Stephen Mulhall has noted, it would indeed be self-contradictory if it did not (Mulhall 1997). Murdoch believes that creative imagination is the best model for conceptualisation as such. Moreover, the continuous breeding of imagery performed by the consciousness is, "for better or worse a function of moral change" (MGM, 329). This change is about

refining one's perceptive faculties, one's sensitivity for qualitative distinctions, and new possibilities. Moral philosophy should be able to deal with this kind of imaginative activity. This conviction is reflected not only in the content but also in style of Murdoch's moral philosophy. She frequently appeals to the imagination of the reader by using literary techniques such as metaphor, assonance, simile, and so on.

There is a strong tendency in western, and particularly Anglo-American philosophy to regard one specific style of writing as the one best suited to philosophy. This is the plain, clear, general style inspired by the discourse of natural sciences, the style to which Murdoch presumably refers in the comment above. This is a fairly new way of writing philosophy. Thorough its history, philosophy has been done in a variety of literary forms, such as dialogue, instructive poetry, confessions, letters, and aphorisms. Today, a lively discussion on the relationship between philosophy and literature has brought with it an increasing awareness of these and other alternatives to the standard form of philosophical article or treatise. It has been noticed that the style of writing philosophy is not always a contingent matter, a decoration put on a content which could be put forward in some other form as well. Rather, as for example Martha Nussbaum has reminded us, "style itself makes its claims, expresses its own sense of what matters" (Nussbaum 1992, 3). Forgetting this can lead to somewhat comical effects. For example, a treatise that advocates the involvement of imagination in moral reflection but presents this claim in a totally unimaginative and conventional way would seem to be self-defeating.

In Murdoch's philosophy, style and content, conception and expression, suit each other. This poses a problem for someone writing on her philosophy. There is a part of her thought in which the form of its expression is an inalienable aspect of the message. Such thoughts cannot be paraphrased without changing them. Yet conscientious faithfulness to Murdoch's original formulations can result in the study becoming a collection of Murdoch-quotes. One has to find another way of making a justified contribution to the study of Murdoch's philosophy. The earlier mentioned reconstructive interpretation is one such way. My aim is to rephrase clearly and analytically certain arguments which, it is argued, can

be found in Murdoch's philosophy. Murdoch's own articulation of these arguments is much richer. I do not claim that the whole essence of the arguments can be conveyed by way of such analyses. I agree with those who think that one of the most important contributions of the philosophical study of literature in the last few decades has been the challenging of the traditional picture of rational persuasion. Philosophers reminding us about the importance of form and style in philosophy have claimed that the reader's rational deliberation might be enriched by texts appealing not only to the intellect but also to the emotions and imagination. In other words, particularly when it comes to practical rationality, it must be considered that it is possible that we are sometimes rationally persuaded also by something other than has traditionally been understood as rational argument. (Cf. Clarke 2006, 155.) This is at times the case with Murdoch's philosophy, as is noted in the fifth and sixth articles of this thesis. There is nevertheless an important task that the reconstruction of arguments serves. It points out the formal structures of the arguments and sometimes even draws attention to their existence. I claim that only a close study of these structures can show the centrality of aesthetics themes in Murdoch's moral philosophy.

Before turning to a more detailed account of how this centrality is revealed in the articles of this thesis, a more general account of Murdoch's philosophy is needed. The next section of this introduction provides such an account. However, it must be remembered that in order to understand the whole persuasive force of Murdoch's philosophy, one will have to get to know it as originally presented in her own writings.

4. Murdoch's Philosophy in a Few Broad Brush Strokes

"She moves on the noumenal level and makes these occasional descents into the phenomenal level", was Sir Isaiah Berlin's comment on Iris Murdoch's friend Professor David Pears' account of how he was sitting in a train departing from New York's Grand Central Station to New Haven in 1959, when suddenly, as the train started to roll, he saw Iris Murdoch on the platform. She was standing beside a cardboard suitcase tied with string, wearing an old McIntosh and a blue French beret, and looked as if

she had been transferred directly out from her normal Oxford surroundings to this unlikely place.¹

Berlin's comment was, of course, an allusion to Murdoch's philosophy, and it tells us as much about the philosophical taste of her Oxford colleagues as it does about Iris Murdoch. In the 1950s and 1960s the dominant philosophical trend in Oxford was strictly analytic. Transparent clarity and rigorous argumentation were primary values. Murdoch took this dominant style to be closer to a moral ideology than to a neutral method of philosophy. As much as the study of certain contents, her philosophy was an attempt to do philosophy in a way which both comments on, and presents an ideological alternative to, standard analytical ethics. The cost for Murdoch of this attempt was to acquire reputation as a mystical and idiosyncratic thinker. As noted in the previous section, today this reputation is quickly giving way to a greater appreciation of her thinking. The originality of her philosophy is increasingly seen as an asset rather than a defect. Also its impenetrability has been questioned: the monographs presenting her thought are a proof of this.

Indeed, there is a clear structure and a large overall argument to be found in Murdoch's philosophy. This structure is, however, not always easy to discern since her work consists to a large part of individual articles. Yet it is difficult to do justice to Murdoch's thinking without placing particular arguments within her philosophy's overall structure. Her philosophy is grounded on a criticism of a certain view of humanity, and a totally different view is constructed on the basis of this criticism. The project is unitary and it runs through Murdoch's whole philosophical production. She once noted that philosophy is, among other things, "a matter of getting hold of a problem and holding on to it and being prepared to go on repeating oneself as one tries different formulations and solutions" (C, 6). This is a perfect characterisation of Murdoch's own philosophy.

In order to explain the relations between the articles of this thesis, an introduction to the overall structure of Murdoch's philosophy is needed. I will in what follows provide a compact overview of the main themes of

¹ Professor Pears shared this anecdote with me in Barcelona in September 2002.

her philosophy. I will not discuss at this stage the main arguments of the articles of the thesis. Thus, in the light of my claim that Murdoch's philosophy cannot be adequately understood without grasping properly the interplay of aesthetic and ethical value in it, this overview should still leave many questions open. I return to these questions later and then present my articles as answers to them.

The following overview presents Murdoch's ideas on (1) consciousness and inner experience, (2) will and morality, (3) the idea of Perfection, and (4) the place of imagination in moral life. A relatively short discussion of these themes can by no means cover all the relevant points and directions of thought in Murdoch's philosophy, even when aesthetic themes are left out. For present purposes it suffices to account for the ideas I take to be absolutely necessary to understand Murdoch's thinking. So the criteria for whether my selection of the topics was the right one is, then, whether the reader finds herself with such understanding at the end of the thesis.

Murdoch's ideas on topics mentioned above are presented with reference to some of her most seminal texts in a chronological order. Consciousness and inner experience will be discussed on the basis of two early articles, "Thinking and Language" (TL) and "Nostalgia for the Particular" (NP) from the years 1951 and 1952. The discussion of will and morality will be based on the articles "Vision and Choice in Morality" (VC) and "Metaphysics and Ethics" (ME) from the years 1956 and 1957. The section on the idea of perfection draws on Murdoch's famous collection of essays, *The Sovereignty of Goodness*. The collection was published in 1970, and the individual articles gathered together in it, that is, "The Idea of Perfection", "On 'God' and 'Good'", and "The Sovereignty of Good over Other Concepts" in the years 1964, 1969, and 1967 respectively. Finally, the main source for the discussion of the place of imagination in moral life is Murdoch's last philosophical work, the lengthy and intricate *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* from 1990.

The chronological structure of the introduction is meant to emphasise the continuity in Murdoch's thinking. I do not suggest that Murdoch only treats the respective topics in the material referred to under each heading. In fact, one can find discussions on most of the topics throughout her

career. Murdoch does indeed hold on to her questions. The answers she tries out add ever new layers onto her earlier thoughts. She also repeats herself and applies her old ideas in new contexts. Thus, something could be said of each topic on the basis of her last book *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* alone, since all her former central ideas appear there together with a vast amount of new material. However, using material from different phases of Murdoch's career has the advantage of giving at once an account of the overall pattern of her philosophy and of its emergence. It shows how her main ideas develop in a process characterized by a gradual adding of elements and reformulation of initial positions.

4.1. Consciousness and Inner Experience

In her early philosophical essays from the 1950s Murdoch defined her own position as set against her contemporary analytical ethics. The four essays considered here form two interconnected pairs. "Thinking and Language" and "Nostalgia for the Particular", from the years 1951 and 1952 respectively, present Murdoch's reflections on inner experience and the nature of consciousness. "Vision and Choice in Morality" and "Metaphysics and Ethics" from the years 1956 and 1957 incorporate these reflections in a discussion of the nature of morality. I begin by reviewing the main themes of these articles and then move on to a discussion of the idea of perfection as a unifying principle of both consciousness and moral reflection.

"Thinking and Language" and "Nostalgia for the Particular" are reactions to logical behaviourism's denial of the semantic importance of introspectively studied experience. According to Murdoch, the denial of the importance of such inner experience was sometimes denied so resolutely that it seemed also, almost by implication, to deny its existence. The view explicitly mentioned in Murdoch's critical remarks is the one presented in Gilbert Ryle's *The Concept of Mind* (1949).

Many ideas of logical behaviourism have been the target of criticism since its heyday, and nowadays philosophers do not tend to be as stringent on inner experience as, for example, Ryle. However, a short review

of Murdoch's criticism serves here to help us understand the groundings of her moral philosophy.

In "Thinking and Language" Murdoch describes her idea of 'thinking' as a "private activity that goes on in our heads" (TL, 33). She assumes that this is what in ordinary speech is meant by 'thinking'. "For the purposes of description" she also assumes that people's experiences of thinking are similar and that they correspond to the ordinary meaning of the word 'thinking' (ibid.). She sets her description and the assumption that follows from it against the logical behaviourist notion of the meaning of mental words. This notion comes with a strict verification principle which demands "an observable or identifiable something which shall by a universal convention be that which justifies the use, and this to be detected from an objective standpoint" (ibid., 38). Thus, according to logical behaviourists, the meaning of mental words, such as 'thinking', cannot be determined by reference to inner, private experience since there is no stable data which could be identified as the reference that the words name. From this perspective, then, inner experience is seen as something "shadowy and nameless" or downright illusory, a "*nothing*". Correspondingly, the meaning of mental words is learned by reference to conduct of others, not by referring to our own inner experience. (Ibid. 37–38.)

With this notion of meaning, the part of thinking which can be meaningfully analysed is that which is expressed in verbal actions. Murdoch disagrees with this claim. In her view language and thinking are not co-extensive (TL, 35). Thinking is verbal only partly. What can be called 'inward speech' occurs with a frame of mind which makes the words in thought occur as they do, with a certain force or colour, depending on the particular thought (ibid. 34). Thought may contain fully verbalised components as well as indescribable and pliant images and in between these two extremes is a "region where words occur but in a more indeterminate imaging manner [...] and not at all like a rehearsed inner speech" (ibid.).

The extra-verbal content of thought becomes evident for example in situations where we are at a loss for words, seeking to describe an obscurely apprehended experience. Such aspects of experience as "colour or tone" are not always captured by a verbal expression. The recognition of

this could, according to Murdoch, lead to “neurotic or metaphysical views about language”: experience slips through language. The attempt to verbalise experience may nevertheless also clarify thought and “result not in frustration but renewal of language” (TL, 36). However, from logical behaviourism’s perspective all such experiences are of no interest.

Murdoch’s claim is that private inner experiences cannot be regarded as irrelevant just because they do not fit a certain theory of meaning. She notes that it is indeed possible to picture a tribe

whose private thoughts consisted entirely of mathematical calculations, simple observation and induction verbally conducted, and exclamations. For such a people thinking would indeed be the private manipulation of exposable symbols; and for them a simple division of language into descriptive and emotive uses would be appropriate”. It is, however, “an important fact about us that we are not like these people (TL, 35).

To Murdoch, both the ontological question about whether particular inner experiences exist, and the semantic question concerning their verifiable meaning are beside the point when their relevance is discussed. She admits that in a scientifically minded verificatory theory it makes no sense to ask, for example, whether a retrospectively described experience was ‘really so’. However, it does make sense in the context of an individual’s self-examination (TL, 38, 41). Murdoch sees the idea of a private inner realm as a “regulative idea” without which we could not understand ourselves as the kind of beings we are. We see ourselves as ‘selves’ or ‘personalities’ with a more or less unified inner realm. If the happenings of this realm are difficult to grasp and verbalise it should not be concluded that they are trivial or mere illusions. Rather, a new description should be attempted (*ibid.*, 38). According to Murdoch, it will not do to say that philosophy is interested in one kind of strictly defined meaning and what falls outside it might freely be sought in another context, such as, for example, the context of art. Philosophy too should be able to take seriously something that is a large part of human life, and thus “phenomena such as ‘thoughts’ and ‘symbolic experiences’ must find their place in any philosophical description of the mind” (NP, 58). In other words, one is

left with “a haunting sense of loss” (*ibid.*, 43) if one accepts the logical behaviourist theory of meaning.

4.2. Will and Morality

In the articles “Vision and Choice in Morality” (1956) and “Metaphysics and Ethics” (1957), Murdoch sets out to evaluate the effects of logical behaviourism on moral philosophy. She discusses emotivist and prescriptivist theories of moral language and moral life. These theories are juxtaposed with another, more favourably judged view of morality.

These two articles are paradigmatic examples of Murdoch’s often noted manner of posing philosophical questions by way of juxtaposing two radically different outlooks. In them Murdoch presents a basic opposition to which she will return throughout her career, although sometimes in different terms. This is the opposition between “the natural law view” and “the current view” of morality. The latter is also called “the liberal view” when its normative character is emphasised. Murdoch’s discussion of this opposition touches on several of the most pivotal issues of late twentieth and early twenty-first century ethics. Two of the most crucial of these are the question concerning the ontological status of moral properties, that is, the realism-antirealism debate, and the question of the nature of moral reasoning. I will return to the former issue in the next chapter. The latter will be discussed in what follows.

The “current view”, as described by Murdoch, consists of traditional elements taken from Hume, Kant, and Mill coupled with a verificationist theory of meaning. From Hume the current view has inherited the idea that we live in a world of disconnected facts, from Kant the notion of morality as the rational seeking of universal reasons, and from Mill that a “creed learned by heart is paganism”, that is, that one’s ethical views should be the consequence of one’s deliberate choice. The verificationist theory of meaning held by logical positivists and Rylean logical behaviourists has been added to this tradition. The result is characterized by Murdoch as a behaviouristic, anti-metaphysical, and liberal view of morality (VC, 80, 93). The behaviouristic trait is exhibited in the belief that the moral life of the individual is a series of overt choices which take place in

a series of specifiable situations (*ibid.*, 77). The view is anti-metaphysical in that morality is pictured without any transcendent background (ME, 63). Finally, the view is liberal in spirit because it includes a hidden moral argument against dogmatism and intolerance (*ibid.*, 66).

Murdoch's discussion of the current view can be structured around four interconnected points where it differs from what she calls the natural law view. These points are the notion of moral action, the analysis of moral language, the question of the universalisability of moral statements, and the notion of freedom. A discussion of these themes reveals two fundamentally different models of morality.

According to Murdoch, in the current view the notion of moral action and the analysis of moral language mutually reinforce each other. The logical behaviourist theory of meaning holds that the meaning of words can only be determined by reference to overt acts. This has very specific implications for the delineation of the subject of the philosophical study of morals. In the current view, the analysis of moral language is tied to the view of moral life as consisting of choices of acts. Consequently, the analysis of moral language concentrates on its choice-guiding meaning. The notion of the choice-guiding meaning of moral language, advocated by, for example, R. M. Hare, was the prevalent analysis of moral language at the time of Murdoch's analysis. Hare's view was that moral judgments are essentially prescriptive. They entail imperatives, and to assent to an imperative is to prescribe action. The relevant "moral data" in this view are, thus, the acts and choices manifested in the overt behaviour of individuals and, secondly, the language used to guide the choice of these acts.

Murdoch admits that the view of moral life as overt choices draws some support from an appeal to "the moral life as we know it". It is reasonable to think that the question "what are somebody's moral principles?" could be answered by studying what the person does (VC, 80). She claims, however, that this is not all there is to morality. A moral philosopher with an exclusive interest in acts alone misses other, important aspects of morality. Part of the data of ethics is, according to her, the inner life of individuals, in the sense of personal attitudes and visions which do not obviously take the form of choice-guiding arguments (*ibid.*). In this area, the question is not only about what the person does but, to an even

greater extent, of what she “is like”. Considerations of what we ourselves or other people are like play an important role in our moral assessments. Murdoch describes such considerations in the following way:

When we apprehend and assess other people we do not consider only their solutions to specifiable practical problems, we consider something more elusive which may be called their total vision of life, as shown in their mode of speech or silence, their choice of words, their assessments of others, their conception of their own lives, what they think attractive or praiseworthy, what they think funny: in short the configurations of their thought which show continually in their reactions and conversation. These things, which may be overtly and comprehensibly displayed or inwardly elaborated and guessed at, constitute what, making different points in the two metaphors, one may call the texture of a man’s being or the nature of his personal vision. (VC, 81)

There are three attitudes towards this “texture of a man’s being or the nature of his personal vision” compatible with the current view. Firstly, the area may be seen as irrelevant to morality, since morality is about choices and their reasons alone. Secondly, it may be held that the area is of interest in that it can make choices and their reasons more comprehensible. Thirdly, the area might itself be seen as moral, due to it being the result of responsible choices and reasons. The view of morality which Murdoch contrasts with the current view takes none of these attitudes. According to that view, the area in question is a direct expression “of a person’s ‘moral nature’ or ‘moral being’”. This view is not limited to the choice and argument model of morality. (*ibid.*, 81.)

The three former attitudes are modelled after the idea of the universalisability of moral judgments. The distinguishing feature of moral judgments is, according to the current view, that they cover all relevantly similar cases of evaluation. Thus, moral judgments imply universal moral principles. The judgment that an action is wrong because it has certain properties, commits one to the moral principle that any action having those properties is wrong. In other words, there are properties that always count as reasons for the same moral attribution. Moral reasoning in turn is conceived as a process where particular cases are subsumed under uni-

versal principles, that is, principles that are equally binding on all agents in relevantly similar situations.

The “natural law view” on moral reasoning differs from the above conception in its understanding of universal principles. For moral life, attention to particular features of the world is much more important than universal rules. Such attitudes to morality “emphasise the inexhaustible detail of world, the endlessness of the task of understanding, the importance of not assuming that one has got individuals and situations ‘taped’, the connection of knowledge with love and of spiritual insight with apprehension of the unique” (VC, 87). All this is not necessarily in contradiction with a universalistic picture of moral reasoning. One can conceive of highly specific universal principles which are framed after carefully and imaginatively exploring a particular situation. One should not, as Hare has pointed out, think that universal rules must be general rules. Murdoch notes this possibility of reconciliation between the views she is describing, but claims that by emphasising it, a much more important difference is lost from sight. Those who hold the current view and those who hold the natural law view have fundamentally different moral beliefs:

There are people whose fundamental moral belief is that we all live in the same empirical and rationally comprehensible world and that morality is the adoption of universal and openly defensible rules of conduct. There are other people whose fundamental belief is that we live in a world whose mystery transcends us and that morality is the exploration of that mystery in so far as it concerns each individual. It is only by sharpening the universality model to a point of extreme abstraction that it can be made to cover both views. (VC, 88.)

The divergence of the moral beliefs of these two kinds of people is reflected in their conceptions of freedom. “Freedom” is the most central value embraced by the current view. The current view is “a liberal view” in that freedom is understood in terms of being able to choose one’s values and to act on the basis of these choices. Actions are chosen and acted out in a neutral, valueless, world. Thus, “from the Liberal point of view it seems axiomatic that however grandiose the structure may be in terms of which a morality extends itself, the moral agent is responsible for

endowing this totality with value” (ME, 71). By contrast, someone holding the natural law view does not envision his freedom as an open freedom of choice in a clearly defined situation. Rather, his freedom lies in “increasing knowledge of his own real being, and in the conduct which naturally springs from such knowledge” (ibid., 70). There is a continuity between the individual and the world of which the individual is a part. The liberal, in turn, concentrates on “the point discontinuity between the chosen framework and the choosing agent” (ibid., 71).

It is in terms of the relationship between the valuing agent and her framework that the attribute “natural” in the “natural law view” is to be understood. In Murdoch’s use, whether in these early writings or later ones, “naturalism” is not to be confused with the view where moral properties are seen as the same sort of natural properties as those investigated by empirical sciences. For Murdoch a ‘naturalist’ is someone “who believes that as moral beings we are immersed in a reality which transcends us and that moral progress consists in awareness of this reality and submission to its purposes” (VC, 96). This use of the term ‘naturalism’ reflects the discussion concerning what G. E. Moore called “the naturalistic fallacy”. Moore did not accuse only those who claimed that the term ‘good’ could be defined in terms of some naturalistic property of the naturalistic fallacy. Metaphysical forms of ethics are also guilty of the naturalistic fallacy if they assume goodness to be definable in terms of something else. One can, in other words, hold that goodness is a property existing in “supersensible” reality and yet be guilty of the naturalistic fallacy. Closely related to this “fallacy” is another, which was pointed out by Hume, that of “deriving ought from is”. The two fallacies are both invoked in what Murdoch calls ‘the anti-naturalistic argument’ (ME, 64). The essence of the argument is the claim that we cannot derive values from fact. To Murdoch, this is the most important claim in modern moral philosophy: “indeed it is almost the whole of modern moral philosophy” (ibid.). “Naturalists” in Murdoch’s sense are people who do not affirm the claim. Some examples that Murdoch gives are Thomists, Hegelians, some Christians, and Marxists. Such people believe that there is moral knowledge to be found by examining the world one lives in, instead of there being neutral facts which human beings endow with value. For example, a

Christian who finds out what God commands also believes that these commands ought to be followed. Murdoch's use of the word "naturalism" refers to these kinds of views.²

Murdoch's claim is that the anti-naturalistic argument is mostly used to state the essence of liberal morality under the guise of neutral logical analysis. She does allow that there are also cases in which it can be used as a genuine argument that points out a fallacy in reasoning. "Someone who says 'Statistics show that people constantly do this, so it must be all right' (pattern of certain familiar arguments) should have it pointed out that he is concealing the premise 'What is customary is right'" (VC, 93). Certain forms of "quasi-philosophy or semi-scientific metaphysics which seek to present the human mind as enclosed within social, historical, or psychological frames" (e.g. varieties of views deriving from Marx, Freud, behaviour calculating machines etc.) can also be fairly accused of fallacious reasoning from is to ought (ME, 71). The natural law view is, however, different from such views. It does not present facts that somehow all of a sudden would be regarded as prescriptions (to paraphrase Hume). Rather, for someone who holds the natural law view, morality is attached to the substance of the world right from the start. Philosophers holding the natural law view have presented a total metaphysical picture of which ethics is a part (ibid., 65). Here moral philosophy is more like an effort to communicate new moral understanding or new moral visions rather than explain the logic of moral language by way of a quasi-neutral analytical method (VC, 83). Thus, the philosopher holding the natural law view is not only expressing a different opinion on the relationship between facts and values. She also pictures her own philosophical endeavour in very different terms than someone holding the view out which the anti-naturalist argument arises. Therefore there is little common ground for argumentation. Murdoch suspects that, seen from the natural law philosophers point of view, a more pertinent argument here would be what she calls a general "anti-metaphysical argument", often falsely associated with the anti-naturalistic argument. The anti-metaphysical argument

² It is in this same sense that some writers such as C. D. Broad and A. N. Prior have spoken of "theological naturalism" (cf. Sturgeon 2007, 114 n.5).

comes in two forms, the stronger of which holds that metaphysical entities are empty, and the weaker that metaphysical entities cannot be established philosophically (*ibid.*, 93). Murdoch accepts the weaker claim. However, she notes that this does not yet mean that belief in metaphysical entities, in this case a transcendent background against which human beings and their morality are to be understood, cannot have a place in a philosophical account of morality (ME, 65). Thus, they do not need to be “empty”. I will return to the transcendent, metaphysical background of Murdoch’s own moral philosophy soon.

At the time of Murdoch’s criticism of the applicability of the anti-naturalistic argument it was a virtually unquestioned dogma in analytic philosophy (Diamond 1996, 79). According to Murdoch, the reason for this was mainly moral. She claims that the fact-value distinction has been defended first and foremost in the name of freedom. The distinction includes a tempting characterisation of a moral agent who is rational and responsible, free to choose his moral terms, free to withdraw, reconsider, and choose again (VC, 83). Morality is centred upon the individual, whose moral life should not be overshadowed by metaphysical entities such as God or History (*ibid.*, 95). It is felt that if morality is attached to the substance of the world there is a danger of morality becoming dogmatic, which leads to intolerance of other values and lack of reflection concerning one’s own. In short, there is fear of a degeneration of moral thinking if morality is taken as a kind of fact instead of something that human beings create by their own choices. (ME, 66.)

The above mentioned worries are naturally to be taken seriously. Murdoch’s point is not that there is something wrong with such worries. It is just that the worries are moral, not logical in nature. In other words it should be acknowledged that the criticism of “naturalism” is not purely a linguistic or logical matter, but another way of presenting the central core of a particularly modern moral outlook, “roughly a Protestant; and less roughly a Liberal” outlook (ME, 68). From this point of view, there is an important similarity in the natural law view and the current view of morality. Just like metaphysicians of the past, the modern linguistic moral philosopher has created a model which incorporates his own morality. Murdoch notes that “Man is a creature who makes pictures of himself and

then comes to resemble the picture. This is the process which moral philosophy must attempt to describe and analyse” (ME, 75). Her analysis of linguistic moral philosophy is best understood as a description of one such process.

4.3. The Idea of Perfection: Murdochian Moral Realism

Parts of Murdoch’s juxtaposition of the current view and the natural law view could be discussed in terms of the opposition between moral cognitivism and non-cognitivism. Advocates of the ‘current view’ were non-cognitivists. Non-cognitivists believe that moral statements, unlike factual statements, cannot be categorized in terms of their truth value. Rather, moral statements consist of emotions of approval or disapproval, as emotivists like Stevenson thought, or of universal prescriptions, as in Hare’s expressivist theory. Such evaluations or expressions are not open to an assessment of their truth, and, hence, emotivist and expressivist theories are non-cognitivist, when it comes to moral statements. Cognitivists in turn hold that moral statements do have a truth value in terms of which their meaning can be explained. Meaning does not of course imply truth, as error theorists have pointed out. They hold that although meaningful, moral statements are massively mistaken, due to their point of reference. They refer to non-existing things, that is, moral properties, and cannot therefore be true. Moral realists, in turn, insist that some moral statements are true.

Murdoch has often been designated an early defender of moral realism against the non-cognitivist bent of modern ethics. Her influence on such later moral realist philosophers as Sabina Lovibond, John McDowell, and Mark Platts has been often noted (Conradi 2001, 303; Kaalikoski 1996a, 18). It is, however, difficult to pin down Murdoch’s exact position in terms of the contemporary realism - antirealism debate. The two most obvious reasons for this are, firstly, the obviously more developed stage of the contemporary debate and, secondly, Murdoch’s idiosyncratic version of moral realism.

Murdoch’s use of the term ‘naturalism’ can be seen as an example of the first difficulty. As noted, Murdoch sees the ‘naturalist’ as someone

“who believes that as moral beings we are immersed in a reality which transcends us and that moral progress consists in awareness of this reality and submission to its purposes” (VC, 96). Even if there is no general agreement on the exact definition of the term, most contemporary meta-ethicists do not use the term in this sense. Rather, they connect naturalism with a scientific world view which rejects the supernatural and the non-natural. Naturalists come in reductionist and non-reductionist variants, but both camps agree that the “natural properties” to which moral statements are ultimately anchored are in principle discoverable by a posteriori empirical science. The possibility of scientific verification of moral principles was, however, not what Murdoch was interested in. Writing today, she would perhaps emphasise more the ‘realist’ and less the ‘naturalistic’ nature of her account of morality.

As noted, however, it is not just terminological reasons that make Murdoch’s philosophy difficult to discuss by using contemporary taxonomies. In her defence of moral realism against non-cognitivism Murdoch shares many views with such philosophers as Elizabeth Anscombe and Philippa Foot, who in turn are regarded as part of the neo-Aristotelian revival which began in the 1950s. As Murdoch, Anscombe and Foot were highly critical of the fact-value division and its consequences to moral theory. Murdoch also shared Anscombe’s and Foot’s broadly Wittgensteinian line of argument referring to the way concepts define the situation perceived. Evaluative concepts used to interpret a situation often make the situation what it is. If these evaluative concepts were removed the situation would no longer be the same one (VC, 95; cf. also Diamond 1996; Kaalikoski 1996b).

The difficulty of placing Murdoch with Foot and Anscombe on flow-charts of ethical theories is, however, due to the subsequent development of her moral philosophy. Both Anscombe and Foot developed an account of ethics which is based on the nature of the human being and on what is “beneficial” or “useful” for such a being. As noted above, instead of this “Aristotelian naturalist” approach Murdoch chose to explore and vindicate a Platonist “metaphysical naturalism”. This position diverges radically from the main variants of both virtue-ethics and moral realist

theories on offer today. Consequently, Murdoch's philosophy is best discussed on its own terms.

Murdoch first presents her account of morality in three famous articles included in the collection *The Sovereignty of Goodness* (1970), namely, "The Idea of Perfection" (1964), "On Good and God" (1969), and "The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts" (1967). In these essays Murdoch also develops further her description of the view she opposes, which she now summarises under the title "'the man' of modern moral philosophy" (S, 4). According to her, the image of this man can be found lurking behind much that was written about morality and politics at the time. It is a behaviourist, existentialist, and utilitarian image (S, 8). It is behaviouristic because of the already discussed feature that it connects "the meaning and being of action" with the publicly observable. It is utilitarian in that it assumes that "morality is and can only be concerned with public acts". Finally, "it is existentialist in its elimination of the substantial self and its emphasis on the solitary omnipotent will". (S, 9.) The last characterisation reflects a change in Murdoch's attitude towards existentialism. Her first book was a study on Sartre's philosophy (*Sartre: Romantic Rationalist*). She was originally attracted to existentialism because it seemed to her, unlike the analytic philosophy of her contemporaries, to take the study of consciousness seriously (Conradi 1999, xxii). She was, however, disappointed. By 1962, that is, the time of the writing of "The Idea of Perfection", she was ready to claim that Sartre's view of the inner life also suffered from one of the main problems she identified in the Anglo-Saxon moral philosophical tradition. It too reduced morality to a model of action guiding choice. Thus, she uses the term 'existentialism' to refer both to philosophers such as Sartre who claim the title, as well as to others who do not (S, 35).

Murdoch claims, again, that there are moral reasons for the prevalence of the picture of the man of modern moral philosophy. The merits of the man of this image are "freedom (in the sense of detachment, rationality), responsibility, self-awareness, sincerity, and a lot of utilitarian good sense" (S, 49). As noted, she claims that this image affects also the view of moral language which is based on the strict fact-value distinction. Thus, contrary to the appearance, there are evaluative commitments informing the sup-

posedly ‘neutral and logical’ view. In *The Sovereignty of Goodness* Murdoch presents an argument why this is necessarily so. Her claim is that in fact any view we have of the world and of ourselves as moral agents is itself already an evaluative view.

The image of the man of modern moral philosophy leaves Murdoch, and she suspects many others too, with a sense that something vital is missing (S, 9). It should be clear by now that this is a substantial description of the consciousness and inner moral life of the individual. Thus Murdoch wants to offer her own rival image of man, one which does justice to concepts such as ‘consciousness’, ‘experience’, or ‘introspectabilia’ (Conradi 1999, xxv–xxvi). As Maria Antonaccio and Heather Widdows have both correctly pointed out, her most central aim is to establish the idea of a particular individual’s consciousness and “moral being” at the centre of moral inquiry. (cf. Antonaccio 2000, 86; Widdows 2005, 38.) The following is the most famous example by which she illuminates her view.

A mother, whom I shall call M, feels hostility toward her daughter-in-law, whom I shall call D. M finds D a good-hearted girl, but while not exactly common, certainly lacking in dignity and refinement. D is inclined to be pert and familiar, insufficiently ceremonious, brusque, sometimes positively rude, always tiresomely juvenile. M does not like D’s accent or the way D dresses. M feels that her son has married beneath him. Let us assume for the purposes of the example that the mother, who is a very ‘correct’ person, behaves beautifully to the girl throughout, not allowing her real opinion to appear in any way. [...] However, the M of the example is an intelligent and well-intentioned person, capable of self-criticism, capable of giving careful and just *attention* to an object which confronts her. M tells herself: ‘I am old-fashioned and conventional I may be prejudiced and narrow-minded. I may be snobbish. I am certainly jealous. Let me look again.’ Here I assume that M observes D or at least reflects deliberately about D, until gradually her vision of D alters. If we take D to be now absent or dead this can make it clear that the change is not in D’s behaviour but in M’s mind. D is discovered to be not vulgar but refreshingly simple, not undignified but spontaneous, not noisy but gay, not tiresomely juvenile but delightfully youthful, so on. And as I say, *ex hypothesi*, M’s outward behaviour, beautiful from the start, in no way alters. (S, 17.)

Murdoch's claim is that M's activity is moral activity. According to the behaviourist-existentialist-utilitarian model of morality, nothing morally relevant happens in the example as long as M's ponderings are in no way reflected in her behaviour. In the account of morality that Murdoch wishes to articulate, the crucial locus of morality is, however, not in the act guiding choice but in what happens in between choices. The idea she wants to make sense of is based on the fact "that M has been doing something, something which we approve of, something which is somehow worth doing in itself. M has been morally active" (S, 19–20). M's moral activity starts with her deciding to check whether her impression of D has been correct. This checking is described by Murdoch as M attending to D. Attention is a term that Murdoch adopts from the philosophy of Simone Weil. It is used to express the idea of "a just and loving gaze directed upon an individual reality" (S, 34). Murdoch's description of moral activity is thus infused with visual imagery. Moral activity is attention aiming at more accurate perception. According to Murdoch, attention is the "proper and characteristic mark of an active moral agent" (*ibid.*). Thus, in contrast to the behaviourist-utilitarian-existentialist view of morality, her account emphasises "looking" rather than choosing: "I can only choose within a world which I can see" (S, 37).

The change in M's vision can be characterized as "the substitution of one set of normative epithets for another": not vulgar but refreshingly simple, not undignified but spontaneous, not juvenile but youthful, and so on (S, 18). This kind of activity is partly private in nature. Our moral language and our thinking are of course connected to a shared context and its rules. On the other hand, we do take concepts with us into our own private realm where we can reconsider them and make their meanings more exact.⁶ Individuals use concepts within some limits in their own way, and this usage is in part a function of the history of this individual. As Murdoch notes, repentance can mean different things to an individual at different stages of her life (S, 25–26). Thus, morality is essentially connected with change and progress (S, 29). It is also an endless task, since "as we move and we look the concepts themselves are changing" (S, 28).

Murdoch's version of moral realism connects the inner moral activity of an individual with the Platonic idea of the Good. Maria Antonaccio has

called Murdoch's position "reflexive realism". The reflexivity of the position is in that "goodness is not something that exists outside consciousness as a property of things or states of affairs; rather, goodness can only be apprehended through the reflexive activity of cognition" (Antonaccio 2000, 128). In reflexive realism consciousness grasps the good as a necessary condition of its own existence (*ibid.*, 126–128). Basically I agree with this description of Murdoch's moral realism. However, my reading of the argument with which Murdoch supports her position differs somewhat from Antonaccio's, as well as from a similar one offered by Heather Widows. Both distinguish two separate arguments in Murdoch's discussion of the existence of the Good, namely, an argument from perfection and a logical argument following Anselm's ontological proof. The former, also called the "metaphysical argument" by Antonaccio, establishes the Good, equivalent to the idea of perfection, as an ideal end point of perceivable hierarchies of value. The latter argument, also called "a transcendental argument" by Antonaccio, posits the Good as "something that both presupposes human consciousness and surpasses it" (Antonaccio 2000, 126). I treat these two arguments as connected to each other so that the idea of an evaluative scale is an essential part of the transcendental argument and Murdoch's reference to the ontological proof in turn is one of her ways of elucidating the nature of her argument. While Murdoch's texts allow for both interpretations, the structure of just one argument is more economical. It saves the interpreter the burden of explaining how Murdoch uses the "metaphysical argument as a support for her transcendental argument for the good" (*ibid.*, 127). What Antonaccio calls the "metaphysical argument" is simply part of the argumentative chain of the transcendental argument.

Murdoch's argument paints one of those openly evaluative "total metaphysical pictures" that those holding the natural law view of morality tend to present. It aims at explaining not only the nature of human morality but also how our understanding of the nature of human morality is always already meditated by moral concepts (*cf.* Antonaccio 2000, 122). In my view it contains, in short, the following claims. In human life there is a sense of moving either in the right or wrong direction. This sense involves an idea of goodness which we think to be more than just a pro-

jection of our own evaluations on neutral circumstances. To have a sense of direction requires that one is able to locate oneself with respect to landmarks independent of oneself. The idea of perfection functions as such landmark. It makes thinking in terms of scales and distances possible, since we have to be able to relate things (including ourselves) to one another in order to make sense of them. In any given area of life, the idea of a scale, an order of merit, leads in turn to the idea of perfection. The idea of perfection is the idea of an ideal end point of scales and distances, never empirically witnessed, but experienced as existing. Hence, there is an idea of an unattainable, yet supremely valuable perfection. This idea of perfection, also called 'the Good', is necessary for all thinking. It unifies our experience, makes it in fact the experience of a person, and, hence, is a necessary condition of us having a vision of ourselves or the world in the first place.

Murdoch's Good is a concept that should, according to her, take the place in moral philosophy that formerly belonged to God. Murdoch tells us that the Good is – like God was – one, transcendent, undescrivable, and necessarily existing object of attention (S, 55). However, when speaking about the existence of the Good, she wants to avoid 'the heavy material connotation' of the word 'existence' (S, 64). In what sense, then, does the Good exist? According to Murdoch's transcendental argument, as a condition of experience. Transcendental arguments proceed from concrete experience to the necessary conditions of that experience. A classic example of a transcendental argument is Kant's argument for the categories of understanding. More recently such arguments have been used by Charles Taylor, whose argument has many affinities with that of Murdoch's, and arguably also, for example, by Merleau-Ponty and Wittgenstein. (cf., e.g., Taylor 1979; 1992; Pihlström 2005).

But why speak about the existence of the Good in the first place? Why not reduce it to psychological or other empirical terms, for instance, by explaining that, for some, the idea of perfection is a way of bearing the imperfect world, or by asking why assessment should refer to anything over and above the things assessed? Here Murdoch states that the idea of perfection is problematic in the same way as the ontological proof which is a confession of faith rather than a proof. It convinces the convinced (S,

63). Still, she believes that in so far as we find hierarchies of values in our experience, we also find the idea of perfection as their limit. According to the nature of the ontological proof, existence is also necessarily included in this idea. In Murdoch's view, only necessary existence can explain the 'authority' of Good, the way it attracts us and creates order and unity. She remarks sarcastically that only a mind corrupted by philosophy can imagine that we create values by choosing for ourselves what we want to regard as excellent; in other words, by making up the whole scale of values with its perfections (S, 97).

It should be noted that Murdoch never presents the structure of her argument in the above kind of simplified form. In fact, one often gets the feeling that she is rather hesitant as to whether a proper argument for her view can be presented at all or if it is only a matter of a 'confession of faith', as she puts it, when referring to the ontological argument. The following quotation is illustrative:

On the status of the argument there is perhaps little, or else too much, to say. [...] Philosophical argument is almost always inconclusive, and this one is not of the most rigorous kind. This is not a sort of pragmatism or philosophy of 'as if'. If someone says, 'Do you then believe that the Idea of the Good exists?' I reply, 'No, not as people used to think that God existed.' All one can do is to appeal to certain areas of experience, pointing out certain features, and using suitable metaphors and inventing suitable concepts when necessary to make these features visible. (S, 74–75.)

This kind of tentativeness is typical of the type of arguments that Murdoch uses. The point is that their force is not apparent when they are stripped down to their rudiments. The argument proceeds by presenting various conditions that mark an experience, at its simplest, for example, that experience has to be experience about something. Every condition presented should, as the previous one, seem self-evident. As the argument proceeds, the formulation of the conditions becomes, however, more complicated and more difficult. At the same time, one moves from weaker claims to stronger ones. Murdoch proceeds from the experience of moral development to the existence of Good as a condition of all experience. At the end of the chain of experiences and their defining condi-

tions the argument begins to move in an area that is unarticulated in everyday practices of life. Here inventive language is needed, because the aim is to describe something of which we usually do not have experience – to use Murdoch’s favourite metaphor, we do not describe what we see on the wall of a cave any more, not even what we see in the daylight, but daylight itself, finally even the sun (Taylor 1979, 165; cf., e.g., S, 92).

Undefinability and indescribability that are, according to Murdoch, characteristic of Good are connected with this. It is difficult to look at the sun; with naked eye it is impossible to see it clearly. It can, nevertheless, be approached with the help of various instruments. Metaphors serve as such an instrument. Sun is a metaphor, and so is the general idea of perfection, when it is not specified what perfection means within a certain limited practice. (S, 62, 75, 93, 98, 100.) These metaphors refer to something which gives us a direction, a magnet (another metaphor) which attracts us and helps us in our attempt to be good. Such metaphors do not define the Good, but they talk about how it functions in our lives, and the various forms in which we might encounter it, without us ever having the whole idea of Good in our ‘possession’.

4.4. Imagination

Even though in Murdoch’s metaphysical system the idea of perfection unifies human perception, it is not to be confused with the idea that human life is a purposeful project ramified by a substantial *telos*. In addition to the intuition of a perfect standard, an essential feature of human life is its contingency. It is indeed a moral task to come to understand this. Life is filled with meaningless suffering, suffering for nothing. Murdoch claims that it is a serious moral mistake to romanticize death and suffering by giving them some kind of meaning in a “higher plan” (S, 82; MGM, 133). Thus, the central problem of moral philosophy is, “how is one to connect the realism, which must involve a clear-eyed contemplation of the misery and evil of the world with a sense of an uncorrupted good without the latter idea becoming the merest consolatory dream” (S, 61).

Murdoch thinks Freud was right in describing the human psyche as selfish energy striving towards self-preservation. We are prone to try to

shelter ourselves from the fact of the contingency and purposelessness of life. The biggest need and the main pastime of the human psyche is day-dreaming: in order to avoid facing the unpleasant reality, the psyche builds comforting imaginary worlds, in which life has a higher purpose and can itself play the most important part. (S, 51, 78.) This kind of fantasizing is a moral failure, since it distorts one's view of reality. "The fat, relentless ego" (S, 52) stands in the way of a truthful vision of the world outside itself.

How, then, can the human psyche overcome its instinct-driven egoistic fantasy life? Murdoch finds the answer in the various ways in which the faculty of imagination can work. She discusses the imagination already in the *Sovereignty of Good*, as well as in several other writings from the same period. The most extensive and explicit exposition of it, however, is to be found in her last philosophical work, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (MGM). Plato and Kant, her most important historical sources of influences, provide the leads for this discussion. She draws a parallel between Plato's division of reality into a lesser world of the senses and the truly existing world of ideas and Kant's segregation of the empirical deterministic world of sense from the moral realm of freedom granted to rational beings. She then incorporates Kant's notion of imagination as a link between the sensible and the intelligible, and Plato's view that there is a higher and a lower use of the imagination into her own account of imagination.

There are several notions of imagination to be found in Kant's philosophy. These stretch from it being the faculty responsible for all direct perception (Kant 1903/1781, 120 n.) to it being the highest creative power of a genius who creates new ideas and images (Kant 1908/1790, § 49). The fundamental function attributed to imagination in all its forms is that of mediating between the sensible and the intelligible. The "transcendental" imagination is a unifying and "schematizing" faculty, a power that moulds sense perceptions by rules imposed by the categories in order for them to be connected with concepts. This kind of imagination makes knowledge of the phenomenal world possible. It operates, as Murdoch puts it, "at the transcendental barrier of consciousness" (MGM, 310). In the aesthetic realm, imagination does not operate in the service of knowl-

edge, but again has a mediating function. Central to its operation here is its “freedom”. In the judgment of beauty, it is “free” in the sense of not being restricted by the concepts of understanding (cf. Kant, 1908/1790, § 49). It unifies and orders sensations as if ready to be connected to a concept, even if the final connection never happens. This free movement affords aesthetic pleasure, which is then the object of the aesthetic judgment of beauty. Freedom of imagination is also a constituent of *genius* in art. *Genius* is born out of the imagination’s ability to produce aesthetic ideas, that is, presentations of the imagination for which no thought is adequate. Such an idea “induces much thought, yet without the possibility of any definite though whatever” (1982/1790, § 49). The experience of the sublime is a different matter when it comes to an experience of pleasure in something operating in a free manner. Here imagination tries to form a representation of something “absolutely” huge or powerful but fails. There is a frustration of the imagination, which however turns into pleasure as frustration itself reveals how reason, in its freedom, can require representations of infinity, that is, conceive of ideas that can never be sensuously represented.

Despite these and other seminal functions attributed to imagination, Kant does not think that it is a particularly relevant faculty from the point of view of morality. Morality is a question of the autonomous will of a person, and this is independent of knowledge concerning the phenomenal world. Moral imperatives are intelligible to all human beings by virtue of rationality alone. Thus, there is in the sphere of practical reason no need for the ordering and unifying of sense perception performed by imagination in the formation of knowledge, nor for a creative, free, and thought promoting aesthetic imagination. In the experience of the sublime, Kant lets imagination almost side with reason in a moral experience. But here too, the experience of the sublime is only an encouraging sign of the autonomy of reason, and the thrill of it a mere consequence, not a basis of moral judgment (MGM 310).

Murdoch argues against Kant that imagination, which is involved in all the representations we have of the world, can hardly be a morally neutral matter (MGM 314). She also believes that in its representing capacity

imagination is a far more free and creative faculty than Kant is prepared to allow for. Thus, she claims that

When we settle down to be ‘thoroughly rational’ about a situation, we have already, reflectively or unreflectively, imagined it in a certain way. Our deepest imaginings which structure the world in which ‘moral judgments’ occur are already evaluations. Perception itself is a mode of evaluation” (MGM 314–315).

In the Murdochian picture of morality, imagination is a profoundly moral concept. “How we see our situation is itself, already, a moral activity, and one which is, for better as well as worse ‘made’ by linguistic process” (MGM 315). In the Kantian account, we cannot exactly say how reason works on its phenomenal data. The process is transcendental. However, Murdoch holds, unlike Kant, and also Wittgenstein, that the picture of the transcendental which “cannot be said” is likely to be felt as intolerable. We have to speak about how we picture our situation, and here the talk will be largely imaginative. As indicated earlier, transcendental arguments require inventive language since they move in areas beyond everyday experience. Murdoch compares the transcendental barrier to “a huge wide various band (it resembles a transformer such as the lungs in being rather like a sponge)” which is penetrable by creative activity made possible by the imagination (MGM 315).

Murdoch characterizes imagination as “the searching, joining, light-seeking, semi-figurative nature of the mind’s work, which prepares and forms the consciousness for action” and also as “an (inner) activity of the senses, a picturing and grasping, a stirring of desire” (MGM 323, 325). We use the imagination to find concepts which could accurately describe reality. In imaginative activity the ordering capacity of the mind is used to picture something not familiar, something quite other. Imagining is a conceptual exploration of the world, and it can, when successful, lead to the discovery of new conceptual connections. Large moral concepts are especially “porous in character”. “If we study one moral concept we soon see it as an aspect of another” (MGM 322). For example, Murdoch notes that “courage is composed of imagination” and “truthful imagining requires courage and humility”. Moral reflection is thus “a matter of deep-

ening the conceptions in question through a relation to each other. There is a continuous and spontaneous interplay. ‘Becoming better’ is a process involving the exercise and refinement of moral vocabulary and sensibility” (MGM 324).

However, with a reference to Plato’s insights Murdoch reminds us that imagination is not always used in the service of more accurate descriptions of one’s situation. Plato was very well aware of the “lying, fantasising tendency of the human mind” (MGM 317). The *Sophist*, for example, is a discussion of different levels of ‘fantasising’. In the dialogue, false propositions are discovered to have a meaning since being and non-being do not exclude each other (cf. *Sophist* 257 b–c). This is why “all things must be full of idols and images and fancies” (ibid. 260 c). The *Republic* teaches us, according to Murdoch, how moral improvement involves the destruction of such false images. There are different levels of image making activity and some of them come closer to reality than others.

There are thus two views of the imagination to be found in Plato’s philosophy. The low form is the source of base illusions, but the high form is “passionately creative” in its attempt to reach what is “perfectly good but extremely remote” (MGM 319). In contrast to Kant, Plato sees imagination, in both its low and its high form as being of most relevance morally, the former in a negative and the latter in a positive way. High imagination can lead towards the reality which has been “forgotten” in the egoistic fantasy life, and is thus a vehicle of moral improvement (MGM 320).

The idea of a morally high and a morally low form of imagination is adopted by Murdoch in her account of moral activity. To emphasise the division between the two concepts of imagination she uses two terms: fantasy and imagination. According to Murdoch, this division should not be equated with Coleridge’s pair “fancy” and “imagination”. Coleridge’s “fancy” refers to inventive but mechanical activity, where perceptions are reorganized so that they form something “new” without, however, changing or interacting with each other (for example Pegasus, a horse with wings) (cf. Engel 1981, 120). “Imagination”, or “secondary imagination”, refers in Coleridge’s use to higher, creative activity.

Imagination “dissolves, diffuses, dissipates in order to create” (Engel 1981, 345; Coleridge 1910, 159–160). Murdoch in turn allows also fantasy to be a creative activity. It is distinguished from imagination not in terms of its technique but in terms of its motivation. Fantasy is egoistic activity; it aims at consoling and sheltering the subject. Murdoch lists neurotic fantasies, erotic fantasies, delusions of grandeur, dreams of power as examples of fantasy. Such activities impede new understanding and virtuous action. Ultimately they keep the psyche from facing the tragic contingency of life. Thus, from the moral point of view, fantasy is a misuse of creativity. Imagination, on the other hand, is truth-seeking activity. Murdoch’s distinction can therefore be summarized roughly by saying that fantasy is a term for making-believe that something that is not the case is the case or vice versa, whereas imagination is the capacity of thinking of possibilities in order to improve one’s vision of reality.

According to Murdoch, human beings are “fantasising, imaginative animals” (MGM 322). Moral progress is gradual movement from images of fantasy to images of imagination. The world is not given to us “on a plate” but it requires effort to form a truthful image of it. Thus, for Murdoch, morality is a “creative task” (MGM 215). This is one of the points where her examination of morality turns into a discussion of its analogies with art. I now turn to this and other places where ethics and aesthetics meet in Murdoch’s philosophy.

5. The Argument of the Thesis and Summaries of the Articles

By this point of my introduction to Murdoch’s philosophy, the reader has hopefully formed some kind of conception of Murdoch’s thinking, whilst still expecting much clarification. The following questions might be amongst those considered the most pressing: How does the transition from fantasy to imagination happen? How do the idea of the Good and the moral importance of the apprehension of particular individuals fit together? And why should individuals in their particularity, rather than, for example, the abstract idea of the Good be the centre of moral atten-

tion. All these are questions that can be answered through an account of how Murdoch relates the aesthetic experience with morality. Indeed, the main argument of this thesis is that Murdoch's philosophy cannot be accurately understood without a proper understanding of the relationship she sees between the aesthetic experience and morality. The seven attached articles will illuminate this relationship from various angles. In what follows, I summarise the main claims of each article and then proceed to the conclusions of the thesis.

I

The first article, "Sielun hyvyys ja hahmon kauneus: 1700-luvun tulkintoja *kalokagathia*stä" ["Goodness of Soul and Beauty of Form: Eighteenth Century Interpretations of *Kalokagathia*"] provides a backdrop to the subsequent articles. I included it in the thesis only after some hesitation. The article does not directly deal with Iris Murdoch's philosophy. However, since it concerns earlier ideas in a tradition of thought to which Murdoch also belongs, I believe it helps in understanding Murdoch's ideas.

The article discusses eighteenth century notions of aesthetic-ethical humanity. These notions can also be characterized as interpretations of the Greek notion of *kalokagathia*. In the eighteenth century the longing for an ideal of humanity in which the three great values of truth, goodness, and beauty would harmoniously converge was projected onto the ancient Greece. However, rather than exact exegesis of Greek thinking, eighteenth century writings on aesthetic-ethical humanity were efforts to articulate new moral ideals within the intellectual turmoil occasioned by the eruption of modernity.

Lord Shaftesbury's concept "*virtuoso*" and Friedrich Schiller's concept "the beautiful soul" (*die schöne Seele*) are especially helpful for understanding these eighteenth century efforts. Both terms refer to a person whose character reflects both aesthetic and ethical excellence. Both are also presented as alternatives to other prominent seventeenth or eighteenth century conceptions of human nature and the views of moral life implied by them. Shaftesbury set his neo-Platonist moral theory against theories based on the idea of human beings as egoists seeking gratification and

fearing punishment. While formulating his moral theory, based on a moral sense possessed by all human beings, he came to identify an attitude later to be named “the aesthetic” attitude. For Shaftesbury the attitude, typically combined with aesthetic experiences, was a morally adequate way to relate to the world.

Schiller, in turn, was both an admirer and critic of Kant. He challenged the Kantian notion of morality as following of duty and disregarding inclination. By the concept of the beautiful soul he referred to a person in whom duty and inclination, that is, the rational and sensuous side of the human being, would form a harmonious whole. Thus he tried, at a time when the aesthetic and ethical were increasingly seen as two separate fields of value, due to, for example, Baumgarten and Kant, once again to unite them in his ethical theory.

The claim of the article is that the above mentioned philosophers make use of aesthetics in order to broaden the scope of ethics. This broadening aims at incorporating the sensuous, discordant, contingent, and tragic aspects of human life into the sphere of ethics. Although the realism and inner coherence of the accounts of the virtuoso and the beautiful soul can be questioned, Shaftesbury, Schiller, and their kindred spirits did succeed in reminding us that the subject matter of moral philosophy can be broader than the conditions necessary for a peaceful life in society or the formal principles for determining the duties of rational beings.

As indicated earlier, the idea of a broader scope of moral philosophy was also taken up in the second half of the twentieth century. Murdoch belongs to the group of philosophers who suggest that this broadening should be done by way of including aesthetic elements in the notion of morality. She notes herself that the present situation is still in a curious way analogous to the eighteenth century. The problems of human personality posed by the Enlightenment were never really solved (Murdoch 1999/1961, 290).

By including “Goodness of Soul and Beauty of Form: Eighteenth Century Interpretations of *Kalokagathia*” in this thesis, I show that Iris Murdoch’s philosophy can be seen as part of a continuum of philosophical views which criticise certain salient features of modern moral philosophy and offer an alternative view of ethics which draws heavily on aes-

thetics. The subsequent thesis discusses her view further, beginning with an article in which I draw a parallel between her notion of “unselfing” and Shaftesbury’s notion of the aesthetic attitude.

II

The second article, “Tuulihaukan tarkkailua: kauneuden merkityksestä Iris Murdochin moraalifilosofiassa” [“Attending to the Kestrel: On the Significance of Beauty in Iris Murdoch’s Moral Philosophy”], is concerned with the extent to which ethics and aesthetics overlap in Murdoch’s philosophy. I claim that Murdoch, just as her Neoplatonist predecessor Shaftesbury, defines the morally ideal way of relating to the world in terms of the attitude typical to aesthetic experiences. A discussion of this claim answers the question of how a fantasy bound individual could free herself from fantasies and approach her surroundings in an imaginative way.

Murdoch’s answer comes in the form of the notion of “unselfing”. Changing the quality of one’s consciousness is a matter of redirecting one’s consciousness away from oneself. “Unselfing” is a term Murdoch uses for this effort. According to her, beauty is “perhaps the most obvious thing in our surroundings which is an occasion for ‘unselfing’” (S, 84). Beauty is “the convenient and traditional name for something which art and nature share, and which gives a fairly clear sense to the idea of quality of experience and change of consciousness” (“*ibid.*”). The excellence of beauty as a technique of unselfing is based on its ability to prompt, in an almost automatic manner, the kind of activity which Murdoch thinks essential to morality. As noted earlier, Murdoch calls this activity ‘attention’, defined as “a just and loving gaze directed upon an individual reality” (S, 34). Another name for it is love, if understood as an emotion purified of selfishness. Such virtuous love is exhibited in a detached and unpossessive attention to its object. Experiences of beauty are thus examples of how to love virtuously. Murdoch’s claim is that the same loving attitude is the morally correct way of relating to other people. This is, of course, a much more difficult task. Experiences of beauty can nevertheless lead the way. According to Murdoch, beauty is thus not only a per-

factly adequate introduction to morals but also “largely part of the same structure” (S, 41).

Murdoch’s description of the “unsentimental, detached, and unselfish” attention echoes the traditional definitions of the aesthetic attitude. A famous and often quoted definition of the aesthetic attitude is Jeromy Stolnitz’s “disinterested and sympathetic attention to and contemplation of any object of awareness whatever, for its own sake alone” (Stolnitz 1960, 36). Stolnitz traces the origins of this definition back to Shaftesbury. Yet it must be noted that whereas the definition has later been used to separate the aesthetic attitude from other ways of relating to the world, this was by no means Shaftesbury’s intention. Like Murdoch, he proposed that the attitude should be transferred to other fields of life, such as religion, morality, and politics.

However, even though Murdoch pictures the ideal moral attitude in terms of the aesthetic attitude, she does not propose a complete conflation of aesthetics and ethics. Rather, she warns about overly aestheticizing ethics. It is argued in the article that an illuminating way to analyze the limit to which aesthetics and ethics overlap in Murdoch’s thinking is by first introducing the concepts of the aesthetic attitude and aesthetic experience as analytically separable, and then seeing what Murdoch has to say about each of them. The attitude responsible for aesthetic experiences is also the morally preferable one. There is, nevertheless, a difference in aesthetic and ethical experiences, even if they should result from the same attitude. Indeed, this is what makes the aesthetic experience such a good introduction to morality. In Murdoch’s view, aesthetic experiences are different from moral ones in that they are inherently enjoyable. In an aesthetic experience the loving and just attention directed at an object is immediately rewarded by the enjoyment of beauty (when the term is understood in the broad sense as referring to aesthetic value in general). On the other hand, rewards have, according to Murdoch, no necessary connection with morality. Part of morality is to admit the existence of the meaningless suffering and often almost unbearable contingency of human life. In other words, the truth about the human condition is not a consoling one. Virtue, then, does not bring happiness. Thus, it is concluded that the answer to the question of how far aesthetics and ethics overlap in

Murdoch's philosophy is that moral goodness and the experience of beauty require the same attitude, but they differ from each other in that the experience that comes with the attitude is different in the case of beauty on the one hand and morality on the other. Beauty has an inherent pleasurable element to it and thus cannot but console in one sense or another, whereas morality is mostly difficult and always without consolation.

III

The third article "Iris Murdoch on Love and the Sublime" develops further the theme of love as the essence of both aesthetics and ethics in Murdoch's philosophy. It also asks how the seeming tension between love, which is often thought of as a partial emotion, and morality, frequently defined by its impartial point of view, can be solved within the framework of Murdoch's philosophy.

The above topics are discussed in the light of Murdoch's evaluation of Kant's aesthetics. The focus is on two of Murdoch's early articles, namely, "The Sublime and the Good" and "Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited", both written in 1959, which is roughly the same time as the articles that criticize the "liberal view of ethics" and juxtapose it with the "natural law view" appeared. In these articles, Murdoch is concerned with the question of how far Kant's theories of the judgment of beauty and the sublime succeed as theories of art. She ends up rejecting both theories. Her arguments against Kant are by no means conclusive, not least for the fact that neither one of Kant's theories was meant to be a theory of art. Nevertheless, out of Murdoch's discussion of these theories grows a sketch of her own ideas on the relation of art, morality, and love. Furthermore, the criticism of Kant's aesthetics grows into a more general critical argument against moral theories which place freedom of the will at the centre of morality, that is, theories to which Murdoch attached the attribute "existentialist".

After rather quickly dismissing Kant's theory of the judgment of beauty as a possible theory of art, Murdoch contends that his theory of the experience of the sublime is more promising in this respect. The ex-

perience of reverence in front of something boundless is, according to her, an important clue in the search for the essence of both morality and great art. However, Murdoch finds that Kant makes a wrong move when he connects the sublime with the emotion of reverence for the autonomy of human reason. With this connection the theory of the sublime becomes a theory of the perceiving subject encountering itself, of reason being reminded of its own freedom. For Murdoch, the basic problem with this kind of theory as a theory of art is that it cannot account for tragedy. Tragedy is the highest of literary forms, as it is the form most intensely concerned with the individual. According to Murdoch, it is not surprising that Kant's theory of the sublime cannot account for tragedy, since there is no place for tragedy in his moral theory, and experience of the sublime is akin to a moral experience. Kantian ethics does not know moral conflicts caused by insufficient understanding of other people. The freedom of the will is its freedom to subject itself to the demands of practical reason, and these demands, dictates of duty, can never be conflicting in nature.

In Murdoch's view, the freedom connected with the experience of the sublime should be "tragic freedom", by which she means the "exercise of imagination in an irreconcilable conflict of dissimilar beings" (SG, 217). The boundlessness initiating the experience of the sublime is not the boundlessness which the imagination is unable to represent but of which the reason can form the idea, but the infiniteness of the task of particular, historical individuals trying to understand each other, not merely as similar rational beings to oneself, but as particular, historical beings and thus, different from oneself. Again, love is the name of this task. Moreover, love is, according to Murdoch, the essence of both morality and great art. In order for the artist, in this case the novelist, to succeed she must overcome herself and attend to particular beings outside herself. Similarly, morality is about the imagination trying to grasp the fact that "others are, to an extent we never cease discovering, different from ourselves" (SG, 216).

How, then, can Murdoch reconcile love and morality, if these are understood in conventional terms so that the former is a partial and selective emotion whereas the latter is defined by its universality and impartial-

ity? In the last part of the article I present two solutions that have been given to this question and then my own conciliatory view. Roughly, there are two ways of interpreting Murdoch on this question. The more particularist one suggests that in Murdoch's philosophy universality is not an essential part of morality. The moral task is rather to attend and respond to particular persons. A more universalist interpretation, defended by David J. Velleman, maintains that the love that Murdoch connects with morality is also characterized as impersonal and strictly objective and fair-minded. This fits in with the contention that love, even if directed at particular persons, is ultimately a response to the Kantian universal law embodied in that person.

In concluding this discussion, I contend that there is a kernel of truth in both of the above interpretations. I claim that even though Murdoch puts great emphasis on truly seeing the other person in her particularity, this does not rule out the impartial and in some respects even impersonal aspect of love. Murdochian loving attention requires the recognition of a general feature of humanity. This is not Kantian autonomous reason legislating a moral law for itself. Rather, it is the need to put form to the experience of contingency, by creating or attending to art, for example. Human life is, on the one hand, void of purpose, order, and *telos*. On the other hand, our consciousness is structured around the dream of order, which shows itself in the magnetic pull the idea of perfection exercises on us. In this sense the recognition of other people as demanding loving attention begins with the realization of the universal feature of humanity. But this is only the beginning. The truly endless task of love continues infinitely thereafter, since each person has her own contingent history. It is impossible ever to understand another person completely. Thus I conclude that the Murdochian sublime is the experience of overcoming oneself at the face of the infinite task of love.

IV

The fourth and fifth articles of the thesis lay the ground for a later argument concerning the place of literature in the fundamental argumentative structure of Murdoch's philosophy. The first of them, "Good, Self, and

Unselfing – Reflections on Iris Murdoch’s Moral Philosophy” concentrates mainly on presenting an interpretation of this argumentative structure and the moral reasons for Murdoch’s adherence to it.

The article begins with a brief survey of Murdoch’s transcendental argument for the necessary existence of the Good, as well as its implication that all consciousness is evaluative in nature. Thereafter, I proceed to investigate the argument in terms of Murdoch’s own statement that since every moral system is reflecting an evaluative vision and, by implication, commanding an ideal, it is important to make sure that the ideal commanded is a worthy one. I ask what Murdoch’s own moral reasons are for commanding her own account of morality. In my view, there are two main reasons, and both of these arise from discontent with the notion of freedom that goes with the “existentialist” view of moral agency. As seen, according to Murdoch this view identifies freedom with an empty choosing will. The creator of value is the will, whereas the world outside the moral agent consists of facts.

The first moral reason for Murdoch’s discontent is that the existentialist view marginalizes the ethical. According to the existentialist view, human beings share the same facts. We can discuss our moral differences by reference to facts relevant to the question. If there is no agreement on what the relevant facts are, that is, when the disagreement concerns “purely values”, argumentation becomes more difficult and perhaps even impossible. Yet it is in this area of pure value within which the solitary will operates. It is, in Murdoch’s metaphor, “marooned upon a tiny island in the middle of a sea of scientific facts” (S, 27). The area of value in human life becomes peripheral. This is not a worthy ideal for human life from Murdoch’s point of view. Rather, she prefers the view of moral agency where “man is set against a background of values, of realities which transcend him” (Murdoch 1999/1961, 290). Here valuing is not one (peripheral) kind of activity among others, but rather the condition of any cognitive activity, the condition for even the existence of persons with both consciousness and self-consciousness.

The second moral reason for Murdoch commanding her ideal against the existentialist view is that in the latter the solitary will, even if pushed into its own small niche in human life, is turned into a hero figure. It is

believed that an agent can attain authentic ethical existence by sheer force of that will alone. This strong emphasis on the freedom of the will is more likely to enhance than constrain the selfish impulses, which, according to Murdoch, are so natural to human beings. The original Kantian idea of moral autonomy has in her opinion turned into a “Luciferian philosophy of adventures of the will” (S, 48). As long as the choices of the will are “free” in the sense of being authentic, they justify themselves.

My claim is that in her philosophy Murdoch aims at defending a more substantial account of morality as a defence against the above mentioned moral dangers. Rather than being an exaltation of the free will of rational beings, a moral philosophy should be an attempt to answer the question “how can we make ourselves better” (S, 78). As seen in the two previous articles, Murdoch’s own answer to this question is by close attention to what lies outside the selfish mechanism of the human psyche.

V

The fifth article, “Käytännön kokemuksesta kohti hyvää Iris Murdochin moraalifilosofiassa” [“From Practical Experience towards the Good in Iris Murdoch’s Moral Philosophy”] considers Murdoch’s transcendental argument for the necessary idea of the Good as a critique of the fact-value distinction. It also points out that in Murdoch’s philosophy the realistic novel serves as an argument against this distinction.

As noted in the introduction to Murdoch’s philosophy, she suspected the reasons for the wide acceptance of the fact-value distinction were moral more than logical. She wanted to make visible the tempting characterization of the moral agent implied by the distinction: the agent as rational and responsible, free to choose her moral terms, free to withdraw, reconsider, and choose again (VC 83). Even though Murdoch had some sympathy for the original liberal ideology which made this picture so attractive, she also saw, as the previously summarised article claims, the moral dangers that came with it. Thus she presented her own picture of a man whose consciousness is structured around the normative idea of the transcendent Good. I connect Murdoch’s comments on the nature of her argument with Charles Taylor’s discussion of this sort of argument. These

arguments move within an area which is unarticulated in the ordinary practices of life. Therefore the use of inventive language, such and imaginative metaphors, is a part of the argumentative strategy.

However, I point out in the article that Murdoch does not rely in her argument solely on her own imaginative depiction of the human predicament. Following Cora Diamond, I contend that Murdoch appeals to realistic novels as an argument against the fact-value distinction. According to Murdoch, a realistic description of a literary figure includes a presentation of the evaluative framework through which she looks at the world. For the character to be lively, the reader has to see how her value concepts affect her views. And this is but the first level on which concepts and the world experienced through them are tied together in literature. On the second level the same happens as the reader sees the world of the novel in light of the author's evaluative framework and understands how the author's value concepts affect her description. In this way, good realistic literature presents a truthful picture of the being human. Thus, it is my interpretation that Murdoch claims that literature can *show* what the philosophical argument addressed in this and in the previous article tries to *prove*.

VI

The sixth article, "Iris Murdoch on the Extreme Ambiguity of Art", presents what I take to be my strongest argument for regarding aesthetic considerations as an indispensable part of Murdoch's ethical programme. I concentrate on the question of what exactly, in Murdoch's view, is the relationship between literature and philosophy.

I approach the question from the side of Murdoch's philosophy and pinpoint what I think is the most crucial role literature plays in it. At the end of this discussion, I give my answer to the so far unresolved question of whether Murdoch should be regarded as one of the proponents of what has been called philosophy's turn to literature. Although she has often been designated as one of the pioneers of this turn, there are also differing opinions on this. I claim that the question has not yet been examined with sufficient care and that the answer can only be found with a

consideration of the place of literature in the overall structure of Murdoch's philosophy.

For understanding my claim concerning the most crucial role of literature in Murdoch's philosophy, one has to grasp the basic contours of her general philosophical argument. Therefore, I begin with an outline of the overall structure of Murdoch's philosophy, and consequently repeat some of the arguments presented in previous articles. Then, before the discussion of the weightiest role of literature in this structure, I revisit some of the other ways in which the aesthetic experiences as well as art serve as pieces of evidence in Murdoch's argumentation. These ways also have been considered in previous articles.

The specific role of literature discussed in this article differs, however, in gravity from the earlier uses of the examples of aesthetic experience and art. The main argument of the article is that Murdoch's analysis of the nature of great literature is the only concrete argumentative support that she gives for her claim that the primary object of the just and loving attention, which is the mark of moral virtue, is the other human individual in her particularity. In other words, one of the absolutely most central claims of Murdoch's philosophy rests on her understanding of what are the criteria of greatness in literature. All her articles on literature advocate the same criterion: the quality of the author's awareness of others. The greatest authors – Murdoch presents a rather conventional list including Shakespeare, George Elliot, Jane Austen, and Tolstoy – write novels which contain “a number of different people [...] represented as mutually independent centres of significance” (SB, 271). The consciousness of an author is at display in her novels, and an analysis of the consciousness of the greatest writers reveals that it is both detached and compassionate, reaching towards its object without the will to capture and colonize and without being coloured by the author's personal fantasy. The primary objects of this consciousness are human individuals in all their particularity. The claim is that Murdoch takes this as sufficient argument for her conviction that the ultimate object of any virtuous attention in any field of life is the human individual in her particularity.

In order to structure my discussion of the above argument, I refer to Martha Nussbaum's observation that Murdoch in her philosophy by-

passes somewhat impatiently human individuality in search of the good (Nussbaum 1996). Nussbaum suspects that Murdoch does not in fact discount the importance of the vision of individuals in their particularity, but that she holds that such a vision can only be achieved by art, not by philosophy or personal love. Nussbaum supports her claim by a reading of two of Murdoch's novels. I support the part of Nussbaum's claim which states that in Murdoch's view the vision of the individual can be achieved by art rather than philosophy. I claim that besides extracting the view from Murdoch's novels, it can also be supported by reference to her philosophical writings. Her position is that whereas philosophers have to generalize from particular experience, it is the task of authors of literature to challenge these generalizations.

When it comes to the latter part of Nussbaum's suspicion, which is that Murdoch also believes that art, rather than personal love, is where a vision of the individual is best achieved, I hold a different opinion to Nussbaum. I argue for this at the end of the paper where I take up an internal paradox having to do with form in art. In addition to being a clue to morality and "largely part of the same structure", art can also, according to Murdoch, distort our picture of reality. Like Plato, she believes that it can lure people into contentment with appearances instead of seeking the truth. Interestingly though, Murdoch reverses the Platonic order of ascent towards truth. For Plato, the sensible world of contingency and disorder is the world of mere appearance and truth is to be found somewhere beyond it in the harmonious, perfectly ordered sphere of ideas. Murdoch, however, associates the lying and untruthful potential of art with its tendency towards form and order. In Murdoch's discussions of literature, form is constantly presented as a temptation to be resisted by the author since it threatens to seal off the work from the contingent life of human beings. And yet this life in all its messiness is the primary topic of the novel. The internal paradox of art is that in its attempt to be truthful to reality it cannot but change it into something else. It always has to find a form within which to attend to its subject matter. As noted earlier, this is also the strength of art as a clue to morals. It can offer in a rewarding form what otherwise might be too difficult to embrace, namely, the endless, formless, and inexhaustible variety of human life. Nevertheless,

the great danger of art is that it can start posing as a system of morality in its own right. This leads to the kind of aestheticism which Murdoch, despite the fundamental aesthetic currents of her thinking, repeatedly warns against. Thus, I disagree with Nussbaum's suspicion that Murdoch believes that the vision of the individual is better achieved through art than personal love. The greatest moral challenges in the real life of individuals can only be faced without the consolation of art.

VII

If the earlier articles of this thesis have presented the theories of aesthetic experience and art that inform Murdoch's overall philosophy, the last article, "Building Trust: A Fairly Honourable Defeat" is an attempt to put some of these theories into practice. This is done within the context of a philosophical discussion of the concept of trust.

I approach some of the most prominent theories of trust by applying them to a literary example, that of the relationship of Simon and Axel in Murdoch's novel *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* (1970). This should not be interpreted as a sudden move within the study from analysing Murdoch's views on literature in her philosophy to discussing the treatment of philosophical themes in her novels. As noted in chapter III of this introduction, there is an ample amount of studies dedicated to this topic.

What I want to show in this last article is that the kind of loving attention emphasised by Murdoch as essential to both ethics and aesthetics is also fundamental in ethical relations which can be analysed in terms of normative expectations based on moral reasoning. I claim in the article that trust relationships can be fruitfully analysed as being based on the trustor holding the trustee responsible in the sense that she holds her to normative expectations which she believes arise out of a shared perspective on the nature of their relationship and the normative expectations it gives rise to. This analysis of trust can explain, among other things, how something called "therapeutic trust", that is, trusting behaviour undertaken in order to build trust, differs from trust proper. The analysis of trust brings out the dangers of such efforts, which becomes apparent when it is applied to Simon and Axel's relationship. The trustee who de-

fects that the trusting behaviour of the other person is intended to elicit trustworthiness concludes that she is not yet trusted in the proper sense of the word. In the light of the proposed analysis of trust, she takes it that the trustor suspects either that she does not have the capabilities expected of a responsible person or that she does not share the others understanding of their relationship. I interpret this suspicion concerning the others capability or willingness to “see” the other person in the Murdochian sense of seeing “which implies that clear vision is a result of moral imagination and moral effort” (S, 33). In Murdoch’s novel Simon’s constant reminders that they must be able to trust each other make Axel hide things from Simon for fear of being misunderstood whilst Simon in turn interprets Axel’s secrecy as indicating unfaithfulness. As a consequence, the couple grows increasingly “blind” to each other’s true intentions and their communication becomes increasingly insincere. Luckily the novel also suggests a way in which the vicious circle can be broken.

That the literary example I use as a starting point of my discussion of trust comes from one of Murdoch’s novels is of course convenient from the perspective of the thematic unity of this thesis. It is, however, a contingent choice. The “Murdochian argument” of the article is not in the particular literary example itself, but in the use of a literary example as the starting point for an argument. By proceeding in this way, I want to support Murdoch’s view of the epistemic relationship between literature and philosophy. As the sixth article of this thesis shows, Murdoch believes that literature is, in its closer approximation to the ambiguity of lived experience, a more finely tuned medium of truth, and therefore enjoys a kind of epistemic primacy in relation to philosophy.

6. Conclusions

In conclusion, the articles of the thesis show that Iris Murdoch belongs to a tradition of philosophers who seek to broaden the scope of ethics by reference to aesthetic value and aesthetic experience. She sees an attitude responsible for aesthetic experiences as especially relevant for morality. The definition of this particular kind of attitude has been traced back to

Murdoch's Neoplatonist predecessor Anthony Ashley Cooper, the third Earl of Shaftesbury.

However, Murdoch does not collapse morality into aesthetic experience. Although the two meet on the level of the subject's attitude towards its object, there is a clear distinction between the experiences that accompany the attitude. This distinction explains the moral pedagogical value of aesthetic experience. There is an inherent pleasure in aesthetic experience which derives from its formal qualities. Morality has no necessary connection with pleasure or any other form of reward. Thus, aesthetic experiences can function as a clue to morals in that they can present in a pleasing manner moral truths which otherwise might be psychologically too difficult to face.

The aesthetic attitude is equated by Murdoch with virtuous love characterized by unselfish attention to its object. The object of such love is in Murdoch's account another human individual in her particularity. She compares the recognition of the other person as a particular existence to the experience of the Kantian sublime and offers her own version of the "true sublime" which is the experience of awe in the face of the infinity of the task of understanding others.

Although Murdoch attaches moral relevance to both nature and art as sources of morally relevant aesthetic experiences, there are specific features of art which connect it with the substance of morality. Literature is the art form discussed explicitly by Murdoch.

One of the most central claims in Murdoch's philosophy is that human consciousness is evaluatively structured. This claim challenges the distinction between facts and values which has had an immense influence on modern moral philosophy. One of the arguments with which Murdoch supports her claim is the nature of great literature. According to Murdoch, the standard of greatness in literature, especially of realistic novels, is the authors' awareness of the independent existence of particular individuals. Crucial to the realistic novel is that it aims at describing correctly the inner life of its characters. Great novels succeed in picturing individuals in the infinite particularity of their evaluative consciousnesses. In doing this they also display the moral quality of the author's consciousness.

The analysis of the standard of greatness in literature is also Murdoch's only argument for the claim that the primary object of the loving unselfish attention – that is of the attitude common to morality and aesthetic experience – is the other particular individual rather than, for example, abstract entities such as the idea of the Good. She is convinced that great literature reveals a deep truth about the human condition with its capacity to capture the particular. Abstract philosophical discourse cannot compete with this capacity but it should take truths revealed by literature seriously in its own ethical theorising. Recognising that this is Murdoch's stand on the question of the relation between philosophy and literature as forms of human discourse settles whether she is part of what has been called philosophy's turn to literature. The answer is yes.

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