

Iris Murdoch, Philosopher Meets Novelist

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Edited by

Sofia de Melo Araújo and Fátima Vieira

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P U B L I S H I N G

Iris Murdoch, *Philosopher Meets Novelist*,
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INTRODUCTION

SOFIA DE MELO ARAÚJO

*A special and devoted acknowledgment to my
co-editor and one of my academic mentors
Professor Fátima Vieira*

From its starting point, Literature seems to congregate two roles: that of aesthetic delight and that of vehicle for information, tradition and moral values. Excessive critical attention granted to either domain results in a short-sighted approach to an object which is both aesthetic and philosophical. In production, choosing one extreme will lead only to objects worthy of criticism, either as pamphlets or as meaningless entertainment. The debate is ongoing and the Platonic rejection of fiction as the construction of mere aesthetically enjoyable parallel realities continues to influence our reading of literature and to merit the attention of multiple academics¹.

Ethical questions, in particular, have recently been given great attention – quoting Stephen K. George’s words, we are presently living ‘on the cusp of an ethical renaissance within literary-philosophical studies’ (GEORGE, 2005, xvi). Indeed, the later decades of the 20th century have witnessed a bridging of the artificial gap between form and content, and thus also between the literary and the philosophical. This tendency lays its roots on the rejection of the excessive ascetism of mid-20th century literary criticism. Farzaneh Naseri-Sis has recently described ethical literary criticism as what ‘[...] seems to be a reaction against poststructuralist deconstruction and postmodern indecidibility, indeterminacy and uncertainty.’ (NASERI-SIS, 2010: 193). Indeed, after the mid-century extreme rejection of external readings of literature, the turn of the century is being labeled in literary studies as the moment for the ‘Ethical Turn’, a term first coined by Martha Nussbaum². This new attention given (back) to ethical issues within literary studies does indeed turn tables on most 20th century literary criticism but exactly how it works is still a matter of debate. The immediate question is whether this is a turn *towards* ethics or a turn *of* an ethical nature. The latter would, thus, imply, an axiological perspective which many believe would lead back towards censorial attitudes towards literature. That is not, however, the intention behind these studies.

In the unequivocally titled 2000 book *The Turn to Ethics*, editors Marjorie Garber, Beatrice Hanssen and Rebecca L. Walkowitz wonder where this turn will turn Literary Studies towards and who will be in charge of that³. Authors like Marshall Gregory, Richard A. Posner, Stanley Cavell, J. Hillis Miller, Wayne C. Booth, Charles Altieri, Cora Diamond, Martha Nussbaum and Michael Eskin devote their attention precisely to where exactly this 'Ethical Turn' turns Literary Criticism to and to how ethics and literary theory can combine in fruitful criticism. Still, attention has come more often from the realm of Philosophy than from that of Literary Studies, thus often turning novels into mere 'fictional case studies' (GEORGE, 2005: xvi). John Guillory reminds us of the strong opposition to these studies from those in the realm of literature, which, according to him, led to the '[...] an apolitical, professionalized discourse' (GARBER, 2000: 30)⁴.

The reluctance shown by many owes not so much to the clinging towards an ascetic, esthetic reading of a supposedly non-contextualized work of art, but rather to an understandable fear of crossing the thin line between a reading of ethics through literature and the defense of moral education using literature. Censorship, indexes and 'to-read' lists will always haunt any attempt to deal with Ethics within Literary Studies, and indeed they should, so as to keep us wary of crossing that very same line. Remaining within the narrow territory between analyzing and assessing is the challenge. Most studies focus on the author's ethical standing or on given works as ethical objects, but some focus also on fictional aspects (characters, actions, language) read from an ethical perspective. This has been common practice all along, as Stephen K. George explains, claiming that ethical issues have been labeled political or rhetorical, but always remained, in his words, '[...] the things that matter most' (GEORGE, 2005: xvii)⁵. Indeed, fiction has always been both vehicle and generator of existential interpretations and social transformations, and that was at all times the object of scholar attention, even if unwillingly. Although I would not go so far as to say those are 'the things that matter most', they are indeed important aspects which are particularly relevant when they are intentionally included by conscious authors. Such is the case with Iris Murdoch. Both a philosopher and a novelist, actively publishing during almost half a century, Iris Murdoch presents a welcome challenge to those devoted to studying her work: how to balance her philosophical essays and her fictional work? How relevant is, in particular, her ethical thinking in the build-up of her literary production? Is Murdoch's philosophy translated into literature as moral guidance (cf. ROWE, 2002: 131)? Iris

Murdoch herself persistently refused to mingle the two dimensions which she devoted her intellectual life to:

To my mind, philosophy is a completely different game [...] I have definite philosophical views, but I don't want to promote them in my novels or to give the novel a kind of metaphysical background. Of course any seriously-told story may have metaphysical aspects and will certainly have moral aspects. And morality does connect with metaphysics; so, in this sense, any novelist has got a kind of metaphysic. But, I don't want philosophy, as such, to intrude into the novel world at all and I think it doesn't. I find really no difficulty in separating these activities. I mention philosophy sometimes in the novels because I happen to know about it, just as another writer might talk about coal mining; it happens to come in. (quot. BILES, 1978: 116)

However, the conscious decision Murdoch seemed to sustain of separating literature and philosophy is not necessarily proof that they remained indeed separate. Words like multidisciplinary or trans-disciplinarity may sound cutting edge, but they are, in reality, a return to the Ancient Greek and Renaissance conception of culture as an encyclopedic, interrelated vault and, in the case of Iris Murdoch, they become mandatory instruments.

Miles Leeson's 2010 *Iris Murdoch: Philosophical Novelist* and its cross-studies of specific novels and the philosophical currents influencing them is a very clear example of interdisciplinary study, but, in all truth, literary and philosophical aspects have always come hand in hand when reading Iris Murdoch. Even works which choose to have one aspect prevail always include the other: literature-oriented works such as Barbara Heusel's *Patterned Aimlessness Iris Murdoch's Novels of the 1970s and 1980s*⁶ or A. S. Byatt's *Degrees of Freedom The Early Novels of Iris Murdoch*⁷ dwell on Kant, Nietzsche, Existentialism, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Simone Weil, and of course Plato. Even more detailed studies, as Lisa M. Fiander's *Fairy Tales and the Fiction of Iris Murdoch*, Margaret Drabble and A. S. Byatt contain readings of Iris Murdoch's philosophical writings⁸; on the other hand, philosophy-minded studies such as Megan Laverty's *Iris Murdoch's Ethics* or Heather Widdows's *The Moral Vision of Iris Murdoch* repeatedly refer back to Iris Murdoch's fictional work.

Iris Murdoch, Philosopher Meets Novelist aims to gather some of the world's present experts on Iris Murdoch, in an effort to promote dialogue between philosophy and literature. This is due not only to the nature of Iris Murdoch's work itself, but also to our belief that within Humanistic Studies there is a constant need for breaking down disciplinarian barriers and aiming for a deeper, fuller awareness of human thinking. The book is divided into two major sections: Part A, Reading Philosophies in Literature,

includes articles focusing on Iris Murdoch's philosophical concerns and their general influence in her work; Part B, Reading Literature through Philosophy, is intended as a sort of application ground, a series of case-studies wherein authors depart from novels to retrieve the underlying philosophical thinking. Particular attention is granted to *The Black Prince* and *The Bell* as symbols of two Iris Murdoch's general writing periods.

Part A

The first article comes from the realm of philosophy and is penned by American scholar Nancy Snow. “‘Let me look again’: Iris Murdoch's notion of a loving gaze revisited’ is a much expected follow-up on the author's 2005 article ‘Iris Murdoch’s Notion of a Loving Gaze’ (SNOW, 2005). In it, Snow goes beyond the studying of Iris Murdoch's notion of a loving gaze as the basis for virtue, towards an evaluation of its actual worth and of the consequences for overall human existence. For this, Snow resorts to the classic Murdochian example of the mother-in-law striving to change her perception of her daughter-in-law. Simultaneously, Nancy Snow establishes an interesting parallel between the Murdochian loving gaze and Buddhist moral philosophy. From it, the author derives a sense of Iris Murdoch’s approach to social change as based on a non-violent means of self-cultivation close to Ghandi’s attitude. This article thus completes an extremely valuable two-piece contribution to Murdochian studies.

In ‘Iris Murdoch and George Eliot: Two women writers of ideas’, Italian scholar Marialuisa Bignami resorts to two women authors as paradigms of women thinkers in the nineteenth and twentieth century. Through them she studies the evolution of women's public role and how literary writing relates to it. For this, the author pays particular attention to Eliot's *Adam Bede* and *Middlemarch* and Murdoch's *An Accidental Man* and *The Book and the Brotherhood*. Maintaining her usual particular attention to form over theme in reading Iris Murdoch, Marialuisa Bignami focuses on how the realm of Ideas, particularly philosophical ideas, pervades fiction. The essay defends that the two writers managed to find a sound balance between fiction and essay which was largely achieved through the use of narrative strategies interweaving concepts and fictional creations.

Portuguese Philosophy scholar Maria Luisa Ribeiro Ferreira’s contribution to this volume focuses on a topic of the utmost relevance to the general theme pursued. “‘We do not forgive philosophy’ – Iris Murdoch and Simone de Beauvoir on Philosophy and Literature’ is not only a valuable

instrument for those studying the relations of Murdoch with existentialist thinking, but also an important contribution to understanding how Iris Murdoch differentiated literature from philosophy. In her essay, the author pinpoints agreements and disagreements between the two philosophers and provides an interesting general reading of each, paying particular attention to how each writer viewed literature, philosophy, the relations between literature and philosophy and her own individual role as intellectual.

Also from Portugal comes Rui Bertrand Romão's rather innovative article 'Iris Murdoch and the rethinking of Shakespeare as a Philosopher', which refers to current philosophical readings of William Shakespeare by thinkers such as Stanley Cavell and Colin McGinn comparing it with Iris Murdoch's literary and philosophical reading of the Bard, thus eliciting many Murdochian (pre)concepts. For this, the author resorts to an overall reading of the Murdochian scholarship which has focused on William Shakespeare, with Richard Todd at the top. Bertrand Romão is able to establish the Murdochian concepts of Literature and Philosophy by reading into Iris Murdoch's objections to George Steiner's 'A reading against Shakespeare' and to Wittgenstein's interpretation of Shakespeare's supposed philosophical thinking. By studying Iris Murdoch's intellectual attitude towards the philosophy found in literature, Rui Bertrand Romão brings forth a fundamental contribution for Murdochian scholarship.

Fiona Tomkinson's essay 'Incongruent counterparts in *Under the Net*' addresses a philosophical text being written by Murdochian character David Gellman on the incongruity of counterparts. From it, and resorting to Kant and Wittgenstein, and to all the references debated by Murdoch in the novel itself, Fiona Tomkinson breaks new ground in character studies regarding Iris Murdoch's fictional work. Incongruity is here read as a sign of existential contingency, and thus a gateway to Good.

Zeynep Yılmaz Kurt's 'One in All, All in One, as the Incarnated Soul: a Sufi reading of *The Good Apprentice*' provides an original approach to Murdochian literature via eastern mysticism and its links with Christianity and Iris Murdoch's idea of transcendence, resorting to an in-depth reading of *The Good Apprentice*. The author lists Murdoch as a 'mystic' writer and dwells on the transcendental domain of Murdochian Ethics. This essay is a fundamental step for the study of the influence of Eastern mysticism as a whole on the writings of Iris Murdoch.

Ana Paula Dias Ianuskiewtz presents an article on the human relationships in the compared works of Iris Murdoch and Jean-Paul Sartre, focusing particularly on their enclosed creations, *The Bell* and *Huis Clos* and on the concept of the Other. Ianuskiewtz differentiates and contrasts the authors' acknowledgement and valuing of Alterity, including a look

onto the works of Simone de Beauvoir and Albert Camus. The Brazilian scholar concludes that both Murdoch and Sartre recognized the fundamental role of the Other in the understanding of the Self.

‘Iris Murdoch: Existentialist in Spite of Herself?’ resorts to a general study of Iris Murdoch and a more detailed reading of the author's novel *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* in order to question Iris Murdoch's own refusal of Existentialism and to re-read the influence of the philosophical movement on her work. The essay defends that Murdoch's stronger opposition to Existentialism, in particular Sartrian, is time-ridden and at times unfair, as shown by comparing the anthropological ideas of Jean Paul-Sartre and Ayn Rand. The reading is directed to four characters of *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* and to how these seem to condense four distinct readings of the Existentialist self: the stereotypical anguished young man, the self-centred egotist, the puppet-master and the morally-aware, suicidal existentialist.

Frances White's remarkable study ‘Murdoch's Dilemma: Philosophy, Literature and the Holocaust’ casts light on a topic not yet fully studied by Murdochian scholarship – the relationship between Iris Murdoch's ethical pondering and her (mostly second-hand) experience of Nazi horror. White provides the reader with a thorough and scholarly analysis of both the issue itself and of how it has been dealt with by scholars. The author proves the everlasting influence of the Holocaust in Murdoch's vision of the world expressed through philosophy and fiction all the way until her last production, *Jackson's Dilemma*, and studies how Iris Murdoch responded to the ultimate Holocaust dilemma: the danger of glamorizing (and perpetuating) the atrocities of the period by converting them into fiction. White defends that Murdoch's close connection of Art and Ethics explains the answers the novelist and philosopher chose, particularly in her courageous and wise inclusion of Holocaust victims in novels.

Anne Rowe and Pamela Osborn collaborate in ‘The Saint and the Hero: Iris Murdoch and Simone Weil’, an interesting essay focusing on the impact of French philosopher Simone Weil on Iris Murdoch's work beyond the well-documented influence of Weil's concept of ‘Attention’ as the source for Good. For this the authors use cutting-edge resources from the Kingston Archives as well as a comprehensive number of Iris Murdoch's published works, both fictional and non-fictional. Anne Rowe and Pamela Osborn analyse the links and differences between Murdoch and Weil, concluding (and thoroughly demonstrating) that ‘Weil is [Murdoch's] philosophical bedrock’ and opening new and solid paths for Murdochian Studies.

Part B

Articles in this section use *The Bell* and *The Black Prince* as case-studies for the presence of philosophically relevant *topos* or strategies. Reza Yavarian, writing on ‘*The Black Prince* and Lyotardian Fable Crisis’, provides a thorough and innovative study of fable as read by contemporary criticism, based on Jean-François Lyotard’s *Postmodern Fables* and focusing also on Wittgenstein, Umberto Eco and particularly on heteroglossia and Gilles Deleuzes’s rhizomes. Yavarian applies his conceptual study to both Iris Murdoch’s fiction and to her general concept of literature, by recuperating Iris Murdoch’s esteem for words and for the structures of fictional writing, an aspect sometimes overlooked for the sake of attention to content. By using *The Black Prince*, a novel that gives foreground to novel-writing, Yavarian defends that Murdoch is able to question the role of narrative in human understanding of the Truth and, thus, of the Good.

For “‘Who’s there?’ The ghost behind *The Black Prince*”, Yi-Chuang E. Lin establishes links between the creative process and love, resorting to the mind/body and self/other dualities, in a re-reading of the idea of the ‘ghost in the machine’. Lin parallels *The Black Prince* and William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* as tragedies of the failure to act, but focuses also on the character Bradley Pearson’s reading of the bard’s work as privileged insight into the character himself and on how from that derives the overall postmodern feeling of the book, centred on artistic creation and revelation of Self.

Mine Özyurt Kılıç’s interesting essay ‘Postmodern elements in *The Black Prince*’ discusses the place of the Self in postmodern readings of the world and provides a fascinating placing of Iris Murdoch *vis-a-vis* postmodernism and the traditional novel. It is Mine Özyurt Kılıç’s idea that the postmodern rejection of fixed structures of meaning goes hand in hand with Iris Murdoch’s embracing of contingency and uncertainty as a source of moral learning. According to the author, *The Black Prince* entails a deconstruction of the novel that is ridden with postmodern echoes, both with regard to formal composition and to the indefiniteness of content. The ideas of accidental and speed add to this postmodern overall feeling.

‘Moral Philosophy in Iris Murdoch’s *The Bell*: The three sermons’ has Ignasi Llobera compare the moral standpoints of characters James Tayper Pace, Michael Meade and Nick Fawley’s sermons. Bringing a philosophically rich perspective to those key speeches, Llobera’s reading defends the crucial role of Nick’s informal sermon as a pivotal device in the reading of Murdochian morality as depicted by *The Bell*. The author’s

standing point establishes the novel as a case-study for moral philosophy, in which different moral perspectives are synthesized in explicit moral text-forms, namely sermons, both religious (James and Michael's) and non-religious (Nick). By comparing the three sermons, Llobera strives to establish the nature of 'the good man' for Iris Murdoch. In so doing, the author reads into Murdochian usage of ideas such as innocence, experience and ego.

Catalan scholar Margarita Maurí's 'Innocence and knowledge in *The Bell*, by Iris Murdoch' retrieves in *The Bell* one of the most serious dilemmas in Iris Murdoch's moral philosophy: the relations between innocence and knowledge, openness and awareness. If one is knowledgeable can one retain purity of mind? And is there real purity of action, virtue, if there is no depth of knowledge? According to the author, the two central sermons of *The Bell* – Michael Meade's and James Tayper Pace's – are distinct defenses of innocence not as ignorance but as something needed for the attainment of true, deep knowledge. The reflection on this idea appears also as the basis for the make-up of all other characters and the isolation of the Abbey is shown, according to Maurí, as the ultimate refuge of innocence and, at the same time, as the place of greater human understanding (and, thus, knowledge).

Idoia Felis Casillas and Marta Peña López present 'Love in *The Bell*', a study of the murdochian notion of Love as an ethical category and of how it is explored in *The Bell*, both symbolically (the bell) and through characters (Dora and Michael). Felis and Peña depict how evidence of Iris Murdoch's notion of Love as the pathway to the recognition of Alterity is found in *The Bell*. Despite being a common symbolic reference in Murdochian scholarship, the bell as symbol of Love thus receives original interpretation in this article. Felis and Peña also dwell on the interesting link in the novel between the sense of artistic experience and the experience of Love as means towards individual moral progress.

Montse Molist Funollet and Laura Cortes Andreu's 'Relations of Power in *The Bell*' puts forward a significant study of the net of power connections that underlies Iris Murdoch's *The Bell*. This article points towards an interesting new direction, focusing on a possible social, collective, morality, co-existent with morality *per se* in Murdoch. The authors focus primarily on Michael Meade and his rapport with other male characters, namely James Tayper Pace, Toby Gashe and Nick Fawley, but eventually come to establish the Abbess as the ultimate figure of power. The lead female character, Dora, is also studied as a figure of power in her use of sexuality and should be seen as one among other of the novel's examples of the destructive essence of power relationships. The underlying

reading is, of course, that power instincts diminish the potential for personal moral amelioration.

Together, Parts A and B, prove Rubin Rabinovitz's claim that, despite Iris Murdoch's denials, she is indeed a philosophical novelist, one '... as involved with ideas as Conrad was with the sea' (RABINOVITZ, 1968: 45), and provide the reader and Murdochian Studies with a refreshing, multidisciplinary contribute which we hope will both open new doors and walk further down well-known paths for those seeking a fuller understanding of Iris Murdoch and of how the philosopher met the novelist.

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Notes

¹ A majority of the most interesting theoretical texts can be found in ADAMSON, 1998, GARBER, 2000, DAVIS, 2001 and GEORGE, 2005.

² The collection of essays *Mapping the ethical turn: A reader in ethics, culture and literary theory*, edited in 2001 by Todd F. Davis and Kenneth Womack, was pivotal in establishing as mainstream the term which had originally been used by Nussbaum (cf. WHITE, 2010: 27).

³ The authors pose various questions: 'What kind of a turn is a turn to ethics? A Right turn? A Left turn? A wrong turn? A U-turn? Whose turn? Whose turn is it to turn to ethics? And why? Why now?' (GARBER et al, 2000: vii).

⁴ The author goes further: 'A turn away from the political is precisely how many of those in my own discipline – literary study – have understood the long history of the discipline (...) criticism is said to have retreated into the academy, where it was domesticated into an apolitical, professionalized discourse'.

⁵ Stephen K. George is quite adamant: '... literary theory has never really given up ethical criticism (...) we replace 'ethical' and 'moral' with terms such as 'political' or 'rhetorical' and then continue, as students and professors, to teach and write about *the things that matter most*' (GEORE, 2005: xvii, italics mine).

⁶ Heusel includes not only a chapter focusing directly on Iris Murdoch's philosophical work ('*Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* and Iris Murdoch's Ongoing Dialogues with Other Philosophers', pp. 1-22), but also two-folded chapters such as 'Iris Murdoch's Wittgensteinian Voice: A Word Child, Nuns and Soldiers, and *The Sea, The Sea*' (pp. 43-81) or 'Philosophical and Psychological Patterns Underlying the World of Iris Murdoch's Novels' (pp. 207-56).

⁷ The book also includes an essay by Michael Levenson titled 'The Religion of Fiction' (pp. 335-44).

⁸ Fiander gives her attention primarily to Iris Murdoch's 1970 essay 'Existentialists and Mystics' (*EM*,: 221-34).

PART A:

READING PHILOSOPHIES IN LITERATURE

LET ME LOOK AGAIN: IRIS MURDOCH'S NOTION OF A LOVING GAZE REVISITED

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1. Introduction

In an earlier essay, I defended a specific interpretation of Murdoch's notion of a loving gaze as '[...] openness to personality conceived of as a complex intermixture of flexible, dynamic traits and tendencies [...]' (SNOW, 2005: 495). I argued that the loving gaze so interpreted leads one to form a different, more positive, and more kindly perspective toward others, and that it is worth having and cultivating. Why undertake the effort to attain a loving gaze? Answering this query, which I will call 'the motivational question,' is the aim of the present essay.

In part 2, I revisit Murdoch's work to supply some background to the motivational question. I find her answer to the question to be thin, and in need of further elaboration. My answer, offered in part 3, draws on Buddhist moral psychology, and is meant to cohere with and supplement Murdoch's views. I conclude the essay in part 4 with a discussion, admittedly speculative, of some of the benefits that might be gained by achieving a loving gaze.

2. The Background of 'A Loving Gaze'

Murdoch introduces the notion of a loving gaze with the now-famous example of M and D:

A mother, whom I shall call M, feels hostility to her daughter-in-law, whom I shall call D. M finds D quite a good-hearted girl, but while not exactly common yet certainly unpolished and lacking 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. We might underline this aspect of the example by supposing that the young couple have emigrated or that D is now dead: the point being to ensure that whatever is in question as *happening* happens entirely in M's mind.

Thus much for M's first thoughts about D. Time passes, and it could be that M settles down with a hardened sense of grievance and a fixed picture of D, imprisoned (if I may use a question-begging word) by the cliché: my poor son has married a silly vulgar girl. However, the M of the example is an intelligent 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' (*EM*, 312-3)

What is the background of this story? Murdoch introduces the story and the analysis that leads to the notion of a loving gaze by way of offering an alternative to a philosophical outlook that she calls 'existentialist-behaviorist' (cf. *idem*, 299-312). She traces this view primarily to the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein. Its hallmark is a focus on the external, as opposed to the internal. That is, the existentialist-behaviorist position regards as morally primary the agent's will and actions; we discern an agent's mental states, if at all, by examining her actions. Observable actions in the world are what count from a moral perspective. Thus, the view is behaviorist insofar as it focuses on actions or behavior with relatively little regard for mental states. It is existentialist insofar as it regards the choices of agents as in some sense self-creating. The inner life of the agent is viewed more or less as a *tabula rasa* or blank slate. Her actions are not seen as connected in deep and interesting ways with her personality. There is little or no place for soul-searching on this view, or for self-cultivation. The focus is, as I said, on the external.

This thumbnail sketch might be accused of caricaturing the position that Murdoch opposes. Admittedly, more can be said both to elaborate and to defend it. However, my point here is simply to outline in its barest essentials the view she opposes in order to expose the deeper commitments that underlie the story of M and D. Murdoch's alternative to the existentialist-behaviorist emphasis on externality highlights the role of the internal in moral life. Her view stresses the importance of vision and attention – attention to the inner states of the self, to how one 'sees' oneself, to how one 'sees' others, and to how one's perceptions affect one's efforts at self-cultivation and actions in the world. In other words,

she urges a picture of moral life in which the internal has pride of place, and in which the external is deeply affected by the internal.

Her emphasis on vision and attention is influenced by several philosophers. Plato is foremost among them. At the end of the *Republic*, Book VI, Plato introduces the ‘divided line’ ontology and epistemology – a framework that categorizes items in his ontology and identifies the modes of cognition through which we know them (cf. PLATO, 1968: 190-192). Images are on the lowest rung of this hierarchy of being and knowing and are cognizable through imagination; objects are next, and knowable through trust in the senses (that is, we must trust that the objects we perceive through sense perception are there, and are there as we perceive them); we know the objects of mathematics through understanding; and, finally, we can know the forms, including the Form of the Good, through pure intellection. This scheme is illustrated at the beginning of Book VII in the allegory of the cave, through which a person ascends to knowledge of the forms, then comes back down to the realm of the senses for the sake of ruling the State (cf. PLATO, 1968: 193ff).

As well as providing a theory of metaphysics and epistemology, Plato’s scheme can be read as offering guidance in moral psychology. We acquire knowledge of goodness by leaving behind the products of imagination, going beyond the realm of the senses, and even passing through understanding, which relies on sensory input to some extent (some mathematical objects must be represented with the aid of sensory information; for example, I know what a triangle is by envisioning one). This process can be read as a ‘turning inward’, a drawing of the mind inward toward the self, away from the objects of the senses. To achieve knowledge of the Good, we must work to remove certain impediments from occluding our vision.

Similarly, for Murdoch, in order to know what is good, we need to be able to clear away the obstructions that cloud our vision and prevent us from attaining objective knowledge of the world around us. M, then, needs to achieve an objective vision about D – a loving gaze. To do this, she must clear away the hindrances; she must go beyond them. The obstacles that prevent M from having a loving gaze toward D are attitudes such as jealousy, pettiness, conventionality, snobbery, and narrow-mindedness. M admits to herself that she possesses these traits. Admissions of such facts about oneself are not pleasant. Why should M do this? Moreover, why should M care about her attitudes toward D, especially if D is no longer a part of her life? This is the ‘motivational question’ – why make the effort to achieve a loving gaze? Why try to be good?

Plato can be asked the same question. Obviously, attaining knowledge of the Form of the Good is not an easy process. Why do it? Plato's answer is notoriously weak: the Form of the Good is intrinsically attractive. It draws us to it. Murdoch's answer is also unsatisfying. She writes: '[...] 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' (*EM*, 312-3, italics hers). However, the bare fact that M is capable of self-scrutiny and attention does not provide her with a motivating reason to undertake such efforts. Murdoch does not further address the question of motivation, but, in the story of M, goes on to list the deficiencies that M sees herself as having.

From all of this, we can conclude the following: neither Murdoch nor Plato, a primary source of inspiration on which she draws, gives a convincing answer to the motivational question. Where should we turn? I propose what is, for westerners, an unlikely place: Buddhist moral psychology.

3. Buddhist Moral Psychology, Murdoch's Vision, and a Loving Gaze

In this section, I undertake to show that Buddhist resources supply answers to the motivational question, and that aspects of Buddhist moral psychology mesh well with Murdoch's vision of the moral life, including a loving gaze.¹

What would prompt one to undertake the soul-searching needed to acquire a loving gaze? One plausible answer is self-dissatisfaction. M, for example, might regret how she felt about D. Though her behavior toward D was impeccable, it was phony, in that it did not express how M truly felt about D. M might feel that she owed D more, since D was, after all, her daughter-in-law, and regret that she did not interact with D wholeheartedly and honestly. M might, in retrospect, recognize that her own negative traits and emotions prevented her from having a better relationship with D.

The recognition that something in ourselves prevents us from having the kinds of lives and relationships we want is an impetus to 'work on ourselves', that is, to engage in self-cultivation. In Buddhist terms, what M is experiencing in regretting her feelings toward D is a form of suffering. Suffering, according to Buddhist moral psychology, results from selfish attachments to the things of this world, which are impermanent. To alleviate the kind of regret from which M suffers, as well as other ills, Buddhists advise us to engage in meditation. We must look inward to ferret out our attachments, and lessen our reliance on transitory things. In

Buddhist psychology, suffering results not only from enmeshment with the things of this world, but also from attachment to the self, which is an illusion. That is, for Buddhists, like everything else we experience, the self is impermanent. It is merely appearance. We must transcend the self to become no-self, that is, to realize that we are not really a distinct entity separate from our surroundings. These are essential tenets of Buddhist metaphysics that influence Buddhist moral psychology. They require far more explanation than I am able to offer here. For our purpose, the essential question is: How does all of this relate to M and D, and to Murdoch's views on morality?

Let us first analyze M and D in Buddhist terms. As noted, M is experiencing a form of suffering over what she regards as a failed relationship with D. It is clear enough from Murdoch's example that M now thinks she allowed unworthy prejudices and feelings to bias her perceptions and judgments about D. How is this a form of selfish attachment? Buddhists would say that M was attached to and blinded by her prejudices – her snobbery and class consciousness. She clung to a conception of what she thought her daughter-in-law should be like, and this idealization biased her perceptions of D. M's admission of jealousy is also revealing. Apparently, M tried to hold on to her son, perhaps clinging to the idea that she was the only woman in his life. When M thought D supplanted her, she felt jealousy.

If this analysis is correct, M was selfishly attached to a vision of how her daughter-in-law should be, as well as to a vision of her own role in her son's life. M was, as it were, trapped within a worldview that did not allow her to see positive aspects of D. D was who she was – she had both good and bad traits, but M couldn't or wouldn't see the good. M was prevented from having a clear view of D because she clung to a worldview in which M had a privileged position. M, after all, judged D with an air of affronted superiority. Her jealousy, especially, reflected the notion that M, not D, should have pride of place in her son's life. Clinging to these attachments prevented her from having a positive relationship with her daughter-in-law. In Buddhist terms, M was trapped in the realm of *samsara* – transitory appearances. M's present realization of how her attitudes affected her relationship with D now causes her to suffer. This suffering is the impetus for her to begin the journey of self-scrutiny needed to attain a loving gaze.

So far, I believe, the Buddhist account answers the motivational question: M regrets her failed relationship with D, attributes that failure to flaws in herself, and is motivated to engage in the soul-searching needed to achieve a loving gaze because she suffers. Buddhism identifies the

cause of this suffering as M's selfish attachment to a false perspective on both herself and D. To make moral progress, M must admit her attachment to this perspective as well as its falsity, and work to give it up.

The Buddhist analysis meshes well with Murdoch's overall perspective on M and D, as well as with her view of the kind of self-scrutiny needed to attain a loving gaze. But what about the Buddhist notion of transcending the self? The Buddhist goal in undertaking to rid oneself of selfish attachments is self-transcendence – the attainment of Enlightenment, in which we realize that there are no separate selves and all is one. How well does this aspect of Buddhist psychology cohere with Murdoch's thought?

The Buddhist outlook on self-transcendence is similar in some respects to Plato's theory, in which we strip away dependence on imagination, the senses, and understanding in order to attain knowledge of the Form of the Good through pure intellection. We transcend ourselves, or certain aspects of ourselves, in the course of making the Platonic ascent. In Murdoch's view, too, I believe, there is a notion of self-transcendence. Certainly, the present M, who admits her own deficiencies, has taken a step toward overcoming the limitations of the M who in the past so negatively perceived D. In many philosophical traditions, Buddhist, Platonic, and Murdochian, self-cultivation is a form of self-transcendence or self-transformation. We cultivate ourselves in order to make ourselves better. Our efforts at self-improvement include accepting that we have negative traits and tendencies and working to remove or control them. Achieving a loving gaze toward self – viewing ourselves as personalities who are complex intermixtures of flexible, dynamic traits and tendencies that can, within limits, be shaped – is part of the process of achieving a loving gaze toward others.

This process involves changes in knowing and being. Of M, Murdoch writes that she is '[...] continually active [...] making progress [...]']' (*EM* 316). She describes M's '[...] inner acts as belonging to her or forming part of a continuous fabric of being [...]']' (*ibidem*). This inner change in being and knowing, she notes, is what the existentialist-behaviorist view cannot accommodate (*cf. ibidem*). By contrast, Buddhist moral psychology can make sense of transformations, both cognitive and existential, in our inner lives. Furthermore, like Murdoch, Buddhists emphasize the importance of attention. As Murdoch puts it, 'M *looks* at D, she attends to D, she focuses her attention. M is engaged in an internal struggle. She may for instance be tempted to enjoy caricatures of D in her imagination' (*idem*, 317, *italics hers*). Buddhists, too, stress the importance of attention, of focusing the mind through meditation. And, like Murdoch, they readily acknowledge that one's thoughts can stray. Focusing the mind as one

wants is not always easy, but requires practice and self-discipline. Thus, there is a normativity that applies to the self engaged in both Buddhist meditative practice and in the attempt to attain a loving gaze: the person engaged in these endeavors must be motivated to engage in soul-searching, and must be disciplined in appropriately focusing her attention. Moreover, the kind of self-scrutiny and self-transformation needed to seriously engage in Buddhist meditation and in Murdochian self-cultivation is ongoing – serious engagement requires that one look hard at one’s life, not just for a moment, but regularly.

4. Benefits of a Loving Gaze

For the Buddhist as well as the Murdochian, then, a first step toward ‘enlightenment’ consists of the realization that one can overcome one’s failings by detaching oneself from the needs and tendencies that cause them. For both, one pursues enlightenment through sustained and serious self-scrutiny. The aim is moral progress – improvement of the self, with the hope of better living. The benefits of undertaking the efforts needed to achieve a loving gaze are, on this account, mainly self-directed. One hopes to improve oneself and thereby to have better relationships with the people around one. Could there be an other-directed component to all of this? That is, might one undertake self-cultivation with the aim of benefiting others, in addition to oneself?

Both Plato and the Buddhist tradition give affirmative answers. In Plato’s allegory of the cave, the one who achieves a vision of the Form of the Good must return to the realm of the senses for the sake of ruling the State. After achieving Enlightenment, the Buddha also returned to the realm of sensory illusion – *samsara* – for the sake of helping those who suffer to attain Enlightenment. Similarly, one might claim, a Murdochian who has had some success in attaining a loving gaze might help others along their paths, perhaps by sharing experiences and giving advice. The risk of this, however, is presumption – presuming to help or advise others with the self-cultivation that they alone can undertake. Buddhists are well aware of this pitfall. Teachers, they contend, can only point the way. Each of us must walk our own paths; there is inner work that simply cannot be done by others.

The emphasis on inner cultivation notwithstanding, there is a dimension of social engagement in Buddhism that is interesting and instructive. It stems from the Buddhist metaphysical doctrine of *ten del*, or dependent origination, according to which we are all interconnected with

and dependent upon each other (cf. DALAI LAMA, 1999: chapter three). Consider the words of the Dalai Lama:

[...] Buddhism and social activism can contribute to each other [...] While the main emphasis of the Buddha's teaching is on inner development that is no reason for Buddhists not to participate in the society in which they live. We are all dependent on others and so responsible to others [...] The phenomenon of social activism is an attempt by like minded people to alleviate social problems through drawing attention to them and trying to change the attitudes of those in a position to affect them. (quot. PURI, 2006: 5)

Similarly, I propose that a loving gaze could be used in the service of peace-making. That is, why confine Murdoch's notion of a loving gaze to individual self-development? Why not use the same approach in attempts to reconcile conflicts among groups or even nations? To conclude, I would like briefly to sketch what I have in mind.

Many intergroup conflicts in the world today arise because members of clashing groups bear hatred and ill-will toward members of other groups. Such negative attitudes often arise from prejudice and bias – from entrenched worldviews, often with long histories, that allow only negative features (often false caricatures) of the opposing group to enter the field of vision of the other. If individual members of these groups were to work together to try to attain a loving gaze toward members of the other group, such efforts would be a start toward achieving a basis for conflict resolution. In other words, just as the external behavior of individuals can be affected in lasting ways only through internal self-cultivation – by clearing away the prejudices that occlude an individual's moral vision – so, too, perhaps we need to approach intergroup conflict resolution by first working to 'change the hearts and minds' of group members. Long-standing prejudices need to be cleared away through sustained self-scrutiny before lasting cordial relations between groups can be achieved.

What I am suggesting here, of course, is transporting Murdoch's theory from the realm of the individual alone and extending it to groups. To be sure, intra- and inter-group dynamics would increase the complexity of such an undertaking and would need to be addressed. Effecting changes in perception and attitudes would not be easy. Yet, I think that Murdoch's notion of clearing away prejudice for the sake of self-cultivation is essential not only for personal change, but also for group and societal change. Groups and societies, as well as individuals, have moral visions, and can be nearer to or farther from an objective vision of the good. The moral visions they have depend not only on leaders, but also on citizens.

Murdochian individual self-cultivation offers a promising yet challenging model for effecting change on a larger scale. Why try it? The alternative for M, as Murdoch writes, is to '[...] settle down with a hardened sense of grievance and a fixed picture of D [...]' (*EM*, 312). The alternative for groups or societies is to become similarly entrenched in negative conceptions and attitudes, with strained relations at best and violent conflict at worst. This option is hardly satisfying.

There is another reason for gravitating toward a Murdochian approach to peace-making. Gandhi's method of *satyagraha*, or non-violent resistance to oppression, is one of the world's most successful approaches to non-violent social change. Should a Murdochian approach to social change be developed, it would be in the same 'genre' as *satyagraha*, which depends heavily on the spiritual and moral state of the *satyagrahi*, or practitioner of non-violence (cf. LAL, 1978: 113-8; 134-8). In sum, Murdoch's vision of a loving gaze and of the moral life fits well with others, such as those of Plato, the Buddha, and Gandhi, that stress the self-cultivation of the individual. Like those other visions, Murdoch's too, can and should be extended on a societal scale.

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Notes

¹ Unless otherwise noted, my exposition of Buddhist moral psychology draws on DALAI LAMA, 1999 and *The Dhammapada*.

