IRIS MURDOCH AND THE ART OF IMAGINATION

IMAGINATIVE PHILOSOPHY AS RESPONSE TO SECULARISM

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THESIS SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF LITERATURE, THEOLOGY AND THE ARTS

UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW

JULY 2004

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the work of the British philosopher and novelist Iris Murdoch. A central concern of this work is a question Murdoch poses more than once: 'How can we make ourselves morally better?' This question is understood to initiate a form of philosophy which is critical of much of its tradition and its understanding of reasoning and argument. It also recognises its dependence on other disciplines.

Murdoch develops this form of philosophy in reply to the cultural phenomenon of secularisation. In the absence of God, she attributes tasks to philosophy formerly performed by religion. Most importantly, she advocates a concept of transcendent reality in philosophical discourse. This reality is the Good. She finds that in order to do so, she has to reconsider philosophy's central faculty of reason. Drawing on literary, philosophical and theological sources, Murdoch develops an understanding of reason and of argument in which images, imagery and imagination are central.

This study has three objectives. It first aims to present Murdoch as an imaginative philosopher by exploring the role of literature in her philosophical writing. In doing so, it challenges various presuppositions about philosophy, held by both philosophers and non-philosophers. Its second aim is to reconsider these assumptions in general terms. This part draws significantly on the work of Le Doeuff. In particular, it considers the presence of imagery in philosophy as well as philosophy's assumed neutrality, which has arisen from its long affiliation with science. Thirdly, the thesis presents a reconsideration of the notion of imagination. This notion is often invoked in the interdisciplinary debate between theology, philosophy and the arts. Murdoch's notion of imagination challenges two important assumptions. By releasing imagination from the limited corner of art, it first challenges a strict distinction between literary and systematic writing. By introducing fantasy as the bad opposite of good imagination, it secondly critically assesses unconditional 'praises of imagination'.

PREFACE

This thesis examines the work of the philosopher and novelist Iris Murdoch. 'Her work not her life', I feel almost compelled to add, because of the notable media attention her life has received in the years in which I have been working on this thesis. A film was released, depicting in particular her last years, Conradi published his biography and Wilson added his memoirs.[1]

I shall not deny having enjoyed the more serious coverage as well as the sheer gossip, which have almost transformed Murdoch from a thinker into - as I once read in a review of Conradi's biography in *The Times* - 'the patron saint of senility'. This change in interest is perhaps worthy of its own research, yet while this thesis does not pretend to reverse the interest, I have felt the desire to do so. I hope this thesis confirms Murdoch as a thinker of great originality and importance and invites its readers into Murdoch's work and world, which features various philosophers (except Aristotle), theologians, and novelists, as well as Oxford dons and London artists, and which I have come to appreciate so much in the past years.

I would like to thank all those people who have helped me in writing this thesis. First of all, I like to thank David Jasper for letting me share in his vast knowledge of thinkers and texts from various traditions and for his ability to challenge my habits in thinking. I like to thank Edith Brugmans for the careful reading she has given my work, and the many discussions we have had about Murdoch. Thanks also to Mariëtte Willemsen, with whom I have spent many hours working on the translation of Murdoch's *The Sovereignty of Good*, until we couldn't recognise one word from another from sheer exhaustion or helpless laughter. Thanks to the University of Glasgow for granting me a scholarship with which to pursue this research and to the Heyendaal Institute for first enabling me to start it and in the end providing me again with a place to work and an income to pursue it till the end. Of its members I would like to thank Ria van den Brandt and Erik Borgman in particular for their interest in this research. I would like to thank Maria Antonaccio for encouragement and suggestions in the early stages of this research. Darlene Bird, Angus Paddison and Karen Wenell I thank for proofreading parts of the final draft. The members of the Centre for Theology, Literature and the Arts I like to thank for the many lively and interesting discussions. Lastly, my gratitude is for Ardo van den Hout for being a constant companion, far away and nearby.

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[1] The film, *Iris*, had the curious tagline 'Her greatest talent was for life'. See also P. Conradi, *Iris Murdoch: A Life* (London: HarperCollins*Publishers*, 2001), A.N. Wilson, *Iris Murdoch, As I Knew Her* (London: Hutchinson, 2003), and the various newspaper items, in particular in *The Times*, about these works.

CHAPTER ONE

'HOW CAN WE MAKE OURSELVES MORALLY BETTER?' MURDOCH'S IMAGINATIVE RESPONSE TO SECULARISM

1. Introduction: An Overview Of The Reception Of Murdoch's Work

It is not easy to characterise the thought of Iris Murdoch in only a few lines. Murdoch has left an original oeuvre, with respect to both content and form. Over a period of more than forty years, she has written 26 novels. She is also the author of several philosophical works, including the first book on Sartre written in the English language.[1] This already significant and diverse amount of works is complemented by several plays, an opera libretto and poems.[2]

Her unusual oeuvre has engendered a vast and diverse body of commentaries. An important and returning question in many of these works is whether and how the literary and the philosophical works may be understood to be related.[3] At first encounter, there seems to be a strong relationship between the two. On the one hand, the characters in her novels use vocabulary taken out of her philosophical essays or they write treatises with similar titles and in similar tone, thus suggesting that the essays provide a clue for reading the novels. So, Marcus in *The Time of the Angels* is working on a book provisionally entitled *Morality in a World Without God.* An excerpt from that work in the novel leaves little doubt that Murdoch had her own *The Sovereignty of Good* in mind.[4] A work of the philosopher Rozanov in *The Philosopher's Pupil* is called *Nostalgia for the Particular*, which is also the title of one of Murdoch's earliest articles. Even more often, characters simply quote lines taken literally or almost literally out of her essays.[5]

In her systematic essays, on the other hand, Murdoch often writes about art and especially about literature. Art and literature play an important role in her moral philosophy. Novels, in particular a selection of novels from the nineteenth century, she considers to reveal what philosophical texts have much more difficulty in arguing for. Art thus indicates what an exemplary state of consciousness can be like, but also shows more common, less ideal states of

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[1] Conradi claims that *Sartre: Romantic Rationalist* is 'the first book in any language on Sartre', but a quick search shows that this is simply not true. (P. Conradi, 'Editor's Preface', in I. Murdoch, *Existentialists and Mystics: Writings on Philosophy and Literature* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1997) p. xix-xxx. The quotation is found on p. xxi.)

[2] See Fletcher and Bove for a complete list of works published. The bibliography in the thesis contains a selection.

[3] For some it is even 'the central problem which Iris Murdoch's work poses for us...: is she a novelist-philosopher or a novelist *and* a philosopher? In other words, is there a relationship between her novels and her philosophy and if so, what is this relationship?' (B. Le Gros, *Rencontres avec Iris Murdoch*, p. 63 as quoted in and translated by H. Spear, *Iris Murdoch* (Basingstoke, etc.: MacMillan, 1995) p. 7)

[4] Murdoch, *The Time of the Angels*, p. 128.

[5] Compare for example: 'What does he fear? is usually the key to the artist's mind.' (Murdoch, *The Black Prince*, p. 85) and: '(It is always a significant question to ask about any philosopher: what is he afraid of?)' (Murdoch, 'On 'God' and 'Good'', p. 359) All references to Murdoch's essays use her collection *Existentialists and Mystics: Writings on Philosophy and Literature* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1997) unless indicated differently. This also applies to

mind. 'Art', Murdoch argues in 'On 'God' and 'Good'', 'presents the most comprehensible examples of the almost irresistible human tendency to seek consolation in fantasy and also of the effort to resist this and the vision of reality which comes with success.'[6] In particular contemporary literature Murdoch assesses critically. She considers it no longer 'concerned with 'the human condition' ... with real individuals struggling in society'.[7] Because of this failure Murdoch gradually loses interest in contemporary literature.

Murdoch's oeuvre thus suggests different ways to relate the novels to the philosophical texts. It has been examined for example whether Murdoch's own novels meet the standards she describes in her systematic essays. Some agree they do, others that they don't.[8] It has also been argued that the novels are illustrative or expressive of ideas explored in the philosophical works, or that Murdoch probes her philosophical ideas in her novels.[9] By and large, it is assumed that there is relationship between the two.

It is then remarkable that the fiercest opposition to the suggestion that her novels and her philosophical texts are in some way related has come from Murdoch herself. Most prominently in an interview with Magee she has denied that the presence of philosophical ideas in her novels has any significance, baffling her readers by stating that

> I feel in myself such an absolute horror of putting theories or 'philosophical ideas' as such into my novels. I might put in things about philosophy because I happen to know about philosophy. If I knew about sailing ships I would put in sailing

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references to *The Fire and the Sun*, *The Sovereignty of Good*, as well as the interview with Magee, 'Philosophy and Literature: A Conversation with Bryan Magee'.

[6] Murdoch, 'On 'God' and 'Good'', p. 352.

[7] Murdoch, 'Against Dryness', p. 291. Contemporary literature thus fails in *moral* terms and her essays on literature often end with explicit recommendations what the contemporary should be concerned with. See for example Murdoch, 'Against Dryness', p. 294-5: 'Real people are destructive of myth, contingency is destructive of fantasy and opens the way for imagination. ... Literature must always represent a battle between real people and images; and what it requires now is a much stronger and more complex conception of the former.' Murdoch has been criticised for evaluating literature in moral terms. For such a criticism see in particular. J. Wood, 'Iris Murdoch's Philosophy of Fiction' in *The Broken Estate: Essays on Literature and Belief* (London: Jonathan Cape, 199), p. 174-185. Bronzwaer argues that in this form of criticism Murdoch shows her affinity to Plato. (W. Bronzwaer, 'Images of Plato in "The Fire and the Sun" and "Acastos"' in R. Todd, (ed.), *Encounters with Iris Murdoch* (Amsterdam: Free University Press, 1988) p. 55-67)

[8] In chapter three I argue that this concerns in particular the plea for portraying real characters. Conradi considers her novels to do so, whereas Bergonzi thinks they don't. (P. Conradi, *The Saint and the Artist: A Study of the Fiction of Iris Murdoch* (Londen: HarperCollins*Publishers*, 2001), B. Bergonzi, *The Situation of the Novel* (London and Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1979))

[9] See for the former P. O'Connell, *To Love the Good: The Moral Philosophy of Iris Murdoch* (New York, etc.: Peter Lang, 1996) and for the latter M. Willemsen, '"We are simply here": Over de metafysica van Iris Murdoch' in M. Hoenen (ed.), *Metamorphosen: Acten van de 20e Nederlands-Vlaamse Filosofiedag* (Katholieke Universiteit Nijmegen, 1998) p. 101-114.

> ships; and in a way, as a novelist, I would rather know about sailing ships than about philosophy.[10]

The presence of philosophical ideas in the novels, Murdoch suggests here, is incidental and should not be considered as a tool for interpretation of the work.

Despite this strong defiance of general agreement commentators have considered the novels from the philosophical ideas extracted. Such research is often couched in terms of the question whether Murdoch was a philosophical novelist. As the first to write a book about Murdoch's work Byatt wonders what the notion 'philosophical novelist' means, and 'even whether it is a term of praise or abuse.'[11] Murdoch may feel 'horror' at being called a philosophical novelist, but this sentiment is not a general one.

For Byatt Murdoch's criticism of Sartre is essential to her appraisal. She wonders that if for Murdoch 'Sartre displays to us the structure of his own thought, but he does not give to us the *stuff* of human life. How far, loosely, does this critical attitude to the philosopher as novelist apply to Miss Murdoch herself?'[12] Byatt continues: 'I think that much of the uneasiness that her readers experience with her symbols in particular and patterning in general might well be attributed to the tension she herself seems to feel between her natural ability intellectually to organize, and her suspicion of the *tidying* function of the kind of literary form which now comes naturally to us. A novels, she says, has *got* to have form; but she seems to feel a metaphysical regret about it.'[13]

Quoting yet another interview in which Murdoch considers the possibility that philosophical ideas seeping into the novels but where she also denies being a philosophical novelist in the sense of Sartre or De Beauvoir, Byatt concludes:

> But here she is disclaiming partly the didactic intention of which Sartre is proud; and in any case the result of the deliberate planning which she does not disclaim, is that the novels certainly *appear* to centre on ideas, the variations on a theme, in terms which we can analyse them without feeling that we are seriously distorting them. The characters are approached from the theme, whereas with other writers,

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[10] Magee, 'Philosophy and Literature: A Conversation with Bryan Magee', p. 19-20.
[11] A.S. Byatt, *Degrees of Freedom: The Early Novels of Iris Murdoch* (London: Vintage, 1994), p. 208. Byatt also rightly remarks: 'Reviewers have talked a great deal about whether Miss Murdoch is or is not a 'philosophical novelist'; those who say she is not tend to describe her as a compulsive storyteller, which is not of course incompatible with being a philosophical novelist.' (Byatt, *Degrees of Freedom*, p. 207)
[12] Byatt, *Degrees of Freedom*, p. 209.
[13] Byatt, *Degrees of Freedom* p. 209 and 216-7 respectively.

> Joyce Cary, Angus Wilson, one has the sense that character or action is where the novel began and that theme developed from there.[14]

Byatt here argues that it is no more than natural that Murdoch, as a 'practising philosopher', is considering ideas when writing novels. It is this practise which has been recognised by various commentators.

In contrast, the possible influence of her novel-writing on her philosophy has been much less debated. Still, in the interview with Magee Murdoch does not only deny the relevance of philosophy for her novels, but also tries to save philosophy from any literary contagion. These remarks have occasioned confusion, when she argues that whereas there

> is not one literary style or ideal literary style ... I am tempted to say that there is an ideal philosophical style which has a special unambiguous plainness and hardness about it, an austere unselfish candid style. A philosopher must try to explain exactly what he means and avoid rhetoric and idle decoration. Of course this need not exclude wit and occasional interludes; when the philosopher is at it were in the front line in relation to his problem I think he speaks with a certain cold clear recognisable voice.[15]

The statement has been severely criticised by Martha Nussbaum in *The Fragility of Goodness.* Nussbaum introduces the quotation as exemplification of the prevalent philosophical style in the Anglo-American philosophical tradition. She understands Murdoch to defend a philosophical style of 'plain hard reason, pure of appeal to emotions and sense', which is 'content-neutral'. This style, however, is not at all Murdoch's. Nussbaum acknowledges this in a later text.[16]

The interview with Magee then contains curious remarks for anyone familiar with Murdoch's oeuvre. She seems to defend a style which is not her own. The misunderstanding, created by the quotation above, is partly explained by Murdoch's choice of words, which is surprisingly similar to that of scientific objectivity. Such remarkable vocabulary is not uncommon

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[14] Byatt, *Degrees of Freedom*, p. 210. Byatt quotes from an interview in *The Times*, 13 February 1964.
[15] Magee, 'Philosophy and Literature', p. 4-5.
[16] See M.C. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) p. 16. In *Love's Knowledge* Nussbaum repeats her argument, but adds that she cannot understand how these statements relate to Murdoch's own thoughts. (M.C. Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (Oxford etc.: Oxford University Press, 1990) p. 251 and note 8.) Compare M. Antonaccio, *Picturing the Human: The Moral Thought of Iris Murdoch* (Oxford etc.: Oxford University Press, 2000) p. 19-20 and 199n58, and See also M.C. Nussbaum, 'Love and Vision: Iris Murdoch on Eros and the Individual' in M. Antonaccio and W. Schweiker (eds.), *Iris Murdoch and the Search for Human Goodness* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996) p. 29-53.

in Murdoch's writing. Antonaccio notes how in one of her more distinctive examples Murdoch also suggest an analogy between her understanding of moral realism and scientific observation:

> [Murdoch] writes: "Rilke said of Cézanne that he did not paint 'I like it', he painted 'There it is'." The sharp contrast drawn in the passage between the artist's personal or subjective desire on the one hand ("I like it"), and the clear vision he achieves on the other ("There it is"), suggests that "reality" stands apart from the self as something wholly "impersonal".[17]

At first glance, in the interview with Magee Murdoch seems indeed to support the scientific approach Nussbaum discerns by speaking of 'unambiguous plainness and hardness', the avoidance of 'rhetoric and idle decoration' and the 'cold clear' voice. It is indeed possible that Murdoch is here more supportive of a scientific approach than in most other texts. Yet, it could be too that Murdoch is considering a form of objectivity which is acquired through consideration of self, rather than by disregarding it.[18] Here I am reminded of the opening sentence of 'On 'God' and 'Good'", where Murdoch argues that '[t]o do philosophy is to explore one's own temperament, and yet at the same time to attempt to discover the truth.'[19] An unselfish style is acquired through exploration of personal temperament.

By calling this style 'austere' Murdoch suggests that the ability to explore in this way is not easily acquired. Murdoch is reluctant to call herself a philosopher. In answer to Le Gros she states that she is 'a teacher of philosophy and I am trained as a philosopher and I 'do' philosophy and I teach philosophy, but philosophy is fantastically difficult and I think those who attempt to write it would probably agree that there are very few moments when they rise to the level of real philosophy. One is writing about philosophy ... One is not actually doing the real thing.'[20] The real thing is an austere ideal to aspire to.[21]

The remarks in the interview may also be explained by observing the rigid presuppositions in Magee's introduction and questions. The interview is part of a series called 'Men of Ideas', after the gender of the other participants. Magee had invited Murdoch to talk

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[17] Antonaccio, *Picturing the Human*, p. 138. Compare Murdoch, 'On 'God' and 'Good'", p. 348.
[18] Compare in this respect Antonaccio's notion of 'reflexive realism', to be discussed in the next part.
[19] Murdoch, 'On 'God' and 'Good'", p. 337.
[20] Interview with M. Le Gros in *Rencontres avec Iris Murdoch*, p. 79, as quoted in Spear, *Iris Murdoch*, p. 8.
[21] Her reluctance to call herself a real philosopher is perhaps even better portrayed in the comic image of pupils of the philosopher Dave Gellman in *Under the Net* to whom 'the world is a mystery; a mystery to which it should be reasonably possible to discover a key. The key would be something of the sort that could be contained in a book of some eight hundred pages. To find the key would not necessarily be a simple matter, but Dave's pupils feel sure that the dedication of between four and ten hours a week, excluding University vacations, should suffice to find it.' (Murdoch, *Under the Net*, p. 25)

about 'some of the respects in which philosophy and literature do overlap.' From the very beginning, however, Magee's firm assertions and subsequent questions ban many possible points of overlap from the conversation. He begins the interview by stating firmly at the outset that '[i]f a philosopher writes well, that's a bonus - it makes him more enticing to study, obviously, but it does nothing to make him a better philosopher.' In his first questions to Murdoch he maintains a strict division between philosophy and fiction. Hence, he asks her: 'When you are writing a novel on the one hand and philosophy on the other, are you conscious that these are two radically different kinds of writing?', or he asserts: 'In your novels the sentences are opaque, in the sense that they are rich in connotation, allusion, ambiguity; whereas in your philosophical writing the sentences are transparent, because they are saying only one thing at the time.' So, from the outset one perceives in Magee's words the desire to ascertain a clear distinction between philosophy and literature. Philosophy is pictured as straightforward and unambiguous, whereas literature is messy and ambiguous.

These remarks by Magee evince to a commonly held position that whereas the influence of philosophy on literature may be a matter of debate, a possible reverse influence of literature on philosophy is less often considered. This position is in particular prominent among analytical philosophers. It is therefore not accidental that the field of philosophy and literature has arisen in particular within the Anglo-American tradition. Yet, even in that field the relationship between philosophy and literature is not always considered to be one of equals. The prominent work of Nussbaum exemplifies this attitude. In a critical reading of her work Eaglestone argues that Nussbaum engages literature as a way of expressing what cannot be said in philosophy. Philosophy thus considers literature, but only to 'help the work of philosophy'. This apprehension of literature is revealed in Nussbaum's limited recognition of the artistic aspect of literature: 'Nussbaum reads art works as people, made real through enactment and emotional involvement, but she is never able to admit that they are just art works.'[22]

Murdoch occupies a more complex position in this debate. The importance she attributes to art also appears in her answers to Magee. These only superficially concur with the image of philosophy and literature delineated. Even though she replies in the affirmative to Magee's questions and assertions, in her answers the distinction between philosophy and literature becomes more confused. Thus, she introduces a third category of 'thinker' to accommodate 'great writers' such as Kierkegaard and Nietzsche.

Murdoch's oeuvre then raises the question of the relationship between philosophy and literature and it offers different ways to consider this relationship. Yet, her oeuvre has not only

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[22] R. Eaglestone, *Ethical Criticism: Reading After Levinas* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), p. 57.

been studied because of this relationship, prominent though that it may be. The importance of her work is not only or even primarily decided by the unusual combination of disciplines. Murdoch's novels and her philosophical work have been independently considered in relation to contemporary works and issues in both literature and philosophy.

Byatt remarks how it is not easy to position Murdoch as a novelist.[23] Murdoch was first associated with the 'Angry Young Men' and *Under the Net*'s Jake Donaghue was compared to their 'rootless picaresque heroes'.[24] Subsequent novels showed that this classification would not do. *The Sandcastle* and *The Bell* separated Murdoch from these contemporaries.[25] Henceforth, she has been regarded as a novelist in her own kind, where her yearly-published novel becomes a phenomenon, wittily portrayed in the character of Arnold Baffin in *The Black Prince*.[26]

Interpretations of the novels have ranged from such divers perspectives as feminist, post-modern, and various religious ones. One prominent aspect in many of these interpretations has in recent times taken a rather peculiar form. This body of interpretation namely testifies that Murdoch must have been a most imposing person. Murdoch is indeed considered to have decided up to a considerable extent the interpretation of her novels. Backus points out that the narratives of both Murdoch's 'detractors and her supporters' are inadequate, precisely because of their shared starting-point 'that Murdoch's readings of her novels is critical, or at least of overwhelming importance, for their correct reading.'[27] Even if one considers Murdoch's reading as critical (to which Backus objects in general), then it remains difficult to distil a distinct voice, for Murdoch's own criticism is full of inconsistencies, especially in the interviews.[28] It may be most natural to ask Murdoch about her own work, but it would be misleading to regard these interviews as unequivocal instruction for reading it. The interview with Magee may serve as illustration here.

Murdoch's personal concern for the criticism of her work has recently had its parallel in the attempts of some scholars to reinterpret her work from life. Conradi's biography and recent

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[23] See also Spear, *Iris Murdoch*, p. 121: 'One problem is that she defies classification: she is not a Modernist; she is not a Post-Modernist; she is not, like many of her female contemporaries, a feminist writer; yet, despite the fact that she employs many Victorian devices in her novels, no serious reader of her fiction could place her among the traditionalists.'

[24] Byatt, *Degrees of Freedom* p. 207, Spear, *Iris Murdoch*, p. 23-24.

[25] Byatt, *Degrees of Freedom*, 207.

[26] See the various biting remarks by his fellow author Bradley Pearson, in particular his review of Baffin's latest book. (Murdoch, *The Black Prince*, p. 151-2) For a concise outline of the development of Murdoch's novels in different periods, as well as a description of returning imagery, see R. Todd, 'Iris Murdoch: veertig jaar romanschijven' in *Wijsgerig Perspectief* 35-3 (1994/5), p. 66-71.

[27] G. Backus, *Iris Murdoch: The Novelist as Philosopher, The Philosopher as Novelist: 'The Unicorn' as a Philosophical Novel* (Bern etc.: Peter Lang, 1986), p. 13.

[28] Backus phrases his general objection as follows: '... to locate, as a general principle, the controlling intention in a work of art or philosophy squarely with the artist is mistaken. Heidegger's compelling accounts of Descartes as preoccupied with being and Nietzsche as the last metaphysicians of the West, Derrida's story of Husserl as a protogrammatologist: these interpretations are falsifications enough.' (Backus, *Iris Murdoch*, p. 13)

article represent this approach.[29] Already in the preface to *Existentialists and Mystics* Conradi speculates on a similarity between the novels and real life: 'Is it an impertinent speculation to find something owed to Franz Stein in the gentle, scholarly and dying Peter Saward, a character in Murdoch's second published novel *The Flight from the Enchanter* (1956) … Or in Mischa Fox, the enchanter himself, something owed to the book's dedicatee, Elias Canetti?'[30] In his biography his tone is much more assertive, writing 'Mischa Fox/Canetti' as if the enchanter from *The Flight from the Enchanter* and Canetti are one and the same.[31] He considers this way of reading most natural, remarking in his preface to the reissue of the second edition of *The Saint and the Artist* that '[i]t is a relief to be able to report that writing her biography did not substantially change my view of the shape of Murdoch's work.[32] Not all reviewers were taken in by Conradi's reading of Murdoch's novels from her life.

Murdoch's philosophical career experienced an original beginning with the publication of *Sartre: Romantic Rationalist* in 1953, one year before the publication of her first novel, *Under the Net.* To write this first work on Sartre in those days was, as Mary Warnock emphasises 'an act of genuine imagination and originality'. In the analytical philosophy of that time there was very little interest in philosophy of the continent.[33] Murdoch's interest in existentialism originated out of a deep dissatisfaction with much of the analytical philosophy she encountered in Britain in the beginning of her career. Unlike many philosophers in Oxford and Cambridge in those days Murdoch was interested in moral value and concepts of consciousness. Existentialism promised a philosophical consideration of these ideas. Yet, it is not certain if she ever considered herself an existentialist. From the very beginning of her career she was not just curious about, but also critical of the tradition.

Her second book of philosophy, *The Sovereignty of Good* from 1970, was also unconventional. At its first reception various commentators remarked on its unusual form of argumentation.[34] Now, it is regarded as an influential work in the analytical tradition.[35] This is not

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[29] See also P. Conradi, 'Did Iris Murdoch Draw from Life?', in *Iris Murdoch News Letter* 15 (winter 2001), p. 4-7 and a presentation at the first Iris Murdoch Conference: 'On Writing *Iris Murdoch: A Life*: Freud versus Multiplicity', 1st Annual Conference of the Iris Murdoch Society, St. Anne's Oxford, 14 September 2002. Conradi has thus contributed to the recent interest in Murdoch's private life, which in some respect has overshadowed the interest in her work.

[30] Conradi, 'Editor's Preface', p. xx.

[31] As noted by M. Lievers, [review of Conradi's *A Life*], in *NRC Handelsblad*, 19 October 2001.

[32] Conradi, *The Saint and the Artist*, p. xvii.

[33] Warnock writes how Ayer 'was the only person (apart from Iris) who was credited with any knowledge of [the existentialists'] philosophy; and I remember a peculiarly dismissive talk he gave in the Oxford Playhouse, to introduce a translated version of *Huis Clos* that was staged there.' (M. Warnock, *A Memoir: People and Places* (London: Duckworth, 2002) p. 86.)

[34] See for example G.J. Warnock, 'The Moralists: Value and Choices' in *Encounter* 36 (April 1971), p. 81-84.

[35] Arguing the historical as well as contemporary importance of Murdoch's criticism of the distinction between fact and value, Diamond mentions H. Putnam, *Realism with a Human Face* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990) as one to regard *The Sovereignty of Good* as 'groundbreaking in this regard'. (C. Diamond, '"We Are Perpetually

(yet) true of Murdoch's last and largest work of philosophy.[36] *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (1992) has baffled her readers even more with its many asides, its long quotations and vast amount of ideas and thinkers. Antonaccio argues that is may be best described with Murdoch's own words as 'a huge hall of reflection full of light and space and fresh air, in which ideas and intuitions can be unsystematically nurtured.'[37] While still working on it Murdoch suggested another description, as noted by one reviewer of *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*. The review quotes from a conversation between Crimond, and Gerrard in *The Book and the Brotherhood* on the book the first is writing:

> 'So, it's like a very long pamphlet?'
> 'No, it's not a long simplification. It's about everything.'
> 'Everything?'
> 'Everything except Aristotle. I regard him as an unfortunate interlude, now happily over.'[38]

This quotation is not only an apt description of *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* as a book about everything except for Aristotle, it also indicates that Murdoch was keenly aware of possible criticism of her writing. For both Murdoch's novels and philosophical works have received severe criticism. Whereas the novels have been criticised in relation to the philosophy most of all, the philosophical works have been criticised for diverting from the philosophical tradition in different aspects. Reviewers of Murdoch's work often argue that their expectations have not been met. In particular *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* has been accused of unclear argumentation or even lack of argument. All the same, it has also been called the most original contribution to philosophy of the past century. This diversity in judgement raises the question what philosophy is and what philosophical argument is. These questions motivate the present research. In particular, it considers how Murdoch's philosophical writing is affected by her interest in religion and literature. It argues that her understanding of imagination, as pervading all perception and thought and related to the Good, is a most valuable contribution to philosophy.

Moralists": Iris Murdoch, Fact, and Value' in M. Antonaccio and W. Schweiker (eds.), *Iris Murdoch and the Search for Human Goodness* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996) p. 79-109, p. 104n. 22)

[36] That is, the last work published. Murdoch was writing a work on Heidegger and Wittgenstein, which she abandoned when she became ill.

[37] M. Antonaccio, [Review of *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*] in *The Journal of Religion* 74.2 (1994), p. 278-280. Compare Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p. 422.

[38] Murdoch, *The Book and the Brotherhood*, quoted in I. Hacking, 'Plato's Friend' in *London Review of Books*, 17 December 1992, p. 8-9.

2. 'How can we make ourselves morally better?'

The present research proposes an exposition of Murdoch's philosophical writings. I just noted how in comparison to the novels the philosophical texts have received limited attention. Whereas there are many monographs on the novels, so far only a few works attempt to situate Murdoch in contemporary philosophical debates. Of these Antonaccio's *Picturing the Human* provides the first and thus far only systematic account of *all* of Murdoch's philosophical writing.[39] The book is a remarkable achievement for different reasons. By identifying Murdoch as a 'reflexive realist' it has assembled Murdoch's scattered oeuvre into a systematic framework and placed Murdoch's thought in a contemporary debate with which Murdoch was not directly engaged. Moreover, in its methodological considerations it also provides means for reading Murdoch's unusual philosophical works.

The framework of 'reflexive realism' Antonaccio derives from the work of Schweiker.[40] Schweiker develops this framework as an intermediary position in-between naive realism and mere subjectivism. Reflexive realism has its starting point in consciousness, but avoids a purely subjective position by assuming the possibility of surpassing consciousness in its reflexive moments. Antonaccio uses this idea in particular when analysing Murdoch's understanding of the ontological proof. The Good that the proof is to prove does not exist 'outside consciousness as a property of things or states of affairs', Antonaccio argues. In this respect the position of reflexive realism differs from that of naive realism. The Good 'can only be apprehended though the reflexive activity of cognition.'[41] However, the Good that is grasped by the consciousness is not an invention of that consciousness. Instead, it surpasses consciousness as a reality which confronts the self. Reflexive realism is thus distinguished from mere subjectivism.[42] Antonaccio identifies Murdoch as such a reflective thinker, comparing her to other reflexive thinkers, like Descartes, Kant, Taylor and Schweiker.

With this understanding of reflexive realism Antonaccio analyses what she considers Murdoch's most important contribution to contemporary ethics: her concern for humans in their variety, and for the individual in philosophy:

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[39] O'Connor, *To Love the Good* omits Murdoch's last and largest work, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals.*

[40] See for the importance of Schweiker for this work p. 197n.35. Antonaccio refers here to his *Responsibility and Christian Ethics*, p. 106-114, and admits to being deeply influenced by it. Schweiker, in his turn, confesses to borrow terms from Taylor. See W. Schweiker, *Responsibility and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge etc.: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 114, and the chapters seven and eight. He refers here to Ch. Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), in particular its 23rd chapter, and its conclusion. as well as to Ch. Taylor, 'Responsibility for Self' in G. Watson (ed.), *Free Will* (Oxford: Oxford University Press) 1982, p. 111-126. On the difference between Murdoch as a reflexive thinker and Descartes, Kant, Taylor, Schweiker see Antonaccio, *Picturing the Human*, p. 216n.123 and p. 214n.27, and also p. 220n.4.

[41] Antonaccio, *Picturing the Human*, p. 128.

[42] See Antonaccio, *Picturing the Human*, p. 15, and p. 123ff. For a more elaborate discussion of the ontological proof see chapter five.

The moral philosophy of Iris Murdoch presents an important challenge to current ethical inquiry: the effort to reclaim a notion of the self as individual and to reconceive its relation to an idea of moral value or the good. Specifically, Murdoch seeks to retrieve the notion of consciousness as morally central to an account of human being and, further, to conceive consciousness as inescapably related to the idea of the good. Such an argument is bound to be controversial in an intellectual climate characterized by an unrelenting critique of the idea of subjectivity, as well as a suspicion of any attempt to make substantive claims about humanity or the human good.[43]

Here one encounters two groups of words which Murdoch - against the objections of an 'intellectual climate' that has largely abandoned these notions - seeks to retrieve and connect: self, individual and consciousness on the one hand, and moral value and the idea of the good on the other.

Antonaccio notes how Murdoch's concern for the individual finds to some extent its expression in her use of 'persona'. Antonaccio speaks of 'conceptual "persona"', in quotation marks, when referring to Ordinary Language Man, Totalitarian Man and others.[44] These personae 'represent abstract theoretical positions in the form of identifiable human types.'[45] They, Antonaccio argues, signify Murdoch's understanding of moral philosophy as 'the making of models and pictures of what different men are like'[46]. She acknowledges that for Murdoch

> moral philosophy needs a method appropriate to the nature of human beings as imaginative, self-interpreting creatures. ... Murdoch understands metaphysical reflection as a form of imaginative construction that makes use of concepts, images, explanatory schema, and metaphors to describe reality and human experience. In her view, metaphysics is not (as some analytical philosophers would hold) a logically neutral attempt to explain the nature of reality, but a "figurative"

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[43] *Picturing the Human*, p. 3. This persuasion is repeated at the beginning of almost every chapter. Compare the beginning of chapter three, where Antonaccio recapitulates 'the book's general thesis that the importance of Murdoch's thought for contemporary ethics lies in her effort to redescribe the moral self and its integral relation to the good.' (Antonaccio, *Picturing the Human*, p. 61). Compare too the first pages of chapter four, five and six.

[44] Ordinary Language Man and Totalitarian Man appear in 'The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited'. (Murdoch, 'The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited', p. 268-270)

[45] Antonaccio, *Picturing the Human*, p. 23.

[46] Antonaccio, *Picturing the Human*, p. 23. The quotation is taken from 'Metaphysics and Ethics', p. 74.

> activity of creating myths, concepts, and images to describe and illuminate human existence.[47]

Yet, despite acknowledging the importance of imaginative construction for Murdoch's philosophy, Antonaccio chooses a conceptual approach to Murdoch. In *Picturing the Human* she distils from Murdoch's scattered writings the systematic position of 'reflexive realism'.

Picturing the Human has thus undoubtedly made a significant contribution to Murdoch's recognition as philosopher. By fitting Murdoch into an existing framework Antonaccio has not only translated the arguments into a systematic whole, but also given Murdoch's work a status it has frequently been denied. It is likened to the work of such established philosophers as Descartes and Kant. *Picturing the Human* has also directed the present research in particular in the beginning. Certain assumptions I now consider mine originated in reading Antonaccio's book. This is in particular true for the importance of the ontological proof in Murdoch's philosophical thinking. Antonaccio is not the only one to attest to the importance for this proof for Murdoch's thought, but she does provide the most extensive reading of it.

Nevertheless, while pursuing this research points of divergence have emerged. In particular I question whether understanding Murdoch as a reflexive realist satisfactorily acknowledges her originality and creativity. By positioning Murdoch's work within an existing framework Antonaccio has not only provided status and recognition, but also overlooked some of its original, imaginative and comic features. By disregarding the fiction Antonaccio in a way endorses Magee's strict distinction between philosophy and literature.

This thesis differs from Antonaccio in considering Murdoch's contribution to philosophy in closer relation to her interest in literature and her practise as a novelist. It argues that Murdoch is an important philosopher, *because* she has not confined herself to philosophy. In order to encompass the truths from literature in her philosophical writing, it becomes literary and incorporates literary elements as metaphor, imagery and imagination. This incorporation, I argue, has significant consequences when regarding the scope and nature of her argument.

The present research starts from a question or from questions Murdoch herself poses on different occasions. I consider these the central questions of her oeuvre:

> What is a good man like? How can we make ourselves morally better? *Can* we make ourselves morally better?[48]

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[47] Antonaccio, *Picturing the Human*, p. 22.

[48] Murdoch, 'On 'God' and 'Good'', p. 342. Compare Murdoch, 'The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts', p. 364 and p. 368. Murdoch uses 'man' when speaking of the whole human race. In chapter two it is argued that she

These are the questions, Murdoch writes, 'the philosopher should try to answer.'[49]

The addition that 'the philosopher should try to answer' these questions reveals Murdoch's assessment of contemporary philosophy. Philosophers *should* try to answer these questions yet, Murdoch would maintain, in current philosophy the questions are neither posed nor answered. On the contrary, ethics and moral philosophy have almost been forced out of philosophy.[50] And even the few philosophers who are concerned with ethics do not ask questions about becoming morally better. Rather, their intention is to provide neutral descriptions of different forms of morality, concentrating on the notions of will and decision.

Murdoch, in contrast, considers it impossible to provide such neutral descriptions. She objects to the way in which the objective of neutrality has substantially affected the language used. At the beginning of 'The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts' Murdoch argues against attempts of what she calls 'modern behaviourist philosophy' to divide metaphors into non-metaphorical components:

> One of the motives of the attempt is a wish to 'neutralize' moral philosophy, to produce a philosophical discussion of morality which does not take sides. Metaphors often carry a moral charge, which analysis in simpler and plainer terms is designed to remove. This too seems to me to be misguided. Moral philosophy cannot avoid taking sides, and would-be neutral philosophers merely take sides surreptitiously.[51]

Murdoch strongly objects to any attempt to neutralise moral philosophy. In different essays she persistently tries to show how the assumed neutral views of the world are not neutral after all, but instead assume a particular set of values.[52]

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considers the position of 'man' to be universal, whereas 'woman' is not. I do not comment on this use of these words apart from the designated pages in chapter two. In my own writing I try to avoid using concepts which apply to considerably less people than intended.

[49] Murdoch, 'On 'God' and 'Good'', p. 342.

[50] Murdoch, 'On 'God' and 'Good'', p. 339: 'Empiricism, especially in the form given to it by Russell, and later by Wittgenstein, thrust ethics almost out of philosophy. ... Ethics took place in this scene. After puerile attempts to classify moral statements as exclamations or expressions of emotion, a more sophisticated neo-Kantianism with a utilitarian atmosphere has been developed. ... The cult of ordinary language goes with the claim to be neutral. ... Linguistic analysis claims simply to give a philosophical description of the human phenomenon of morality, without making any moral judgments. In fact the resulting picture of human conduct has a clear moral bias.'

[51] Murdoch, 'The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts', p. 363.

[52] See Diamond, 'Fact and Value', on the importance of Murdoch's criticism of the distinction between fact and value. Diamond points out that Murdoch was one of the first to criticise 'two closely related ideas', 'accepted as virtually unquestionable' in the 1950s: 'that it is a logical error to attempt to infer any evaluative conclusion from factual premises, and hat there is a fundamental distinction between fact and value.' (Diamond, '"We Are Perpetually

Instead of aiming at neutrality, Murdoch argues, moral philosophy should do two things. First, it should provide a realistic picture of human beings and secondly recommend an ideal.[53] In recommending an ideal, but also in its "realistic" picture of human beings Murdoch's position is significantly different from that of her contemporaries. The "realistic" picture of human beings Murdoch provides is, as she describes herself, 'rather depressing' and could not be more removed from 'the world in which people play cricket, cook cakes, make simple decisions, remember their childhood and go to the circus' of contemporary analytical philosophy[54]:

> [H]uman beings are naturally selfish [which] seems true on the evidence, wherever and wherever we look at them, in spite of a very small number of apparent exceptions. About the quality of this selfishness modern psychology has had something to tell us. The psyche is a historically determined individual relentlessly looking after itself. In some ways it resembles a machine; in order to operate it needs sources of energy, and it is predisposed to certain patterns of activity. The area of its vaunted freedom of choice is not usually very great. One of its pastimes is day-dreaming. It is reluctant to face unpleasant realities. Its consciousness is not normally a transparent glass through which it views the world, but a cloud of more or less fantastic reverie designed to protect the psyche from pain. It constantly seeks consolation, either through imagined inflation or self or through fictions of a theological nature.[55]

'Selfish' is the crucial word in Murdoch's description of human beings. Human beings are very selfish, concerned with their own anxieties, safety and well-being, and in preserving themselves they rather act like a machine: 'The area of its vaunted freedom of choice is not usually very great.' Murdoch considers this description self-evident, 'true on the evidence, whenever and wherever we look at them.' Such references to the obvious one often encounters in Murdoch's

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Moralists", p. 79) In the conclusion of this part Diamond outlines points where Murdoch's work is still relevant for contemporary analytical philosophy, in particular her understanding of fiction.

[53] 'It should be realistic. Human nature, as opposed to the natures of other hypothetical spiritual beings, should be suitably considered in any discussion of morality. Secondly, since an ethical system cannot but commend an ideal, it should commend a worthy ideal. Ethics should not be merely an analysis of ordinary mediocre conduct, it should be a hypothesis about good conduct and about how it can be achieved.' (Murdoch, 'The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts', p. 363-4) In the earlier discussion of the notion of 'reflexive realism' it was argued that this notion of 'realism' can be understood in different ways, hence the quotation marks around the word in the subsequent sentences. See also the discussion of realism in chapter four.

[54] The image of cricket playing and cake eating comes from Murdoch, *Sartre: Romantic Rationalist*, p. 78-79. It is a description of Ryle's *The Concept of Mind.*

[55] Murdoch, 'The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts', p. 364.

writing. She frequently uses words like 'simply', or 'surely'. These words often designate the 'realistic picture' which philosophy should acknowledge.[56]

The modern psychology which Murdoch refers to, is mainly the work of Freud. Murdoch is reluctant to call herself a 'Freudian', but adopts his 'important discovery about the human mind'. This discovery Murdoch describes with the theological terms of original sin and fallen man:

> modern psychology has provided us with what might be called a doctrine of original sin, a doctrine which most philosophers either deny (Sartre), ignore (Oxford and Cambridge), or attempt to render innocuous (Hampshire). … One may say that what [Freud] presents us with us a realistic and detailed picture of the fallen man.[57]

In Freud Murdoch recognises her 'depressing' image of human beings. This image she considers not 'anything very new, since partially similar views have been expressed before in philosophy, as far back as Plato.'[58] So, this image of human beings is not a creation of Freud, or Murdoch. Rather, it is an insight almost lost with the recent decline of religion. For Murdoch, Freud merely retrieves rather than creates this image. Murdoch does not consider these insights Christian, but rather insights also expressed by Christianity.

When this is indeed the state human beings are in, it is obvious why Murdoch considers it impossible for moral philosophers to remain neutral. For to provide neutral descriptions of different forms of morality, when faced with this unfortunate state of being, is to ignore what Murdoch regards as obvious reality. It is also a moral decision, namely the decision not to get involved, in which the reality is (consciously) ignored, whereas one could also decide to try to, as Murdoch puts it, 'defeat' 'the enemy', which is 'the fat relentless ego.'[59]

Philosophers, according to Murdoch, should be engaged in this 'fight with the enemy', as she phrases it dramatically. Indeed, for Murdoch it has become all the more important for

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[56] See also chapter three, in particular the discussion of M and D.

[57] Murdoch, 'On 'God' and 'Good'', p. 341. Several works have in recent years provided an account of Murdoch's ambiguous relationship with Freud and psychoanalysis. J. Turner, *Murdoch vs. Freud: A Freudian Look at an Anti-Freudian* (New York: Lang, 1993 (American University Studies. Series 4, English Language and Literature, vol. 146)) provides a psychoanalytic reading of eight of Murdoch's novels. Turner distinguishes different reasons why Murdoch distances herself from Freud so strictly. She distrust the emphasis put on introspection, fearing that the other will disappear in this process. In addition, Turner argues, '[Freud], too, is a father-figure she is emulating and castrating in order to be effective as herself.' (Turner, *Murdoch vs. Freud*, p. 12) This last remark indicates the disappointing turn the readings of Murdoch's novels take. Based on admittedly little biographical information Turner reads Murdoch's novels from assumptions about the relationship between her and her parents. I find his readings rather constrained. He ignores possible arguments against Freudian ideas in favour of personal analysis.

[58] Murdoch, 'On 'God' and 'Good'', p. 341.

philosophers to do so, because of what she calls 'the collapse of religion'. Religion shared with moral philosophy this aim of combating against the fat relentless ego and its assumed collapse makes it all the more important for moral philosophy to undertake this task.[60]

Murdoch does not substantiate her assumption that religion, and by religion is meant the Christian religion, is disappearing. She admits that the assumption 'that 'there is no God' and that the influence of religion is waning rapidly' may be challenged.[61] However, this challenge does not affect her thought, because such a challenge, she would argue, does not acquit moral philosophy of its task to consider the question of becoming morally better. The disappearance of religion merely makes it all the more urgent for moral philosophy to do so. Murdoch is writing for a growing number of people for whom religion, in particular Christianity, no longer provides any help or direction when they looks for answers to the question 'How can we make ourselves morally better?'. In 'On 'God' and 'Good'" Murdoch refers to these people as 'those who are not religious believers'. Her own relation to Christianity she abridges to 'a neo-Christian or Buddhist-Christian or Christian fellow traveller.'[62]

Her concern for the disappearance of religion underlines both her fiction and her philosophy. From *The Bell* onwards her literary imagination forcefully reveals this preoccupation. The novels may feature nuns, priests and even bishops who are often in doubt about their calling, but very few ordinary churchgoers. *The Bell* in particular provides a most powerful image of the situation Murdoch considers her readers to be in: an interim period, the time of the angels.[63] *The Bell* features two communities: one of nuns and another, next to the abbey, of people who belong neither in a religious order nor to the world. The latter have limited access to the abbey, only some of them are allowed to enter and then only when they are called for. This limitation is however in a way self-imposed. The youngest member once climbs into the convent, imagining 'a picture of nuns fleeing from him with piercing screams [or] nuns leaping upon him like bacchantes.'[64] Instead, he meets a very friendly nun, who invites him to try the swing and shows him that the door is not locked at all.[65]

Murdoch's concern with Christian imagery in her novels has invited various responses, in particular from theologians. Jansen at the beginning of his chapter on Murdoch points out how the identification of Murdoch as a 'religious writer' is interpreted very differently:

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[59] Murdoch, 'On 'God' and 'Good'", p. 342.
[60] Murdoch, 'On 'God' and 'Good'", p. 337.
[61] Murdoch, 'On 'God' and 'Good'", p. 361.
[62] See respectively Murdoch, 'On 'God' and 'Good'", p. 344 and Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p. 419.
[63] This is the title of one novel, which features a rectory of an atheist priest isolated from the world by permanent fog. It is also a term used by the philosopher Rozanov to characterise the present era. (Murdoch, *The Philosopher's Pupil*, p. 187)
[64] Murdoch, *The Bell*, p. 177.

For Elizabeth Dipple, the religious character of Murdoch's novels consists in spiritual discernment of "bourgeois complacency and prejudice." Suguna Ramanathan argues that "... [Murdoch] penetrates to the very heart of Christianity and interprets it to the contemporary world in terms which it will find acceptable." Yet a third point of view is offered by Peter Hawkins who has recently purported to find in Murdoch's novels "the strange possibility that an avowedly non-Christian writer, using Christian language and tradition for her own different ends, can produce novels of powerful and genuine Christian interpretation."[66]

Even though Murdoch may be 'an avowedly non-Christian writer', her novels can be interpreted in quite different ways, ranging from the 'spiritual' to the 'Christian'. This variety in interpretation may be understood as affirmation of the strength of her art. However, Jansen cautions against interpretations favouring one's own intention over those of the author.

The readings which consider Murdoch's novels as reinterpretation of Christianity interestingly contrast to Murdoch's understanding of contemporary literature, expressed in different essays. In this sense she is a rather odd companion for those interested in the relation between literature and theology. Murdoch has little belief in contemporary literature. Her emphatic statement that '[f]or both the collective and the individual salvation of the human race, art is doubtless more important than philosophy, and literature most important of all' is about literature from the nineteenth century, rather than contemporary art.[67] Of course, this general judgement allows for felicitous exceptions, and her own novels may be those.

Murdoch may not have much esteem for contemporary literature, yet she cherishes particular nineteenth century novels. This literature she considers most important for the salvation of the human race, after the collapse of religion. It is her most important tool when considering the question which I consider the central question of her oeuvre: 'How can we make ourselves morally better?'. The answer concerns an understanding of consciousness in relation to an external reality. Literature is not the only tool in answering this question, but its importance is

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[65] Murdoch, *The Bell*, p. 180.
[66] H. Jansen, *Laughter Among the Ruins: Postmodern Comic Approaches to Suffering* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang Verlag, 2001) p. 61. The quotations are taken from E. Dipple, *Iris Murdoch: Work for the Spirit* (London: Methuen, 1982) p. 3, S. Ramanathan, *Iris Murdoch: Figures of Good* (Houndsmills, Basingstoke, London: MacMillan Press, 1990) p. 23, and P.S. Hawkins, *The Language of Grace: Flannery O'Connor, Walker Percy and Iris Murdoch* (Cambridge, Antonaccio: Cowley Publications, 1993) p. 91.
[67] Murdoch, 'On 'God' and 'Good'", p. 362.

signified in its presence and influence in Murdoch's philosophical writing when considering this question.

This thesis argues that Murdoch's understanding of this literature provides the position in her philosophical writing from which she criticises contemporary philosophy, in particular linguistic analysis and existentialism, and which inspires her own philosophy. From incidental remarks in early essays literature develops into an intrinsic part of the argument. The thesis further argues that the form of the philosophical argument changes accordingly, featuring images, imagery and metaphors. This form of *imaginative philosophy* receives its fullest expression in Murdoch's understanding of imagination and fantasy in relation to the Good.

Before I proceed to distinguish the different chapters of this thesis, it should be noted that the terms used above - imagination, image, imagery - are notoriously difficult to define or describe. This point is evidenced when studying imagination, and it has indeed proven to be a popular point to make at the beginning of any book or article on imagination. Thus Strawson at the beginning of an article which has inspired other works on imagination writes:

> The uses, and applications, of the terms 'image', 'imagine', 'imagination', 'imaginative', and so forth make up a very diverse and scattered family. Even this image of a family seems too definite. It would be a matter of more than difficulty exactly to define and list the family's members, let alone establish their relationships of parenthood and cousinhood.[68]

Because it is more than difficult to define and distinguish these related words, Strawson briefly acknowledges different areas of association. He subsequently pursues to connect two particular modes in which the word imagination is used, and thus to acquire better understanding the notion of imagination.[69]

Similarly, the pursuit of this thesis, in particular its second and fourth chapter, further develops understanding of the notions of imagination, image and imagery by considering Murdoch's understanding of these. Murdoch's understanding proceeds from what she assumes to be an immediate understanding of imagination and imagery. Imagination is not always described in detail, but also introduced by urging her readers to consider - what she regards as - great art:

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[68] P. Strawson, 'Imagination and Perception' (L. Foster, J.W. Swanson (eds.), *Experience and Theory*. London: Duckworth, 1971, p. 31-54), p. 31.

[69] The three areas distinguished are 'the area in which imagination is linked with *image* and image is understood as *mental image* ... the area in which imagination is associated with invention ... the area in which imagination is linked with false belief...'. In the remainder of the article he is intend to connect Kant's use of imagination in *The Critique of Pure Reason* to perceptual recognition. (Strawson, 'Imagination and Perception', p. 31)

the novels of Tolstoy, the paintings of Velasquez and Titian.[70] This understanding inspires the present preliminary understanding of imagination as a faculty of the mind, at work in particular in art and literature, but not only there. This faculty creates images, examples of which have been mentioned in this chapter, as for example in the image of human beings retrieved from Freud, or the image taken from *The Bell.*[71] Images collectively are called imagery.

The argument of this thesis proceeds as follows. The second chapter considers the presence of imagery in philosophical discourse and more generally the often problematic relationship between philosophy and rhetoric. The chapter features a study of the work of Michèle le Doeuff and her notion of the philosophical imaginary. The work of Le Doeuff is of importance for two reasons. It provides first a general consideration of the relationship between philosophy and imagery, and secondly methodological considerations for regarding the imagery in Murdoch's philosophical writing.

The third chapter examines the role of literature and in particular of character in Murdoch's early work. It considers the role of these in the confrontation with contemporary analytical and existentialist philosophy. It thus considers Murdoch's earlier writings, from the first essays in the beginning of the 1950s to 'The Idea of Perfection' from 1964. This last essay also features the image of a mother M and her daughter-in-law D, which has taken a prominent place in commentaries on Murdoch's work. The discussion of this image in this chapter wonders to what extent Murdoch is able to uphold an understanding of the inner life and of transcendent reality.

The fourth chapter discusses the notion of imagination as in a way the successor to Murdoch's understanding of character. It presents the distinction between good imagination and bad fantasy and Murdoch's discussion of the notion in Kant and Plato. By leaving Kant's understanding of the aesthetic imagination out of the small corner Kant had allowed it, Murdoch presents an epistemology in which different faculties are no longer strictly distinguished. She subsequently considers Plato's understanding of the Good not only as the means of guiding this imagination, and distinguishing it from fantasy, but also as a source of inspiration for high imagination.

The fifth and last chapter considers this notion of the Good. It argues that understanding of this notion of the Good needs elaboration of Murdoch's concept of religion. The discussion of *Acastos* presents the particular point of view with which Murdoch considers religion. The

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[70] See for example Murdoch, 'On 'God' and 'Good'', p. 353, where the imperative 'consider' urges the reader to look at Velasquez or Titian, or to read Shakespeare or Tolstoy. See chapter four for a more thorough discussion of this and similar parts.
[71] See p. 18 and p. 19 respectively.

chapter proceeds to discuss her perception of the Ontological Proof, wondering in particular about the position of the fool.

3. Reading Murdoch

Reading Murdoch's texts can be an exhilarating and also exasperating activity. I have already noted that Murdoch's texts and in particular *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* are difficult to read. She refers to many different texts, from philosophy, literature as well as theology. Especially when first reading her texts, or when unfamiliar with Murdoch's intellectual tradition a reader encounters various unfamiliar arguments, ideas and thinkers, which are often referred to only in passing.

Understanding of these ideas and thinkers seems assumed, but it would be impossible to study all these different ideas as well as Murdoch's use of them. Even a limited study may lead one ultimately from Murdoch's writing, for the ideas and thinkers she refers to are often of great complexity. Moreover, her use of texts and ideas does not always ask for a thorough study of the thinkers and ideas she mentions. It is not uncommon that statements are not based on any thorough study, even though it is suggested differently.[72]

Also, in considering Murdoch's work I encountered a variety of thinkers, which were sometimes unfamiliar to me, or discussed in an unfamiliar way. To this difficulty of interpretation another one is added, because I consider texts from a period of more than forty years, on a wide variety of topics. Most explanation of the way I have handled these difficulties is to be found in the different chapter, where I comment on the difficulties encountered when reading the text and I explain my reasons for reading the text in the way I do. I consider the texts Murdoch refers to sometimes, but not always thoroughly. Generally speaking I have chosen to stay with Murdoch's text as much as possible. Disputable interpretations are noted, but I am more concerned with the way in which Murdoch's interpretation affects her thinking, rather than with any confrontation with another, more generally accepted interpretation. My concern has been with the development of Murdoch's thought and I have been guided in these interpretations by what she considers important herself: literature, metaphor and imagery.

Even though I am concerned with literature and imagery I do not provide a lengthy discussion of any of Murdoch's novels, though I occasionally refer to them. I do not regard

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[72] In an earlier version of this thesis I added here within brackets that I doubted that Murdoch ever read *The Critique of Pure Reason*, basing this doubt on her reading of Kant's notion of imagination discussed in chapter four. In between first submitting my thesis and defending it I have had the opportunity to look at her library, presently held in the Iris Murdoch Centre at Kingston University. I found that it contains a well annotated copy of *The Critique of Pure Reason*. I thus revoke my earlier supposition, and I am excited by the possibility of new research to be done once this collection is fully catalogued.

Murdoch's novels as well as her consideration of literature as spheres separate from the philosophical concerns. Yet, a lengthy discussion of the novels is not indispensable for my research. It focuses on Murdoch's understanding of literature in her philosophical writing. Though I consider her considerations of literature most likely to proceed from her own experience as a novelist, it would be hard to decide in what way. I refer to the novels mainly to argue the pervasiveness of certain ideas in Murdoch's thought. More importantly, this study does not aim to assess the philosophical texts in relation to the novels, as the novels have been assessed in relation to the philosophy. Rather, it intends to show Murdoch's imaginative philosophy, which is a form of philosophy inspired by her understanding of literature, as a important challenge to many supposition about philosophy, and makes ample use of imagery. I examine the presence of imagery in philosophy. Such examination may seem unusual if not recalcitrant, as it can go against the grain of the text or of ordinary interpretations. As the work of Le Doeuff argues, such characteristics are neither unexpected nor regrettable. The next chapter introduces her thought as inspiration for reading Murdoch's philosophy.

CHAPTER TWO

MICHELE LE DOEUFF AND THE PHILOSOPHICAL IMAGINARY: WOMEN, PHILOSOPHY, REASON, ETC.

1. Introduction

The previous chapter argued that Murdoch entrusts philosophy with a task occasioned by the decline of religion. In 'On 'God' and 'Good'" she urges philosophy to rescue the values involved in this 'collapse of religion'. In *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* she contends that in order to change Christianity 'into something that can be generally believed ... it might also be necessary for philosophers to become theologians and theologians to become philosophers, and this is not very likely to happen either.'[1] Philosophy's main concern becomes the question 'How can we make ourselves morally better?'. An answer to this question, I shall argue, comes most importantly in an understanding of self in relation to the Good, which involves the use of images, imagery and imagination.

In her last work of philosophy published in 1992 Murdoch considers it unlikely that philosophy is to assume this task. In the philosophy she encountered at the beginning of her career - linguistic analysis and existentialism, to be discussed in the subsequent chapter - she had great difficulties merely raising the possibility. Any discussion of the notion of the Good was likely to have been frowned upon. Linguistic analysis, on the one hand, is modelled after a positivistic idea of science, in which there is no room for a more substantial understanding of self or for metaphysical concepts as God or the Good. In different articles Murdoch pictures how Moore's successors banished the Good from philosophy. Existentialism, on the other hand, seems reluctant to ever grant any authority to anything but the individual consciousness itself.

The difficulty Murdoch faced when introducing the Good has been more complicated than presenting an unappreciated subject matter. Linguistic analysis in particular did not only not regard the Good as some sort of 'property', but also employed a language, and favoured a form of argumentation which thwarted any consideration of the Good, or a more substantial understanding of self.[2] So, one finds that Murdoch is not only proposing consideration of an unfashionable topic, but also constantly probing what philosophy should and could be like, what is proper philosophical questioning and proper philosophical argumentation.

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[1] Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p. 419.

[2] Murdoch considers Moore to have initiated, though not endorsed this understanding of good, by distinguishing the question 'what things are good" from the question 'what does good mean'. Yet Moore, Murdoch argues, 'was not wholly of the modern time in that although he pointed out that 'good' was not the second name of any natural or metaphysical property, he could not rid himself of the conviction that it was nevertheless the name of *a* property, the unanalysible non-natural property of goodness...'. (Murdoch, 'Metaphysics and Ethics', p. 60) See for a

In doing so, Murdoch is concerned with an aspect of philosophy, which has been disregarded by many philosophers. Even to suggest that philosophy prefers a form of language or argumentation which is unfriendly to certain topics is an intricate thing to do. It suggests that the language and arguments used are not neutral to the object of argumentation, and that the author intends to convince his or her readers by other than pure argumentation. It presumes the presence of rhetoric in philosophy.

This suggestion is not easy to maintain, for it counters a conviction long held in the history of philosophy. Especially, but certainly not exclusively in the analytical tradition philosophy is considered to be contrary to rhetoric.[3] Indeed, it partly receives its identity from not being rhetorical. Rhetoric is regarded as superfluous, even inimical to philosophy. It is hereby assumed that it is possible to fully distinguish philosophy and rhetoric. Yet, the rhetoric Murdoch discerns in analytical philosophy is one which is intrinsically bound with the argument and cannot be entirely separated from it. She denies philosophy its assumed position of neutrality.

The opposition between philosophy and rhetoric is found throughout philosophy's history and not limited to linguistic analysis. In this chapter I discuss the implication of this long held conviction in general terms. In particular I am concerned with the presence of images and imagery in philosophical texts. My discussion focuses on the work of the French philosopher Michèle Le Doeuff and her notion of the philosophical imaginary.

Le Doeuff is a philosopher and also a feminist thinker. She holds that "thinking philosophically' and 'being a feminist' appear as one and the same attitude'. In *Hipparchia's Choice* she argues that it is not just possible to think the two together, but even that '[b]eing a feminist is also a way of integrating the fact of being a philosopher. Because for two centuries a feminist has been a woman who does not leave others to think for her...'.[4] Still, I first consider objections made against regarding Murdoch's work from a feminist perspective. I do so not just because I find that these objections tend to come up anyway, but also because underlying such objections, as well as underlying Murdoch's understanding of feminist thinking, are presuppositions about philosophy and rhetoric central to this chapter. These considerations well introduce the chapter's central concerns of the relation between rhetoric and philosophy. Starting from a discussion of feminism, philosophy and rationality I proceed to imagery in philosophy and the work of Le Doeuff. In particular I discuss her methodological propositions for considering imagery in

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discussion of the differences between Moore's and Murdoch's understanding of the Good, Antonaccio, *Picturing the Human*, p. 116-123.

[3] However, Le Doeuff's work confirms that the strict distinction between rhetoric and philosophy is not absent from the work of philosophers on the continent.

[4] Le Doeuff, *Hipparchia's Choice: An Essay Concerning Women, Philosophy, etc.*, translated by T. Selous (Oxford UK & Cambridge MA: Blackwell, 1991) p. 29.

philosophy. I finally apply these to the image of the fool, which I consider to be Le Doeuff's founding myth.

2. Women, Philosophy, Rationality

It may seem immaterial to observe in a study on Murdoch that for a long period women were not allowed to enter universities and study philosophy in an academic environment. Murdoch did not write about feminism. Only when questioned in interviews she commented on it, and then merely to admit in general terms that she regarded it of great importance.[5] When studying her work it is easy to forget that for women to study and teach philosophy at a university, as she did, was a rather new thing to do. Indeed, Murdoch actually experienced some of the past's regulated inequality when she was at Cambridge. The University did not grant degrees to women until 1948. Murdoch was there a year before.

There are not many discussions of Murdoch's work in relation to feminist philosophy.[6] Indeed Murdoch - always impressive when it comes to the interpretation of her work - has dissuaded critics from considering it from a feminist perspective. Griffin writes that 'Murdoch does not want to acknowledge any gender difference ... while being aware of the fact that Western culture has been dominated by men.'[7] When asked about her preference of male narrators Murdoch explains:

> I think I want to write about things on the whole where it does not matter whether you're male or female, in which case you'd better be male, because male represents ordinary human beings, unfortunately, as things stand at the moment, whereas a woman is always a woman![8]

Murdoch may express her sympathy for feminism and her discontent with the situation where women only represent women. However, the quotation above also suggests a strong sense of resignation and disinterest to explore this situation.

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[5] G. Griffin, *The Influence of the Writings of Simone Weil on the Fiction of Iris Murdoch* (San Francisco: Mellen University Press, 1993) p. 6-7.

[6] There are a few commentaries on her novels from a feminist perspective. (For a discussion of these works, reading the novels from a feminist perspective see Griffin, *The Influence of the Writings of Simone Weil on the Fiction of Iris* Murdoch, p. 7- 13.) I know of only one short reference to her systematic writing: M. Deveraux, 'Feminist Aesthetics', in J. Levinson (ed.), *Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003) p. 647-666. Murdoch's work is here mentioned as possible subject for future research.

[7] See Griffin, *The Influence of the Writings of Simone Weil on the Fiction of Iris Murdoch*, p. 7.

[8] J.-L. Chevalier (ed.), *Recontres avec Iris Murdoch*, p. 82, as quoted by D. Johnson, *Iris Murdoch* (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1987) p. xii.

This emphatic statement made Johnson practically apologise in her *Iris Murdoch* for using feminist theory:

> My aim in this short book has been to suggest a critical evaluation of the novels based on close reading and located within the context of contemporary feminist debate about the nature of 'women's writing'.
> Such an approach, especially when conducted within the narrow limits of a very short book, will necessarily appear partial and *eccentric* (that is, at a tangent to the dominant cultural tradition in which Iris Murdoch writes). I undertook the work with some misgivings, being particular anxious to avoid what might be construed as a 'narrowly feminist' reading.[9]

In her 'short' or 'very short' book Johnson aims at placing Murdoch within a debate that is different from Murdoch's own tradition. Both the modest length of the work and the different angle introduce her misgivings for doing so.

However, it is not clear what Johnson's misgivings are. In her discussion of Johnson's book Griffin appropriately remarks that '[o]ne cannot help wondering (and these questions remain unsolved in the text) why [Johnson] was "particularly anxious to avoid", what she assumes would "construe", and what she takes to be "narrowly feminist reading"'.[10] One wonders whether Johnson would have had similar misgivings if her approach had been equally un-Murdochian yet not feminist. Does Johnson think that feminist readings *as such* are more likely to be narrow, or that a feminist reading *of Murdoch's work in particular* is more vulnerable to such criticism?

Still, Johnson's qualms do not stand on their own. Rather, they reflect the atmosphere surrounding Murdoch and her work. There seems here no need to be reminded of the long and pervasive bias of much of Western Culture against intellectual women. On the other side of the Canal, Simone de Beauvoir, Murdoch's senior by only eleven years, was 'taken in hand' by Sartre and only in recent studies has she been established as an independent thinker.[11] In the year that Murdoch went to Oxford Virginia Woolf published *Three Guineas*, and yet Murdoch can confess

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[9] Johnson, *Iris Murdoch*, p. xi.
[10] Griffin, *The Influence of the Writings of Simone Weil on the Fiction of Iris Murdoch*, p. 12.
[11] See for example K. Vintges, *Filosofie als passie: het denken van Simone de Beauvoir* (Amsterdam: Prometheus, 1992), and M. Le Doeuff, *Hipparchia's Choice*, in particular the second and third notebook. The quotation 'taking in hand' she discusses in this third notebook. It is taken from Simone de Beauvoir, *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter.*

to be 'not very interested in the female predicament'.[12] Because of Murdoch's own reluctance to consider her position as a woman philosopher and writer they have hardly been discussed at all.

Instead, it has been considered to be no more than normal, that at the time when Murdoch started her philosophical career Oxford and Cambridge employed quite a number of female scholars. Among them were prominent philosophers, friends and colleagues of Murdoch. With Elizabeth Anscombe Murdoch shared a passion for the work of Wittgenstein and she dedicated *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* to her. With Mary Midgley she vied for the same job at St. Anne's and from their studies at Sommerville Philippa Foot was a life long friend.[13]

These women seldom addressed their novel existence as female philosophers employed by a college. Yet another Oxford philosopher, Mary Warnock, has done so. Both in her *Women Philosophers* and in her memoirs she comments on the gender of these philosophers. In the memoirs she is rather brief and evasive. She notes that Foot, Anscombe and Murdoch are all three 'remarkable and original women', and adds: '[o]n whether their originality, had anything to do with gender, I cannot make a final judgement, but I suspect that women are less prone to jump on bandwagons than at least some of their male colleagues, and more reluctant to abandon common sense'.[14] This remark seems based on an everyday psychological observation, even though it may be stretched to support Le Doeuff's suggestion that feminism and philosophy as a form of thinking for oneself are indeed very close.

However, this suggestion does not find any support from Warnock in her collection of essays by female philosophers, where she naturally has to comment on 'women and philosophy'.[15] Yet, for one who has compiled this collection she is surprisingly reluctant to consider the possibility that there would anything different to say about 'women and philosophy' than there is to be said about 'men and philosophy'. This is in particular clear when Warnock explains why she has included only a few feminist texts in the collection. She admits that much of what is written on 'the Women Question' would satisfy her 'criteria of generality and of the hoped-for explanation of phenomena; a great deal is concerned to go behind the superficial and to expose the presuppositions of society as a whole.' She mentions a number of works, 'all plausibly purporting to be philosophical'. However, they are not included for the following reasons:

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[12] In an interview with J.I. Biles, 'An Interview with Iris Murdoch', in *Studies in the Literary Imagination* XI (Fall 1978), p. 115-125. The quotation is taken from p. 119, as quoted by Griffin, *The Influence of the Writings of Simone Weil on the Fiction of Iris Murdoch*, p. 6.

[13] See Conradi, *Iris Murdoch: A Life* and also Warnock, *A Memoir*. The latter provides an intellectual as well as personal description of Anscombe, Murdoch, and Foot.

[14] Warnock, *A Memoir*, p. 37.

[15] With these words Le Doeuff describes the topic of *Hipparchia's Choice*. (Le Doeuff, *Hipparchia's Choice*, p. 3ff.)

yet, just as in the case with religion, there tends to be too much unexamined dogma in these writings, too much ill-concealed proselytising, too little objective analysis, to allow them to qualify for inclusion among philosophical writing proper. Moreover, as we look at these titles and others like them it becomes clear that they fail, after all, the test of generality. For the great subjects of philosophy, the nature of human knowledge, the limits of science, the foundations of morality or aesthetics, the relation between our language and the world, must be concerned with 'us' in the sense in which 'we' are all humans. The truths which philosophers seek must aim to be not merely generally, but objectively, even universally, true. Essentially, they must be gender-indifferent. ... And so, with some misgivings, I decided to represent the most famous and one of the earliest feminists, Mary Wollstonecraft, and no one else who published under that banner....
My other reason for omitting most writing that would be called specifically feminist is that I wanted to show the variety of philosophical topics on which women have written, and written well.[16]

Feminism for Warnock fails to be general enough for inclusion in a volume of philosophical texts. Her plea to include only writing which is universal seems to me one which many philosophers would support. Yet, Warnock seems unaware of the fact that this criterion used strictly would abandon many prominent works from the philosophical canon. Many texts consider only a privileged group, often of male Europeans, and thus are neither 'concerned with 'us' in the sense in which 'we' are all humans'.

Warnock's book, while being an interesting collection of texts, uncomfortably steers between two thoughts.[17] On the one hand, she has selected texts by women philosophers only, and it cannot have escaped her that the fact that there is no need for such a selection of texts by men is significant. The cover text wonders whether 'the woman philosopher [has] a distinctive voice'. On the other hand, however, the possibility that women may have a distinct voice is repudiated from the very beginning. The text on the cover states that the 'great subjects of philosophy ... are arguably gender indifferent since the search for truth is objective.' Warnock

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[16] M. Warnock, *Women Philosophers* (London: Everyman, 1996), p. xxxiii-xxxiv. Warnock does include Anne Conway, Catherine Cockburn, Mary Wollstonecraft, Harriet Martineau, The Hon. Victoria Lady Welby, Mary Whiton Calkins, L. Susan Stebbing (the first woman professor of philosophy in Britain and in this volume the only British academic preceding Murdoch), Susanne K. Langer, Hannah Arendt, Simone De Beauvoir, Iris Murdoch, Mary Midgley, G.E.M. Anscombe, Philippa Foot, Judith Jarvis Thomson, Onora O'Neill and Susan Haack.

[17] As reviews can hardly fail to notice. S. Gonzalez Arnal [review of M. Warnock, *Women Philosophers*], in *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 6-2 (1998), p. 306-8) is milder than B. Clack [review of M. Warnock, *Women*

then recognises that female and male philosophers are not equal in all respects, but her idea of philosophy prevents her from researching whether any possible difference may be significant.[18]

Warnock's selection bears out that women philosophers are still exceptional. For her, this exception is only one of numbers. There have not been many women philosophers, yet presently this limited number will be only something of the past as women are now allowed to pursue academic careers. Warnock cannot allow any change to philosophy because of this growing number of women (and of individuals from other groups formerly excluded from pursuing academic careers), for then she would have to admit that philosophy has not been the quest of general truth she considers it to be. Admitting the change would diminish the image of philosophy. Feminist perspectives are too particular to qualify as philosophical reasoning proper.

I do not assume that Warnock here fully represents Foot's, Anscombe's or Murdoch's conception of women and philosophy. Her remarks on women philosophers writing on religion, for example, testify to the contrast, as they clearly dissent from Murdoch's interest in religion. Nor do I maintain that it is always necessary to remark on the gender of a philosopher. I use Warnock here for different reasons. Her work reveals a tension between recognising the different positions of women and men in philosophy, and at the same a desire to maintain philosophy's claim of universality. This tension I find also present in Murdoch's writing as well as in commentaries on her writing. Moreover, the tension is not just a difficulty within a philosophical discourse, but instead it concerns a central argument as well as anxiety in the history of philosophy. In order to conceive how profound this difficulty and this anxiety are I turn to an article by Alcoff, from a recent discussion of this problem.

Alcoff in her article 'Is the Feminist Critique of Reason Rational?' not only shows how these presuppositions are still prevalent, but she also considers the arguments as well as anxieties sustaining them. She engages in a discussion with recent articles by Nussbaum and Lovibond. [19] In a critique of feminist philosophy Nussbaum wonders whether it is correct to criticise the philosophical canon for being patriarchal, whether it is possible to critique philosophical

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Philosophers], in *Women's Studies International Forum*, 5-6 (1997), p. 452-3). Where the former speaks of 'wonder', the latter moves from 'limitations' to 'inadequacy' and 'poverty'.

[18] Warnock has included De Beauvoir, even though she had doubts about doing so, not because she does not consider De Beauvoir a philosopher, but rather because she thinks it impossible to distinguish her thoughts from those of Sartre. Interestingly, she finds at the end of the introduction that despite the omission of feminist texts, still a disproportionally large number of texts is concerned with one topic, i.e. moral or political philosophy. Warnock remarks: 'This, I suppose, lends some colour to the view prevalent in the 1950s and 1960s ... that moral philosophy was a woman's subject, a kind of soft option. It is certainly true that there are many women who are good at moral philosophy. But this is not to say that women have not worked successfully in other fields as well.' She concludes: 'In the end, I have not found any clear 'voice' shared by women philosophers. ... [T]hey turn out, unsurprisingly, to be as various as their male colleagues. I believe this is a matter not for disappointment but for pride.' (Warnock, *Women Philosophers*, p. xlvii)

[19] See M.C. Nussbaum, 'Feminists and Philosophy', in *New York Review of Books* 20 October 1994, p. 59-63, and S. Lovibond, 'Feminism and the 'Crisis of Rationality'' in *New Left Review* 207 (Sept/Oct 1994), p. 72-86).

reasoning while at the same time using this reason as means of critique, and lastly if such a critique does not undermine the process of emancipation. She fears that by abandoning reason women lose the means to claim their equality.[20]

The accusation that the philosophical canon is patriarchal has been around for some time and thanks to years of research there now exist impressive collections of examples of misogynist quotations as well as of their opposite.[21] Alcoff provides ample of both, opposing Nussbaum's collection and her own. Nussbaum 'cites Mill's argument for women's liberation, Plato's against the use of convention to maintain women's exclusion from sports, and Aristotle's emphasis on the role of emotion in practical reasoning.' Alcoff, in contrast, wonders if philosophy is at all concerned with truth when 'Aristotle explains that women are deformed males, when Rousseau advises to consult women's opinions only in bodily matters and never in matters of morality or understanding, when Kant jokes that a woman who reasons might as well have a beard, and when Hegel likens the differences between males and females to those between animals and plants'.[22] How is one to relate to these remarks, are they a mere triviality or do they imply a more important problem?

Alcoff describes how a common reaction when she was in school was to consider remarks as those from her list as 'relative trivialities, asides rather than central theses ... This explanation then justified the fact that these passages lay unattended to, passed over in class except perhaps to joke about in was which were usually discomforting (as if painful sexism was simply funny), but never examined for their relationship to the central ideas of the text.'[23] That this may be still the case in certain departments is partly explained by the dissatisfaction with the alternative conceived. This alternative discards the possibility that reason can be universal and independent.

Of the two authors Alcoff responds to, Nussbaum in particular seems to suggest that the alternative to this position is a radical banishment of philosophical reasoning, which she considers the acceptance of irrationalism. This position, which worries Nussbaum and Lovibond most, is that of radical feminism, a term introduced by Braidotti and adopted by Lovibond. Radical feminists, among whom Braidotti and Grosz, and Alcoff suggests also Irigaray, consider

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[20] L.M. Alcoff, 'Is the Feminist Critique of Reason Rational?' in *Philosophic Exchange* 26 (1995-96), p. 59-79. The quotations are taken from p. 59, 61-63.

[21] See for an extensive selection of philosophical writings about women - from Laotse, Konfuzius and Demokritos to Horkheimer, Marcuse and Gehlen - A. Stopczyk (ed.), *Was Philosophen über Frauen denken* (München: Matthes & Seitz Verlag, 1980).

[22] Alcoff, 'Is the Feminist Critique of Reason Rational?', p. 65 and p. 61 respectively. Nussbaum argues these are 'only temporary lapses of reasoning'.

[23] Alcoff, 'Is the Feminist Critique of Reason Rational?', p. 65.

reason as essentially tainted by 'complicity with the sexual power structure'. Reason is beyond repair and radical feminism suggests a replacement of reason by a 'feminist symbolic'.[24]

In response, Alcoff challenges the limitations in Nussbaum's understanding of reason.[25] More importantly for the present discussion she offers a third possibility, next to the alternatives outlined above. She first illustrates how the feminist project of rethinking reason and enlarging the understanding of reason may be situated within a long philosophical tradition of criticising reason, and not in opposition to it.[26] Referring to MacIntyre she argues that a historicist understanding of reason does not imply relativism: 'to locate an epistemology or a concept of reason in a social history … is not to say that it cannot understand or communicate with other traditions, that is it shares no common ground with them upon which it can criticize their positions or learn from them how its own positions are limited. Nor does it follow that nothing we say represents the real.'[27] Rethinking reason is not restricted to feminist philosophers. It is a general philosophical activity.

In a most interesting footnote Alcoff wonders also whether the distinction between 'dutiful versus rebellious daughters' holds. This distinction is introduced by Braidotti, who positions herself with the latter, while Nussbaum may be assumed to join the former. Alcoff wonders, whether 'this trope of dutiful versus the rebellious progeny, representing as it does what is really a male oedipal scenario, can be correctly applied to any woman.' Referring to a Nye's *Philosophia*, on Rosa Luxembourg, Simone Weil and Hannah Arendt, who did not find either attitude in the thinkers, Alcoff concludes, that '[p]erhaps our female status as the disinherited may free us from the dialectic of the sons oscillating between loyalty and rebellion, and will make it possible to create a new relationship to the fathers, less caught in binaries, more capable of independence.'[28]

Lastly, while wondering why feminist philosophy has been singled out in receiving the criticism of being irrational Alcoff points out how the discussion is also troubled by a deep philosophical anxiety. This anxiety does not immediately disappear when noticed. From the examples given in the beginning of the article Alcoff shows herself not exempt from these. This is an anxiety held deeply, the 'the Philosophy/Rhetoric split we all intoned in graduate school as the primary legitimation for philosophy, that is philosophy's distinctiveness from and superiority over writing which aims primarily to persuade, which appeals to emotion, which supplants

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[24] Alcoff, 'Is the Feminist Critique of Reason Rational?', p. 66. The quotations are from Lovibond, 'Feminism and the 'Crisis of Rationality'', p. 76.
[25] Alcoff, 'Is the Feminist Critique of Reason Rational?', p. 62ff.
[26] Alcoff, 'Is the Feminist Critique of Reason Rational?', p. 63ff.
[27] Alcoff, 'Is the Feminist Critique of Reason Rational?', p. 69.
[28] Alcoff, 'Is the Feminist Critique of Reason Rational?', p. 77n.18.

aesthetic for logical criteria, or which conceals from view its ideological content or overriding strategic aim.'[29] In contrast to philosophy, rhetoric has been of old considered at its best as superfluous and at its worst as misleading.

So, in conclusion Alcoff pleads for 'philosophy ... to become more rhetorically self-conscious'.[30] Referring to Gadamer she introduces a 'dialogical model of truth. Here, the positivist model of knowing in which an active knowing agent confronts a passive object is reconceptualized as a conversation between participants all of whom have their own horizon or interpretive perspective.'[31] She concludes: 'If truth is understood as the product of an argument (involving two or more participants), then all the contributing elements of that argument need to be analysed within an epistemological characterisation of its results.'[32] The imagery, metaphors and myths of a philosophical text are part of this conversation.

This emphasis on the dialogical character is one which fits Murdoch's work well. Murdoch wrote dialogues, texts properly deserving this title, as well as many conversations between fictional characters in her novels. It has also been argued that her philosophical writing in general and *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* in particular is best characterised by a dialogical or mime-like character.[33]

Murdoch then occupies a complex position in between the two extremes discussed. When asked in interviews she argues, that because she is concerned with 'things on the whole' her main characters are males. When thus considering her novels Murdoch equates the male with the universal position.[34] She recognises the particularity of the position of women, but also retains the possibility of a universal position. Could one infer from these reflection on her novels, that in her philosophy she also regards philosophical reasoning as universal?

Murdoch does not commend on feminism in relation to philosophy, or on the presence of misogynist excerpts.[35] However, she exposes the assumed neutrality of arguments and does not hesitate to consider temperament a valid part of philosophy. Then again, like many philosophers, she is also imbued with anxiety about the split between philosophy and rhetoric. This is found in her writing, but most of all in interviews. Murdoch, other than Alcoff or Le

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[29] Alcoff, 'Is the Feminist Critique of Reason Rational?', p. 69
[30] Alcoff, 'Is the Feminist Critique of Reason Rational?', p. 70.
[31] Alcoff, 'Is the Feminist Critique of Reason Rational?', p. 71.
[32] Alcoff, 'Is the Feminist Critique of Reason Rational?', p. 71.
[33] See especially D. Tracy, 'Iris Murdoch and the Many Faces of Platonism' in M. Atonaccio and W. Schweiker (eds.), *Iris Murdoch and the Search for Human Goodness* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996) p. 54-75.
[34] Then again, the readings of for example Griffin and Johnson testify that her novels do not simply approve of this situation.
[35] I know of no occasion in which Murdoch comments on feminism and philosophy. Conradi notes that Murdoch read De Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* and considered it a book 'whose 'fierce war-like manner' [she] believed fifty years ahead of its time.' (Conradi, *Iris Murdoch*, p. 309) She does not discuss this book in her own writing.

Doeuff, never explicitly pursues the question of the split between rhetoric and philosophy. When questioned in interviews about aspects relating to this split, her arguments are confusing rather than elucidating in relation to her own writing.

To recognise the importance of rhetoric, in particular of imagery and imagination in Murdoch's philosophical work, I turn to the work of Le Doeuff and her notion of the philosophical imaginary. Le Doeuff addresses more extensively than Murdoch the presence of imagery in philosophical texts. In particular, she discusses the way in which philosophers' interest or disinterest in imagery decides their understanding of philosophy. In the first chapter the aim of the present thesis was described as presenting Murdoch's philosophy as a form of *imaginative philosophy*, thus expressing the importance of imagery and of imagination in Murdoch's thought. Reading Murdoch through Le Doeuff's notion of the *philosophical imaginary* highlights features of her work which a reading using her own vocabulary may leave more obscure. In particular, it reveals Murdoch's generous use of imagery throughout her philosophical works.

3. Philosophy, Metaphors and Imagery

That recognising the presence of imagery in philosophical texts may change one's expectation and understanding of philosophy becomes apparent at the introduction of the topic. A study on imagery and imagination in philosophical texts may be expected to define these concepts at its start. However, Murdoch nor Le Doeuff commence their work by decisively answering the question what images are, or what imagination is. Neither do they state fully what is and what is not philosophy. One way in which they uphold their positions as philosophers is by finding themselves competent companions: Le Doeuff claims that the Shakespearean fools she wanted to be when she was a child, 'were the distant heirs of Socrates' and Plato is for Murdoch 'the philosopher under whose banner [she is] fighting'.[36]

Even if they are excused for not defining philosophy - as they are certainly not the only philosophers to shy away from this question - a definition of images and imagery may still be expected. This expectation has to be adjusted, with respect to the work of Murdoch and Le Doeuff. In the opening of 'The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts', Murdoch most explicitly maintains that the use of images, pictures, and metaphors is neither marginal nor accidental and that philosophy cannot and should not avoid using these:

> Metaphors are not merely peripheral decorations or even useful models, they are fundamental forms of our awareness of our condition: metaphors of space,

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[36] Le Doeuff, *Hipparchia's Choice*, p. 9, and Murdoch, 'The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts', p. 364.

metaphors of movement, metaphors of vision. Philosophy in general, and moral philosophy in particular, has in the past often concerned itself with what it took to be our most important images, clarifying existing ones and developing new ones. Philosophical argument which consists of such image-play, I mean the great metaphysical systems, is usually inconclusive, and is regarded by many contemporary thinkers as valueless. The status and merit of this type of argument raises, of course, many problems. However, it seems to me impossible to discuss certain kinds of concepts without resort to metaphor, since the concepts themselves are deeply metaphorical and cannot be analysed into non-metaphorical components without loss of substance.[37]

Murdoch argues here that her interest in consciousness or 'our awareness of our condition' requires the use of imagery and of metaphors. Even though contemporary philosophers may not consider them of any value, she considers herself in alliance with philosophy of the past versus contemporary thinkers.

Murdoch does not distinguish 'metaphor' and 'image' sharply. The notions are explored throughout the essay. In the quotation above Murdoch argues that metaphors make one aware of one's condition, and that it is impossible to discuss certain concepts without using metaphors. She also indicates three possible forms: 'metaphors of space, metaphors of movement, metaphors of vision'. Later on in the same essay she reflects on the metaphor of the Good, which she deems the most important of all.[38] Here she also considers the imagery by which the Good is explained: the image of the sun and the allegory of the cave.[39] She also mentions Love as a metaphor.[40]

It is possible to extend this list of what may be understood as image or metaphor. Antonaccio remarks how Murdoch uses pictures and imagery in her thought. As a prominent example she mentions the mother M and her daughter-in-law D from 'The Idea of Perfection'.[41] Yet, this addition revives the question of definition. Is it right to speak of picture or imagery with respect to M and D, or would story be a better term? If so, what distinguishes the two notions? Then again, it could even be suggested that any study of metaphors does not need to limit itself

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[37] Murdoch, 'The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts', p. 363.
[38] Murdoch, 'The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts', p. 377ff.
[39] Murdoch, 'The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts', p. 376 and 382.
[40] Murdoch, 'The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts', p. 384.
[41] Antonaccio, *Picturing the Human*, p. 22.

to the Good or Love, but would also include for example the battle-like metaphors which Murdoch has a preference for in *The Sovereignty of Good.*[42]

At the beginning of *The Philosophical Imaginary* Le Doeuff also refrains from any definition. Arguing that 'philosophical discourse is inscribed, and declares its status as philosophy through a break with myth, fable, the poetic, the domain of the image', she notes that nevertheless one finds in philosophical texts 'statues that breathe the scent of roses, comedies, tragedies, architects, foundations, dwellings, doors and windows, sand, navigators, various musical instruments, islands, clocks, horses, donkeys and even a lion, representatives of every craft and trade, scenes of sea and storm, forests and trees'[43].

The absence of any general description is deliberate here. Even though Le Doeuff does not explain the absence immediately, one finds her explanation in the pursuit of the text. For one, such a description may make one disregard that 'there is not one *reason*, or one *imaginary*.'[44] More importantly, for Le Doeuff, imagery is connected to the question of philosophical reasoning. What counts as imagery in a particular philosophical text is also decided by the reasoning of that text.[45] Therefore, what is and what is not an image cannot be decided in general terms, or prior to the reading of any particular text. Moreover, using imagery, or disapproving of such use in philosophical texts, is not just engaging in an argument on stylistic means within such texts. Rather, such use or disapproval arises from values underlying the thought. These values often concern the nature or status of philosophical reasoning and of philosophy.

With the term 'imaginary' another member of what Strawson characterised as 'a diverse and scattered family' of terms is introduced. Chapter one argued that the terms imagination, image and imagery are part of an extensive family of related terms. These terms were said to be notoriously difficult to define or describe and the relationship of one to another best understood from careful examination. A preliminary understanding of imagination and image I retrieved from what Murdoch considers an immediate understanding of these terms obtained from considering art.

The term 'imaginary', however, cannot be treated in quite the same way as imagination and image were in the first chapter. 'Imaginary', the word introduced by discussing Le Doeuff, is

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[42] In 'On 'God' and 'Good'", for example, Murdoch treats the history of philosophy as a chronicler. She uses many words relating to adventure and battle. 'To do philosophy is to *explore* one' own temperament, and yet at the same time to *discover* the truth.' Present-day philosophers, however, are experiencing hard times, because 'areas peripheral to philosophy expand ... or collapse', and the proper heir, existentialism, is degenerated, yet still capable of 'getting into the minds of those ... who have not sought it and may be unconscious of its presence.' Battle is everywhere: 'Wittgenstein had attacked the idea of the Cartesian ego or substantial self and Ryle and others had developed the attack.' And: 'Determinism as a philosophical theory is not the enemy ... In the moral life the enemy is the fat relentless ego.' (Murdoch, 'On 'God' and 'Good'", p. 337ff., emphasis added)

[43] M. Le Doeuff, *The Philosophical Imaginary*, translated by C. Gordon (London: The Athlone Press, 1989) p. 1.

[44] Le Doeuff, *The Philosophical Imaginary*, p. 5.

an important word in feminist thinking. Indeed, Le Docuff has been criticised by certain feminist thinkers for using the term the way she does. It has been argued that Le Doeuff's use of the term 'imaginary' is vague, and does not provide 'a reading position in relation to the whole', or a 'stable reference point'.[46]

In reply to this criticism it should first be reiterated that Le Doeuff argues that there is not one imaginary. Le Doeuff accentuates that even though this statement may be accepted in general terms, 'yet as soon as it comes to putting it into effect, almost everyone abandons the principle in favour of a preponderant reference to 'the imaginary' – and Jung remains the great provider of tools for interpretation.'[47] The call for a 'stable reference point' suggests such an understanding of 'imaginary' as *the* imaginary. Le Doeuff, in contrast, arguing against the 'radical heterogeneity of reverie and objective knowledge' concludes that 'imagery copes with problems posed by the theoretical enterprise itself'. She consequently assumes that if image and theory are so closely connected a work may feature its own particular images, rather than a 'collective imaginary'.[48]

In this context it is illuminating to repeat the argument put forward by Anderson, in her *A Feminist Philosophy of Religion* where she maintains 'a critical distinction between Le Doeuff's philosophical imaginary and Irigaray's male imaginary'. Quoting Grosz it is argued that Le Doeuff 'distinguishes her [philosophical] notion sharply from Lacan's. It is not a psychological term describing the narcissistic and identificatory structure of two-person relations; rather, it is a rhetorical term which refers to the use of figures of imagery in philosophical texts.'[49] Le Doeuff's notion of the philosophical imaginary is, thus, a rhetorical term. Consequently, and to be discussed at length in the fifth part of this chapter, Le Doeuff proposes with her notion of the philosophical imaginary a form of research into philosophy's rhetoric and the specific use particular texts make of imagery. Thus the imagery under scrutiny is not necessarily found in any collection of images known. The variety of the imagery to be possibly considered becomes apparent from the use I make of the notion to understand the working of Murdoch's

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[45] See the fifth part of this chapter.

[46] M. Morris, 'Operative Reasoning: Michèle Le Doeuff, Philosophy and Feminism' (*Ideology and Consciousness* 9 (1981-82) p. 71-101) p. 72, as quoted in S. Maras, 'Translating Michèle Le Doeuff's Analytics' (M. Deutscher (ed.), *Michèle Le Doeuff: Operative Philosophy and Imaginary Practice* (New York: Humanity Books, 2000) p. 83-104), p. 87. Maras criticises certain interpretations (Grosz and Morris) which have arisen from certain translations of the term *l'imagier*, complaining that Le Doeuff's use of the term imaginary is vague.

[47] Le Doeuff, *The Philosophical Imaginary*, p. 5.

[48] Le Doeuff, *The Philosophical Imaginary*, p. 5-6.

[49] E. Grosz, *Sexual Subversion: Three French Feminists* (London and Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1989), p. xviii-xix, as quoted in P.S. Anderson, *A Feminist Philosophy of Religion: The Rationality and Myths of Religious Belief* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), p. 210.

understanding of literary character in her work, but also for example in the reading of analytical imagery by La Caze.[50]

The notion of the philosophical imaginary thus introduces a strong connection between imagery and argument. Such a connection between imagery and argument is only suggested by Murdoch when she writes that '[p]hilosophical argument which consists of such image-play ... is usually inconclusive, and is regarded by many contemporary thinkers as valueless.' Is one justified to discern a causal relationship here? Is it that because this image-play, which needs metaphors, is inconclusive, that it is regarded as valueless? Le Doeuff would be more assertive here. Yet both thinkers agree on the importance of imagery and are constantly questioning what philosophy is and should be about.[51] In an examination of imagery the latter question cannot be ignored.

What is regarded as imagery by either Murdoch or Le Doeuff may be learnt from the lists they provide and from their reading of actual texts. Le Doeuff considers it impossible to decide what imagery is before reading a particular text, as this would counter the exercise of considering the imagery in philosophical texts as she conceives it. What is imagery is also decided by that text. If one acknowledges the presence of such elements in a philosophical text, it may be impossible for philosophy to remain conclusive.

4. Michèle Le Doeuff: A Philosopher-Fool

From the beginning Le Doeuff shows herself to be an unusual guide into the world of the philosophical imaginary. This impression remains on further acquaintance. One could introduce her by describing her present position as Director of Research at the Centre Nationale de Recherche Scientifique in Paris or her major works.[52] While these works may confirm Le Doeuff's standing as philosopher, it has also been noted that it is not easy to characterise her philosophy. Gordon, in his note preceding his translation of *The Philosophical Imaginary*, asks and

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[50] See M. La Caze, (M. Deutscher (ed.), *Michèle Le Doeuff: Operative Philosophy and Imaginary Practice* (New York: Humanity Books, 2000) p. 61-80).

[51] See for example the opening paragraphs of the other two essays which together with 'The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts' make up Murdoch's best known philosophical work *The Sovereignty of Good*. In 'The Idea of Perfection' she mentions those 'musts' in which 'lie the deepest springs and motives of philosophy'. Murdoch lists two: 'Contemporary philosophers frequently connect consciousness with virtue, and although they constantly talk of freedom they rarely talk of love. But there must be some relation between these latter concepts, and it must be possible to do justice to both Socrates and the virtuous peasant.' ('The Idea of Perfection', p. 299, 300) 'On 'God' and 'Good'' starts thus: 'To do philosophy is to explore one's own temperament, and yet at the same time to discover the truth.' ('On 'God' and 'Good'', p. 337)

[52] *L'imaginaire philosophique* (1980) was translated into English in 1989 as *The Philosophical Imaginary*. Her second book, *L'etude et le rouet: des femmes, de la philosophie etcetera* (1989) was translated in 1991 as *Hipparchia's Choice: An Essay Concerning Women, Philosophy, etc.*. Her latest work is called *Le sexe du savoir*, published in 1998 and translated into English in the autumn of 2003 as *The Sex of Knowing* (London: Routledge, 2003). Added to these three works a number of essays have been translated into English. Less well known in the English speaking world is that her work is much more divers than these three titles suggest. She has also published on philosophy of science and has translated Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* into French as well as different works by Bacon.

answers the 'unavoidable' question '[w]here… is Michèle Le Doeuff to be located on the maps of contemporary French philosophy and feminism? The shortest answer, and one which the author might herself favour, would be: elsewhere, or nowhere. Her writing is singularly bare of the period's usual fashionable impedimenta; it shows no systemic affiliation, no signs of a formative debt or repudiation.'[53] Le Doeuff's philosophy is then in no obvious way described by an -ism or -ean. It would, however, be incorrect to consider it in any way insular, for being clearly rooted in the French feminist movement she is concerned with topics which are also discussed by other French feminist thinkers and she is a critical reader of different authors in the philosophical tradition.[54]

In his introduction to *Michèle Le Doeuff: Operative Philosophy and Imaginary Practice* Deutscher likewise remarks on the difficulty of characterising her work: 'People seem always to have found it hard to place the writings of Michèle Le Doeuff.'[55] His introduction is preceded, however, by a quotation from *Hipparchia's Choice* to which he never refers, but which reveals a possible reason for these difficulties. At the beginning of *Hipparchia's Choice* Le Doeuff describes how her inspiration to become a philosopher was preceded by a childhood desire to be a Shakespearean fool. After initial disappointment that life was not written by Shakespeare, that there were no fools around and that Shakespeare's fools were all men, she found the possibility to live by this aspiration in philosophy:

> Looking back it seems to me that what had seduced me in the Shakespearian characters was already philosophy. With their sarcastic and corrosive utterances, their unseasonable taste for truth without pomposity, their corruption of words and their art of impertinence which forces authority, sometimes royal authority, to enter into their irony, my fools were the distant heirs of Socrates, of Diogenes the Cynic, of Epictetus and many others. One day Aristippus of Cyrene was asked what benefits he had gained from philosophy. And he, whom they called 'the royal dog', replied: 'that of being able to speak freely to everyone.' Shakespearian

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[53] C. Gordon, 'Translator's Note', p. vii.
[54] Le Doeuff prefers to speak of the Movement, with capital M. See Le Doeuff, *Hipparchia's Choice*, p. 320n.21 for her reasons for doing so. See M. Walker, 'Silence and Reason: Woman's Voice in Philosophy' in *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 71- 4 (1993), p. 400-424, for a comparison between Irigaray, Lloyd and Le Doeuff on the exclusion of women from philosophy. E. Grosz's, *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1989) is an introduction to Irigaray, Kristeva and Le Doeuff; Maras 'Translating Michèle Le Doeuff's Analytics' distinguishes Le Doeuff from other forms of textual analysis, in particular Derrida and Foucault.
[55] M. Deutscher, 'Introduction' in *Michèle Le Doeuff: Operative Philosophy and Imaginary Practice* (New York: Humanity Books, 2000) p. 9.

> characters are certainly closer to the Greek philosophers than Auguste Comte ever was.[56]

Thus in the first pages of *Hipparchia's Choice* Le Doeuff proclaims to be a philosopher and a fool. As if to demonstrate this particular disposition she adds the rather shrewd remark on Comte and Socrates which concludes the paragraph. Such remarks, she seems to suggest, one should expect from an author of 'sarcastic and corrosive utterances', from 'a corrupter of words', from someone with 'an unseasonable taste for truth without pomposity' and 'an art of impertinence which forces authority, sometimes royal authority, to enter into [her] irony'.

Even though Le Doeuff emphasises that philosopher-fools are not exceptional in the history of philosophy, her defensive remark on Comte illustrates that this image is not undisputed either. To speak of the wisdom of fools, or desired by fools, is a deliberate twist on the prevalent image, where fools are regarded as the opposite of wise, and philosophers (as their name gives away) desire wisdom. Indeed, fools have been introduced into philosophical work to show its potency when it proves itself able to convince even them. Such fools should not be thought of as stupid or simple-minded. Convincing the simple does not signify a victory of reasoning. Rather they are intelligent but reluctant to appreciate an argument or its conclusion.[57] To convince such fools may indicate reason's strength, as even those who are not sympathetic to what is argued have to yield to the conclusion. A famous example of such a fool can be found in Anselm's *Proslogion*, where an infidel against his own (dis)belief is convinced of God's existence.[58]

The fool is clearly an ambiguous image. Hence, it should not be surprising that the writing of one who calls herself a fool is not easily characterised. Closer analysis of the image of the fool may thus be needed. Such an analysis is also expedient because this image appears in the work of an author who claims that her first interest is always in imagery.[59] These reasons are supplemented by yet another, for the image appears at a pivotal stage in *Hipparchia's Choice*. It is

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[56] Le Doeuff, *Hipparchia's Choice*, p. 9-10. For Aristippus Le Doeuff refers to Diogenes Laertius, *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers*, R.D. Hicks trans. (London: Heinemann and Cambridge, Mass, Harvard University Press, 1925), vol. II, p. 98-102. Deutscher does not use this exact quotation, but offers an abbreviated quote from the longer section, leaving out some of the more scathing remarks.

[57] See V.K. Janik, 'Introduction', in *Fools and Jesters in Literature, Art, and History: A Bio-Bibliographical Sourcebook* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1998) p. 1-22, on different kinds of fools.

[58] Anselm's Ontological Proof is discussed at length in chapter five. There I also argue that the fool does not necessarily signify the opposite of Anselm.

[59] In the interview with Mortley, she remarks that the imaginary is indeed a unifying them, adding: 'Some people find it strange that I sometimes work on imaginary islands, utopias, or the idea of the island of reason, for example, and sometimes on the representation of women in philosophical texts. I can't see why they wonder, since it is one and the same approach in a sense... My work is about the stock of images you can find in philosophical works, whatever they refer to: insect, clocks, women or islands. I try to show what part they play in the philosophical enterprise. But, obviously, when I work on the figure of 'woman', something more important is at stake than when I work on imaginary islands.' See R. Mortley, 'Michèle Le Doeuff' in *French Philosophers in Conversation: Levinas, Schneider, Serres, Irigaray, Le Doeuff, Derrida* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991) p. 80-91. The quotation is taken from p. 85-86.

introduced at a point where self-validation seems unavoidable. Is it worth writing on women and philosophy as Le Doeuff proposes to do? Yet self-validation is what Le Doeuff criticises philosophy most for. Her recurrent argument is that philosophy can only be self-validating at the expense of exclusion. It needs to exclude what is other: images, primitives, women.[60] Le Doeuff then tries to avoid self-validation and its unfortunate consequences, but is unable to do so without stating *what she herself values in philosophy*. At this point, where a premature collapse in contradiction is looming, Le Doeuff introduces the fool. The fool is in a way Le Doeuff's founding myth.

Regarding these reasons for examining the image of the fool, it is remarkable that in most commentaries it is not even mentioned. Deutscher cites part of Le Doeuff's text introducing this image, but he does not entertain the image in his introduction. Sanders includes the fool in an article on the use of the concepts 'philosophy' and 'rationality' in feminist writing. She argues that for Le Doeuff the fool is the connection between the past and the future of philosophy: 'The perspective of the fool was always an important part of philosophy..., and it will represent the best of the philosophy of the future.'[61] Here the image of the fool depicts the acceptance of the limitations of philosophy in its the dependence on other forms of writing, as well as a critical stance towards any theory. Sanders does not pursue this image in the main argument of her article.[62]

In the remainder of this chapter I consider the fool with regard to Le Doeuff's own 'methodological propositions' from the introduction to *The Philosophical Imaginary*. These propositions I shall also use when considering Murdoch's texts. I first introduce those propositions and further examine this founding myth of the fool.

5. Methodological Propositions from The Philosophical Imaginary

Le Doeuff does not introduce her methodological propositions without the proviso that these 'do not encapsulate a method systematically deployed in these essays but rather are their result, a concluding appraisal designed to help outline a programme for further work.'[63] Indeed, neither in these essays nor in later work should one expect Le Doeuff to exactly follow these propositions. This should not be regarded as an omission but rather, as will become apparent, as an intrinsic element of her thought.[64]

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[60] See for example Le Doeuff, *The Philosophical Imaginary*, p. 6-7, and Le Doeuff, *Hipparchia's Choice*, p. 26.
[61] K. Sanders, 'Michèle Le Doeuff: Reconsidering Rationality', in *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 71-4 (1993), p. 425-435, p. 426.
[62] Sanders, 'Michèle Le Doeuff', p. 425-426.
[63] Le Doeuff, *The Philosophical Imaginary*, p. 7.
[64] See also La Caze, 'Analytic Imaginary', p. 71. Although La Caze uses the word 'method' when applying it to images in analytical philosophy she notes that 'it would not work if one were simply to imitate her method.'

The methodological propositions are written after the different essays which make up *The Philosophical Imaginary*. This notion of philosophical imaginary designates a particular approach Le Doeuff encountered while working on these essays. She started her work on the different essays not with this notion or methodological propositions, but with different hypotheses about 'the functioning of imagery in texts when its presence is supposedly abnormal'. The one she still deems 'essential and serviceable' she expresses in a minimalist and maximalist form:

> The narrow version states that the interpretation of imagery in philosophical texts goes together with a search for points of tension in a work. In other words, such imagery is inseparable from the difficulties, the sensitive points of an intellectual venture.
>
> The broader version states that the meaning conveyed by images works both for and against the system that deploys them. *For*, because they sustain something which the system cannot itself justify, but which is nevertheless needed for its proper working. *Against*, for the same reason – or almost: their meaning is incompatible with the system's responsibilities.[65]

According to both versions images cannot be dismissed without change in content. The narrow version speaks of difficulties and sensitive points, where it remains possible that these may be solved. The broader version speaks of something which the system - by which presumably is meant the argument or what the different arguments amount to - cannot itself justify. Here it seems impossible to maintain the system without its images.

Images are then a substantial part of philosophy, yet, Le Doeuff maintains, this has seldom been acknowledged in the history of philosophy. Philosophy has affiliated itself with 'the rational, the concept, the argued, the logical, the abstract', she writes in the first paragraph of her preface. Even if philosophers have avoided such an affirmative statement they have been decisive about what philosophy is not. 'Philosophy is not a story, not a pictorial description, not a work of literature. Philosophical discourse is inscribed and declares its status as philosophy through a break with myth, fable, the poetic, the domain of the image.'[66] To maintain then that 'imagery is inseparable from the sensitive points of an intellectual venture', or that it 'works both for and against the system that deploys them' goes beyond assumptions of even those philosophers for

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[65] Le Doeuff, *The Philosophical Imaginary*, p. 3.
[66] Le Doeuff, *The Philosophical Imaginary*, p. 1.

whom 'thinking in images' has become acceptable.[67] Le Doeuff maintains not just that images are a suitable topic for philosophy, but that they form an essential part of philosophical discourse.

For the analysis of such imagery Le Doeuff distinguishes four stages: denegation, iconographic investigation, erudition, and structural analysis.[68] The division into these stages reads as a rhetorical device. Philosophy, it was argued earlier, as a discipline has almost always denied its own rhetoric. In contrast, Le Doeuff maintains not just that philosophy uses rhetoric, but even that it has developed rhetoric of its own. This philosophical rhetoric is developed in a tradition which has denied its existence. These four stages are designed to expose and examine the philosophical rhetoric or imaginary which has arisen from this peculiar situation.

The first stage is that of *denegation*. It calls attention to denial which often introduces images into a philosophical text. An image is introduced into the text, yet at the same time it is denied any (genuine) significance. Le Doeuff concludes:

> 'Thus between the writing subject and his text there is a complex and negating relationship, which is a sign that something important and troubling is seeking utterance - something which cannot be acknowledged, yet is keenly cherished. As far as I am concerned, taking an interest in images and enquiring into this sort of evasion are one and the same activity.'[69]

This first stage of denegation exposes the relationship between an author and precarious aspects of his (or her) text.

In general, Le Doeuff finds that denegation describes the attitude of philosophers towards the imagery in their texts. Images are not a real part of the text, but instead they are directed to an (irrational) Other who does not grasp the philosophical argument. Yet, because 'the image is not part of the enterprise ... the good reader, who has passed through the

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[67] Le Doeuff explains the difference between her work and two perspectives of *thinking in images*: 'our time has seen major studies of myth and dream, locations where thought in images is in some sense at home. Bachelard, conversely, has offered analysis of the imaginary component within scientific work, whose final aim is to extradite an element judged alien and undesirable, and assign it a residence *elsewhere*. The perspective I am adopting here differs, as will be seen, from both these approaches, since it involves reflecting on strands of the imaginary operating in places where, in principle, they are supposed not to belong and yet where, in principle, nothing would have been accomplished.' (Le Doeuff, *The Philosophical Imaginary*, p. 2)

[68] In a footnote Le Doeuff suggests: 'This successive order should not be taken as a hard-and-fast rule. Let us say that there are several complementary ways of approaching the image ... The interpretation of the image lies at the intersection of these different areas of investigation.' (M. Le Doeuff, *The Philosophical Imaginary*, p. 172n. 10) Le Doeuff illustrates these four by discussing a passage from Kant. In chapter II of part III of the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant sums up what has been achieved so far and immediately introduces the image of an island to which he compares 'the territory of pure understanding', which has been 'explored', 'carefully surveyed', and 'measured' in the preceding text.

[69] Le Doeuff, *The Philosophical Imaginary*, p. 8-9.

philosophical discipline, will know he should pass it by.'[70] However, when the use of imagery is acknowledged, as it is especially by Le Doeuff, but also by Murdoch, this stage may be less significant. In such works one may expect the recognition of the limits and inconclusiveness of thought as well as a philosopher's dependence on other than pure rational thought.[71]

The second stage is one of *iconographic investigation.* In this stage it is asked whether the image is a hapax, an isolated feature in the text, or whether it occurs at other places as well. This stage again is intended to reveal the peculiar nature of the philosophical rhetoric. With this form of rhetoric it is important to look for recurrences of this image, for these may reveal the significance of the image encountered and suggest whether or not one has to do with a structural element in the thought of the thinker. This stage, as well as the third stage, originates in the supposition that an image is more difficult to recognise as such, when it has become a recurrent element of the debate. [72]

The third stage is that of *erudition.* Here one looks for earlier usages of the image by philosophers as well as to a precise source. Le Doeuff explains this strategy in 'Red Ink in the Margin', one of the essays in *The Philosophical Imaginary.* In the preface she only discloses its main principle: 'it is a good thing not only to bear in mind all the earlier usages of an image by philosophers but also to locate a precise source, an image which, at the level of the signifier, is close to the one being studied.'[73] Borrowing an image from a particular source, Le Doeuff argues in 'Red Ink', is to continue something in that source without argument. Le Doeuff urges to consider both the image as it appears in the source and its transformation in the present text.[74] Imagery, it is implied, gains in importance when it has become part of a tradition, not just of a thinker. It is then also more difficult to acknowledge its presence.

Le Doeuff more than once argues how this is particularly true for the image of woman. Both in her article 'Ants and Women, or Philosophy without Borders' and in the interview with Mortley she relates an occasion on which she gave a paper on Bacon. In his explanation of

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[70] Le Doeuff, *The Philosophical Imaginary*, p. 7.

[71] The analytical tradition interestingly enough, may be suspicious of the use of metaphors, but does not conceal the use of examples. Compare here La Caze: 'The image or imaginary anecdote is displayed rather than hidden by the analytical philosopher, but the blatant use of fantasy as a method of uncovering allegedly necessary conceptual truths distracts attention from the assumptions made by the way the story is told'. (La Caze, 'Analytic Imaginary', p. 67)

[72] With respect to the example she uses Le Doeuff wonders whether Kant has only one island or does he speak of various ones, and how do they relate to one another? Le Doeuff indicates the direction such research may take: 'It would show, for instance, that the northern isle in the quoted passage, the island one must content oneself with, has its symmetric antithesis in the island of the South Seas, the seat of the Golden Age, which must be utterly renounced. So far this investigation generates no interpretation, but it enables us to specify the images of the island of the Analytic and its distinctive trait, embedded in a system of opposition between islands in the South which must be abandoned and islands in the North which must not be left.' (Le Doeuff, *The Philosophical Imaginary*, p. 9) The second island is to be found in *Conjectural Beginning of Human History* (1786).

[73] Le Doeuff, *The Philosophical Imaginary*, p. 9

[74] M. Le Doeuff, 'Red Ink in the Margin: The Invention of 'Descartes' Morality' and the Metaphors of Cartesian Discourse', in *The Philosophical Imaginary*, p. 57-99. The passage referred to is to be found on p. 92ff.

intellectual attitudes and knowledge Bacon uses the image of ants as well as of that of woman. In response to her paper a man in the audience, Le Doeuff recounts, objected to Bacon's use of ants. This objection did not surprise Le Doeuff as much as the fact that nobody objected to his use of "woman". Le Doeuff concludes: 'I have come to the conclusion that insects are more protected against philosophical abuse than women.' [75]

The last phase is that of *structural analysis*. Le Doeuff calls this the essential stage in which one looks for the 'sensitive or problematic theoretical point an image bears on', which is often difficult to find.[76] This stage brings together the previous stages in order to detect what the role is of the imagery whose presence is denied.

Le Doeuff distinguishes here between an image's emblematic and its fantasy-function. In its emblematic role the image produces a dogma.

> Images are the means by which every philosophy can engage in straightforward dogmatization, and decree 'that's the way it is' without fear of counterargument, since it is understood that a good reader will pass by such 'illustrations'- a convention which enables the image to do its work all the more effectively.[77]

On the subjective or fantasy level the image seduces its readers into accepting it. It does so, Le Doeuff maintains, by opposing a more general imagery, which it claims it can do without. This general imagery is replaced by particular imagery, appealing only to a specific group.[78] One fantasy is replaced by another fantasy, even though it is presented as if the first fantasy is abolished. Analysing imagery is then also emancipatory, as in the analysis the excluding nature of the philosophy becomes apparent and may be criticised:

> The idea of a dialectical solidarity between the reverie and theoretical work must, in my view, necessarily lead to a study of the particularism of a social minority and its problematic encounter with other thought and other discourses - and also to an appreciation to the tension between what one would like to believe, what it is necessary to think and what is possible to give logical form.[79]

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[75] Mortley, 'Michèle Le Doeuff', p. 86-7. Le Doeuff, "Ants and Women, or Philosophy without Borders' in A. Phillips Griffith (ed.), *Contemporary French Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) p. 41-54. The incident is related on p. 41.
[76] Le Doeuff, *The Philosophical Imaginary*, p. 10.
[77] Le Doeuff, *The Philosophical Imaginary*, p. 12.
[78] See Le Doeuff, *The Philosophical Imaginary*, p. 14ff. for examples of such imagery.
[79] Le Doeuff, *The Philosophical Imaginary*, p. 19

The four stages thus intend to reveal a rhetoric directed by being disregarded. Imagery is used and yet it has seldom received recognition by philosophers, even though Le Doeuff maintains it has had the important function of maintaining an understanding of what philosophy is or should be like. This understanding often rests on the exclusion of forms of reasoning and of social groups. Le Doeuff's methodological propositions suggest that this problem is not limited to individual texts or even the work of particular authors. Rather, the stages of iconographic investigation and erudition confirm the opposite. Imagery, while being denied any relevance, often upholds established convictions. Le Doeuff has often argued how this is in particular true for the image of woman and the exclusion of women from doing philosophy.

6. 'The question-which-has-already-obviously-been-settled'[80]

These methodological propositions sharply diverge from an understanding of philosophy as distinguished from rhetoric, which at least in theory philosophers profess to hold. Of the different reasons for this divergence the most important for Le Doeuff is philosophy's attempt at self-justification. With this notion she refers to an understanding of philosophy in which it justifies itself and is independent of any other discipline. Philosophy is understood to rely on anything but itself, even or in particular for its foundations.

How prevalent this image is, becomes clear from the pages preceding the introduction of the fool. At the beginning of her work she faces the problem of self-justification. Le Doeuff finds herself compelled to argue that her subject is worthwhile pursuing. From the beginning of her work Le Doeuff foresees objections to her undertaking. Yet, she does not refute these objections, but rather questions them. Refuting them would constrain her into a formal argument on value which is exactly the form of argument she has criticised in *The Philosophical Imaginary* and will criticise again in *Hipparchia's Choice*. Her unwillingness to do so is important here for two reasons. It explains the introduction of the fool and it also shows the persistent as well as peculiar nature of refuting objections before one has started.

In the first pages of *Hipparchia's Choice* Le Doeuff introduces her topic, 'women and philosophy'. She notes that it is significant that this topic is generally rendered with the vague term of 'women question'. The subsequent notebooks show what she is concerned with in the present work: the image of woman in philosophy, elaborated in an examination of the use which De Beauvoir made of Sartre's existentialism, as well as political implications of images of woman.

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[80] Le Doeuff, *Hipparchia's Choice*, p.3: 'whatever the 'woman question' may consist of (and the fact that we are obliged to speak of it so vaguely is already significant), it always presents itself to the conscious mind as the question-which-has-already-obviously-been-settled.'

The first and most devastating objection is that her topic is not a topic at all, because 'whatever the 'women question' may consist of (and the fact that we are obliged to speak of it so vaguely is already significant), it always presents itself to the conscious mind as the question-which-has-already-obviously-been-settled'. She notes how De Beauvoir expressed the same sentiments in her introduction to *The Second Sex*, which may surprise those who see forty years later than in 1949 problems were not solved at all.[81] Le Doeuff wonders how to refute this suggestion to her undertaking, and to demonstrate that the question has not been settled in many areas, in particular that women are still banned from philosophy. The one approach she does not want to take is providing shocking examples, 'just as others begin their books by having the chill wind of the Gulag blow across the first page.'[82] Besides moral and aesthetic reasons Le Docuff also finds intellectual ones not to follow this suggestion: it stops the thinking of all involved.

Should she then argue that philosophy is a good in which women should (therefore) desire to participate? This approach she cannot follow either. From the first paragraph Le Doeuff expresses her ambiguous feelings about philosophy. 'On occasion I have maintained that this discourse which claims to understand everything better than any other is a mode of phantasmagorical hegemony; all the same, in it I saw my road to freedom.'[83] Yet, whether it is a good or bad thing, this should not make any difference to women's participation: 'Philosophy is like military life: either you think it is a good thing, and in that case you should be pleased to see women in West Point and the other military academies, or you think it despicable and support conscientious objectors.'[84]

Without an argument from the Gulag or the Good, how is one to explain the worth of her work? Le Doeuff here provides the answer one finds throughout her work. She will not look for such an affirmation first (or even at all), for 'it is precisely when philosophers undertake to give the value of their own efforts a theoretical basis that they start to drift off into myth.'[85] Precisely these myths have marred the freedom of thinking:

> 'What value can there be in philosophical thinking about politics if it is understooped from the outset that the conclusion will be that it is the vocation of philosophers to govern? ... Everything can gradually become distorted by the corporatist imperative, which is often implicit but always categorical: think what

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[81] Le Doeuff, *Hipparchia's Choice*, p. 3-4. Le Doeuff argues: 'In those days there was no freedom of contraception or abortion, for, among other things, a certain French law, passed in 1920 and banning every publicity about contraception, was in force. It still is, by the way.'
[82] Le Doeuff, *Hipparchia's Choice*, p. 4.
[83] Le Doeuff, *Hipparchia's Choice*, p. 1
[84] Le Doeuff, *Hipparchia's Choice*, p. 2
[85] Le Doeuff, *Hipparchia's Choice*, p. 6.

you like, but in the end your words must once more reaffirm the value of philosophy. At least that of your own philosophy.'[86]

Le Doeuff is convinced that value comes first and precisely therefore it is impossible to state clearly at the beginning what this value is. There is no (neutral) standpoint from which the value can be described: 'The abandonment of all attempts to establish the value of my own project, and ultimately that of philosophy itself, has for me gone hand in hand with a belief which can be stated as follows: if the value of philosophy cannot totally be put into thought, this is because in philosophical work essential values comes first, before even thought itself.'[87] This revelation places Le Doeuff in a difficult position. She does not want to establish the value, but she assumes it nevertheless. Le Doeuff rejects 'thinking about the value of philosophy, in advance and even in retrospect', yet she cannot help expressing her desire to philosophise either. 'The self-justification', she makes an imaginary critic say, 'may not be a preliminary, but it comes along the way just the same.'[88]

7. The Fool

At this point the fool enters the text:

It is impossible to see how such a desire [i.e. to philosophise] can be rationalized or deduced from an essence of philosophy of such great value that one would be conquered on first perceiving it and would decide to devote all one's energy to it. The origins of my taste are known to me only in the contingency of my autobiography. When I was still a child I developed a passion for Shakespeare, and especially for the characters of the fools. I wanted to be Feste, or the nameless Fool of King Lear when I grew up. Then I realized that life is not as well written as it would have been if Shakespeare had taken charge of it; it is very grey and there is no place in it for a fool. Besides, Shakespeare's fools are all men. This is a strange thing, in an author who often portrays women characters disguised as men. Viola passes for a page in this way, Portia for lawyer and Rosalind for an

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[86] Le Doeuff, *Hipparchia's Choice*, p. 6-7

[87] Le Doeuff, *Hipparchia's Choice*, p. 11. Compare p. 17 ff. where Le Doeuff argues against teaching philosophy from an absolutely neutral, which is an empty, critical standpoint. 'Ants and Women, or Philosophy without Borders', provides a similar argument. Here Le Doeuff writes how feminist thinking is guided by certain values. After a disturbing example of a scientific work which defended a theory of an unknown chromosome 'supposed to 'explain' the 'fact' of women's inferiority on various activities' Le Doeuff writes: 'The task of carrying out a critical epistemology is among philosophy's duties, and it has an ethical end.' (Le Doeuff, 'Ants and Women, or Philosophy without Borders', p. 48)

older brother. They are all very 'wise' and often praised as such; none of them is a 'clown', that is to say, they are not 'corrupters of words', although Feste explains that foolery is an omnipresent thing that 'does walk about the orb like the sun, it shines everywhere.' So Shakespeare played on sexual identity to the maximum, but he could not go so far as to imagine a certain form of comic utterance spoken by a female character. The two 'Merry Wives of Windsor' are certainly jokers, but they are not given the subversive speech of the Fool.

> I gave up my first vocation. Some years later I began to read philosophy; it seemed to me every close to the language of fools and, marvels of marvels, it was a way of speaking that existed on this earth: there are no longer any Fools in real life, but it would seem that there are still philosophers around. And women are not kept out of the business; indeed it is even a compulsory subject for all students in their last year at any French lycée, so I was about to be required to carry out my apprenticeship. Blessed obligation which removed all risk of being forbidden.
>
> Looking back it seems to me that what had seduced me in the Shakespearian characters was already philosophy. With their sarcastic and corrosive utterances, their unseasonable taste for truth without pomposity, their corruption of words and their art of impertinence which forces authority, sometimes royal authority, to enter into their irony, my fools were the distant heirs of Socrates, of Diogenes the Cynic, of Epictetus and many others. One day Aristippus of Cyrene was asked what benefits he had gained from philosophy. And he, whom they called 'the royal dog', replied: 'that of being able to speak freely to everyone'. Shakespearian characters are certainly closer to the Greek philosophers than Auguste Comte ever was.[89]

Le Doeuff presents herself here as a fool and as such she transpires to an unusual guide into the topic 'women and philosophy'. Though she mentions imagery from the Good or the Gulag in favour of her argument, she professes that she does not want to use these. Instead she refers to 'the contingency of [her] autobiography' and introduces this image of the fool, which at first may not seem related at all.

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[88] Le Doeuff, *Hipparchia's Choice*, p. 8

[89] Le Doeuff, *Hipparchia's Choice*, p. 9-10. The image of the Shakespearean fool (or 'clown' as it is called as well) returns in the interview with Mortley. There the image is introduced after Le Doeuff remarks that she never had a mentor or *maître*, but always discussed philosophy with her equals. (Mortley, 'Michèle Le Doeuff', p. 83).

The quotation above starts with a striking juxtaposition of desire and seduction on the one hand and conquest on the other: 'It is impossible to see how such a desire [i.e. to philosophise] can be rationalized or deduced from an essence of philosophy of such great value that one would be conquered on first perceiving it and would decide to devote all one's energy to it.' The expressed desire to do philosophy cannot be transformed into a defeating philosophical argument.[90]

Le Doeuff's affair with philosophy is then not a story of conquest but of seduction. As a child she felt a passion for Shakespeare, yet when growing up she realised that the role she desired most in his world he would not give her. It was one of the few parts he would not let women play.[91] Moreover, his world did not exist. Life, if written at all, had been written by someone else. Fortunately, she did not have to forfeit her first love, for in philosophy she found 'approximate fulfilment'[92] of her desires in an actually existing world.

It has been suggested that being seduced is not common for philosophers. In her article on Le Doeuff's 'Philosophy in the Larynx', on voice in philosophy and on the myths of the Syrens, Bassett observes that '[t]he voice of the Syrens is perilous if you are open to its seduction, but if you are a philosopher, you are protected by rigor and thus are able to be seduced without harm.'[93] Cunning as Odysseus, philosophers have let themselves be safely tied to the mast. In turn, they may seduce mere mortals, who are not in danger either, because the philosopher's rigour protects all from shipwreck.

By admitting to being seduced, therefore, does Le Doeuff then reveal she is lacking philosophical rigour? Or by acting the seduced and not the conquering part does Le Doeuff confirm the image of woman as other than philosopher? Le Doeuff often makes jokes about stereo-types about women, and thus about herself. It appears here too that it is not easy to apprehend a fool, if it is possible at all. Seduction may be unusual, but is not entirely lacking from the history of philosophy. Socrates, whom Le Doeuff considers to be Feste's predecessor, is one philosopher who does not mind admitting to being seduced.

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[90] Compare Le Doeuff, *The Philosophical Imaginary*, p. 14.

[91] In a footnote Le Doeuff mentions 'one woman with a clown's aspiration in Shakespeare's work and that is Beatrice in *Much Ado about Nothing*. What she challenges is the touchy pride of the play's male protagonists and its effects on the position of women. We who have been involved in feminism are all Beatrices.' (Le Doeuff, *Hipparchia's Choice*, p. 319n. 9)

[92] Mortley, 'Michèle Le Doeuff', p. 83.

[93] L. Bassett, 'Blind Spots and Deafness' in M. Deutscher (ed.), *Michèle Le Doeuff: Operative Philosophy and Imaginary Practice* (New York: Humanity Books, 2000) p. 105-125. The quotation is take from p. 106. See also Le Doeuff, "Philosophy in the Larynx', in *The Philosophical Imaginary*, p. 129-137.

Le Doeuff is seduced into a world where 'sexual identity is played to the maximum'. This is world in which women play male roles.[94] Viola, Portia and Rosalind all play to be men. To complicate matters, in the original casts men enacted the role of these women who were in turn disguised as men. Lear's fool is so close to Cordelia that when Lear exclaims that his 'poor fool is hanged' (V.3.306) one thinks of both. In fact, one actor may play both parts, for they are never on stage together.

Yet, this world of fools turns out to be inhospitable for Le Doeuff. Shakespeare may play sexual identity to the maximum, the sexually most ambiguous role of all, that of the fool, is given to men only. This is too the role which Le Doeuff, when small, desired to play dearly. In contrast, in the real world, where there may be less play on sexual identity, she is not only allowed but even (at a particular stage) obliged to play that part. Le Doeuff exalts and jokes: 'Blessed obligation which removed all risk of being forbidden.' Given the topic of her present book it turned out to be a mixed blessing.

From this image it may be inferred that the problem of women and philosophy is not just or perhaps not even a problem of women playing men's parts.[95] The question how women can be philosophers and women, where philosophy has notoriously seen 'woman' as that which it is not, is not dissolved by recasting the parts.[96] By putting forward the image of the fool Le Doeuff adds an extra dimension to this problem. The (philosopher-)king is not recasted as the (philosopher-)queen, but as the sexually more ambiguous (philosopher-)fool. Recasting here does not simply mean replacing, for the fool is known to subvert hierarchical order.

The fool is also a marginal figure. He is only indirectly involved in the major developments of the play.[97] Tradition has occasionally brushed him aside.[98] Nevertheless, his comments are persistent and also uncompromising. As Sanders maintains, 'he speaks as one who has no need to justify himself by overinflated and unfounded arguments because his position is one which, unlike the King, does not need to convince others because he is not demanding

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[94] See Janik, 'Introduction', p. 13, who argues that the fool subverts the opposition between masculinity and femininity, and does not replace the one with the other.

[95] Compare too: 'we do not think that feminism is an operation by which 'woman' wants to be like 'man', we insist on the fact that there are *women*, quite different from each other, and that there are *men* also. 'Woman' is a smoke-screen which prevents people from seeing the actual situations of real women.' (Le Doeuff, 'Ants and Women, or Philosophy without Borders', p. 49)

[96] Le Doeuff, 'Ants and Women, or Philosophy without Borders', p. 42, 51ff.

[97] In this respect he resembles women, as suggested by Le Doeuff when she for example in the interview with Mortley exclaims: 'One runs the risk of being looked down on by everybody of course, but, since a woman is doomed to scant respect anyway, it does not matter. If you have nothing to lose, you can afford to be daring.' (Mortley, 'Michèle Le Doeuff', p. 85)

[98] In the reception of *King Lear* the fool actually often has been left out, because he was considered indecorous. See A. Hager, 'Lear's Fool', in Janik, V.K. (ed.), *Fool and jesters in Literature, Art, and History: A Bio-Bibliographical Sourcebook* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1998) p. 289-297, in particular p. 293.

anything on them on the basis of words or position."[99] This position grants the fool a form of authority, namely that of one who, as Le Doeuff states, can have an 'unseasonable taste for truth without pomposity'.

Thus by calling herself a fool Le Doeuff affirms (or reaffirms) her marginal position but also claims some form of authority. Yet authority is confirmed in other ways as well. By retracing the seduction back to childhood, it is implied that philosophy is what Le Doeuff has been doing all her life and to what she has been attracted before she was affected by society's demands and expectations. Le Doeuff is, in short, a natural philosopher. Moreover, by calling herself a fool Le Doeuff also places herself in line, not with Comte, but with illustrious philosophers nevertheless, beginning with Socrates.

Le Doeuff as a philosopher-fool is then part of an old tradition in the history of philosophy. The word tradition perhaps suggests too much cohesion. This is a tradition of individuals who have singly challenged what is generally believed to be true, or beyond discussion. They may be characterised as preferring the image of fool to that of wise, or consider the fool the wiser. Even though it would be odd to speak of an –ism or –ean here, it is neither correct to consider such thinkers as entirely isolated or unique. Avoiding again a strict division between rebellious and dutiful daughters these thinkers are perhaps best characterised as valuing their independence from father, mother, or tradition.

What is the relation of these fools to their Kings? It seems to me that Le Doeuff has omitted this aspect of the image. This observation adds a new dimension to Le Doeuff's methodological propositions. For Le Doeuff discusses the desired functions of an image (emblematic and fantasy), but does not mention the possibility of undesired ones. She does not mention the King against whom the fool directs his banter. Sanders argues that Le Doeuff does not 'fail to recognize that the fool's freedom is contained within the limits of the King's pleasure: when that pleasure is pushed too far the fool can always be beheaded.'[100] Yet, I do not agree with Sanders here. When Le Doeuff remarks to Mortley on the possibility of being looked down upon that 'since a woman is doomed to scant respect anyway, it does not matter. If you have nothing to lose, you can afford to be daring.', I do not sense any recognition that her freedom is contained.[101]

Le Doeuff's limited recognition of the containment of her freedom seems also to have affected her latest work, recently translated as *The Sex of Knowing*, which I have omitted from the discussion thus far. The present remarks are also limited to observing possible limitations of the

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[99] Sanders, 'Michèle Le Doeuff: Reconsidering Rationality', p. 426.
[100] Sanders, 'Michèle Le Doeuff: Reconsidering Rationality', p. 426.
[101] Mortley, Le Doeuff, p. 85.

image of the fool. Reading the work I was reminded of Lear's complaint that his fool had become bitter (I. 4.134). In her merciless, though engaging and warranted condemnation of an introduction to a Jane Austen novel, or of Warnock's reasons for omitting Harriet Taylor from her collection of texts by female philosophers, I detect a bitter tone.[102] It is as if Le Doeuff, like Lear's Fool, perceives folly which is beyond help.

I may be mistaken in detecting this tone and I am not entirely able to sustain my suspicion that the tone may also be occasioned by the translation of the original French text.[103] Yet, the possibility reinforces difficulties surrounding the image of the fool. Or, as a member of the audience on an presentation of paper on Le Doeuff's could not help wondering at the wisdom of presenting oneself as a fool, or more precisely of a woman presenting herself as a fool. Le Doeuff does not comment on the disadvantages of imagery, yet the image of the fool may have its undesired aspects. With respect to the general considerations, considering the disadvantages adds to the methodological presuppositions discussed before.

8. Concluding Remarks

Le Doeuff is a guide into the world of the *philosophical imaginary*, but an unusual one. She provides methodological instruction, but also a notion of philosophy which deliberately undermines the methodology. Crucial concepts are left without much definition. She does not impose, what an image is, what philosophy is, or who is a philosopher. These are questions she wants philosophy not to decide in advance.

Le Doeuff describes herself as fond of sarcastic and corrosive utterances and of truth without pomposity, which leaves the reader to wonder which is what. Le Doeuff's philosopher-fool is not one who wants to take us by the hand (as Sartre took De Beauvoir). On the contrary, with a philosopher-fool one should be constantly alert, both to the banter and to the truth. The distinction between master and student is only one of the many which the fool subverts. With a fool one is forced to think for oneself.

The work of Le Doeuff challenges important and strongly held assumptions from the history of philosophy. Some are so established that they are hardly recognised as such. Her work encourages recognition and even defiance of reading habits suggested by tradition or by actual texts. It calls attention to the metaphors, imagery, and stories in a philosophical text, which

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[102] Le Doeuff, *The Sex of Knowing*, p. 156-7, 197.

[103] See for example the addition of exclamation marks in a discussion of Schopenhauer, where the French text reads 'Fort bien : en conclura-t-il quelque chose d'agréable our notre sexe? Ne rêvons pas: ...' (M. Le Doeuff, *Le Sexe du Savoir* (Paris: Flammarion, 1998) p. 44) and the English text: 'Very well; will he reach a conclusion favorable to our sex? Don't even dream of it!' (Le Doeuff, *The Sex of Knowing*, p. 16. Compare p. 47: 'N'esr-ce pas formidable?' (Le Doeuff, *Le Sexe du Savoir*, p. 47) and in translation: 'Isn't this wonderful?!' (Le Doeuff, *The Sex of Knowing*, p. 18). It should be noted that Le Doeuff read the first draft of the translation.

philosophical reading habit has often decreed to ignore. The first stage Le Docuff's methodological propositions, that of *denegation*, urges to look for phrases that suggest such a reading habit.

Imagery, according to Le Doeuff, often introduces value which is not or even cannot be sustained differently. Often it is concerned with establishing philosophy as a sovereign discipline. The second and third stage, *iconographic investigation* and *erudition*, intend to reveal the significance of the image in a text, an oeuvre, or even a tradition. The second stage wonders whether the image is an isolated figure in the text, if it appears elsewhere, or even if it has counterparts. The third stage traces the image back into the history of philosophy. The three stages are completed by the fourth stage of *critical analysis*, in which the sensitive points of an argument are explored.

These stages, as well as the more general observations on the presence of imagery in philosophy, have inspired the subsequent reading of Murdoch. My reading pursues the importance Murdoch attributes to metaphors, even beyond the possibilities Murdoch foresees or would perhaps accept. This is true for example when reading the image of M and D in the subsequent chapter. Le Doeuff's notion of the philosophical imaginary is in this aspect also important when reading Murdoch in the subsequent chapters. This inspiration is not always marked but generally underlines the research.

I started this chapter by arguing that Murdoch's concerns are closer to feminism than is often assumed. This argument was given in order to counter possible objections. However, the relationship of Le Doeuff and Murdoch to feminism is different and justifies further research. As for now, I only point out that it also affects their consideration of imagery. Le Doeuff considers imagery because of its excluding nature. Her methodological propositions therefore aim at unveiling hidden presuppositions. Murdoch does not express such feminist concerns. Her concern with imagery, as for example in 'The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts', relates more to her own position, as a contemporary Platonist. This difference reinforces Le Docuff's proviso that the methodological propositions 'do not encapsulate a method'. Yet, because this thesis is concerned with Murdoch, rather than with a comparison between Murdoch and Le Doeuff, this comparison will only receive limited attention in the subsequent chapters.

CHAPTER THREE

LITERATURE, CHARACTER AND MURDOCH'S EARLY WORKS OF PHILOSOPHY

1. Introduction

Having discussed the importance of metaphor and imagery in philosophy, I now consider imagery which is of particular importance in Murdoch's early work. The imagery I shall be first discussing is the notion of character. Murdoch considers the portrayal of character in a selection of nineteenth century novels to represent certain values which she does not find in the analytical or existentialist philosophy encountered when employed at St. Anne's. I am concerned with two values in particular: inner life and reality outside the self. I shall first discuss how these are presented in Murdoch's understanding of character. Then, I discuss how existentialism is regarded as insufficient in considering them. Next, in a discussion of 'The Idea of Perfection' I consider the difficulties Murdoch encounters in sustaining a notion of reality outside the self while introducing the importance of the inner life. In this essay she is most of all concerned with contemporary analytical philosophy.[1]

So, this chapter considers philosophical positions which were, especially up to the publication of *The Sovereignty of Good* (1970), of importance for Murdoch's thought. The importance of both linguistic analysis and existentialism is acknowledged by almost every commentator. Some emphasise analytical philosophy, others existentialism. This chapter thus introduces two streams of thought which each in its own way helped form Murdoch's own thought. 'Help form', however, should not be understood in a merely constructive way. Even though Murdoch has acknowledged the merits of either one, she has come to posit her own thought more and more in opposition to these two. When in 'The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited' (1959) Murdoch presents the images of Ordinary Language Man and Totalitarian Man she expresses her criticism more than her appreciation. Ordinary Language Man is here the man of the contemporary British philosophy, Totalitarian Man of (Sartrean) existentialism.

The number of texts and arguments to consider in this chapter is considerable. I approach these texts from the following perspective. In the first, introductory chapter I reflected on the relationship between literature and philosophy in Murdoch's work. I argued that whereas the influence of the philosophy on the literature has received ample consideration, this is not true for the influence of the literature on the philosophy. In the present chapter I pursue this insight, yet considering not so much Murdoch's novels as her understanding of literature. Literature, and

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[1] The analytical philosophy which Murdoch encountered she also calls 'linguistic analysis', 'linguistic behaviourism'. (Compare Antonaccio, *Picturing the Human*, p. 205n2). I shall be using the term 'linguistic analysis' most of all.

in particular the nineteenth century novel, provides for her values which she does not find in contemporary philosophy.

In the first part of this chapter I discuss how these values (inner life and reality outside the self) are taken from her understanding of character, and how they have usually been discussed. In the second part I discuss how she looks for these values when considering existentialism. From the various reasons she may have had for being attracted to existentialism I focus on its representation of consciousness. I argue how Murdoch is in the end disappointed by existentialism, for its understanding of inner life does not endorse evaluation by an independent reality. Her later criticism of existentialism concerns most of all the similarities to linguistic analysis, as for example its emphasis on will. Existentialism has been an important, but also a passing concern for Murdoch's thought. In the third part of this chapter I focus on Murdoch's 'The Idea of Perfection'. I show the difficulty Murdoch has in sustaining both values in challenging a central argument in linguistic analysis, and how the introduction of the inner life impedes that of the reality outside.

2. Literature, Character and the Ills of Philosophy

The present research argues for the importance of Murdoch's understanding of literature and character in her philosophical thought. In doing so, it diverts from most other discussions of this notion, for Murdoch's observations on the nineteenth century novel and its notion of character have not been observed by philosophers as much as by literary theorists. Most often, they have been judged in relation to her own novels. In contrast, I shall argue that Murdoch intended her remarks to have a much wider scope, or perhaps a rather different scope.

A wider scope is also suggested by Conradi, entitling the sixth part of *Existentialists and Mystics*: 'Can Literature Help Cure the Ills of Philosophy?'. This heading is inspired by the following quotation from 'Against Dryness' (1961), one of two essays in this sixth part: 'Literature, in curing its own ills, can give us a new vocabulary of experience and a truer picture of freedom.'[2] The other essay in this part is 'The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited' (1959), in which Ordinary Language Man, the man of linguistic analysis, as well as Totalitarian Man, the man of existentialism, receive their name.

The origin of the heading, the full quotation from 'Against Dryness', suggests something different from the heading. The ills are, contrary to what Conradi's question implies, not only

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[2] Murdoch, *Existentialists and Mystics*, p. 259, compare Murdoch, 'Against Dryness' p. 295.

philosophical but also literary.[3] One would then be mistaken to think of philosophy as the problem and literature as the answer. Rather, Murdoch considers both contemporary philosophy and contemporary literature to be suffering from the same ill: a 'far too shallow and flimsy an idea of human personality.'[4]

This contraction of all of analytical, or even all of contemporary philosophy to a unified theory or even person is quite common in Murdoch's work.[5] In 'The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited' she introduces Ordinary Language Man as the man of 'linguistic empiricism' and Totalitarian Man of 'Sartrean existentialism'.[6] In 'Vision and Choice' she speaks of 'the current view', apologising to those who do not hold it.[7] In 'Metaphysics and Ethics' she explains her use of the term 'modern philosophers and modern philosophy' as 'the present-day version of our traditional empiricism which is known as linguistic analysis'.[8]

Murdoch perceives the contemporary (analytical) philosophers around her as a fairly harmonised assembly. Its most significant members she considers Ryle, Hare and Hampshire. Although she touches on the differences between her contemporaries, such comparisons do not appear frequently and do not have much significance, for even in these comparisons Murdoch stresses features these philosophers share.[9] She considers her main criticism so fundamental that it bypasses minor points of contrast and affects the different philosophers equally. In even later work Murdoch combines her criticism of analytical philosophy and existentialism in one image.[10]

In the same spirit Murdoch argues in 'Against Dryness' that both analytical and existentialist philosophy display a similar poor picture of human beings. She focuses on the image in analytical philosophy, while arguing that any difference in existentialist philosophy is not essential. 'Against Dryness' presents in a few lines what is wrong with the understanding of human beings in moral philosophy. Human beings are in this picture reduced to 'free rational wills'.[11] This exclusive attention to the will Murdoch most laments in this image, as well as the

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[3] Compare Murdoch, 'The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited', p. 266-267, where literature is said to give 'a more telling diagnosis of these ills [i.e. of philosophy]' and p. 270 where Murdoch announces 'to use certain philosophical conceptions in the diagnosis of certain literary ills.'

[4] Murdoch, 'Against Dryness', p. 287.

[5] The contraction of all of philosophy to one image is no more amazing than the contraction of all of literature to one image. However, my comments on the latter are limited, as I am not considering Murdoch's understanding of literature here, but her understanding of literature in the way in which it functions in her philosophical thought.

[6] Murdoch, 'The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited', p. 267-270.

[7] Murdoch, 'Vision and Choice', p. 77.

[8] Murdoch, 'Metaphysics and Ethics', p. 59.

[9] See for example Murdoch, 'Metaphysics and Ethics', p. 69.

[10] Compare for example the imagery of absorption in 'On 'God' and 'Good'': 'Existentialism has shown itself capable of becoming a popular philosophy and of getting into the minds of those (e.g. Oxford philosophers) who have not sought it and may even be unconscious of its presence.' (Murdoch, 'On 'God' and 'Good'', p. 337-8)

[11] Murdoch refers to S. Hampshire's *Thought and Action* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1959) for a developed image of what she there describes as 'ideally rational man'. She will refer to this text again in 'The Idea of Perfection', to be discussed later.

lack of any transcending reality or value. Murdoch argues that these human beings will never meet any real others, or encounter any overpowering reality. Instead, they oversee their surroundings and express their beliefs in acts and choices: 'We picture man as a brave naked will surrounded by an easily comprehended empirical world.'[12]

This understanding of human beings is the illness which Murdoch expects literature to cure. This link between literature and philosophy is not exceptional, but found throughout her work. Murdoch naturally thinks in literary imagery and easily switches between philosophy and fiction. In 'Thinking and Language', for example, one of the earliest essays, Murdoch interjects the musing of Gwendolin from George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*, in order to argue that inner monologues are relevant in themselves, not only with regard to subsequent overt actions and choices.

> But in fact, to us (as opposed to the external observer naming our goings on), our imagined monologues are not always unimportant, and we *do* attempt to characterise particular events which occur in them. In *Daniel Deronda* when Gwendolin hesitates to throw the lifebelt to her detested husband, who subsequently drowns, it matters very much to her to know whether or not at that moment she intended his death.[13]

The example from *Daniel Deronda* is presented to dispute the assumed insignificance of mental events. 'We', who recognise what Gwendolin endures are contrasted to an 'external observer'. Murdoch here equates thinking about fictional characters and about 'us'.

Literature is part of an opposition which runs through the essay, of ordinary versus philosophical. Murdoch, while engaging in philosophical arguments, positions herself in opposition to philosophy. So, she writes at the beginning of the essay: 'I set aside all philosophical thinking, old and new' and 'I shall assume, as we all do when we are not philosophising....'[14] Murdoch in her philosophical writings engages literary examples as representing the ordinary or recognisable against philosophical positions. With literature she brings in a position she calls ordinary.

However, only a particular selection of literary works she considers able to challenge philosophy thus. Murdoch refers to this selection as the nineteenth century novel. This notion includes works of a diverse range of authors: Austen, Scott, George Eliot, Henry James, and

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[12] Murdoch, 'Against Dryness', p. 290.
[13] Murdoch, 'Thinking and Language', p. 36.
[14] Murdoch, 'Thinking and Language', p. 33.

above all Tolstoy. These authors she compares favourably to work by another (disparate) group: the twentieth century novel. She expresses this distinction between those works most succinctly in 'Existentialists and Mystics':

> The most obvious difference between nineteenth-century novels and twentieth-century novels is that the nineteenth-century ones are better. Another clear difference lies in the changing attitude to society. The nineteenth-century novelist partly explores society, partly takes it for granted. ... Society is real and the human soul is pretty solid too: the mind, the personality are continuous and self-evident realities.[15]

In 'Against Dryness' Murdoch similarly argues that the nineteenth-century novel 'was concerned with real various individuals struggling in society.'[16]

This substantial nature of the nineteenth century characters Murdoch unmistakably prefers to those she encounters in the twentieth century novel. The twentieth century novel, in contrast to nineteenth century novels, she considers no longer to present those real individuals. In 'Against Dryness' she suggests that it is either 'crystalline or journalistic; that is, either a small quasi-allegorical object portraying the human condition and not containing 'characters' in the nineteenth-century sense, or else it is a large shapeless quasi-documentary object, the degenerate descendant of the nineteenth-century novel, telling, with pale conventional characters, some straightforward story enlivened with empirical facts.'[17] This difference is important, for she regards creation of character as 'the main difficulty of the writer of fiction ... whatever sort of attitude he may take to this activity, whatever mode he uses in relation to the presence of characters in his work.'[18] It is moreover the characteristic of literature in which it shows itself to be something ordinary.[19]

That nineteenth century novels are obviously better, in Murdoch's jest, or that they are most concerned with a portrayal of character, which challenges the demands of an overarching form, can be and has been disputed. Hillis Miller, in his introduction to *The Great Victorians* considers Victorian novels as structures in which the characters fit into the whole: 'Every element draws its meaning from the others, so that the novel must be described as a self-generating and

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[15] Murdoch, 'Existentialists and Mystics', p. 221.
[16] Murdoch, 'Against Dryness', p. 291.
[17] Murdoch, 'Against Dryness', p. 291.
[18] Murdoch, 'Art is the Imitation of Nature', p. 253.
[19] Murdoch, 'Art is the Imitation of Nature', p. 253ff.

self-sustaining system.'[20] Bergonzi, in his *The Situation of the Novel* points out that the enduring faith in character expressed by Murdoch in the quotation above is not something universal, but predominantly British: 'On the Continent it seems to be assumed that the realistic novel of character has had its day; while American critics are agreed that it has never properly flourished in the United States. But in Britain it is widely held that such novels can and should go on being written'.[21] In this context Bergonzi discusses the work of John Bayley, and Murdoch.

However, texts dealing particularly with Murdoch's novels rarely challenge her understanding of the nineteenth century novel. Instead, these comments on the nineteenth and twentieth century novel have been merely regarded in relation to her novels. This may be explained by the recommendation with which Murdoch ends 'Against Dryness'. Murdoch here recommends literature to change, so as to bring about a return to 'a non-metaphysical, non-totalitarian and non-religious sense, the transcendence of reality.'[22] It is literature rather than philosophy which is going to cure the ills of both. Indeed, Murdoch argues that 'literature is so important, especially since it has taken over some of the tasks performed by philosophy.' In order to do so it needs to change. Murdoch suggests a return to 'the now so unfashionable naturalistic idea of character':

> Real people are destructive of myth, contingency is destructive of fantasy and opens the way for imagination. Think of the Russians, those great masters of the contingent. Too much contingency of course may turn art into journalism. But since reality is incomplete, art must not be too much afraid of incompleteness. Literature must always represent a battle between people and images; and what it requires now is a much stronger and more complex conception of the former.[23]

So, Murdoch ends with a recommendation to reintroduce a notion of character, which she claims here has become so unfashionable. She engages this understanding of character in a battle against the form, or myth, of the crystalline novel. Character as a 'destructive power' defies the self-contained or whole. Thinking of the Russians one may recognise how real people and contingency destroy fantasy and make way for imagination.

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[20] J. Hillis Miller, *The Form of Victorian Fiction Thackeray, Dickens, Trollope, George Eliot, Meridith, and Hardy* (Notre Dame & London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968)
[21] Bergonzi, *The Situation of the Novel*, p. 42.
[22] Murdoch, 'Against Dryness', p. 293.
[23] Murdoch, 'Against Dryness', p. 294-295. With the term journalistic Murdoch refers here to her criticism of the contemporary novel in this essay.

It is unlikely that such recommendations do not in one way or another relate to the difficulties Murdoch experienced herself when writing novels. Critics have applied in particular this quotation from 'Against Dryness' to Murdoch's novels. Her plea in this essay for 'the now so unfashionable naturalistic idea of character' has been pivotal for some in the appraisal of her novels, yet the verdict has been far from uniform. Some critics consider these to come up to her own theoretical standards whereas others find them decidedly failing.

When applying these ideas to her own novels literary critics have been outspoken, yet they have also intimated the straightforwardness of their assessment. For example, Bergonzi writes after the quotation on the importance of character given above that '... it will be *evident* to the readers of Miss Murdoch's innumerable novels that she has conspicuously failed to put her ideas into practice, at least since *The Bell* came out in 1958'. Indeed, he argues that the characters may be complex, but they cannot interact as real people. Instead, he argues 'they can relate to each other only by some form of arbitrary sexual encounter, or an act of violence, or by involvement in the complicated or dangerous physical activity that Miss Murdoch describes rather well.'[24] For Bergonzi, even though the characters in Murdoch's novels may be real and rather complex, form plays the main part.[25] However, where for Bergonzi Murdoch evidentially fails, Conradi is adamant as well as brief in his defence of her: 'As to her supposed relative poverty at depicting character, however, her work everywhere gainsays this judgement.'[26]

Notwithstanding Conradi's defence, Murdoch's remarks on form in novels reflect the difficulties she encounters as a novelist. She considers her own novels unfavourably in comparison to the nineteenth century novel in this respect: 'I think it's true that the patterns which keep up the structure in my work - I think this is true of a lot of novelists writing today - are sexual, mythological, psychological patterns, and not the great hub of society which a nineteenth-century writer relied on.'[27] An enlightening discussion of this point I find the review of *The Red and the Green* by Ricks. He analyses how Murdoch's use of metaphor is intended to introduce the reality which is to combat form, but he considers it to fail in this aim. Ricks argues that 'Miss Murdoch's beliefs and intentions seem to me admirable, relevant, and almost completely unachieved in her novels.' He cites Murdoch's (theoretical) appreciation of 'history, real beings and real change, whatever is contingent, messy, boundless, infinitely particular and endlessly still to be explained', yet finds that her routine use of words like "[m]ystery' and its

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[24] Bergonzi, *The Situation of the Novel*, p. 47 and 48. (emphasis added)
[25] See also Ch. Ricks, 'A Sort of Mystery Novel' in *New Statesman*, 22 October 1965, p. 604-5.
[26] Conradi, *The Saint and the Artist*, p. 375. Conradi responds here to Bloom, who 'championed Murdoch as a religious fabulist, a writer of brilliant entertainments rather than a writer excelling at the fresh invention of personalities.' (See H. Bloom, 'A Comedy of Worldly Salvation' in *New York Times Book Review*, 12 January 1986, 1, p. 30-31.)
[27] Interview in *Listener*, 4 April 1968. Quoted in Bergonzi, *The Situation of the Novel*, p. 49.

derivatives, 'vague', 'sinister', 'strange', 'obscure', 'curious', 'somehow', 'weird', 'eerie', 'alarming', 'appalling" as well as 'a sort of' and 'a kind of' abandons any sense of mystery. He concludes: 'The adjective duress and the formulaic repetitiveness of her style undo any independent life in the characters, and bear out a remark of hers that is characteristic in its honesty but merciless in its judgement: Sartre's

> inability to write a great novel is a tragic symptom of a situation which afflicts us all. We know that the real lesson to be taught is that the human person is precious and unique; but we seem unable to set it forth except in terms of ideology and abstraction.'[28]

Recalling chapter one, Ricks is certainly not the only one to apply these words to Murdoch's own novels.

Murdoch's recommendations for the creation of character have most likely arisen from Murdoch's own practise as a novelist. In her novels she tries to create characters unlike the flimsy personalities she encounters in most contemporary writing, where it is debatable how much she has succeeded in doing so. However, she is not only writing as a novelist here. Other than its reception suggests, Murdoch is not solely concerned with fiction in the essays discussed here. In many of these essays written in this period Murdoch is considering both philosophy and literature. So, at the beginning of 'The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited' she claims to 'approach the problem as a novelist concerned with the creation of character.'[29] Yet contrary to one's expectations, this remark is followed by a short history of the notion of the individual in philosophy, starting with Kant. Conversely, in the second part of the essay when turning to literature Murdoch claims that she is not a critic, but that she is 'doing what philosophers do'.[30] This alternation between Murdoch the novelist and Murdoch the philosopher suggests that Murdoch does not limit herself here to one discipline.[31]

Conradi's question then, 'Can Literature Help Cure the Ills of Philosophy?', encourages to consider Murdoch's concern with character in a larger perspective. As a novelist concerned with the creation of character Murdoch turns to philosophy. As a philosopher concerned with the individual she turns to novels. So, Murdoch is not only talking about her own novels, but more

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[28] Ricks, 'A Sort of Mystery Novel', p. 605. The quotation is taken from Murdoch, *Sartre: Romantic Rationalist*, p. 148. Compare similar remarks by Byatt, in chapter one.

[29] Murdoch, 'The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited', p. 261. The problem referred to consists of a literary and a moral aspect: 'Is the Liberal-democratic theory of personality an adequate one?' and 'What is characteristic of the greatest literary works of art?' or 'What, chiefly, makes Tolstoy the greatest of novelists and Shakespeare the greatest of writers?'

[30] Murdoch, 'The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited', p. 270.

generally about contemporary literature and philosophy. Her attempts to reintroduce a less flimsy notion of self not only concern her novels but also her philosophical writing. Even though her concern is with analytical philosophy primarily I first turn to existentialism as a philosophy which in its interest in literature promised to be a philosophy interested in inner life.

3. The Merits of Existentialism

It has been argued that Murdoch's turn to existentialism was motivated by 'her deep dissatisfaction with Anglo-Saxon philosophy'.[32] Murdoch has been said to have found the attraction of existentialism in its interest in consciousness and in moral value. She did not find these in the contemporary philosophy she encountered in Oxford and Cambridge.[33]

Murdoch is also said to have been drawn towards Sartre's work because it consisted both of works of literature and works of philosophy. Thus David Gordon suggests that '[t]he subject of *Sartre: Romantic Rationalist* must have recommended itself readily to someone of her generation who was well trained in philosophy and about to publish a novel'.[34] Similarly, Hilda Spear writes that '[i]t is perhaps very much a pointer to her underlying interests at the time that the book, although essentially a philosophical study, is based on a consideration of Sartre's novels which, [Murdoch] suggests, 'provide more comprehensive material of study of his thought'.[35]

Sartre's philosophy was, moreover, at the time very popular. The atmosphere of excitement which it brought about after the war Murdoch vividly recalls in the 1987 introduction to *Sartre: Romantic Rationalist.* Sartre, she writes, was one of the very few philosophers whose popularity has been with large masses of young people all over Europe, even more than with professional philosophers:

> It had been long known that God was dead and that man was self-created. Sartre produced a fresh and apt picture of this self-chosen being. ... The war was over, Europe was in ruins, we had emerged from a long captivity, all was to be remade. Sartre's philosophy was an inspiration to many who felt that they must, and *could*,

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[31] Compare Murdoch, 'Against Dryness', p. 289.
[32] I shall be speaking of Sartre only here. He was, of course, not the only existentialist thinker nor the only one discussed by Murdoch. There is also, for example, Gabriel Marcel, whose Gifford Lectures, *The Mystery of Being*, Murdoch discusses in 'The Image of the Mind' (1951). His thoughts should be much closer to Murdoch's for he, as Phillips notes: 'stresses the need for true communication with others ...' (D. Phillips, *Agencies of the Good in the Work of Iris Murdoch* (Frankfurt am Main, New York: Peter Lang, 1991), p. 45) Phillips notices Murdoch's 'serious interest in and close knowledge of Marcel's philosophy', but she assumes that 'Marcel's thought has probably not influenced and shaped Murdoch's own philosophical stance as deeply and directly as Simone Weil's has'. (Phillips, *Agencies of the Good*, p. 63 n.1). Marcel is rarely mentioned in Murdoch's later work.
[33] P. Conradi, 'Preface', p. xxii.
[34] D. Gordon, *Iris Murdoch's Fables of Unselfing*, p. 17.
[35] H. Spear, *Iris Murdoch*, p. 8. The quote from *Sartre: Romantic Rationalist* is taken from p. 138.

> make out of all that misery and chaos a better world, for it had now been revealed that anything was possible. Existentialism was the new religion, the new salvation. This was the atmosphere in Brussels in 1945 where I first read *L'Être et le Néant* and where I briefly (and on this occasion only) met Sartre. His presence in the city was like that of a pop star. Chico Marx, who was there at about the same time, was less rapturously received.[36]

Murdoch's appreciation for existentialism is not only with the 'fresh and apt picture of a self-chosen being', but also with the abundant enthusiasm with which this image was perceived as 'the new religion, the new salvation.' When in later writing she is mainly critical of existentialism she still praises its attempt and desire 'to be a philosophy one could live by. Kierkegaard described the Hegelian system as a grand palace set up by someone who then lived in a hovel or at best in the porter's lodge. A moral philosophy should be inhabited.'[37] Existentialism Murdoch deemed inhabitable, yet if she ever moved in, she did not stay long.[38] In her later work, the term became synonymous for her criticism of contemporary philosophy, both analytical and continental.

Previously, I argued that novels and characters regularly feature in Murdoch's thought. It must have attracted her to encounter philosophers interested in literature. Sartre's, De Beauvoir's and Camus' concern for literature is moreover in Murdoch's observation more than an interest. 'These writers would claim that they are philosophers in the main tradition of European philosophy - and that their use of literary means is symptomatic of the turn that philosophy as a whole is now taking', she argues in a broadcast for the BBC in 1950.[39] This suggestion, that philosophy is taking a literary turn, recalls the argument in 'Against Dryness', where literature was considered to assume some of philosophy's tasks. There is, however, a remarkable difference between the two texts. The broadcast 'The Novelist as Metaphysician' precedes 'Against Dryness' by more than ten years. In 1950 Murdoch is still exploring existentialism's possibilities. Ten years later her tone is much more critical.

In the broadcast Murdoch argues that Sartre's novels have 'a strictly didactic purpose. They are intended to makes us conscious of the predicament that one is free and lonely, so that we may pursue sincerely and with open eyes our human *métier* of understanding our world and conferring meaning upon it.'[40] This didactic design reminds of another aspect mentioned above

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[36] Murdoch, *Sartre: Romantic Rationalist*, 9-10.
[37] Murdoch, 'On 'God' and 'Good'", p. 337.
[38] Whether Murdoch was ever an existentialist has been debated. Warnock 'roughly' applies the title still in *Women Philosophers* in 1996 (Warnock, *Women Philosophers*, p. xliii). Conradi reproaches her for doing so, calling her claim 'doubtful and inattentive'. (Conradi, 'Preface', p. xxii)
[39] Murdoch, 'The Novelist as Metaphysician', p. 101.
[40] Murdoch, 'The Novelist as Metaphysician', p. 103-4.

as one which has appealed to and also influenced Murdoch's thought. Existentialism has no desire to remain neutral. In the modern world without God it promises understanding and meaning. Existentialism shows Murdoch that philosophy as a way to live was not something belonging to the past.

In 'The Novelist as Metaphysician' Murdoch briefly explains Sartre's understanding of man, which his novels are to demonstrate, from his concept of consciousness. She argues that this notion of consciousness is best understood in relation to his understanding of things. Consciousness is in Sartre's well-known phrase, understood as *être-pour-soi*, being-for-itself, and things as *être-en-soi*, being-in-itself. The *en-soi* Sartre explains as being which is in itself, and is what it is.[41] It is complete identity. Consciousness, in contrast, Murdoch argues, 'is not a substance and it has no meaning, although it is the source of all meaning. Its fundamental character is nothingness, that is, its freedom'.[42]

This radio-broadcast swiftly moves from the metaphysical language of *pour-soi* and *en-soi* to a picture for many who like everyone 'readily seek out pictures whereby to understand ourselves'.[43] Human beings are not just free, they are *condemned* to freedom. They have the obligation to be free. Yet, the realisation of this obligation creates dread. Human consciousness has to determine itself. It has to decide what to believe, what to do, what to avoid. In doing so it has to be wary of all efforts to make it into a thing, or an *en-soi*. Consciousness 'has to contend, not only with the world of things, but with other selves who are only too ready to make it an object in their universe and to give it their alien significance.'[44] In Sartre's existentialism people are fundamentally alone in an inimical world.

It is this condition which the novels describe. Murdoch concludes that these novels are a new kind of novel 'in the sense that the writer's attention is focused on this unusual point, this point at which our beliefs, our world pictures, our politics, religions, loves and hates are seen to be discontinuous with the selves that may or may not go on affirming them.'[45] This is a remarkable observation with the hindsight of her later writing. Here, Murdoch introduces a new form of writing, which she considers as providing exciting possibilities for describing what it is like to live and give meaning to one's life in a world without God. In later writing this lonely man, whom she recognises in most novels, embodies a much criticised understanding of human being.

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[41] J.-P. Sartre, *L'Être et le Néant : essai d'ontoloie phénoménologique* (Paris : Gallimard, 1943) p. 34.
[42] Murdoch, 'The Novelist as Metaphysician', p. 104. Murdoch says too that consciousness '*is* nothing'. This may be misleading. It should of course not be understood to imply that there is no consciousness. Rather, consciousness relates to itself and to everything else as to something it is not. This is the origin of freedom for human beings. (Compare Sartre, *L'Être et le Néant*, p. 121)
[43] Murdoch, 'The Novelist as Metaphysician', p. 104.
[44] Murdoch, 'The Novelist as Metaphysician', p. 104.
[45] Murdoch, 'The Novelist as Metaphysician', p. 107.

The shift from enthusiasm to more sober judgment is explained by *Sartre: Romantic Rationalist*, particularly by its discussion of *La Nausée* and its main character Antoine Roquentin. Murdoch's strongest as well as lasting fascination rests, I would argue, not as much with existentialism's general picture as it does with Antoine Roquentin in *La Nausée*. When pressed by Magee to consider a possible role for philosophy in literature this first novel of Sartre's is 'the one good philosophical novel' she can think of, for it 'does manage to express some interesting ideas about contingency and consciousness, and to remain a work of art which does not have to be read in the light of theories which the author has expressed elsewhere. It is a rare object. Of course it is still philosophically 'fresh'.'[46] Her interest in this novel lasts from her early writings to the last, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*.

Sartre: Romantic Rationalist testifies to Murdoch's fascination with *La Nausée*. The novel is discussed in the first chapter, as an unorthodox introduction to Sartre's work. *Sartre: Romantic Rationalist* is not organised according to chronology. In fact, the work does not have much resemblance to a more common appearance of a work on one thinker, starting with a description of his life, or an attempt at an overview of his work. It is instead ordered in a rather idiosyncratic way. *La Nausée* poses a problem for which Murdoch in consequent chapters looks for a solution. It is via the image that *La Nausée* presents that one may understand the extraordinary construction of *Sartre: Romantic Rationalist*.

This image is that of its main character and narrator, Antoine Roquentin. Roquentin is condemned to ethical and logical loneliness.[47] He is a man almost without relation or conversation. Yet his loneliness goes far beyond that of any form of ordinary solitude. He feels not only isolated from, but also disgusted by the mere existence of things and people. Murdoch concisely relates how he experiences a feeling of horror at different occasions. Standing on the seashore about to throw a pebble into the water, he is suddenly overcome with 'a curious sickly horror'.[48] Sitting in a café, '[l]ooking at a glass of beer, at the braces of the café *patron*, he is filled with a sweetish sort of disgust' (*une espèce d'écoeurement douceâtre*)'.[49] He visits a museum full of pictures of the bourgeoisie in Bouville. He recognises how they claim that their lives had meaning by referring to the institutions of state and family they belonged to and Roquentin turns away, disgusted.[50]

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[46] Magee, 'Philosophy and Literature', p. 20. Yet, in the same interview she expresses to feel *horror* at the thought that the same verdict is applied to her own work.
[47] Murdoch, 'The Novelist as Metaphysician', p. 106-7.
[48] Murdoch, *Sartre: Romantic Rationalist*, p. 39.
[49] Murdoch, *Sartre: Romantic Rationalist*, p. 39.
[50] Murdoch, *Sartre: Romantic Rationalist*, p. 40.

It is not just other things which provoke this experience. Murdoch notes that 'what marks him out as an existentialist doubter is the fact that he himself is in the picture: what most distresses him is that his own individual being is invaded by the senseless flux; what most interests him is his aspiration to *be* in a different way.'[51] The experience of nausea is first encountered when he 'looks at his own face in the mirror, and suddenly it seems to him inhuman, fishlike.'[52] Roquentin realizes that there is no inevitability in a lived life, that there are no adventures: 'One can live or tell: not both at once'. What is the 'I' that exists presently? It is 'merely the ever-lengthening *stuff* of gluey sensations and vague fragmentary thoughts.'[53]

The climax and also the most metaphysical part of the story Murdoch considers to be Roquentin's realisation that word and thing are not related at all. The word 'seagull' makes it possible to think in classes and kinds, yet it is delivered from the bird Roquentin sees in the park.

> Then comes the final and fullest revelation. 'I understood that there was no middle way between non-existence and this swooning abundance. What exists at all must exist to this point: the point of mouldering, of bulging, of obscenity. In another world, circles and melodies retain their pure and rigid contours. But existence is a degeneration.'[54]

Imprisoned between this existence and the purity he is looking for, Roquentin finds his salvation through art, through a book he will write, and which will enable him to 'attain to a conception of his own life as having the purity, the clarity and the necessity which the work of art created by him will possess'.[55]

Murdoch is not much convinced by this solution and neither, she assumes, is Sartre.[56] She decides that *La Nausée*'s 'interest lies in the powerful image which dominates it, and in the descriptions which constitutes the argument.'[57] *La Nausée* is 'a philosophical myth' which 'shows to us in a memorable way the master-image of Sartre's thinking.'[58] It is said to describe alternately 'all of us', the philosopher and Sartre. At one point Murdoch allows for 'Roquentin's sensations [to be] not in themselves so rare and peculiar'[59], but fairly recognisable. At another point she denies that Roquentin is an ordinary man. He regards the world with the reflexive consciousness

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[51] Murdoch, *Sartre: Romantic Rationalist*, p. 43.
[52] Murdoch, *Sartre: Romantic Rationalist*, p. 39.
[53] Murdoch, *Sartre: Romantic Rationalist*, p. 40.
[54] Murdoch, *Sartre: Romantic Rationalist*, p. 41.
[55] Murdoch, *Sartre: Romantic Rationalist*, p. 46.
[56] Murdoch, *Sartre: Romantic Rationalist*, p. 46-7 and 50 respectively.
[57] Murdoch, *Sartre: Romantic Rationalist*, p. 47.
[58] Murdoch, *Sartre: Romantic Rationalist*, p. 42, 49.

of a philosopher. In an illuminating comparison to K. in Kafka's *The Castle*, Murdoch points out how despite the absurdity of his surroundings K. keeps faith in ordinary communication and signs, whereas Sartre's hero quickly abandons such hopes when he realises the absurdity of the world. Murdoch concludes: 'The hero of *La Nausée* is reflective and analytical; the book is not a metaphysical image so much as a philosophical analysis which makes use of a metaphysical image.'[60]

La Nausée offers a rather disturbing image of the human situation, yet it does not offer any solution.[61] Murdoch looks for Sartre's more positive points in other novels, and in his writing on literature and philosophy, and finally in his political work.

> As a European socialist intellectual with an acute sense of the needs of his time Sartre wishes to affirm the preciousness of the individual and the possibility of a society which is free and democratic in the traditional liberal sense of these terms. ... As a philosopher however he finds himself without the materials to construct a system which will hold and justify these values; Sartre believes neither in God nor in Nature nor in History. What he *does* believe in is Reason ... Sartre is a rationalist; for him the supreme virtue is reflective self-awareness.[62]

Here Murdoch sketches the dilemma Sartre finds himself in. He wants to defend the preciousness of the individual, but he despises most means to do so: God, Nature, History. The only true value Sartre acknowledges is that of self-reflection.

This individual finds itself on the one hand threatened by the deadening stability of existence, of things as well as people. In Sartre's world people can only relate by domination or submission. On the other hand via its reason it cannot reach any salvation. Its notion of freedom is contradictory: 'The empty consciousness flickers like a vain fire between the inert petrifying reality which threatens to engulf it and the impossible totality of a stabilised freedom. There is total freedom or total immersion, empty reflexion or silence.'[63] His situation is hopeless, but as a romantic he embraces this hopelessness. 'When in insuperable practical difficulties a sense of 'all or nothing' is what *consoles*.'[64]

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[59] Murdoch, *Sartre: Romantic Rationalist*, p. 43.
[60] Murdoch, *Sartre: Romantic Rationalist*, p. 48.
[61] Murdoch, *Sartre: Romantic Rationalist*, p. 45.
[62] Murdoch, *Sartre: Romantic Rationalist*, p. 105.
[63] Murdoch, *Sartre: Romantic Rationalist*, p. 110-1.
[64] Murdoch, *Sartre: Romantic Rationalist*, p. 111. Compare Murdoch, 'On 'God' and 'Good'', p. 340-1.

Sartre: Romantic Rationalist expresses Murdoch's fascination, but also her disappointment with Sartre's understanding of human beings. This disappointment she expresses in the work's last words:

> [Sartre's] inability to write a great novel is a tragic symptom of a situation which affects us all. We know that the real lesson to be taught is that the human person is precious and unique; but we seem unable to set it forth except in terms of ideology and abstraction.[65]

These words, I argued before, have been often quoted as indicative of her own thought. So, even though she is now more critical of existentialism than she was in 'The Novelist as Metaphysician', it cannot easily be discarded as a possibility which did not live up to its expectations. Instead, existentialism slowly comes to occupy her own mind (as she puts it herself when talking about analytical philosophers[66]). Sartre's problem becomes her problem. In the first chapter of *Sartre: Romantic Rationalist* she cannot decide whether Roquentin presents everyone, or only philosophers, or even only Sartre's mind. In later writing she has to acknowledge the similarity between Roquentin and between various contemporary representations of individuals, including her own.

How profoundly the image of Roquentin has captured Murdoch's imagination can indeed be seen in her literary work. There are various allusions to it, often in puns. For example Jake Donaghue in *Under the Net* comments on parts of London 'where contingency reaches the point of nausea'[67]. He is also one of the various main (almost always male) characters and narrators in Murdoch's novels, who do not acknowledge any binding commitment to family or friends. They literally embody this independent existence, for their bodies are remarkably immaterial, hardly affected by time, and without any distinguishing features. These men pride themselves on not having to shave often, on not being bald, nor small, nor fat, thin or large. Charles Arrowby in *The Sea, The Sea* thus contrasts to his cousin James, who 'has to shave twice a day. Sometimes he positively looks dirty'.[68] Bradley Pearson in *The Black Prince* prides himself on his clean outlook and Rupert in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* has not lost his blond looks, whereas his wife Hilda decidedly shows her age.

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[65] Murdoch, *Sartre: Romantic Rationalist*, p. 148.
[66] Compare Murdoch, 'On 'God' and 'Good'", p. 337-338: Existentialism has shown itself capable of becoming a popular philosophy and of getting into the minds of those (e.g. Oxford philosophers) who have not sought it and may even be unconscious of its presence.'
[67] As quoted in Phillips, *Agencies of the Good in the Work of Iris Murdoch*, p. 47.
[68] Murdoch, *The Sea, The Sea*, p. 173-4.

Her novels can be seen too as attempts to create imagery in reply to Sartre's. One such instance in one of the earlier novels is discussed by Allen, in his 'Two Experiences of Existence: Jean-Paul Sartre and Iris Murdoch'. In *The Unicorn* Effingham Cooper, a rather egoistic, intelligent and successful civil servant finds himself at one point trapped in a bog from which there seems no escape and death is near. At the proximity of his death he has a most unusual experience.

> Something had been withdrawn, had slipped away from him in the moment of his attention, and that something was simply himself. Perhaps he was dead already, the darkening image of the self forever removed. Yet what was left, for something was surely left, something existed still? It came to him with the simplicity of the simple sum. What was left was everything else, all that was not himself, that object which he had never before seem and upon which he now gazed with the passion of a lover.[69]

Allen points out that this image is a response to that of Roquentin. Where the one experiences reality as something that must be loved, the other's experience of reality is to feel nauseous. Allen points out that neither experience is close to any ordinary form of experience. Their importance he places in the evaluation each of them makes of ordinary experience, reasoning from these extraordinary ones. Allen argues that for Sartre ordinary experience is self-deception, for Murdoch it is serious distortion. For Sartre there is no way out: people are craving for completeness, which can never be obtained without giving up freedom. For Murdoch the inward person needs to be broken down in order to make space for what is outside. This imagery reveals the direction of Murdoch's thought. While maintaining the importance of consciousness she attempts to relate it to a reality independent of it.

Sartre's work for Murdoch then reveals a problem facing her as a novelist concerned with the creation of character. In his work she recognises the kind of hero found in contemporary literature. This problem is one which, I argued before, affects her too as a philosopher, reflecting on the general perception of human beings. Like Sartre, Murdoch is looking for means to 'affirm the preciousness of the individual'. Yet already in the first chapter of *Sartre: Romantic Rationalist*, she doubts if the individual can only be defended through Roquentin's image, and if the individual can only be imagined to be a Roquentin. With Gabriel Marcel she wonders in *Sartre: Romantic Rationalist*'s first chapter: 'why ... does Sartre find the contingent over-abundance of the

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[69] Murdoch, *The Unicorn*, p. 167. Also quoted in D. Allen, 'Two Experiences of Existence: Jean-Paul Sartre and Iris Murdoch' in *International Philosophical Quarterly* 14.2 (June 1974), p. 181-187, p. 182-3.

world nauseating rather than glorious?'[70] In 'The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited' she writes how existentialism's Totalitarian Man 'is entirely alone. ... In the world inhabited by Totalitarian Man there are other people, but there are not real contingent separate other people.'[71] Her answer to this solitude will be to connect the self to reality again, which in these essays is understood as a common sense concept. Murdoch attempts a return to this world, which Sartre found nauseating. Turning to Anglo-Saxon philosophy I shall argue how Murdoch tries to introduce consciousness in its relation to reality; how she attempts to retain the (moral) importance existentialism attributes to private deliberation, against a moral philosophy which focuses on observable actions; and how she unlike existentialism tries to connect these deliberations to an independent reality. In the following discussion of M and D I shall consider what difficulties she encounters in these attempts.

4. Struggle and Temperament in 'The Idea of Perfection'; A Mother-in-Law M and her Daughter-in-Law D

The example of M and D has become the emblem of Murdoch's thought, yet it first arose in a specific context, the essay 'The Idea of Perfection' (1964). This text is the first of three essays which together make up *The Sovereignty of Good* (1970), Murdoch's best known work of philosophy. All three had been previously published individually and were only assembled for the series 'Studies in Ethics and Philosophy of Religion', edited by D.Z. Phillips.[72] In the latter two, 'On 'God' and 'Good'' (1969) and 'The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts' (1967), Murdoch develops her own moral philosophy around the idea of the Good. The state of contemporary philosophy is shortly and idiosyncratically related in the first few pages of each of the two essays.[73]

A first and obvious difference between 'The Idea of Perfection' and the other two essays is its length. 'The Idea of Perfection' is considerably longer, roughly one and a half time the size of each of the other two. Another distinguishing feature may explain this first difference. In 'The Idea of Perfection' Murdoch is constrained by the arguments as well as by the form of

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[70] Murdoch, *Sartre: Romantic Rationalist*, p. 49.
[71] Murdoch, 'The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited', p. 268 and 269.
[72] P. Conradi, *Iris Murdoch*, p. 492. 'The Idea of Perfection' in: *Yale Review* 53.3 (spring 1964), pp. 342-380; *The Sovereignty of Good*, London: C.U. Press, 1967 (Leslie Stephen Lecture); 'On "God" and "Good"' in: M. Grene (red.), *The Anatomy of Knowledge* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), pp. 233-258. 'The Idea of Perfection' is based on the Ballard Matthews lecture, which Murdoch gave in 1962 at University College North Wales. 'The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts' was the Leslie Stephen Lecture in 1967, held in Cambridge.
[73] In 'On 'God' and 'Good'' Murdoch proceeds by wondering in what way prayer can still be valuable for those she calls 'unreligious believers'. Would it be possible for them to direct their attention to the Good? What would such a Good be like? In 'The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts' she considers the metaphor of the Good in answer to a question she also asks in 'On 'God' and 'Good'': 'How can we make ourselves better?'. 'The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts', p. 368, compare 'On 'God' and 'Good'', p. 342: 'What is a good man like? How can we make ourselves morally better? *Can* we make ourselves morally better? These are questions the philosopher should try to answer.'

argumentation she encounters in the prevalent discussion in moral philosophy. Because of this constraint she finds herself repeatedly unable to pursue her own argument and consequently forced to try bolder, new directions. This time-consuming procedure is replaced by a more concise, idiosyncratic depiction of current moral philosophy in the other two essays.

The on-going dispute in 'The Idea of Perfection' can in first instance and in its entirety perhaps best be characterised by a metaphor which Murdoch introduces into the discussion. This is the metaphor of 'struggle'. Images of struggle are invoked throughout this essay. Thus one finds Murdoch 'mounting an attack upon this heavily fortified position'[74] or appealing for 'some sort of change of key, some moving the attack to a different front.'[75] It may be a defining moment when she remarks, in parenthesis: '(There is curiously little place in the other picture for the idea of *struggle*.)'.[76]

This struggle is up to a certain degree decided by temperament, which for Murdoch is a natural ingredient of philosophical debate. She does not mind admitting that it may be temperament which decides whether one is satisfied with a certain argument, 'whether or not we *want* to attack or whether we are content. I am not content.'[77] In the first sentence of 'On 'God' and 'Good'' she even suggests that philosophy is as much about temperament as it is about truth: 'To do philosophy is to explore one's own temperament and yet at the same time to attempt to discover the truth.'[78] The way in which temperament characterises the dispute in 'The Idea of Perfection' is well illustrated by the image of people protesting and crying out to receive only a cool reply from philosophers.[79] The philosophers' cool reply does not only convey a very different sort of temperament but also suggests that temperament is of no importance in a philosophical debate.

In 'The Idea of Perfection' Murdoch is discontent with 'current moral philosophy' for two reasons: 'it ignores certain facts and at the same time imposes a single theory which admits of no communication with or escape into rival theories.'[80] Taking her cue from Moore, who answered McTaggart's 'time is unreal' by 'I just had breakfast' Murdoch proposes 'a move back towards the consideration of simple and obvious facts.'

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[74] Murdoch, 'The Idea of Perfection', p. 311.
[75] Murdoch, 'The Idea of Perfection', p. 318.
[76] Murdoch, 'The Idea of Perfection', p. 317. These images are present in the other two essays as well, even though the confrontation with linguistic analysis is less turbulent there. Compare the first paragraphs of 'On 'God' and 'Good'' and of 'The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts'.
[77] Murdoch, 'The Idea of Perfection', p. 311, compare p. 324, Murdoch, 'On 'God' and 'Good'', p. 340, 359.
[78] Murdoch, 'On 'God' and 'Good'', p. 337.
[79] Murdoch, 'The Idea of Perfection', p. 309.
[80] Murdoch, 'The Idea of Perfection', p. 299.

> Instances of the facts, as I shall boldly call them, which interest me and which seem to have been forgotten or 'theorised away' are the fact that an unexamined life can be virtuous and the fact that love is a central concept in morals. ... it must be possible to do justice to both Socrates and the virtuous peasant.[81]

Thus, in 'The Idea of Perfection' Murdoch starts an argument against a position that leaves no room for other positions and she does so by returning to certain facts. Talking of facts is indeed a 'bold' thing to do, for in 'The Idea of Perfection' as in other essays Murdoch challenges the strict distinction between fact and value. Her facts are, moreover, of an unusual kind. The moral philosophers Murdoch argues against in 'The Idea of Perfection' would not at all recognise as facts those mentioned by Murdoch: 'the fact that an unexamined life can be virtuous and the fact that love is a central concept in morals'.

The position Murdoch introduces against 'current moral philosophy' is also largely indicated by words like 'simple' and 'obvious'. 'Simple', 'simply', 'obvious', 'surely' are all regularly used, often in opposition to philosophy. So one finds people protesting and crying out against philosophers, when the latter have reasoned away the inner life: 'Surely there is such a thing as deciding and not acting? Surely there are private decisions? Surely there are lots and lots of objects, more or less easily identified, in orbit as it were in inner space?' And even after the cool reply these people maintain that they 'surely ... *do* have images, talk to [them]selves etc.'[82]

It is the simple and obvious that likewise inspires the 'rough ordinary' analysis of the example of M and D, 'as yet without explanation':

> [I]s not the metaphor of vision almost irresistibly suggested to anyone who, *without philosophical prejudice*, wishes to describe the situation? Is it not a *natural* metaphor? ... M's activity here, so far from being something very odd and hazy, is something which, in a way, *we find exceedingly familiar.* Innumerable novels contain accounts of what such struggles are like. *Anybody* could describe one without being at a loss for words.[83]

With expressions as 'without philosophical prejudice', 'natural', and 'exceedingly familiar' Murdoch is appealing to some form of common sense which all should recognise from life or from innumerable novels.

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[81] Murdoch, 'The Idea of Perfection', p. 299.
[82] Murdoch, 'The Idea of Perfection', p. 309-310. As Murdoch indicates herself this argument goes back to one of her earliest articles, 'Thinking and Language'.

The reference to 'innumerable novels' is noteworthy here. It recalls the part literature plays in Murdoch's thought, discussed in the first part of this chapter. Novels are opposed to philosophy as well as likened to the familiar. Somebody looking for a way to describe M and D would naturally use the metaphor of vision, Murdoch maintains. Innumerable novels provide vocabulary for anyone to describe the situation differently from the alien analysis of philosophy.

The supporters of simple and obvious facts in 'The Idea of Perfection' dissent from 'ideally rational man'. He represents the kind of moral philosophy Murdoch intends to challenge. She assembles his image from two works by Hampshire: *Thought and Action* and 'Disposition and Memory'. The term 'ideally rational man' is taken from the latter.[84] He is introduced with a considerable amount of quotation.

> This person would be 'aware of all his memories as memories ... His wishes would be attached to definite possibilities in a definite future ... He would ... distinguish his present situation from unconscious memories of the past ... and would find his motives for action in satisfying his instinctual needs within the objectively observed features of the situation.' This ideal man does not exist because the palimpsest of 'dispositions' is too hard to penetrate, and this is just as well because ideal rationality would leave us 'without art, without dream or imagination, without like or dislikes unconnected with instinctual needs'.[85]

From this quotation it is possible to draw out ideally rational man's main features. First, his intentions should be clear. Murdoch writes: '[Hampshire] utters in relation to intention the only explicit 'ought' in his philosophy. We ought to know what we are doing.'[86] In 'The Darkness of Practical Reasoning' and 'On 'God' and 'Good'' she argues that it is indeed possible for Hampshire to maintain this requirement, for he considers it always possible to take a step back and reconsider the situation. Secondly, the thoughts and actions of 'ideally rational man' are directed to what is overtly observable. Reality is thus defined as 'potentially open to different observers'. This observable world of facts is clearly distinguished from the value one may attach to it. This distinction leads to the third point. Decisions are made by the will, which is isolated from reason, belief and emotions. More than once Murdoch quotes Hampshire's 'I identify

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[83] Murdoch, 'The Idea of Perfection', p. 316-317, emphasis added.
[84] Murdoch, 'The Idea of Perfection', p. 303. Compare S. Hampshire, 'Disposition and Memory' (*Freedom of Mind and Other Essays*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, p. 160-182). The quotation is taken from p. 176.
[85] Murdoch, 'The Idea of Perfection', p. 303-304. Compare Hampshire, 'Disposition and Memory', p. 176.
[86] Murdoch, 'The Idea of Perfection', p. 304.

myself with my will'.[87] For 'ideally rational man' as for Ordinary Language Man from 'The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited' any daydreaming or musing has no meaning if it is not expressed in words or acts. Morality is reduced to choice. Ordinary Language Man observes the facts, reasons the values and chooses.[88] Both men are decidedly alone, surrounded by a world and a language which has no secrets for them. Other people do not exist other than as similar rational agents.[89]

What Murdoch is most concerned with in 'The Idea of Perfection' is the (moral) absence of the inner life. Murdoch's criticism is thus extended to the philosophy of mind which sustains the moral philosophy.[90] In this philosophy of mind the inner life is, if not insignificant daydreaming, no more than a shadow of the public life. The idea of a private certainty, as for example Descartes' *cogito*, cannot be part of the structure of a concept and is discarded in favour of an understanding of a concept as a public structure. This understanding of meaning is lucidly illustrated by the concept of red: 'the inner picture is necessarily irrelevant and the possession of the concept is a public skill. What matters is whether I stop as the traffic lights, and not my colour imagery or absence of it.'[91]

Of all the different objections Murdoch formulates against this position[92] I focus on those against the argument which she calls 'the most radical argument, the key-stone, of this existentialist-behaviourist type of moral psychology, the argument to the effect that mental concepts must be analysed genetically and so the inner must be thought of as parasitic upon the outer.'[93] It is this argument which makes the position so difficult to challenge. Murdoch describes how it has originated in the *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, but was then further developed by 'Hampshire, Hare, Ayer, Ryle and others'[94] in a way which is not found in Wittgenstein's own work. According to the genetic argument all concepts are learnt only in public situations. 'The structure of the concept is its public structure, which is established by coinciding procedures in public situations.'[95] In this line of argument the inner life is stripped of all relevance for

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[87] Murdoch, 'The Idea of Perfection', p. 303, 304-5, and 328.
[88] Compare Murdoch, 'The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited', p. 267.
[89] Murdoch, 'The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited', p. 268.
[90] See Murdoch, 'The Idea of Perfection', p. 300.
[91] Murdoch, 'The Idea of Perfection', p. 307.
[92] 'I find the image of man which I have sketched above both alien and implausible. That is, more precisely: I have simple empirical objections (I do not think people are necessarily or essentially 'like that'), I have philosophical objections (I do not find the arguments convincing), and I have moral objections (I do not think people *ought* to picture themselves in this way).' (Murdoch, 'The Idea of Perfection', p. 306)
[93] Murdoch, 'The Idea of Perfection', p. 306. Compare Hampshire, 'Disposition and Memory', p. 167 ff.
[94] Murdoch, 'The Idea of Perfection', p. 308. Compare p. 311.
[95] Murdoch, 'The Idea of Perfection', p. 307.

determining the meaning of concepts and because this is so, Murdoch argues, 'it has been too hastily assumed that something else is not there.'[96]

Recapturing the inner life proves to be difficult.[97] After first attempts Murdoch expresses the need for an object which we can all look at. She suggests that she might have used an example other than that of M and D, namely that of a ritual. A ritual, just as the example used, begs the question of the inner life or of what is extra to public words and gestures: whether being sorry adds to saying one is, or whether one is repentant when one says so, or beats one's chest. Murdoch, however, does not pursue this religious example, because 'it might be felt to raise special difficulties.' Instead she turns to something 'more ordinary and everyday'.[98]

The following quotation gives the full flavour of the example:

> 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 in dignity and refinement. D is inclined to be pert and familiar, insufficiently ceremonious, brusque, sometimes positively rude, always tiresome 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 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.
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> 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 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

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[96] Murdoch, 'The Idea of Perfection', p. 307.
[97] Murdoch, 'The Idea of Perfection', p. 309-311.
[98] Murdoch, 'The Idea of Perfection', p. 312. Of course, it can be disputed that religious examples are not ordinary and everyday. Again, Murdoch is not denying it is ordinary and everyday for some. It is however not so for those whom she considers her audience.

> 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, and so on. And as I say, *ex hypothesi*, M's outward behaviour, beautiful from the start, in no way alters.[99]

This engaging imagery Murdoch introduces as 'an example ... some object which we can all more or less see, and to which we can from time to time refer.'[100] In the secondary literature it has obtained the status of the emblem of Murdoch's philosophy, in particular but not exclusively in Antonaccio's *Picturing the Human*. Antonaccio calls it 'a prominent example ... of a kind of conceptual analysis in the form of "pictures" and images of human existence in order to analyze moral identity in relation to the good' and 'a particularly rich illustration of many of Murdoch's complex theoretical points'.[101]. The image is of great significance in Antonaccio's work. She distinguishes different aspects in which the image is different from Hamsphire's 'Ideally Rational Man'.[102] However, by using the terms 'example' and 'illustration' she allows that the image may be omitted.

I shall argue that the image cannot be omitted, because it does not only illustrate Murdoch's arguments, but also shows their difficulties. It is indeed true that the musings and personal thoughts cannot be omitted. The image is thus formulated that the inner life is *per definition* of importance for moral philosophy and the change happening within that inner life is *per definition* good. Whatever it is that is happening it is only happening within the inner life. M's change of view is not noticeable, for M has behaved correctly throughout. Neither is there is any observable external cause which encourages or forces M to change her image of D. The change is not instigated by D or by anyone else. What has started the change Murdoch describes thus: '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."

The words 'intelligent', 'well-intentioned' etc. are deliberately chosen to convey that the change of view should be considered as good. Murdoch explicitly asks her readers to think of the change in that way. She acknowledges that 'in real life, and this is of interest, it might be very hard to decide whether what M was doing was proper or not, and opinions might differ. ... Some

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[99] Murdoch, 'The Idea of Perfection', p. 312-313.
[100] Murdoch, 'The Idea of Perfection', p. 312.
[101] Antonaccio, *Picturing the Human*, p. 22, and 24.

people might say 'she deludes herself' while others would say she was moved by love or justice. I am picturing a case where I would find the latter description appropriate.'[103]

Murdoch adds specific claims 'to ensure that whatever is in question as *happening* happens entirely in M's mind.' However, for the analytical philosophers she is arguing against these claims make the example irrelevant for moral philosophy. The example of M and D is immediately followed by its refutation, and Murdoch characteristically presents their refutation as if in a dialogue. A philosopher, against whom the argument is directed, she suggests, can argue that either there is no inner life and since there is no change in the outer life either, it is difficult to speak of any change at all. Or, there is some form of inner life, but for this form of inner life to regain meaning and not to be just 'the charmed and habitual rehearsal of phrases'[104] one needs the outer world. On her own M cannot give meaning to what she is doing or give meaning to the words she speaks to herself.[105] This setback makes Murdoch dismally exclaim: 'this is one of those exasperating moments in philosophy when one seems to be relentlessly prevented from saying something which one is irresistibly impelled to say.'[106]

Murdoch counters this exasperation by stating 'in a rough and ordinary way and as yet without justification' what she thinks to be the case. Part of this explanation I quoted above. M is 'continually active ... making progress ... her inner acts [belong] to her or [form] part of a continuous fabric of being ... one feels impelled to say something like: M's activity is peculiarly *her own*. Its details are the details of *this* personality; and partly for this reason it may be an activity which can only be performed privately. M could not *do this* thing in conversation with another person.'[107]

Against analytical philosophy's interest limited to the observable Murdoch posits the importance of the inner life and of private deliberation. In order to strengthen her argument she suggests the absence of any other person. 'M could not *do this* thing in conversation with another person.' Murdoch dismisses even D: 'the young couple have emigrated or ... D is now dead: the point to ensure that whatever is in question as *happening* happens entirely in M's mind'. So, when Murdoch later remarks that 'M observes D'[108], 'M *looks* at D, she attends to D, she focuses her attention'[109] it should be surmised that this too happens entirely in M's mind. For one has learnt earlier that D - the object of attention- has emigrated or died.

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[102] Antonaccio, *Picturing the Human*, p. 88-95.
[103] Murdoch, 'The Idea of Perfection', p. 313.
[104] Murdoch, 'The Idea of Perfection', P. 315.
[105] Murdoch, 'The Idea of Perfection', p. 313-316. Compare M. Antonaccio, *Picturing the Human*, p. 88.
[106] Murdoch, 'The Idea of Perfection', p. 316.
[107] Murdoch, 'The Idea of Perfection', p. 316-7.
[108] Murdoch, 'The Idea of Perfection', p. 313.
[109] Murdoch, 'The Idea of Perfection', p. 317.

The lasting absence of D does not impede M's attempts to change her thoughts on D. Yet, the stipulation occasions a surprising contrast to the language of vision and attention. M looks at D, but D is not actually present. The contrast arises again when Murdoch later connects the idea of perfection and the idea of the individual: 'Love is knowledge of the individual. M confronted with D has an endless task.' Murdoch also mentions, referring to Weil, the notion of attention, 'the idea of a just and loving gaze directed upon an individual reality. I believe this to be the characteristic and proper mark of the active moral agent.'[110]

While the supposition of D's absence suits the arguments against the analytical philosophers, as there is no change but in M's mind, it also creates an unusual picture of a change of mind. Without any external prompting or direction M conceives of a better picture of D. If D had been there all along, it is easy to picture how M might have changed her mind when both women would get more used to one another. Also, in D's absence, it is possible to envision that M's son has married a woman even less mature, or that M feels obliged to defend her son's choice against neighbours or colleagues. However, the claims put upon this image exclude these possibilities. What M is doing is not perceived or influenced by anyone. It is a purely individual activity. M changes her mind to obtain a more realistic picture in complete solitude.

Any difficulty to imagine this change of mind could be explained by arguing that imagination does not easily engage with what is unfamiliar. Recalling the depressing picture Murdoch has of human beings, it should not be surprising that it is difficult to imagine something unknown, in this case changing one's mind without much external compulsion. This difficulty to envision this change of mind does not entail the impossibility to do so, yet it disputes the supposed simplicity of the imagery.

To imagine M is not so simple, because Murdoch adds extra claims in order to meet the philosophical argument. What M thinks is *ex hypothesi* of importance and the change is *ex hypothesi* good, for if not the picture would no longer fit the philosophical argument. The absence of any observable change necessitates the conclusion that the change must have been in M's mind. However, at the same time Murdoch also supposes the absence of any reality of other people surrounding M. M is a lonely individual, and in her loneliness more like Roquentin than Murdoch would like her to be. My reading of the imagery of M and D thus reveals the pervasiveness of the shortcomings which Murdoch finds in contemporary philosophy, in particular an understanding of individuals as solitary, and not surrounded by an independent reality.

Against this reading of M and D it may be argued that too much weight is given to D's absence. As a detail of the picture it receives too much emphasis. Murdoch is after all not

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[110] Murdoch, 'The Idea of Perfection', p. 327.

concerned with D in this example of M and D, but with M's inner life. She needs an example to challenge the arguments of analytical philosophy and to introduce a rich and important understanding of inner life into the philosophical debate. D is absent only as guarantee that whatever is happening happens in M's mind alone.

Against these possible objections I would argue that the noted difficulty to introduce an inner life in relation to an independent reality is not just reflected in this detail, but instead characterises the entire essay. The image of M and D reflects the difficulty Murdoch has when trying to refute the arguments of analytical philosophy and to introduce the facts she mentions at the beginning of the essay. Against their exasperating refutation of her arguments Murdoch adjusts her own argument in order to make them more decisive. She attempts to convince her adversaries of the importance of the inner life by making sure that whatever is happening happens in M's mind alone. Yet, this attempt to present a conclusive argumentation also introduces imagery which surprisingly contrasts to the central imagery of vision and attention.

Earlier I argued that 'The Idea of Perfection' is very different from the other two essays in *The Sovereignty of Good* in its representation of contemporary philosophy. I pointed out that in this essay Murdoch is more constraint by the arguments as well as the form of argumentation encountered in the analytical tradition. My reading of M and D offers additional insight in this difference by arguing that in her involvement with the analytical tradition Murdoch feels compelled to present her own argument as conclusive. In contrast in the other essays, she significantly recognises the limitations of her own arguments. Thus, in 'On 'God' and 'Good'' she acknowledges:

> On the status of argument there is perhaps little, or else too much, to say. ... Philosophical argument is almost always inconclusive ... All one can do is to appeal to certain areas of experience, pointing out certain features, and using suitable metaphors and inventing suitable concepts where necessary to make these features visible.[111]

In order to discuss her facts it may turn out to be necessary for Murdoch to give up the desire to provide the final conquering argumentation.

This absence of D is thus not incidental, but may be understood to point to a more general philosophical difficulty. In encountering this difficulty Murdoch is not alone. Just as M does not think any better of D until D is gone, so many a philosopher only considers the

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[111] Murdoch, 'On 'God' and 'Good'', p. 360-361.

tiresome juvenile reality which is the real topic of study. Only in the retirement of the study can this reality be valued. This does not imply that everything done there is useless. One would be cynical to suggest that what M does is of no use. Yet, M's example also urges to leaving this study and perhaps accepting that philosophical argument in the face of reality can no longer be definite.

5. Concluding Remarks

This chapter ends with a solitary mother-in-law and started with Murdoch's criticism of the lonely individual she encountered in both analytical and existentialist philosophy. Against the 'flimsy personality' of the latter two I argued that Murdoch positions her understanding of character found in novels from the nineteenth century. This notion I regard not as illustration or example, but as a structuring principle in Murdoch's thought.

This understanding of the role of character in Murdoch's philosophical writing shows the import of Le Doeuff's notion of the philosophical imaginary for the present research. Le Docuff argues that imagery is part of the argument, and should not be disregarded even though philosophical reading habits, or an author's directions would suggest differently. The importance of such imagery increases when it appears at different places in the argument or in the texts of other philosophers.

I regard Murdoch's understanding of literature and in particular of character as such imagery. One finds various references to literature from Murdoch's earliest writing onwards and I consider their frequency to increase their importance as part of the argument, rather than regard them as omissible examples. I have related Murdoch's reflection on character to her philosophical writing rather than to her novels. I have found that as a structuring principle in Murdoch's thought this imagery is often allied with the obvious or simple, and as such posited in contrast to philosophy.

Even though Murdoch will criticise both analytical and existentialist philosophy more and more in the same argument, I consider her criticism to be directed against the former, more than the latter. Murdoch encounters existentialism only after her studies in Oxford, and when later again teaching in Oxford she is one of very few philosophers interested in it. Existentialism first excited Murdoch for its interest in literature, in moral value and in consciousness. All these topics were of limited importance to the analytical philosophy she encountered in Oxford. However, already in her book on Sartre Murdoch is critical of existentialism and aware of possible difficulties. The most prominent of those she notes in *Sartre: Romantic Rationalist*'s last lines. Sartre she considers unable to defend the preciousness and uniqueness of the individual other than 'in terms of ideology and abstraction'. Existentialism shows itself unable to remedy analytical

philosophy and in Murdoch's vocabulary the term becomes synonymous for what she considers contemporary philosophy to be failing in.

In the essay 'The Idea of Perfection' which features the imagery of M and D Murdoch is mainly concerned with analytical philosophy. In my reading of this text and in particular of the image of M and D I have argued how this form of philosophy and in particular the genetic argument hindered Murdoch in introducing a notion of inner life. In my reading of M and D the influence of Le Docuff shows again. This reading in particular reveals the peculiarity which may accompany defying conventional philosophical reading habits, or directions for reading given by the author. Focusing on the absence of D in imagery which is concerned with M's inner life may appear as a deliberate attempt at misunderstanding. It also shows the radical nature of Le Doeuff's approach to philosophy. My reading emphasises a difficulty Murdoch faces when introducing an understanding of the inner life in relation to an external reality. Indeed, I have pointed out that the difficulties result from attempting to do so by means of a deciding argument.

'The Idea of Perfection' differs from the other two essays in *The Sovereignty of Good* in being more involved with arguments from the analytical tradition. This close involvement lessens in later writing, coinciding with Murdoch's retirement from St. Anne's. The next chapter considers the notion of imagination as a successor to character in attempting to establish an inner life in relation to an external reality. It also features an idiosyncratic reading of Kant and Plato.

CHAPTER FOUR

IMAGINATION: *METAPHYSICS AS A GUIDE TO MORALS*

1. Introduction

The previous chapter analysed the importance of literature and in particular the notion of character for Murdoch's early philosophical writing. It argued that her conception of character in nineteenth-century novels reveals for her the failings of contemporary philosophy and literature. Philosophy employed too flimsy a notion of personality and it had no conception of independent reality. However, the discussion of 'The Idea of Perfection' evinces the difficulties Murdoch had when introducing the ideas of inner life and transcendent reality into the contemporary philosophical debate. She expressed exasperation when attempting to defeat the genetic argument, and in her defence of M's inner life she removed surrounding reality, including D as the object of attention.

The present chapter considers the notions of imagination and fantasy, as in a way the successors of Murdoch's understanding of character. Imagination is not a notion foreign to the history of philosophy, and in Murdoch's conception it continues concerns expressed in her understanding of literature and in particular of character. Murdoch becomes interested in imagination and fantasy when writing on Kant's aesthetics from 1959 onwards. In these notions she expresses similar concerns for the moral importance of the inner life in relation to a reality independent of it, which are central to her understanding of character.

Of the different texts considering imagination I regard the longer depiction of the notion in Murdoch's last and largest work of philosophy, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, as the most important one. My discussion concentrates on this text, but I shall also consider the various, often short, earlier appearances of imagination in her philosophical writing. Murdoch's first more extensive reflections on imagination are found in articles on Kant and art, dating back to the late fifties and early sixties.[1] These articles include 'The Sublime and the Good' (1959), 'The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited' (1959), and 'Against Dryness' (1961). In these articles one first finds the distinction Murdoch makes between imagination and fantasy. This distinction is present in a more established mode in 'The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts' (1967), 'Philosophy and Literature: An Interview with Bryan Magee' (1977), 'Art is the Imitation of Nature' (1978)

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[1] She merely mentions imagination in *Sartre: Romantic Rationalist* and in 'Knowing the Void', a review of Simone Weil's *Notebooks*. (Murdoch, *Sartre: Romantic Rationalist*, p. 96, Murdoch, 'Knowing the Void', p. 158, 159) Imagination in both texts is understood to be strictly separated from reality. And in this respect both Sartre's and Weil's notion of imagination is very different from the one Murdoch develops. She does not pursue these notions of imagination.

and finally in one of the Gifford lectures, published first as 'Ethics and the Imagination' (1987) and finally as the eleventh chapter in *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (1992).[2]

In between these two groups of articles which I have set out there is another, which fits neither group. This is a review of Hampshire's *Freedom of the Individual*: 'The Darkness of Practical Reasoning' (1966). In this article also one finds the distinction between imagination and fantasy. Yet, it is presented in a different way. 'The Darkness of Practical Reasoning' is perhaps the last article in which Murdoch closely engages with a philosophical text from the analytical tradition. Murdoch objects here to Hampshire's relegation of imagination 'to the passive side of the mind. ... Hampshire certainly regards imagination as a side issue.' In contrast to this disinterest Murdoch introduces imagining as 'something which we all *do* a great deal of the time' and which she describes as 'a type of reflection on people, events, etc., which builds detail, adds colour, conjures up possibilities in ways which go beyond what could be said to be factual.'[3] Unlike Hampshire and much of the analytical tradition Murdoch prefers art to science, as a model for philosophy, and imagination to reason.[4] These preferences considerably change the outlook of philosophy, introducing the possibility that not everything philosophy considers can be presented with absolute clarity.[5]

In my attempt to distil an understanding of imagination from the texts mentioned I found myself confronted with several difficulties. These texts are written over a period of more than thirty years and they are concerned with different topics. With the possible exceptions of the texts based on the 1982 Gifford lectures, Murdoch is not interested in imagination *per se*. The notion of imagination and its counterpart fantasy appear in texts concerned with art, art criticism and art theory, as well as moral philosophy.

In order to apprehend this variety of topics and texts I concentrate on the text from *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*. From the discussion of imagination in this text I refer back to earlier texts. Indeed, I have found that these earlier texts are indispensable for understanding *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*. Throughout the chapter there are implied references to ideas discussed more extensively before. This I have found to be characteristic of Murdoch's philosophical thinking. Murdoch habitually appropriates ideas in telling imagery, short phrases or

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[2] See *Existentialists and Mystics*, 'The Sublime and the Good', p. 216, 'The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts', p. 374, 'Philosophy and Literature', p. 11, 14, 17, 18, 28, 'Art is the Imitation of Nature', p. 255-256. 'Against Dryness', p. 292, 'Ethics and the Imagination', in *Irish Theological Quarterly*, 52.1-2 (1986), p. 81-95.

[3] Murdoch, 'The Darkness of Practical Reasoning', p. 198.

[4] In 'The Idea of Perfection' she expresses this difference in rather puzzling words: 'We are men and we are moral agents before we are scientists, and the place of science in human life must be discussed in *words*. This is why it is and always will be more important to know about Shakespeare than to know about any scientist: and if there is a 'Shakespeare of science' his name is Aristotle.' (Murdoch, 'The Idea of Perfection', p. 326-7)

[5] See Murdoch, 'The Darkness of Practical Reasoning', p. 199-200 in particular.

even in a single term. From these texts I compose the different aspects of the *animal imaginationale*, as Murdoch considers human beings to be 'fantasising imaginative animals'.

This chapter consists of three parts. In the first I discuss the distinction between imagination and fantasy. I regard this distinction central to Murdoch's thought and to the chapter's argument, because of its consistent presence from rather early essays onwards. From this discussion I proceed to examining Murdoch's apprehension of the two philosophers from whom in *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* she retrieves the different aspects of imagination and fantasy, Kant and Plato.

2. Imagination and fantasy

In *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*' chapter eleven the distinction between imagination and fantasy is found at about a third into this chapter and marks a shift. The subsequent part of the chapter consists of a variety of different topics, for which it is difficult to find a structure. The discussion of Kant and Plato, in the first part, is directed towards the distinction between imagination and fantasy.

> To mark distances we need for purposes of discussion, two words for two concepts: a distinction between egoistic *fantasy* and liberated truth-seeking creative *imagination*. Can there not be high evil fantasising forms of creative imaginative activity? A search for candidates will, I think, tend to reinforce at least the usefulness of a distinction between 'fantasy' as mechanical, egoistic, untruthful, and 'imagination' as truthful and free. ... I want to see the contrast ... in terms of two active faculties, one somewhat mechanically generating narrowly banal false pictures (the ego as all-powerful), and the other freely and creatively exploring the world, moving towards the expression and elucidation (and in art celebration) of what is true and deep.[6]

The distinction between imagination and fantasy is introduced by remarking that it is made 'for purposes of discussion'. Murdoch expresses the need for 'two words for two concepts', fantasy and imagination, and instantly wonders whether this is a proper distinction. Her doubt cautions against considering it an absolute distinction. Similarly, in the interview with Magee she suggests that 'creative imagination and obsessive fantasy may be very close almost indistinguishable forces

[6] Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p. 321.

in the mind of the writer.'[7] The distinction is thus useful for the discussion, but not easily recognised in a writer's mind or in any particular text, by Murdoch or anyone else. In this respect it is significant that Spear in her introduction suggests that '[t]he theme of fantasy versus imagination is a recurrent one in her non-fiction and is a significant index to an understanding of her fiction', yet she does not return to this remark when discussing the different novels.[8]

The use of the terms like 'for purposes of discussion' in the quotation above exhibits an important characteristic of Murdoch's philosophy, closely allied to the distinction between imagination and fantasy. When developing these notions Murdoch increasingly recognises how the omnipresence of imagination and fantasy inhibits the possibility of unmediated perception or knowledge. Perception and imagination, or fantasy, are intertwined in a way which makes it impossible to distinguish them. Imagination and fantasy determine the perception to a certain extent, and are determined by the perception. This aspect is noted by Antonaccio, and reflected in the title of her work, *Picturing the Human.* Antonaccio takes this title from Murdoch's own characterisation of philosophy as involving 'the making of models and pictures of what different kinds of men are like. ... Man is 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.'[9] In 'The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts' Murdoch reaffirms that moral philosophy should be on the one hand 'realistic', but that on the other 'since [it] cannot but command an ideal, it should commend a worthy ideal.'[10] This characteristic mixture of real and ideal also characterises Murdoch's understanding of imagination and fantasy, and the notion of reality with which the two are distinguished.

In the quotation from *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* fantasy and imagination are distinguished from one another by terms like 'egoistic' on the one side and 'liberated truth-seeking creative' on the other; 'mechanical, egoistic, untruthful' are opposed to 'truthful and free'. The quotation concludes by contrasting two active faculties: 'one somewhat mechanically generating narrowly banal false pictures (the ego as all-powerful), and the other freely and creatively exploring the world, moving towards the expression and elucidation (and in art celebration) of what is true and deep.'

The distinction between fantasy and imagination is given in *moral* terms. *Bad* fantasy is opposed to *good* imagination. Where fantasy is said to be directed only at the preservation of self,

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[7] Magee, 'Philosophy and Literature', p. 11. Compare too: 'imagination (good by definition) ... fantasy (bad by definition)'. (Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p. 322)
[8] Spear, *Iris Murdoch*, p. 9.
[9] Murdoch, 'Metaphysics and Ethics', p. 74- 75. Compare Antonaccio, *Picturing the Human*, p. 13. Antonaccio also analyses how Dipple's disregard of this position (of 'reflexive realist') causes her to observe a friction, or even contradiction between the philosophical writing and the literature. (See Antonaccio, *Picturing the Human*, p. 138-139)
[10] Murdoch, 'The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts', p. 363-4.

imagination looks at the world and is cheerfully described as 'creative ... liberated ... truth-seeking ... elucidation ... celebration'. Fantasy is called mechanical whereas imagination is connected to creativity and exploration.[11]

Imagination and fantasy are moral terms. This is true too of the notion of reality that is used to distinguish them. Reality for Murdoch is not merely given. This understanding of reality in the distinction between imagination and fantasy shows how Murdoch upsets a set of distinctions commonly applied to imagination. Imagination has been often attached to art in contrast to reality and facts. A list of opposing notions is assumed: fancy is opposed to fact, frivolous to serious, art to systematic thinking, mediacy to immediacy, leisure to learning, messy to clean, beauty to function.[12]

The reality which for Murdoch is to distinguish imagination from fantasy, is outlined in 'On 'God' and 'Good'', where Murdoch explicitly considers this notion. At first, her answer to the question 'What is reality?' appears to be simple. Any really good man (using his imagination and not his fantasy), Murdoch argues, 'may be infinitely eccentric, but he must know certain things about his surroundings, most obviously the existence of other people and their claims.'[13] So, the good man must be aware of his surroundings, but what is meant by the vague notion of 'certain things'? What things? Is the answer to this question too obvious or too obscure that Murdoch does not expand it? Murdoch answers these questions by yet another image, one from art: 'Rilke said of Cézanne that he did not paint 'I like it', he painted 'There it is'.'[14]

I think that it is both obvious and obscure what is meant by 'certain things'. The remark is meant to appeal to an ordinary observation. Murdoch assumes everyone to understand what is meant by 'certain things'. No one, however, knows 'certain things' fully. There is no such thing as immediate or absolute understanding for Murdoch, or if there is it is extremely rare. Here one is reminded of the discussion of M and D where Murdoch argues that 'M confronted with D has a endless task.'[15]

One of the rare occasions in which immediate understanding would be possible is when the philosopher, in Plato's famous myth, has come out of the cave and is finally able to look at the sun. Significantly, of this image Murdoch writes:

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[11] The term mechanical originates in Murdoch's reading of Kant. See part three of this chapter.
[12] It is remarkable how much writing on imagination, and as a defence of imagination, remains within this dichotomy. A distinct example can be found in M.C. Nussbaum's reading of Dickens' *Hard Times*, in *Poetic Justice*. (See in particular the second chapter of M.C. Nussbaum, *Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995)) See for a short overview of how imagination came to be associated with the arts in particular E. McMullin, 'Enlarging Imagination', p. 228-240.
[13] Murdoch, 'On 'God' and 'Good'', p. 347.
[14] Murdoch, 'On 'God' and 'Good'', p. 348. Compare Antonaccio's discussion of these words 'There it is'. (Antonaccio, *Picturing the Human*, p. 138)
[15] Murdoch, 'The Idea of Perfection', p. 327.

> Plato pictured the good man as eventually able to look at the sun. I have never been sure what to make of this part of the myth. … Perhaps indeed only the good man knows what it would be like to look at [the sun]; or perhaps to look at the sun is to be gloriously dazzled and to see nothing.[16]

So, reality has two simultaneous meanings. Reality in Murdoch's writing is both what one ought to *most obviously* know and what only can know with great difficulty, if at all. It is not easily comprehensible (if at all), yet the good man '*must know certain things* about his surroundings, *most obviously* the existence of other people and their claims.' Given the unlikely experience of looking at the sun, reality means for Murdoch that the moment one thinks one sees the sun, perception and thinking should be mistrusted. The notion of reality reminds that whatever it is that we talk or think about, it is more complex, subtler than theories and words can convey. Whatever is *too* neat, *too* clear should be mistrusted. At the same time reality is what one should want to know. The difficulty in understanding should not keep one from trying.

Imagination should then be directed at reality, but reality is not immediately given. The notion is explained in terms of one's understanding or perception of it, and its complexity via the difficulty of perceiving, thinking and imagining reality. Yet, reality is not reduced to imagined reality. It is while imagining or trying to understand that one finds the reality which is not completely imagined or understood. Thus, in 'The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts' Murdoch writes:

> In intellectual disciplines and in the enjoyment of art and nature we discover value in our ability to forget self, to be realistic, to perceive justly. We use our imagination not to escape the world but to join it, and this exhilarates us because of the distance between our ordinary dulled consciousness and an apprehension of the real.[17]

Realism is not identical with thought, but a characteristic of good thinking.

This quotation also indicates the pervasiveness of fantasy and imagination. The use of the faculty is not limited to the arts, but found in 'intellectual disciplines and in the enjoyment of art and nature'. Of these, art nevertheless offers for Murdoch the most prominent examples of imagination and fantasy. She explains the distinction between the two often by referring to art.

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[16] Murdoch, 'On 'God' and 'Good'', p. 357.

From the paintings of Cézanne, Velasquez, the music of Bach and the works of Shakespeare the distinction between fantasy and imagination is best understood for in these imagination is present in its most excellent form.[18]

The references to the works of these artists are general and rarely explained in detail.[19] Rather they are introduced by an imperative: consider.

> Consider what we learn from contemplating the characters of Shakespeare or Tolstoy or the paintings of Velasquez or Titian. What is learnt here is something about the real quality of human nature, when it is envisaged, in the artist's just and compassionate vision, with a clarity which does not belong to the self-centred rush of ordinary life.[20]

Murdoch refrains here from an explanation by means of a discussion of artistic devices. Her argument suggests a shared understanding of the works of these artists.[21] Perhaps too she fears that any explanation may prevent her readers from exploring their own imagination and fantasy.

The importance of art is also evident from Murdoch's explanation of the meaning of fantasy by establishing its origin in literary criticism. In an interview with Magee she remarks:

> It is illuminating in the case of any reflecting discipline to see what kind of critical vocabulary is directed against it. Literature may be criticised in a purely formal way. But more often it is criticised for being in some sense untruthful. Words such as 'sentimental', 'pretentious', 'self-indulgent', 'trivial' and so on, impute some kind of falsehood, some failure of justice, some distortion or inadequacy of understanding or expression. The word 'fantasy' in a bad sense covers many of these typical literary faults. It may be useful to contrast 'fantasy' as bad with 'imagination' as good.[22]

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[17] Murdoch, 'The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts', p. 374.

[18] Murdoch mentions the great but not the minor artists by name. On the latter one finds some remarks only in the interview with Magee, where she remarks: 'In bad art fantasy simply take charge, as in the familiar case of the romance or thriller where the hero (alias the author) is brave, generous, indomitable, lovable (he has his faults of course) and ends the story loaded with the gifts of fortune.' (Magee, 'Philosophy and Literature', p. 11)

[19] Of course, there are exceptions. See in particular the discussion of *King Lear* in the fifth chapter of *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals.*

[20] Murdoch, 'On 'God' and 'Good'", p. 353, compare p. 348.

[21] Of different examples confirming this understanding of literature the following most strongly suggests the immediacy and collectivity assumed in reading literature. In *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*' first chapter on consciousness Murdoch quotes the pagoda passage from James' *Golden Bowl* and concludes: 'How it is done? Well, like that and in innumerable other ways. Do we understand? Yes, of course, we follow, in context, these descriptions of states of consciousness with no difficulty.' (Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p. 171)

[22] Magee, 'Literature and Philosophy', p. 11.

Murdoch then explains imagination by these frequent references to art - and in particular what she calls 'great art'. These are central to her understanding of imagination.

This last quotation also demontsrates how Murdoch habitually presents her ideas as sensible and nothing extraordinary. 'Literature may be criticised in a purely formal way. But more often it is criticised for being in some sense untruthful.' To discuss art in terms of true and false is, Murdoch suggests, a very common thing to do. Similarly, the difficulty of really using one's imagination is not a purely artistic one. Imagination is not given exclusively to the artistically gifted. The difficulty is moral.[23] Imagination is difficult because of the human generally dulled consciousness. Imagination is not limited to great art, but also present in the art of storytelling which is something Murdoch argues we do all the time.[24]

Murdoch then presents her understanding of imagination and fantasy as nothing extraordinary, but rather something all virtuous peasants, saints and mothers of large families have known all along. They intuitively know the distinction between imagination and fantasy, while others may learn it from contemplating Tolstoy or Shakespeare or from learning a language or a craft. The contemplation of art, which gives rise to the distinction between imagination and fantasy, Murdoch considers her readers able to recognise. It is, however, not an easy distinction to appropriate. It is not easy to use imagination rather than fantasy. This combination of at once being obvious and difficult is evinced too by the notion of reality which distinguishes good imagination from bad fantasy. This notion implies a permanent conflict between the two, where fantasy stops at egoistic imagery and imagination constantly moves on. They thus present an understanding of moral philosophy as a constant process of change.

Murdoch sometimes suggests that the distinction between imagination and fantasy is not connected to any contemplation of other philosophers. For example in a discussion of Kant's *Critique of Judgment* the distinction is thus introduced: 'Let me now briefly and dogmatically state what I take to be, in opposition to Kant's view, the true view of the matter.'[25] However, in *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* in particular it arises from reflection upon similar distinctions by other thinkers. Here, she describes her indebtedness to two thinkers, Kant and Plato. The following discussion presents them in the order from *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*.

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[23] Compare 'One might say here that art is an excellent analogy of morals, or indeed that it is in this respect a case of morals.' ('On 'God' and 'Good'', p. 348)
[24] See for example Magee, 'Literature and Philosophy', p. 11-12.
[25] Murdoch, 'The Sublime and the Good', p. 215.

3. Kant: Imagination in the Small Corner of Art

Murdoch often returns to Kant as a thinker who, as she once put it 'was marvellously near the mark' or who 'followed a sound instinct but, in my view, looked in the wrong place.'[26] In Kant's philosophy on the one hand Murdoch locates the presence of many aspects of contemporary thought which she disputes. Numerous examples may be given here and her imagery is not always gentle: 'Kant's man had already received a glorious incarnation nearly a century earlier in the work of Milton: his proper name is Lucifer.'[27]

On the other hand Murdoch considers Kant only partly to blame for the ideas which have ensued from his work. She also returns to it to pursue his sound instincts, in a way different from how they have been pursued. This dual attitude towards Kant's philosophy (as well as the slightly condescending remarks) one encounters too in the chapter on imagination.

At the end of the few pages devoted to Kant in this chapter of *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* Murdoch writes:

> How flexible can a deep concept be? is a founding question of philosophy. Kant, in his precision, is careful not to demand too much of the concept of imagination. He distinguishes the empirical imagination, which spontaneously yet 'mechanically' prepares a sensuous manifold for subjection to the synthetic *a priori* and empirical concepts of the understanding, but which is not independently creative or aesthetically sensible, from the aesthetic imagination which is spontaneous and free and able to create a 'second nature'. But are 'fine art' and 'genius' as described by Kant really such a small corner of human faculty and experience? The concept of genius itself emerges from an appreciation of the deep and omnipresent operation of imagination in human life.[28]

How flexible can the concept of imagination be? Perhaps, Murdoch suggests, more flexible than she believes Kant to allow for. The flexibility of deep concepts is contrasted to the mechanical working of the empirical imagination.[29] It is also understood in contrast to the small corner to which Kant directs the aesthetic imagination. It must be Murdoch then, and not Kant, who

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[26] See respectively Murdoch, 'The Sublime and the Good', p. 216, and Murdoch, 'The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts', p. 368.
[27] Murdoch, 'The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts', p. 366.
[28] Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p. 316.
[29] The quotation marks around that word may also refer to it being used in connection to fantasy, later on. See Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p. 320.

concludes that the 'concept of genius itself emerges from an appreciation of the deep and omnipresent operation of imagination in human life.'

Murdoch observes a friction between Kant's 'precision' and imagination's possibilities. In aspiration for his precision she understands Kant to place upon imagination different restrictions. These she discerns in his strict distinction between the empirical imagination and the aesthetic imagination. To the empirical imagination Kant assigns a confined role in understanding. Only to aesthetic imagination does he allow independent creativity and aesthetic sensibility. These limitations Murdoch contends in the first few pages of the chapter.

Murdoch begins her discussion of Kant with the empirical imagination as the faculty which 'spontaneously yet 'mechanically' prepares a sensuous manifold for subjection to the synthetic *a priori* and empirical concepts of the understanding'. It is, as Murdoch points out, 'a mediator between sense perception and concepts, something between sense and thought.'[30] Murdoch does not pay much attention to the different tasks assigned to the empirical imagination, or its distinction from the transcendental imagination. She does not mention the epistemological problems Kant's notion of imagination is commonly understood to solve. In order to discern the possible significance of this omission I consider it necessary to provide a limited account of the epistemological issue omitted.

In the *Critique of Pure Reason* the empirical imagination is given two tasks. First, it enables one to recognise a certain object as such. For example, it enables one to recognise a particular rhododendron bush as a rhododendron bush. The empirical imagination's second purpose is to recognise an individual through time. For example, the ability to recognise a rhododendron bush in the drive as the one that was there yesterday and the day before is attributed to the empirical imagination.[31]

The empirical imagination Murdoch distinguishes from the transcendental imagination. As introduction to this distinction it is useful to briefly consider of the notion of transcendental as used by Kant. Transcendental for Kant above all designates the necessary or *a priori* part of experience or knowledge. In *The Critique of Pure Reason* Kant is most of all concerned with the *a*

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[30] Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p. 316 and 308 respectively. Warnock and McMullen point out that imagination had this function also for earlier thinkers (Descartes, Locke, Berkeley, Hume). Yet, they note too that Kant gives a larger role to this notion of imagination than his predecessors. McMullen refers to Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* A78/B103 (See M. Warnock, *Imagination* (London: Faber and Faber, 1976), p. 13-15, 33 and McMullen, 'Enlarging Imagination', p. 238) See also P. Strawson, 'Imagination and Perception' (*Freedom and Resentment and Other Essays*. London: Methuen and Company, 1974).

[31] I am using Warnock's example here: 'When a man sees his own bush, he applies to it the concept of 'my rhododendron bush', and when he sees a new bush, he applies to it the concept 'rhododendron bush'; but he could not apply either of these concepts unless he had in his mind the image of other rhododendron bushes or of his own bush on another day, both of them, of objects not immediately before him when he applies the concept.' (Warnock, *Imagination*, p. 29-30)

priori rather than the *a posteriori* part of human understanding.[32] He is thus more concerned with what makes experience and knowledge possible, than with the particular knowledge or experience.[33]

Murdoch mentions this distinction between the empirical and transcendental imagination at the beginning of her chapter as follows. The transcendental imagination, she writes, 'spontaneously joins or fuses space and time (forms of intuition, perception) and the categories (conceptual forms of the greatest generalities) so as to make an empty pattern or schematic form of 'an empirical object in general'.' This transcendental imagination is distinguished from the empirical imagination which 'at a less fundamental level, provides (in ways which may be available to conscious awareness) sensuously bodied schemata of classes of empirical objects. Imagination is a spontaneous intuitive capacity to put together what is presented to us so as to form a coherent spatio-temporal experience which is intellectually ordered and sensuously based.' Murdoch concludes that Kant gives imagination a large role in comprehending any object.[34]

This distinction between transcendental imagination and empirical imagination, as well as the subsequent paragraph on Hume, are later additions to this chapter. The essay 'Ethics and Imagination', published five years earlier and also based on the 1982 Gifford Lectures is for a considerable part identical to the chapter in *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, yet it omits part of the text.[35] The addition has, however, not resulted in major changes in the remainder of the text, in its arguments or conclusions. This is true too of the addition on Coleridge, later in the chapter.[36] The present addition shows the idiosyncratic way in which Murdoch reads Kant. Her discussion of the empirical and the transcendental imagination is brief, and, unlike for example Warnock or Strawson, she pays limited attention to the epistemological problems these understandings of imagination are to solve for Kant. Likewise, in her discussion of the aesthetic imagination Murdoch does not consider the relationship between the *Critique of Judgment* and the first and

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[32] See A. Vennix, *Waarheid en Kennis* (Nijmegen: Syllabus 1991) for a thorough and illuminating introduction into the central problems of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. Vennix writes: 'Dit onderzoek, dat zich zal bezighouden met de ontdekking en de systematische ordening van de mogelijkheidsvoorwaarden van synthetische kennis a priori, moet zich natuurlijk niet richten op het aposteriorische (empirische) aandeel in de menselijke kennis, maar op een verondersteld apriorisch (zuiver) aandeel daarin.' [This research, which will be engaged with the disclosure and systematic arrangement of the conditions for the possibility of synthetic knowledge a priori, must not be directed to the aposteriori (empirical) part in human understanding, but to a supposed apriori (pure) part.] Vennix argues that Kant 'van meet af aan zowel de eenzijdigheid van het rationalisme, als die van het empirisme tracht te doorbreken.' [from the beginning onwards attempts to avoid the partiality of both rationalism and empiricism.] (Vennix, *Waarheid en Kennis*, p. 99). See also Warnock, *Imagination*, p. 30 and p. 31

[33] See Strawson, 'Imagination and Perception', p. 42, and R. Kearney, *The Wake of Imagination*, p. 168-169 and also p.427n.29 for a short discussion of Kant's understanding of transcendental.

[34] Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p. 308. Compare here Warnock, *Imagination*, p. 27 for this distinction.

[35] The part added runs from 'Kant here connects imagination essentially with the conception of an object' on page 308 to page 309 'Kant saw that space-and-time was 'a special case', to be seen as a 'form of intuition'; so was morality, to be seen as a unique operation of reason.'

second critique. Her reading of Kant's understanding of imagination is characterised by the title of the entire book, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*. She regards the 'metaphysical' concept of imagination in regard to the 'day-to-day and moment-to-moment pilgrimage'.[37] Moreover, the distinction between empirical and transcendental imagination has been generally noted to be difficult to make, as Murdoch notes too.[38]

Murdoch adopts the central place Kant attributes to empirical and transcendental imagination in understanding, but she also adds significant changes. Her reading of Kant, while disregarding some of the commonly discussed arguments, instead introduces its own imagery. On close reading one finds that Murdoch's concern with imagination is expressed in the returning image of 'barrier'. The transcendental imagination she describes 'as a power of spontaneous synthesis operating at the transcendental barrier of consciousness.' Then she wonders:

> Exactly how this transcendental function of imagination makes the phenomenal world available has been much discussed and disputed, and Kant himself appears to give different accounts. Is it misleading simply to read the conscious activity back into the unconscious (transcendental) activity? Can we intelligibly speak of a primal conception of an object? Is the schema to be thought of as a sort of image or a sort of method of assembly?[39]

Murdoch hesitates to accept a notion of imagination that is barred behind a transcendental or unconscious barrier. In the quotation above the direction of her own thoughts are already revealed in the use of an often employed term, 'simply': 'Is it misleading simply to read the conscious activity back into the unconscious (transcendental) activity?'

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[36] The second part actually runs from the last part of the discussion of Kant, from p. 315 the sentence starting with 'Kant himself does not ...' to Virgil's advice on p. 317.

[37] Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p. 146: 'How do the generalisations of philosophers connect with what I am doing in my day-to-day and moment-to-moment pilgrimage, how can metaphysics be a guide to morals?' Compare Warnock, *Imagination*, 28ff, 42ff. Murdoch here diverts from various historical treatments of imagination, as for example Strawson's article, to which Warnock admits to be indebted (she writes that Strawson's 'Imagination and Perception' 'made seem that my project thread-tracing might possibly be philosophically respectable, even if I have failed to make it so in the end'), as well as Kearney's narration of imagination in his *The Wake of Imagination*, or McMullen's plea for the presence of imagination in science. R. Kearney, *The Wake of Imagination: Toward a Postmoden Culture* (London: Routledge, 2001 (1988)), McMullen, 'Enlarging Imagination'. Compare too E. T. H. Brann. *The World of the Imagination: Sum and Substance* (Boston: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1991), part one in particular.

[38] Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p. 308-9. Compare here too Warnock: 'Kant held that to determine these general forms is the task of transcendental philosophy, while to determine what reminds me of a palm tree is the task of psychology. It is not entirely obvious that this is a proper distinction. but we can at least distinguish between particular psychological truths about individual people, which are part of the history of those people, and general psychological truths about people at large. What Kant is offering us is *a general psychological truth* about the function of imagination, but a truth which he claims is not only universally applicable, but can be shown to be *necessarily* true.' (Warnock, *Imagination*, p. 31)

Murdoch introduces an understanding of the empirical imagination whose spontaneous operation in understanding does not remain entirely unaffected by any conscious operation of the imagination. She attempts to understand imagination's 'unconscious or transcendental 'spontaneity' ... figuratively upon analogy. We can attempt to give sense to the idea, as we extend and modify the conception of a barrier or network (or set of 'schemata'), in terms of empirical concepts, and (now also) of language as a, to some extent consciously manipulable, experiential threshold.'[40] So, Murdoch attempts to lower the barrier until it is no more than a threshold. This imagery reveals a distinctive position. The impersonal method of assembly is not entirely closed off for the individual, yet neither is it entirely in his or her control.[41]

Access is found via the more conscious imagination. 'Imagination provides essential fusion, also gratuitous creation. At one end of the scale is the unconscious activity necessary to experience a world, at the other the free inventive power of exceptional minds.'[42] How this active imagination relates to the unconscious one, is not accounted for. Murdoch explains this lack in telling imagery:

> Imagination is a mixed matter, in its basic transcendental use it 'knows' both mind and sense. It is an intelligent sensibility, it can feel about in the dark and move both sides of the barriers. One might almost say that 'imagination' is the *name* of the transcendental problem, or is used as a convenient blanket to cover it up. Kant *had* to invent the idea. At least, one might add, it stirs thought to advance in the right direction.[43]

So, imagination 'can feel about in the dark and move both sides of the barrier'. Yet, precisely because it can do this, Murdoch writes: 'In any case it is too double-sided a concept, too much like a kind of feeling, to be allowed (by Kant) near the essence of morality.'[44] Even though, '[w]e would ordinarily say that rational judgement must involve, for instance, an ability to imagine

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[39] Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p. 308-9.
[40] Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p. 309.
[41] This attempt she compares to earlier ones in which she argued against networks of concepts or language. Murdoch detects this network of language in the analytical philosophy she encountered in Oxford, but later also in postmodernism. In earlier work she used words like 'convention' to express the idea that we are operated by a system we cannot change. (Murdoch, 'The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited'. Compare Antonaccio, *Picturing the Human*, 101-113, 180-184.)
[42] Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p. 309.
[43] Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p. 310.
[44] Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p. 310.

various situations. In a strict Kantian view of the concept this might be seen as a dangerous activity.'[45]

In order to learn about this unconscious form of imagination from a more conscious one Murdoch turns to the aesthetic imagination. Whereas the empirical imagination is restricted to an automatic performance, as Murdoch understands Kant, the aesthetic imagination, recalling the quotation at the beginning of the present section, 'is spontaneous and free and able to create a 'second nature". It may have this freedom for the aesthetic imagination is also limited by Kant to what Murdoch calls the 'small corner' of art.

Murdoch notices how Kant's introduction of the aesthetic imagination is 'cautious', because, she writes, 'here one is certainly in 'danger' of giving imagination a prime moral function.'[46] The aesthetic imagination, Murdoch writes, is 'an exercise of freedom', it is 'free', it 'plays or frolics with the understanding without being governed by empirical concepts. It is out at the edge of things. The experience of beauty is often ineffable, the creation of art inexplicable.'[47] These characteristics indicate the 'danger' involved, that is the danger of connecting such a free and irrational faculty in any way to morality: 'The idea of such an exceptional and godlike power might be felt to be inappropriate in a strict account of morality. As moral agents we are not called upon to be original geniuses but to be good persons.'[48] Morality for Kant is decided by reason. A moral agent should be able to explain, to reason his decisions and actions. Murdoch writes: 'Kant would have little patience with a moral agent who could say nothing rational to justify his choice, but merely referred to a feeling.'[49]

Morality for Kant cannot be something extraordinary. It should not, as Murdoch puts it, 'think it is out on the edge of things. … Morality concerns what an ordinary man may be expected to be able to do and what in Kant's extended metaphysical picture he *can* do.'[50] Thus, '[a]s moral agents we are not called upon to be original geniuses but to be good persons.'[51] Conversely, because imagination is separated from morality it is allowed its freedom.

> The imagination, in its free play, is a more independently speculative faculty, and may be so because what it does, in its discernment of the beautiful, in a sense does not matter. The good is compulsory, the beautiful is not. We *look* at clouds and stoves, we *construct* pictures in our minds. In our experience of beauty in art or

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[45] Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p. 310.
[46] Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p. 310.
[47] Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p. 310-311.
[48] Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p. 310.
[49] Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p. 311.
[50] Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p. 311.
[51] Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p. 310.

> nature imagination is free to discern conceptless forms, it plays or frolics with the understanding without being governed by empirical concepts. It is out at the edge of things.[52]

Murdoch, as I maintained before, intends to take the aesthetic imagination out of a position restricted to art. Her discussion is here occasionally bewildering. Arguments explored in detail elsewhere are here omitted, or succinctly referred to. With these short remarks Murdoch regularly switches between discussing the beautiful, the sublime and genius, without indicating clearly that she is doing so. The present argument consequently relies on these earlier discussions of Kant, in particular 'The Sublime and the Good', and 'The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited', as the discussion in *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* is hard to render on its own.

In 'The Sublime and the Good' Murdoch provides the first and most extensive reading of particular parts of the *Critique of Judgment*. Murdoch is in this essay concerned with two questions: 'Is the Liberal-democratic theory of personality an adequate one?' and 'What is characteristic of the greatest literary works of art?'. The essay consists of a philosophical and a literary discussion. She starts her philosophical discussion with Kant, because 'Kant is the father of all modern forms of the problem of freedom, and also incidentally the father of most modern theories of art.'[53]

Murdoch's interest in the *Critique of Judgment* is occasioned by her desire to understand as well as modify the contemporary aesthetic discussion. The few pages in 'The Sublime and the Good' read as a short summary of relevant passages of the *Critique of Judgment*, which augmented by a few minor criticisms, bring her at a widely held, contemporary view. Again it is Stuart Hampshire who is marked to represent this view:

> [The artist] did not set himself to create beauty, but some particular thing. The canons of success and failure, of perfection and imperfection, are in this sense internal to the work itself … Anything whatever may be picked out as an object of aesthetic interest … An aesthetic judgment has to point to the arrangement of

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[52] Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p. 311.

[53] Murdoch, 'The Sublime and the Good', p. 262. The *Critique of Judgment* though is a notoriously difficult book to read. Warnock remarks how the difficulty is caused by the variety of purposes of this third Critique (even though she does not distinguish them clearly): 'In one sense, in this *Critique*, he was attempting to make a link between the world of understanding and the world of reason.' The Critique is then written as a link between the first and second critique and meant to solve various problems arisen in these two. (Warnock, p. 41-42. Compare here p. 45 and H. Berger, *Leeswijzer bij de Kritiek van de Oordeelskracht* (Tilburg: Tilburg University Press, 1997), p. 3-34.) Murdoch does not consider these questions.

> elements and to show what constitutes the originality of the arrangement in this particular case.[54]

An object of art in this view is held to be a thing on its own, which is judged according to its own rules.[55]

Murdoch, in contrast, intends to connect art to morals. She writes at the beginning of this essay:

> Tolstoy rightly says, 'The estimation of the value of art ... depends on men's perception of the meaning of life.' Whether we think art is an amusement, or an education, or a revelation of reality, or is for art's sake (whatever that may mean) will reveal what we hold to be valuable and (the same thing) what we take the world to be fundamentally like.[56]

One's understanding of art then reveals one's values and worldviews. Here as elsewhere Murdoch makes a strong connection between art and morals. Indeed, 'The Sublime and the Good' is the essay containing the famous sentences 'Art and morals are ... one. Their essence is the same. The essence of both of them is love. Love is the perception of individuals. Love is the extremely difficult realisation that something other than oneself is real. Love, and so art and morals, is the discovery of reality.'[57]

Murdoch in her discussion of Kant here is concerned with preserving on the one hand an understanding of art as moral, and on the other the uniqueness of the individual. That is, she agrees with Tolstoy that 'our estimate of art show[s] our views on good and evil' and that 'that great art expresses religious feeling, or religious *perception*, to put the essence in less controversial form'.[58] This last remark indicates that whereas Tolstoy is considering religion, Murdoch adapts his concerns to moral philosophy. In thus arguing that art reveals morals Murdoch diverts from Kant and from contemporary aesthetics. Yet, she agrees with them on the uniqueness of the art object, but again diverts by arguing for the uniqueness of the individual as well. She literally wonders if it is possible to 'connect [Tolstoy's view that great art expresses religious feeling, or religious *perception*] with some of the perhaps acceptable elements of Kant's view.'[59]

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[54] Murdoch, 'The Sublime and the Good', p. 211.
[55] Compare other essays (e.g. 'Against Dryness') where Murdoch strongly opposes the notion of an object of art as something on its own.
[56] Murdoch, 'The Sublime and the Good', p. 206.
[57] Murdoch, 'The Sublime and the Good', p. 215.
[58] Murdoch, 'The Sublime and the Good', p. 211, 212.
[59] Murdoch, 'The Sublime and the Good', p. 212.

Following Kant's own text the discussion opens with the beautiful. Murdoch reads the beautiful as prelude for the sublime. Her discussion of Kant's notion of the beautiful is brief, and proceeds from her appreciation of particular works of art.[60] She first introduces Kant's familiar phrase of harmony between the imagination and the understanding, which for Kant determines the beautiful. In an ordinary - not an aesthetic - perception of an object, the empirical imagination prepares a perception for the understanding to attach a concept to the perception according to specific rules. This mechanism was illustrated earlier in the identification of a rhododendron bush. In a judgment of beauty, in contrast, no given concept is attached to the object observed. Such a judgment is independent of any consideration of purpose. For Kant, Murdoch argues '[w]hat is truly beautiful is independent of any interest, it is not tainted either by the good, or by any pleasure extraneous to the act of representing to ourselves the object itself.'[61] The disinterestedness held in the contemporary view is derived from Kant's understanding of the beautiful.

Murdoch's initial criticism of Kant's notion of the beautiful departs from what she understands to be a limited understanding of art. Given Murdoch's constant preference for works of particular artists this is not surprising. In 'The Sublime and the Good' she argues that aesthetics 'must stand to be judged by great works of art which we know to be such independently. … So let us start by saying that Shakespeare is the greatest of all artists, and let our aesthetic grow to be the philosophical justification of this judgment.'[62] So, after presenting Kant's aesthetics she first notices that for Kant, only very few things can be said to be truly beautiful, where true or free beauty is contrasted to dependent beauty:

> As examples of free beauty, i.e. true beauty, Kant gives flowers, birds, wallpaper patterns, lines aimlessly intertwining, and 'all music that is not set to words'. ... As examples of dependent beauty he gives 'the beauty of man, the beauty of a horse, or of a building' which 'presupposes a concept of the end that defines what the thing has to be, and consequently a concept of its perfection'.[63]

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[60] The present discussion of Murdoch's understanding of Kant's notion of the beautiful leaves out the more familiar aspect which she does mention, as well as those she does not (like the relationship of this critique to the first two). The elements left out are for example the well-known harmony between imagination and understanding (see Murdoch, 'The Sublime and the Good', p. 206) or the distinction between dependent and independent beauty. Especially in 'The Sublime and the Good', these aspects read as a reiteration of Kant's text, rather than part of Murdoch's argument. Murdoch is most of all concerned with the sublime.

[61] Murdoch, 'The Sublime and the Good', p. 207. Note that this is only true of independent beauty. See Murdoch, 'The Sublime and the Good', p. 207-8.

[62] Murdoch, 'The Sublime and the Good', p. 205.

[63] Murdoch, 'The Sublime and the Good', p. 207.

In *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* Murdoch adds in brackets: (Kant evidently liked flowers, especially tulips.)'[64] Shakespeare does not fit Kant's limited understanding of art and Murdoch comments decidedly: 'Kant prefers bird-song to opera. Kant thinks that art is essentially play. Now Shakespeare is great art, and Shakespeare is not play, so Kant must be wrong.'[65] The limited understanding of what art is and the strict separation of art from anything else of Kant's theory of art make Murdoch swiftly move on to the sublime.

Murdoch, both in 'The Sublime and the Good' and in *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, explains the sublime in its contrast to the beautiful. The sublime, other than the beautiful, is connected with emotion. It is strictly not said of objects, but rather of the state of mind which certain objects occasion. Murdoch points out too that '[w]hereas beauty results from a harmony between imagination and understanding, sublimity results from a conflict between imagination and reason. ... Confronted with the starry sky, the mountains, imagination strives to its utmost to satisfy the requirements of reason, and fails. So that on the one hand we experience distress at the failure of the imagination to encompass what is before us, and on the other hand we feel exhilaration in our consciousness of the absolute nature of reason's requirement and the way in which it goes beyond what mere sensible imagination can achieve.'[66]

Murdoch understands Kant's theory of the sublime as his theory of art, which connects art and morals.[67] The sublime is a '(high) spiritual experience.'[68] Confronted with the overpowering magnitude of a 'mountain range, the starry sky, the stormy sea, a great waterfall'[69] both the limitations and the capacities of one's mental faculties are experienced. Imagination on the one hand fails to grasp what it finds before it, but reason on the other hand exalts in its requirement for totality and in its ability to go beyond what is merely sensible.

I mentioned before that Murdoch's interest in Kant's understanding of imagination proceeds from a particular point of view. In the discussion of the sublime the divergence between her aim and Kant's is of particular importance. For Kant, an experience of the sublime signifies the limitations of the imagination. Warnock writes that 'it is our own very inadequacy to form an image of the *idea suggested by the object* which constitutes our sense of the sublime. ...

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[64] Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p. 311.
[65] Murdoch, 'The Sublime and the Good', p. 211, cp. p. 209 and p. 212, where a similar argument is used against Tolstoy. Wood complains about this form of art theory, as illogical: 'If one simply *knows* 'independently' that Shakespeare is great (though Murdoch never tells us whence comes this independence: nor can she, of course), then one cannot test one's aesthetics by recourse to Shakespeare.' (Wood, 'Iris Murdoch's Philosophy of Fiction', p. 179ff.)
[66] Murdoch, 'The Sublime and the Good', p. 208. Compare Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p. 311. With respect to the term 'exhilaration' it should be noted that Warnock remarks that 'Kant argues that it is more proper to describe the sense of the sublime as producing not pleasure so much as awe or respect.' (Warnock, *Imagination*, p. 58)
[67] Murdoch, 'The Sublime and the Good', p. 212.
[68] Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p. 311.
[69] Murdoch, 'The Sublime and the Good', p. 208.

Imaginatively we stretch out towards what imagination cannot comprehend.'[70] This experience of the inadequacy of imagination for Kant is occasioned only by rare events.

Murdoch, in contrast, considers the experience of the sublime of a more ordinary nature. Wondering that '[w]ith the theory of the sublime we have the distressing feeling of some vast and wonderful idea being attached to a trivial occasion' she reconsiders what occasions sublime feelings.[71] 'What stuns us into a realisation of our supersensible destiny is not, as Kant imagined, the formlessness of nature, but rather its unutterable particularity; and most particular and individual of all natural things is the mind of man.'[72] The experience of the sublime, and of the limitations of imagination is then for Murdoch what can accompany perceiving other people. In perceiving other people one can experience the failure of imagination to encompass this individual. The individual transcends any image formed by the imagination. What for Kant is an exceptional experience, for Murdoch becomes an important element in her moral philosophy, encountered in the perception of other people.

Moreover, this experience of the failure of the imagination is for Murdoch not redeemed by any hope for grasping the whole.[73] Kant, Murdoch writes, 'thinks of the sublime as the failure of imagination to compass an abstractly conceived non-historical, non-social, quasi-mathematical totality which is not *given* but only vaguely adumbrated by reason. The sublime is a segment of a circle, grasped by imagination, with the rest of the circle demanded and as it were dreamt of by reason, but not given.'[74] Murdoch, in contrast, holds that 'there is no prefabricated harmony, and others are, to an extent we never cease discovering, different from ourselves. Nor is there any social totality within which we can come to comprehend differences as placed and reconciled. We have only a segment of the circle.'[75] Murdoch thus considerably transforms Kant's understanding of imagination, and of knowledge. The failure of imagination is a much more common event than it is in Kant's epistemology. Moreover, this failure is not made up for by reason's adumbration of a totality.

Moreover, the experience of the sublime is for Kant, Murdoch argues, a 'sort of moral experience'.[76] She understands his texts not in relation to his epistemological concerns, as much as in relation to her moral philosophical ones. Kant's main interest is knowledge. Murdoch is concerned with the question 'How can we become morally better?'. Murdoch's reading of Kant's aesthetics steadily introduces appraisal in moral terms. In the present text it is only implied that

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[70] Warnock, *Imagination*, p. 57-58.
[71] Murdoch, 'The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited', p. 264.
[72] Murdoch, 'The Sublime and the Good', p. 215.
[73] Murdoch, 'The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited', p. 263.
[74] Murdoch, 'The Sublime and the Good', p. 213.
[75] Murdoch, 'The Sublime and the Good', p. 216.
[76] Murdoch, 'The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited', p. 263.

the automatic function of the imagination, which for Kant is an ordinary use of imagination and a crucial part of his understanding of perception, becomes in Murdoch's terms a bad form of imagination. Any perception of another person which encompasses the person (as it should in any ordinary use of imagination) is at odds with her understanding of human beings as endlessly different.[77] Murdoch thus rejects the ordinary form of imagination, and introduces the notion of genius in its place. Her discussion of genius concludes the discussion of Kant in *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals.*

Genius is the same as 'superior' imagination. As its main characteristic Murdoch distinguishes its ability to create its own rules:

> Genius, or high inspiration, is a spontaneous imaginative power which enables the artist to create new unique original forms. 'Fine art is the art of genius. Genius is the talent (natural endowment) which gives the rule to art.' Empirical knowledge and moral judgment depend upon *rules* given by the understanding and the reason respectively. The art object too must accord with rules, that is have form, but here, in the creation of good art, the rules are not general rules, but rules invented in and for the making of the individual object itself. ... Kant's 'genius' is a spontaneous faculty which its owner cannot explain, and whose products offer no general rules for imitators. There is 'complete opposition between genius and the spirit of imitation.'[78]

Genius as a form of superior imagination is not decided by general rules, which are the same for everyone. Nor is it possible to explain the rules which are applied in the creation of each unique object.

It is precisely this elusive notion which Murdoch considers to 'felicitously extend or amend [Kant's] characterisation, earlier in the *Critique of Judgment*, of art generally in narrower formal terms as the production of conceptless object, and the experience of beauty.'[79] Even more

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[77] Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p. 320.
[78] Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p. 313. Murdoch makes the following comparison with structuralism: 'We may compare here the place given to genius in structuralist theory, where the original creative artist, philosopher, scientist, as inventor of language and meaning, is exempt from the general conventional preformed linguistic rules or codes whereby 'language speaks the man'. Structuralism, sometimes offered as 'scientific', is in its general tendency an aesthetic system if value.'
[79] Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p. 313-314: 'The apprehension of beauty involves an individual imaginative synthesis, as when we attend to the shape of a shell or leaf, or apprehend a wallpaper pattern. But the grander nature of fine art involves, for artist and client, a creative imagination of a higher order capable of inventing or appreciating far more complex, more intellectual laws, categories and modes of vision, incarnate and not removable from the objects themselves.'

importantly, this notion of genius provides her with a notion of imagination with which she can amend the empirical imagination. The following quotation I consider here essential:

> Kant tells us that 'the imagination (as a *productive* faculty of cognition) is a powerful agent for creating, as it were, *a second nature* out of the material supplied to it by actual nature ... By this means we get a sense of freedom from the law of association (which attaches to the empirical employment of the imagination).' (My italics) So, imagination can create 'a second nature' (a new being). This idea can go very far, father perhaps than its author intended. If we let art out of the small corner denoted by 'fine art' and 'genius', then we may want to maintain that the world around us is constantly being modified or 'presented' (made or made up) by a spontaneous creative *free* faculty which is not that of 'reason' thought of as 'beaming in' upon purely empirical situations not otherwise evaluated.[80]

In the quotation of Kant the law of association is still attached to the empirical imagination. Yet in the lines following that quotation Murdoch suggests a reconsideration of the empirical imagination. It is no longer thought to be ruled by association, but rather it is understood along the lines of the imagination of a genius. The empirical imagination, which appropriates the perception, is characterised as *creating* a second nature out of a first one. Imagination does not present the world, but it makes it, or makes it up. Murdoch concludes: 'Perception itself is a mode of evaluation.' This conclusion returns throughout the present chapter.[81] Art is crucial in understanding ourselves: 'We have to 'talk' and our talk will be largely 'imaginative' (we are all artists).'[82]

At this point, the image of the barrier returns.

> The point is, to put it picturesquely, the 'transcendental barrier' is a huge wide various band (it resembles a transformer such as the lungs in being rather like a sponge) largely penetrable by the creative minds of individuals (though of course

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[80] Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p. 314.
[81] Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p. 315, p. 328, p. 329 and p. 334.
[82] Murdoch points out how this conclusion introduces a conception of moral philosophy which differs from that of Kant and Wittgenstein: 'Exactly *how* rational insight works upon its phenomenal problematic data (the situations of beings who are phenomenal as well as noumenal) strictly speaking cannot be said', as reason must be supposed to be an ultimate faculty not explicable in other terms. ... Moral activity 'shows itself' and it essentially solitary and silent. In both cases (Kant and Wittgenstein) the metaphysical picture is illuminating but likely to be felt as intolerable.' (Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p. 315.)

> we are culturally marked 'children of our time' etc.) and this creativity is the place where the concept of imagination must be placed and defined.[83]

It is with this image that Murdoch concludes the discussion of imagination in Kant. What I have assembled here as a step-by-step reading of the first few pages of *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*'s chapter eleven on imagination does not appear as such in the work itself. I have been arguing that Murdoch seriously reverses Kant's theory of knowledge. This powerful change is not noticed as such by Murdoch. She does not comment on the disappearance of most of Kant's epistemological structures, but rather considers him 'marvellously near the mark'.

In her reading imagination is operative at both an unconscious and a conscious level. It is from the conscious level, the imagination of the genius, that the unconscious one is understood. Imagination cannot always be explained by its owner, and neither should it be thought of as mere imitation. It creates its own rules for verification. It experiences its limitations in confrontation with other people, when it fails to encompass an individual. In this understanding of the sublime Murdoch introduces moral terms in her reading of Kant's aesthetics. The subsequent reading of Plato further develops this moral reflection on imagination.

4. Plato: The Artist and the Good

If Murdoch's regard for genius suggests unconditional appreciation for art and artists, her reading of Plato speaks differently. Murdoch considers Plato to be a philosopher who - not unlike herself - is an artist, and yet expresses deep distrust of artists, and one who supplies his dialogues with persuasive images and yet is wary of imagery for its misleading nature. The distrust of artists, of their imagery and imagination Murdoch considers to have been lost in the Romantic understanding of imagination: 'The modern self-conscious concept of 'imagination' as something generally exalted is Romantic.'[84] Such an exalted notion still inspires the recently grown interest in imagination, where some confess the desire to write 'a Praise of the Imagination'.[85]

Whereas Kant and Plato both receive much attention in this discussion of imagination, the Romantics only surface as a brief transition from Kant to Plato. Murdoch seems not very interested in Romanticism here, which is also apparent from the general nature of her comments. This disinterest is remarkable. The Romantic understanding of imagination is generally

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[83] Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p. 315.
[84] Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p. 316. Again, I wonder here about the use of the quotation marks. Do they signify the considerable divide between Murdoch's understanding of imagination and that of the Romantics?
[85] E.T.H. Brann, *The World of the Imagination: Sum and Substance* (Boston: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1991), p. 4. In the past twenty to thirty years the interest in imagination has occasioned several books on the topic. Some of these are mentioned in the footnotes throughout this chapter.

considered as essential for the understanding of contemporary imagination. Murdoch admits as much in her remark on the modern self-conscious concept of imagination, quoted above.[86] Murdoch's understanding of imagination is, moreover, not entirely dissimilar from the Romantic understanding. At least in general terms Murdoch agrees with Romantic authors such as Coleridge or Wordsworth on, for example, the importance of artists for divine or religious revelation and in understanding human beings as first and foremost imaginative.[87]

Nevertheless, throughout her work Murdoch has been invariably critical of ideas she deems Romantic. She admits to appreciating the Romantic Movement for its evaluation of art over science, yet she opposes its 'deification' of art.[88] Admittedly, her criticism does not apply to 'the great Romantic artists and thinkers at their best', but to 'the general beaten track'.[89] Romanticism then stands for different ideas descended from the 'great Romantic artists'. Most consistent of these ideas is the image of the Romantic man as a lonely man and Romantic art as a self-contained myth.[90]

Romanticism, or its remnants are, according to Murdoch, still prevalent in contemporary thought and need to be countered in a return to what Murdoch describes as reality and real human beings:

> 'We need to turn our attention away from the consoling dream necessity of Romanticism, away from the dry symbol, the bogus individual, the false whole, towards the real impenetrable human person.'[91]

This image of the lonely man is found as early as Murdoch's first book of philosophy. In *Sartre: Romantic Rationalist* she calls Sartre a romantic for *embracing* a hopeless situation in which one is

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[86] Compare Warnock, *Imagination*, p. 10. For Kearney it introduces the existentialist imagination. (Kearney, *The Wake of Imagination*, p. 181-188)

[87] The similarity between Murdoch and romantic thinkers has occasionally been suggested to me, but I have not found any reference to it in the secondary literature. The subsequent discussion considers the difference Murdoch notes between her understanding of imagination and that of the Romantics.

[88] Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p. 85. See also Murdoch, 'Salvation by Words', p. 235: 'The Romantics felt instinctively that science was an enemy of art, and of course in certain simple and obvious ways they were right.'

[89] Murdoch, 'The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts'. p. 368. Compare: 'The great Romantics ... transcended 'Romanticism'. (p. 369) Compare too Murdoch, 'The Sublime and Beautiful Revisited': 'The word 'Romantic' is best defined by what it is opposed to...' (p. 261) In this essay one finds the most extensive discussion of the Romantic Movement.

[90] See respectively Murdoch, 'The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited', p. 264, 266, 279ff and Murdoch, 'The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited', p. 272. In these characteristics the Romantic Movement is certainly different from the acclaimed nineteenth century novel. (See Murdoch, 'The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited', p. 271.)

[91] Murdoch, 'Against Dryness', p. 294.

either to be overcome by the sticky reality or to seize control and establish one's total freedom from everything else.[92]

Given these earlier texts it is not surprising that *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* provides only a short discussion of the Romantic notion of imagination, which is even a later addition to the text.[93] Murdoch mentions Coleridge as the one to introduce Kant's notion of imagination in England, but she is reluctant to discuss his work:

> For 'the shaping spirit of imagination' (Coleridge's *Ode to Dejection*) we in England have to wait for what Coleridge learnt from Kant's German successors. Into this morass or dark forest I do not propose to enter but will follow Virgil's advice to Dante, *non ragionem di lor, ma guarda e passa.* (Don't let's talk about them, just look and pass by.)[94]

Romantics are here compared to the suffering souls outside the gates of hell, to 'the worthless crew that is hateful to God and to his Enemies.'[95] This is a curious comparison, and it is only possible to guess at its rationale. Perhaps Murdoch's account of the Romantic notion of imagination indicates the extent of her knowledge of Coleridge or Wordsworth.[96] It may follow contemporary prejudices, where Coleridge is not considered a philosopher or even an original thinker.[97] Perhaps too her disapproval of the deification of art she regards more important than any possible agreement. Murdoch 'looks and passes by' the Romantics when considering imagination. She moves on to Plato.

In Plato Murdoch finds a notion of imagination which is not 'exalted'. Her discussion of Plato opens by arguing that he is, in contrast to the Romantics, wary of art and artists, as well as of their imagination. They are in a state of 'eikasia' or 'phantasia', the gloomy situation of the

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[92] Murdoch, *Sartre: Romantic Rationalist*, p. 110-111: 'When in insuperable practical difficulties a sense of 'all or nothing' is what *consoles*. ... The general impression of Sartre's work is certainly that of a powerful but abstract model of a hopeless dilemma, coloured by a surreptitious romanticism which embraces the hopelessness.' Compare too Murdoch, 'Existentialists and Mystics', p. 223: 'The existentialist novel is the natural heir and outcome of the Western nineteenth-century thought and is the child of the Romantic movement.'

[93] Compare Murdoch, 'Ethics and Imagination', p. 86.

[94] Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p. 316-7.

[95] Dante, *Inferno*, III.

[96] In her various overviews of the history of literature Coleridge is mentioned only occasionally and Wordsworth not at all.

[97] Warnock's chapters on Coleridge are in this respect revealing in their attempt to handle the unsystematic nature of his thought and writings. (See Warnock, *Imagination*, chapter three.) See too D. Jasper, *Coleridge as Poet and Religious Thinker* (Allison Park, Pennsylvania: Pickwick Publications, 1985): 'Norman Frumann's *Coleridge: The Damaged Archangel* (1972) stands as a sad monument to the tendency of many critics to regard Coleridge's work as little more than a mosaic drawn from his extraordinary wide reading. The danger is, then, that he becomes merely a channel for the work and ideas of others ...' (Note how a similar danger threatens any study of Murdoch's philosophical work.)

prisoners in the Cave, who mistake the shadows of the fire for reality.[98] The state of these prisoners as well as of artists is one of illusion.

Plato is famously remembered for banishing the artists. In *The Republic* they are politely though relentlessly escorted to the borders of the state, if they do not accept a strictly confined role. Confined, that is, by the philosopher-rulers. Only puppets are allowed to stay to express the truths of the ideal state.[99] Plato is alarmed by artists' inability to explain or understand what they are doing. This inability he considers a moral failure. Plato, Murdoch writes, 'connects egoistic fantasy and lack of moral sense with an inability to reflect.'[100] He fears art's ability to charm and to lead away from reality by providing easy pleasure.

Yet, for Murdoch this image from *The Republic* does not fully express his attitude to artists. Plato for Murdoch always remained both artist and philosopher, and never lost interest in art. Bronzwaer argues that the mixture of art and philosophy is what characterises the writings of both:

> And since Plato was an artist (he set out as a poet and in Iris Murdoch's view no less than in D.H. Lawrence's always remained one), art played a crucial role in his own thinking and is therefore bound to play one in Iris Murdoch's own writings, which are in terms of Plato and which are the writings of an artist.[101]

Murdoch notes that Plato does not always treat artists in a hostile way. He allows them, in particular in the earlier dialogues, the gift of divine inspiration, and he does not always disapprove of their inability to explain these gifts.[102] Moreover, Murdoch points out that Plato uses myth, imagery and metaphors in philosophical discussion: 'the artist (or is it the philosopher?) in him still urges to explain by using images.'[103]

Jasper's study intends to counter this image and argue that that Coleridge is 'a unique genius who was yet highly sensitive and original in his reading.' (Jasper, *Coleridge as Poet and Religious Thinker*, p. 8)

[98] This Greek word 'phantasia' is most likely the source for Murdoch's own use of fantasy. Murdoch does not reveal the origin of her use of the term. The closest she comes to etymology is when she states that the distinction between imagination and fantasy is not to the same as Coleridge's distinction between imagination and fancy. (Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p. 321.)

[99] Plato, *The Republic*, 398ab.

[100] 'One might take the *Republic* (597) passage about the painter as indicating art which was bad because thoughtless.' (Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p. 317)

[101] Bronzwaer, 'Images of Plato', p. 55.

[102] Murdoch, *The Fire and the Sun*, p. 387. See too p. 392 for a discussion of *Ioon*, in which Socrates smirks at Ioon for his ignorance of anything but the art of recitation, and p. 416 for a discussion of the *Phaedrus*. Compare too Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p. 317: 'Plato refers more than once to the unconscious non-rational creativity of poets who do not know how they do it and cannot explain what they have done. That great artist had mixed feelings about such dangerous gifts.'

[103] Murdoch, *The Fire and the Sun*, p. 445.

Art and philosophy are intertwined in Plato's work, according to Murdoch, and what Plato objects to in art, is not confined to art. Artists are not the only ones to betray 'egoistic fantasy and lack of moral sense'. Instead, the distinction between illusion and reality involves a deep mistrust of human nature and of its tendency to look for comfort rather than truth. Humans prefer illusion to reality. In chapter one it was argued how this fallen state of mankind is a persistent theme in Murdoch's thought. She recognises it in Weil's notion of gravity and argues that Freud 'had provided us with what might be called a doctrine of original sin'. The most eloquent and admittedly 'depressing description' is found in the beginning of 'The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts'.[104]

Not merely artists but everyone can thus be understood to be like a prisoner in the Cave. Given this image of human beings morality is for Plato and for Murdoch not only a matter of acting well from time to time. Though morality may be expressed in such moments, it is not limited to these. Plato and Murdoch maintain an image of moral progress or pilgrimage. Humans are in a state of illusion from which it is not easy to escape. The attempt to do so is a constant struggle.

The intricate attitude of Plato to artists arises from the fact that imagery is here necessarily deluding, and yet unavoidable, as Murdoch argues:

> Moral improvement, as we learn from the *Republic*, involves a progressive destruction of false images. Image-making or image-apprehending is always an imperfect activity, some images are higher than others, that is nearer to reality. Images should not be resting places, but pointers towards higher truth. The implication is that the highest activities of the mind, as in mathematics and mysticism, are imageless.[105]

The highest activities of the mind then do not use images. Murdoch expresses reservation about considering mathematics as the highest activity of the mind. She claims that Plato does not regard mathematics as the summit of knowledge and adds that '[t]he Greeks were impressed and inspired by their own rapid progress in mathematics, especially geometry, and likely to see this as an exemplar of understanding.'

Murdoch is then not that much impressed by mathematics, yet mysticism she holds in high esteem. Mysticism, both eastern and western, Murdoch considers to maintain that

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[104] See respectively Murdoch, 'Knowing the Void', p. 158, Murdoch, 'On 'God' and 'Good'', p. 341, and Murdoch, 'The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts', p. 364. This last text is quoted in chapter one.
[105] Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p. 317-8.

'theological mythology, stories about gods, creation myths and so on' are at 'a lower level than reality and ultimate religious truth ...: beyond the last image we fall into the abyss of God.' This image she derives from St. John of the Cross.[106] Murdoch emphasises that 'Plato's moral philosophy is *about* demythologisation.' Indeed, she concludes - albeit with an image - to the end of all imagery. Images should be regarded 'as ladders, to be thrown away after use'.

Images thus plead the end of all imagery. Even though Plato and Murdoch argue that the highest activities of the mind are imageless, to make this argument imagery is indispensable. While they present imagery's limitations, they acknowledge its significance. Their understanding of imagination is not 'exalted'. Good imagination - as opposed to bad fantasy - is not solely decided by an artist's consciousness, but as in the myth of the Cave it is directed at realities surrounding the artist and finally at the good.

Murdoch and Plato do not respond identically to the peculiar situation in which imagery is indispensable and yet mistrusted. The divergence in their positions is best explained by pointing out the more political nature of Plato's philosophy. Plato as a politician has a 'strain of unbalance, of violence, of the beginnings of totalitarianism, of unlimitedness. Perhaps also of fear', which Bronzwaer argues Murdoch pictures so well in the young Plato in *Acastos*.[107] As a totalitarian politician he distrust art. 'Art is feared by tyrants', Murdoch more than once remarks.[108] Thus the artists are politely escorted to the border.

Yet, the puppets are allowed to remain, for Plato also recognises the necessity of imagery. He has use for imagery for all who cannot manage the deeper understanding of philosophy. While Murdoch expresses her trust in the virtuous peasant to know, and 'to go on knowing, in spite of the removal or modification of the theological apparatus', Plato's Socrates retains artists - albeit the minor ones - for the ideal state. Even the philosophers are given a comparison between the sun and the good, as well as the allegory of the cave, but above all they must have been charmed by their election as the only ones who can do without imagery. In the creation of this final imagery one might discern a role for the great artist after all. For who would be able to create this imagery, but a philosopher who is also an artist?

Murdoch indeed pursues this possibility. It was argued before that for Murdoch - in contrast to Plato - great art in particular can not only play a role in moral progress, but is even

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[106] Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p. 318. Compare here too Murdoch, *The Fire and the Sun*, p. 443: 'St John of the Cross says that God is the abyss of faith into which we fall when we have discarded all images of him. This is the point at which Plato starts making jokes.' Compare Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p. 320: 'The spiritual life is a long disciplined destruction of false images and false goods until (in some sense which we cannot understand) the imagining mind achieves an end of images and shadows (*ex umbris et imaginibus in veritatem*), the final *demythologisation* of the religious passion as expressed by mystics such as Eckhart and St. John of the Cross.'

[107] Bronzwaer, 'Images of Plato', p. 63.

[108] See for example Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p. 90.

considered more important than philosophy. Murdoch does not mind the artists' lack of explanation. Similarly, in her moral philosophy she defies 'the unexamined life is not worth living' against the grain of contemporary philosophy.[109] Moral agents and artists are allowed their inability to express the truth or goodness of their work and doings.

In *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* Murdoch discerns this capacity of art, to thus play a role in the moral pilgrimage, in what she calls Plato's concept of high imagination:

> High imagination is passionately creative. ... In Plato the unmoved Forms inspire the creative love of spirit which is active at a lower level. ... Plato, teaching by images and myths, also acknowledges high imagination as creative stirring spirit, attempting to express and embody what is perfectly good, but extremely remote, a picture which implicitly allows a redemption of art.[110]

Thus Murdoch discerns in Plato's understanding of high imagination a possibility to attribute to art this important role in becoming morally better. High imagination looks at a better reality, or even at the Good, when creating. Murdoch considers it expressed in Plato's image of God creating the world, as well as anamnesis in the *Meno*.[111]

With this imagery, at the end of this discussion of Plato Murdoch returns to Kant and concludes:

> So it appears that Plato, like Kant, offers two views of imagination. For Plato the lower level, which for Kant is necessary automatic synthesis, is seen in human terms as the production of base illusions, or perhaps simply of the ordinary unimaginative egoistic screen of our conceptualising. ... The spiritual life is a long disciplined destruction of false images and false goods until (in some sense which we cannot understand) the imagining mind achieves an end of images and shadows'.

This quotation introduces the distinction between imagination and fantasy, which this chapter started with. In *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* Murdoch distinguishes between imagination and fantasy based on an idiosyncratic discussion of Kant and Plato. Murdoch's reading of Kant's empirical and aesthetic imagination introduces the ubiquity of an imagination characterised as the

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[109] Murdoch, 'The Idea of Perfection', p. 300.
[110] Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p. 319-320.

imagination of genius. In the analysis of Plato and his understanding of artists imagination is further developed as a notion related to reality, and finally to the Good. The Good appears here as both the distant goal at which imagination should be directed as well as the source of inspiration for high imagination.

5. Concluding Remarks

The distinction between fantasy and imagination is a defining characteristic of Murdoch's understanding of these notions. The distinction is moral: fantasy is bad and imagination is good. Fantasy denotes an obsession with the self. Imagination denotes attention to reality. The distinction is presented as in a way obvious. Just looking at the work of Velasquez or reading Tolstoy leads to comprehension. However, Murdoch admits too that the distinction may not be clearly distinguished in an artist's or anyone's mind.

In *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* the distinction between fantasy and imagination appears after reflection upon two thinkers: Kant and Plato. In Murdoch's reading of Kant the image of the barrier reveals her understanding of imagination. The crucial step in her reading of his work is releasing the aesthetic imagination out of the limited corner it was allotted by Kant. This notion of imagination for Murdoch also determines the empirical imagination, which is present in all perception. The empirical imagination is not hidden behind a barrier, but behind a threshold. Thus, conscious imagination determines the unconscious imagination up to a certain extent.

Yet, imagination for Murdoch is not fully decided by the individual (artistic) consciousness. In turning to Plato Murdoch reveals not only admiration but also distrust of artists and their imagination. This distrust is an expression of a general distrust of all human beings. Against natural egoistic tendencies Murdoch's reading of Plato posits the importance of reality and ultimately the notion of Good, to which imagination should be directed. Moral pilgrimage is understood as a long destruction of imagery.

The pervasiveness of imagination, discerned in this chapter, reinforces the importance attributed to imagery in the previous chapter. The reading of imagery inspired by the work of Le Doeuff, is now even more justified by Murdoch's reading of Plato where it turned out to be impossible to philosophise without resort to imagery. This chapter on imagination thus also accounts for the previous interest in imagery.

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[111] She mentions the image of God as a creative artist at the end of *The Sophist* as well as in the *Timaeus*. (Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p. 319-320)

CHAPTER FIVE

RELIGION, MORALITY AND THE ONTOLOGICAL PROOF

1. Introduction

The preceding chapter introduced notions of imagination and fantasy. It was argued how imagination and fantasy pervade human understanding and perception. The best way to understand them is from the imagination of the artist. For Murdoch the imagination of an artist is not in any way 'exalted'. Instead, it is directed at an independent reality, and ultimately at the Good.[1] Imagination, it was argued, is both directed at and inspired by the Good.

The notion of the Good can be understood to further explain Murdoch's understanding of reality. In the third chapter and thus in Murdoch's earlier writing, reality was understood in a more or less common sense way, which was up to a certain extent decided by Murdoch's understanding of literature. In the first part of the fourth chapter the notion of reality was further explored. I argued that the notion of reality signifies for Murdoch something obvious and at the same time impossible to fully grasp. In the discussion of Plato and in particular in the allegory of the Cave the importance of reality in moral progress was complemented by the importance of the Good. To know reality is, in Murdoch's phrasing, to see the world in the light of the Good.

This chapter considers the notion of the Good, as both direction and source for imagination. In doing so, it returns to the questions which I argued to be central to Murdoch's work: 'How can we make ourselves morally better?' and 'What is a good man like?'. It also returns to what occasioned the importance of these questions for philosophy: the collapse of religion. The answer to them, I argued, came in an understanding of an inner self in relation to an external reality. The inner self I argued to be fantasising and imaginative, the external reality is decided by the Good.

This chapter examines what the Good is like, to what extent it is possible to know it and whether and how it can be argued to exist. The questions are all the more important because Murdoch considers that little can be learnt from people generally regarded as good:

> Christ, Socrates, certain saints ... if we try to contemplate these men we find that the information about them is scanty and vague, and that, their great moments apart, it is the simplicity and directness of their diction which chiefly colours our conception of them as good. ... Goodness appears to be both rare and hard to

[1] Imagination here reminds of attention, a notion Murdoch receive from Weil. (See Murdoch, 'Knowing the Void')

> picture. It is perhaps most convincingly met with in simple people - inarticulate, unselfish mothers of large families - but these cases are also the least illuminating.[2]

Good people are hard to picture. An answer to the question 'What is a good man like?' comes in an understanding of the good rather than in the image of any good person. In the absence of clear examples, it becomes very important to ascertain an understanding of the good.

For Murdoch the ontological proof is a most important tool in doing so. In the third part of this chapter I discuss this proof, as well as the position of the fool to whom it is directed. The most famous conception of this proof one finds in Anselm's *Proslogion*. This conception especially has had a long and diverse reception. It has been considered as a decisive logical proof for the existence of God, as an assertion of faith or as a self-fulfilling prophecy.[3] Murdoch cites the ontological proof both in her fictional and in her philosophical work.

For Murdoch the proof is about the Good, not God. In the Good Murdoch intends to preserve what she considers universal and timeless in religion, and of which she regards Christianity as one expression. Even if the Good is not considered a replacement of God, it is explained from a certain understanding of God in religion. In order to understand the Good, it is necessary to further examine Murdoch's understanding of religion. Murdoch's notion of religion is first discussed in this chapter, preceding the discussion of the ontological proof and of its fool. This chapter thus begins with a discussion of the different views on religion expressed in Murdoch's Platonic dialogue *Above the Gods*, one of two dialogues presented in *Acastos* (1986).

2. 'Above the Gods': Religion and Morality

Above the Gods is, as its subtitle confirms, 'A Dialogue about Religion'. The remarks of its different characters express the particular angle from which Murdoch regards this topic. The dialogue's significance lies both in the ideas distinguished in this discussion and in the ones disregarded. The dialogue thus pursues an understanding of religion in, what Murdoch calls, 'the time of the angels'. It focuses on the notion of Good, and possible differences between morality and religion. Yet, it disregards other aspects of religion. There is for instance scarcely any sense of community, or any interest in sacred texts.[4]

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[2] Murdoch, 'On 'God' and 'Good'', p. 342. Compare Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p. 318: 'It is very difficult to understand 'what goes on' in the souls of dedicated religious people, even when we know them face to face and they are trying to tell us. It is also difficult to *imagine* ways of life which are much above our own moral level as being morally demanded. They exert no magnetism and cannot be seen except in terms of senseless deprivation.'

[3] Compare Murdoch, 'On 'God' and 'Good'', p. 351.

[4] Religions are generally understood to consist of more than belief in God or Good, or be not just a sustainer of morality. Murdoch here differs significantly from discussions of actual religions. See for example Smart, who distinguishes the following aspects: Practical and ritual dimension, experiential and emotional dimension, narrative

The present discussion of the dialogue is thus used to expose Murdoch's particular way of regarding religion. It also considers the dialogical structure of *Acastos*. In particular, it considers the way in which this structure affects the arguments presented. It has been noted before that the structure of a dialogue is prevalent within Murdoch's thinking. It presents itself not only in *Acastos*, but also in *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*.[5] Yet, *Acastos* more explicitly reveals this form and thus more naturally invites consideration of this form.

In favouring the dialogue form Murdoch expresses her admiration for Plato. Like the philosopher 'under whose banner [she is] fighting'[6], she considers it impossible to state philosophy's ultimate concerns. She refers to Plato's *Seventh Letter* especially in support of this statement: 'The *Seventh Letter* makes the point even more emphatically. What is really important in philosophy cannot be put into written words and scarcely indeed into words. (Language itself may be a barrier.)'[7] A dialogue, with its unfinished, interrupted thoughts, and undermining banter exposes the limitations of the thoughts and arguments developed. They are presented by particular people in particular circumstances, which convey the contingency of their truth. It thus inhibits a reading in which one position is considered as ultimate truth.[8] The limitations of language are most pressing where the notion of the Good is concerned. When contemplating the Good the characters in Plato's dialogues also employ imagery, most famously the Allegory of the Cave, where the sun represents the Good. Murdoch considers this imagery at length in 'The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts' and *The Fire and the Sun* in particular.

In this dialogue about religion, the characters' minds are not exclusively occupied by this topic. The discussion is larded with their expressions of love, sexual desire or jealousy for one

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or mythic dimension, doctrinal and philosophical dimension, ethical and legal dimension, social and institutional dimension, material dimension.) N. Smart, *The World's Religions: Old Traditions and Modern Transformations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) p. 12-21.

[5] Tracy even argues that *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* ' - even more than Murdoch's explicitly Platonic dialogues in *Acastos* - seems to me more faithful to the kind of form needed for rendering a Platonic theory of the Good in the late twentieth century ... For *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, in spite of its occasional appearance of meandering formlessness, seems less a treatise and more like the great mime-like Platonic dialogues.' (Tracy, 'The Many Faces of Platonism', p. 66)

[6] Murdoch, 'The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts', p. 364.

[7] Murdoch, *The Fire and the Sun*, p. 405.

[8] Reading Plato's dialogues *as* dialogues is not common practise. For example, the main speaker in *The Sophist* has been regarded as Plato's spokesperson, even when he is called a stranger rather than guest from Elea (xenos), and even though he commits parricide by arguing that 'non-being is'. For readings which do regard the dramatic aspects of the dialogue see S. Rosen, *Plato's* Sophist: *The Drama of Original and Image* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983). Rosen is not surprisingly quoted approvingly in *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* for an observation on Plato in another work: 'Stanley Rosen, in his excellent book *The Quarrel between Philosophy and Poetry*, speaking of Heidegger's failure to understand Plato, suggests that the elusive Being which Heidegger attempts to discover for us is in fact the *light* which illuminates the atmosphere of the Platonic dialogues.' (Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, 142) See also J. Sallis, *Being and Logos: The Way of the Platonic Dialogues* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press International Inc, 1986) for a general discussion on reading Platonic dialogues, and a discussion of 6 of the dialogues.

another. This sexual play both invigorates and undermines the discussion. In their love for Socrates his friends try to stretch their mind while at the same time ridiculing each other's ideas.

Especially the entrance of Alcibiades at the end of the dialogue and his constant mockery of Plato undermine the discussion as a whole. He enters the discussion just after Socrates has declared to like Plato's words and to love him while he speaks. Plato reveals great anxiety by asking if he is not loved all the time. Upon this delicate moment Alcibiades bursts in, establishing himself immediately as a serious rival:

> SOCRATES: Plato has been telling us about being in love.
>
> ALCIBIADES: My subject too!
>
> TIMONAX: He's in love with Good.
>
> ALCIBIADES: Is it mutual?[9]

In a typically Murdochian iconoclastic move the reader is left feeling uncertain about the worth of anything said before.

As is often the case with banter, Alcibiades' remark is not only comic, but also touches upon a serious difficulty in Murdoch's understanding of the Good. The question, whether the Good is as much in love with Plato as Plato is with the Good, reminds of 'someone's' objection in 'On 'God' and 'Good'' that '[i]t makes sense to speak of loving God, a person, but very little to speak of loving Good, a concept. 'Good' even as a fiction is not likely to inspire, or be even comprehensible to, more than a small number of mystically minded people, who, being reluctant to surrender 'God', fake up 'Good' in his image, so as to preserve some kind of hope. The picture is not only purely imaginary, it is not even likely to be effective.' And, the objector continues, would it not be better to give up all metaphysical speculation, now that the concept of God the father is 'outdated' and 'rely on simple popular utilitarianism and existentialist ideas, together with a little empirical psychology, and perhaps some doctored Marxism, to keep the human race going.' Murdoch immediately admits to be 'often more than half persuaded to think in these terms [her]self'.'[10] Likewise, in *Above the Gods* Alcibiades wonders whether Plato's Good is not purely imaginary, thought up by a poetic mind. Did he not on entering ask Plato whether he had 'written any poems lately, dear? Love poems?'[11]

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[9] Murdoch, *Above the Gods*, p. 522.
[10] Murdoch, 'On 'God' and 'Good'', p. 359.
[11] Murdoch, *Above the Gods*, p. 521.

Despite the stage setting as 'Athens in the late fifth century BC'[12] the dialogue is both contemporary and historical. This is suggested by the author's note that the piece is to be performed either in modern dress or in period costume. It is also confirmed by the nature of the conversation and explicit references to contemporary incidents. Acastos for example comments: 'when the priests change the old-fashioned language into modern words it sounds so ugly and awkward, it loses spiritual force – it's as if the gods can't speak to us any more, they are silent, they've hidden themselves.'[13] So, Acastos complains how this change of language occasioned religion to loose its attraction. Their language has lost its force and its sound. His words are a prominent reminder of Murdoch's opposition to the modernisation of liturgy in the Anglican Church.

In a small piece written against this change it emerges that Murdoch considers the values lost to be timeless: 'The loss of lively and natural access to the Authorised Version of the Bible and Cranmer's Book of Common Prayer is a literary loss comparable to losing touch with Shakespeare. It is also, whether or not one believes in God, a spiritual loss. ... These words have been treasured and understood for centuries by people whose use made of them timeless language, perfectly comprehensible and illuminating, a part of ordinary life for educated and uneducated alike. Now an ephemeral parochial 'modernism' threatens to cut us off from these sources of spiritual and literary nourishment. Such a loss could be irrevocable.'[14] Murdoch considers the words of the Authorised Version and of the Book of Common Prayer timeless because of their being used by generations. So too, in rescuing the Good from the disappearing God she is concerned with timeless values, which makes the dialogue contemporary or historical, or even suggest a timeless position.

The topic of discussion has come up at the characters' return from a religious festival to which they go back at the end. This festival provides of course a good opportunity to start discussing religion. This beginning duplicates the beginning of *The Republic*, and as such may be understood as a homage to Plato. Yet no philosopher-king emerges from *Above the Gods*. The dialogue's decisive interest is not with politics. So, if this beginning is also a reminder of the origination of new communities, in particular religious communities, at festivals of the previous ones, this does not have political consequences.

The characters all attend this festival, even though none of them, except for the servant and perhaps Socrates[15], believe in the gods who are honoured. Belief in the gods is considered to

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[12] Murdoch, *Above the Gods*, p. 496.
[13] Murdoch, *Above the Gods*, p. 507.
[14] See I. Murdoch, [untitled] in *PR Review* 13 no. 6.5 (1979), p. 5.
[15] 'ALCIBIADES: ... But have you really been talking about *them*? (*pointing upwards*)
SOCRATES: I think we've passed beyond the gods. No one seems to want to defend them except me.

be something of the past. Their garlands infected with fleas reveal the deplorable state of religion. They wear them while the flowers look nice, but when the fleas are discovered they get rid of the garlands as quickly as they can.[16] And thus, they discuss religion, but none of them really confesses to being a religious man.

The classification of religion as belief in gods is not differentiated. Even though these Greek men as citizens of ancient Athens talk about the gods in the plural, these gods remain without any qualification and the men might as well have been talking about one god. God is here the god of philosophers, the god who received his name from Pascal's famous testament.[17] The conversation is that of philosophers of religion.[18] God or the gods represent an idea to which general concepts are attributed. These men do not consider a god known from religious experience, or from any particular religious practice or text. Their god is primarily a structuring principle in politics or morality and their main concern the question what may replace his beneficial usages.[19]

In the absence of any professed belief in god the discussion promptly shifts to morality. Religion is only considered from its ethical dimension. Or, one could also argue, that morality for Murdoch is something so serious that it is religious, as an angry young Plato puts it in *Above the Gods.*

> 'PLATO (*vehemently interrupting, very fast*): Religion isn't just a feeling, it isn't just a hypothesis, it's not like something we happen to know, a God who might perhaps be there isn't a God, it's got to be necessary, it's got to be certain, it's got to be proved by the whole of life, it's got to be the magnetic centre of everything –
>
> ...
>
> SOCRATES: ... Moral ideas can change people too.
>
> PLATO: Not so deeply, not in the way that's *required* of us, this isn't something optional, we're not volunteers, we're conscripts. We're bad, we have to become

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TIMONAX: Socrates!
ALCIBIADES: He 's a deep one. We don't know how to have him! ...' (Murdoch, *Above the Gods*, p. 522)

[16] Murdoch, *Above the Gods*, p. 497 and 498. Compare p. 507.

[17] These were the first lines of a text found on the piece of paper found sown into his coat after his death, relating what he experienced one night in 1654.

[18] B. Clack, B.R. Clack, *The Philosophy of Religion: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998) p. 6. Clack and Clack discuss here how many works suggest that theism is the main concern for philosophy of religion. (See p. 190 n.11 and 191 n.12 for references.) In this book Clack and Clack offer alternative approaches as well. Note also that Murdoch has been called 'a friend to theistic religion' (F.I. Gamwell, 'On the Loss of Theism', p. 175, compare W. Schweiker, 'The Sovereignty of God's Goodness', p. 209), because her interest in religious ideas is exceptional among contemporary philosophers.

[19] Compare Kerr on what he calls the general misconception of religion, in particular Christianity by philosophers. (F. Kerr, *Immortal Longings: Versions of Transcending Humanity* (London: SCPK, 1997), p. viiff, compare the discussions of the various authors, and in particular p. 154.)

good, it's a long way. Anyhow, morality, if it's anything serious, is something religious.'[20]

So, the term religion is used to emphasise the serious nature of morality. It is doubtful, however, whether this use of the term is generally recognisable. Plato later confesses not to have much use for the notion, precisely because 'people think of religion as something exotic and formal, and a bit aside of life, whereas what I mean is everywhere, like breathing.'[21]

As stated before, Murdoch considers this dialogue both contemporary and historical. Yet, the religion in question is perhaps more Christianity than Greek mythology. The demise of Christianity is a constant presumption in Murdoch's work. In 'On 'God' and 'Good'' she starts from the presumption that religion is collapsing, though she later admits that her assumption that "there is no God' and that the influence of religion is waning rapidly' may be challenged.[22] If only Socrates had been more persistent when arguing that '[q]uite a lot of educated people believe in gods'[23], one could argue, the discussion may have been given a different direction. The suggestion that only the uneducated, i.e. the servant, can be religious and believe in gods would have been disputed.[24]

Such criticism is partly refuted by pointing out that Murdoch's principal interest is not with religious believers, but with whom she calls 'unreligious believers'.[25] She is not arguing that there is no use for religion any more, but that she is preoccupied with people for whom this is true. Her work is about and for these people who are and have been without religion for quite some time. They can no longer imagine any return to the previous belief, but at the same time regret the loss of religion for different reasons. In this time of angels Murdoch endeavours to retain its essentials in a way they can recognise.[26]

Among these people Murdoch distinguishes different positions, which in *Above the Gods* are represented by the different characters. First there is Antagoras. The dialogue takes place at

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[20] Murdoch, *Above the Gods*, p. 513-514. (Compare Murdoch: Religion may be called moral philosophy 'so long as it treats those matters of 'ultimate concerns,' our experience of the unconditioned and our continued sense of what is holy' (Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p. 511-12, as quoted in Schweiker, 'The Sovereignty of God's Goodness', p. 209. Compare also Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p. 416)

[21] Murdoch, *Above the Gods*, p. 519.

[22] Murdoch, 'On 'God' and 'Good'', p. 337 and 361 respectively.

[23] Murdoch, *Above the Gods*, p. 498.

[24] It is interesting to note that the three theological essays in Antonaccio (1996) all consider Murdoch's moral philosophy and its limits for a Christian (theistic) position. That is, as (confessed) Christian theologians they have embraced Murdoch's work (especially Hauerwas openly confesses to doing so) at least partly because she is one of the few philosophers who take religion seriously. Yet, in the articles they reconsider this embrace because Murdoch's thoughts are not as hospitable for Christianity as first assumed.

[25] Murdoch, 'On 'God' and 'Good'', p. 344.

[26] Rozanov uses this term to refer to the present time without god (Murdoch, *The Philosopher's Pupil*, p. 187). Compare too Carel's Bishop's 'interregnum' in Murdoch, *The Time of the Angels*, p. 101.

his house. He is characterised as 'a sophist, in love with Timonax', who is identified as 'a socially conscious youth'. Antagoras and Timonax consider religion from a political perspective. Next are Acastos, 'a serious questioning youth' and a servant. They present an argument from the obvious, as the virtuous peasant and his more educated counterpart. The dialogue culminates when Socrates questions a young and angry Plato. They are interrupted by Alcibiades, who enters near the end of the dialogue.[27] The dialogue proceeds to a culmination in the discussion between Plato, Alcibiades and Socrates. In these persons Murdoch expresses her most personal convictions.

Antagoras, the first to offer his thoughts on religion, finds only one use for religion. This is a political one. Religion is useful to control the uneducated masses: 'considered simply as a social phenomenon religion can be a useful stabilising factor. We're living in a period of intellectual and psychological *shock*, a time of deep change, an interregnum, a *dangerous interim*. ... if people worshipped the gods and kept quiet this might save the state from worse things. So long as there's an uneducated mob, there's a place for something like religion.'[28] He emphasises the use of fear religion may imbue. Pressed by Socrates he is eventually forced to admit to the deification of the state.[29]

This conclusion infuriates Timonax, who, speaking fast, expresses his disapproval of religion. 'Religion is *immoral*, it stops people from thinking about how to change society. ... Religion had always been a reactionary force, it makes people lazy and stupid, it consoles them for their rotten lives ...Religion is false, it's degrading, it makes real morality impossible ... it's a political force, it commits terrible crimes, intolerance and persecution and cruelty, it's *like* a political party, it *is* a political party.'[30] His outburst, vehement as it may be, is not given much reflection. Socrates is quick to point out an inaccuracy in Timonax' reasoning, but more devastatingly, he confesses that Timonax' eloquence makes him tired. Antagoras merely ridicules him.

Timonax and Antagoras both represent positions which are clearly political. Antagoras is a statesman with little interest in the masses. He considers himself (intellectually and morally) superior to 'the uneducated mob'.[31] For this mob he wants religion to continue in order for the state to last, yet only as long as civilisation has not fully grown up and come to see the truth of

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[27] Murdoch, *Above the Gods*, p. 496 and 521 respectively. In the Platonic dialogues Plato and Socrates never appear together. There are only three references to Plato (*Apology* 34a, 38b and *Phaedo* 59b). Socrates appears of course in most of Plato's dialogues and Alcibiades only in *The Symposion*. The names of the other three characters are not taken from Plato's dialogues, but from Greek mythology. The characters in *Above the Gods* are almost the opposite of their namesakes. Acastos is son of Peleus, Antagoras a poet, Timonax a king.

[28] Murdoch, *Above the Gods*, p. 501.

[29] Murdoch, *Above the Gods*, p. 502.

[30] Murdoch, *Above the Gods*, p. 503-4.

science. He significantly speaks of the distinction between fact and value, to which Murdoch draws our attention by means of italics.

> ANTAGORAS: ... Now we can *separate facts from value*, give each its proper place in life, get rid of the supernatural on both sides. Instead of cosmic mythology we have science, instead of picturesque god fables, we have independent moral men making up their minds and choosing their values.[32]

Timonax is young and a fiery communist (*avant-la-lettre*). His characterisation of religion as 'a drug to stop people from resisting tyranny'[33] reminds of course of Marx' 'opium for the people'. Unlike Antagoras, whom he accuses of cynicism and élitism[34] Timonax has much confidence in the masses. He trusts that equality and brotherhood, and morality as something 'absolute', 'as *caring about people*'[35] would be possible, if it was not for religion.

These positions of reactionary and communist do not return in the remainder of the dialogue, though Antagoras and Timonax will offer serious though short challenges to the ideas of Acastos, Plato and Alcibiades. Murdoch does not disregard the political consequences of thought or her own aspiration to speak for or even control the masses. Indeed, Timonax can be understood to resemble her younger self, and Antagoras her older self, who is both in love and annoyed with his youth. Yet, politics is not her primary concern when considering religion. Antagoras and Timonax state their position, but these are not much explored.

The next person questioned by Socrates is young and serious Acastos. From this point onwards the dialogue changes direction. The questions Socrates asks shift from equating religion with belief in god or gods[36] to distinguishing religion from morality.[37] He also changes his role from questioning to more positively stating what he deems to be the case. Unlike Antagoras and Timonax Acastos is not stating positive theories, but more stuttering his answers. Acastos is a nice and perhaps even a good person. He notices 'certain things' around him. His concern for flies reminds of James in *The Sea, The Sea*.[38] Unlike Antagoras and Timonax he does not regard the slave as an object, though he does feel uncomfortable in talking to him. He is also friendly to Plato, offering him a seat in the beginning and taking him along to the festival in the end.

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[31] Murdoch, *Above the Gods*, p. 501.
[32] Murdoch, *Above the Gods*, p. 499-500.
[33] Murdoch, *Above the Gods*, p. 503.
[34] Murdoch, *Above the Gods*, p. 501.
[35] Murdoch, *Above the Gods*, p. 504.
[36] Murdoch, *Above the Gods*, p. 498, 500, 502, 505.
[37] Murdoch, *Above the Gods*, p. 509, 513.
[38] Murdoch, *The Sea, The Sea*, p. 179, where Charles notes that 'James and the fly looked at each other.'

Acastos most eminently talks with the sort of emphasis which is characteristic for many of the discussions in Murdoch's novels, and which gives them their unique and also peculiar timbre. One can only speculate about the use of this idiosyncratic device. I understand it as an attempt to convey a sense of knowing something for sure while at the same time being at a loss to express what is known with so much certainty. It is also open to easy ridicule.

> ACASTOS: I think religion *contains* morality. It goes beyond common sense, it goes beyond that sort of limited attitude, dividing the world into manageable bits.
>
> Religion is believing that your life is a *whole* - I mean that goodness and duty are just *everywhere* - like *always* looking further and deeper - and feeling *reverence* for things - a religious person would care about everything in that sort of way, he'd feel everything mattered and every second mattered.
>
> SOCRATES: No time off![39]

His ideas and metaphors remind one of Murdoch's own words, as in the earlier quotation of his criticism on the change from old-fashioned to modern language. Constantly questioned by Socrates he struggles with the paradox of being 'drawn to the idea of a sort of central - good - something very real'[40], which at the same time cannot be named. He wonders whether religion can go on existing yet without lying, and does not 'want worship and ritual and prayer and so on just to *go* -there's a valuable - precious - thing inside it all'. This something is more remembered than invented .[41]

Yet, when pressed by Socrates,

> SOCRATES: Can there be religion without mythology, without stories and pictures? Should we be trying now to think of it like that?
>
> ACASTOS: I don't know!
>
> SOCRATES: Is a certain opaqueness, a certain *mystery*, necessary to it?
>
> ACASTOS(*almost tearful*): *I don't know!*
>
> SOCRATES: Would you say that religion is something *natural*?'[42]

Acastos, almost in tears, has to confess that he doesn't know. However, being unable to express one's thoughts does not entail bad morality. It has been noted before that Murdoch does not

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[39] Murdoch, *Above the Gods*, p. 508.
[40] Murdoch, *Above the Gods*, p. 506.
[41] Murdoch, *Above the Gods*, p. 507.

condemn the inability to express morality. In his concern for the flies, the slave and for Plato Acastos exemplifies virtue and concern for other human beings. After the vexing moment quoted above Timonax rescues Acastos by suggesting a break. In this interval the servant is questioned.

In this dialogue the simple truth is embodied by the servant, whose belief in god defies the logic of the debating men. He cannot comprehend that they ask what god is like, or that they ask after the reasons why the gods should be loved.

> ACASTOS: Are they good?
>
> SLAVE: (*puzzled*) I don't know. They are gods.[43]

In his broken language he explains to the men what God is like and how he is everywhere and everything for him. Antagoras and Timonax make fun of him, but Acastos is most of all embarrassed.[44]

Plato's angry interruption occurs just after this interval. His manner of speech is rather different from that of Acastos. He is unsocial and obsessed with Socrates, but indifferent if not hostile to the others. Yet, he is equally unable to proceed at the end. Acastos' and Plato's ideas and metaphors are not that different, as affirmed by Acastos' meek remarks of assent.[45] Plato too speaks of something absolute. This is introduced with the undermining sense of comedy, so typical for Murdoch's writing:

> SOCRATES: What is this 'it' that you're certain of in this special unique way, which isn't God and which has to exist and is proved by everything and is seen in the clear light beyond the shadows?
>
> PLATO: Good.
>
> ANTAGORAS: What did he say?
>
> PLATO: *Good.*[46]

Plato helpfully mentions the difference between his ideas and those of Acastos, which is to be found in the notions of love and desire. Indeed, Plato's ideas are in comparison notably

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[42] Murdoch, *Above the Gods*, p. 509-10.
[43] Murdoch, *Above the Gods*, p. 529. Cf. p. 512.
[44] It is interesting to compare this embarrassment to that felt by readers at the presence of this slave. (See M.C. Nussbaum, 'Miscast in Dialogue Form' in *Times Literary Supplement* 15 August 1986, p. 881). Nussbaum's criticism is justified if the slave is mainly introduced to convey the position of the virtuous peasant. However, I consider him even more important for conveying these thinkers' uncomfortable attitude to a position which is not sustained by argument, but may be worthwhile nevertheless.
[45] Murdoch, *Above the Gods*, p. 515.

psychological, in the sense that they have to do with the *psyche*.[47] He distinguishes its different levels: one part is concerned with truth and reality, the rest consists of mere fantasies and 'selfish tricks'.[48] Deeply moral or religious change is compared to learning mathematics or a trade. Thus one may learn that there is something outside us, and to forget oneself.[49] One may even learn this from falling in love. At Socrates' suggestion Plato eagerly admits that there is a god after all and his name is Eros, or rather that Eros is 'a holy passionate spirit ... *in love* with the Good.'[50]

Despite his sceptical audience Plato maintains that everyone instinctively knows that the Good is real and absolute, in a variation on Descartes' famous experiment:

> PLATO: ... People know that good is real and absolute, not optional and relative, all their life proves it. ... We can think everything else away out of our life, but not value, that's in the very - ground of things.[51]

Moral philosophy, for Plato as for Acastos, is everywhere.[52]

Plato's questioning by Socrates is terminated by the crushing entrance of Alcibiades. Alcibiades is above all an iconoclast. He has, as Antagoras suggests, castrated all the statues of the gods. This literal desecration is yet preceded by a figural one, for by being offended by the gods for 'flaunting their organs at us' (his reason for castrating them) Alcibiades has first brought the gods down to the level of ordinary humans, by making them subject to human morality.[53]

Alcibiades is told about the preceding discussion, where Socrates admits that he is the only one who wants to defend the Gods.[54] In a constant mockery of Plato and his sexual jealousy Alcibiades declares that religion is power:

> ALCIBIADES (*solemn and sonorous*): Knowledge is power, as we all know. Power is the *knowledge* that good and evil are *not* enemies, they are *friends*. ... So evil isn't really evil, good isn't really good, we pass beyond the ordinary childish abstract notions of good and evil and enter into the unity of the world! *Then* we are kings,

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[46] Murdoch, *Above the Gods*, p. 514.
[47] Murdoch, *Above the Gods*, p. 515.
[48] Murdoch, *Above the Gods*, p. 515.
[49] Murdoch, *Above the Gods*, p. 516.
[50] Murdoch, *Above the Gods*, p. 518.
[51] Murdoch, *Above the Gods*, p. 518.
[52] Murdoch, *Above the Gods*, p. 516.
[53] Murdoch, *Above the Gods*, p. 522:
'SOCRATES: I imagine you wouldn't call yourself a religious man?
ANTAGORAS: Was it you who castrated all those statues of the gods?
ALCIBIADES: Ssssh! The gods deserve to be castrated. Who are they to flaunt their organs at us? But have you really been talking about *them*? (*pointing upwards*)'

> *then* we are gods, the unified soul is the lord of reality. *That's* religion, *that's* the mystery which the initiated know, and *now is the new era* when at last it will be made plain.[55]

Plato attacks him for his thoughts in a bloodthirsty desire to kill them. Alcibiades is highly amused by this.

If nothing else this derisive Nietzschean response allows Socrates to return away from the elaborate arguments to common sense and simplicity.[56] He argues to simply try to be good, to see the extent in which religion and morality are allies and the extent in which one should live by external rules: 'Goodness is simple, it's just very difficult.'[57] This plea for simplicity amuses Alcibiades and evokes a solemn reaction from Plato. Even though Socrates has beseeched him not to make a drama of it, Plato declares to kneel at what he perceives to be a newly built shrine.

Socrates' plea for simplicity here is reminiscent of the beginning of the 'The Idea of Perfection'. In a reproach of a well-known phrase of the earlier Socrates ('the unexamined life is not worth living'[58]) Murdoch argues that 'it must be possible to do justice to both Socrates and the virtuous peasant.'[59] In *Above the Gods* likewise Murdoch warns the intellectuals debating not to disregard simple answers, where an intellectual approach is naturally likely to favour an intellectual answer. The dialogue thus endorses the truth of this simplicity. In the various arguments presented there is constant warning against preference for the own (intellectual) approach as well as wariness of Plato's too violent feelings that the answer cannot be simple.

The dialogue ends when the characters return to the festival in order to, as Socrates puts it, 'enjoy our gods while we can'. He walks away, 'affectionally arm in arm with Alcibiades'. Socrates does not mind the latter's ideas, but Plato does. Alcibiades is amused by Socrates' plea for simplicity, but Plato can't bear it. The stage directions instruct the actor to 'hold his bursting head.'

In *Above the Gods* as in 'On 'God' and 'Good'' the Good appears after observing the decline of religion. In 'On 'God' and 'Good'' Murdoch notices a void in philosophy, as it is unable to rescue the values involved in the collapse of religion. That essay attempts to retain in

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[54] Is Socrates ironic here? See Timonax' response. (Murdoch, *Above the Gods*, cp. 519-521)
[55] Murdoch, *Above the Gods*, p. 523.
[56] It is a reminder of Murdoch's great admiration for Wittgenstein. Compare:
'SOCRATES: Beware in philosophy of things which 'must be so', at least look at them with a cool eye.' (Murdoch, *Above the Gods*, p. 524) and:
'And of course, as Wittgenstein pointed out, the fact that one is irresistibly impelled to say it need not mean that anything *else* is the case.' (Murdoch, 'The Idea of Perfection', p. 316. L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1984), nr. 299)
[57] Murdoch, *Above the Gods*, p. 525.
[58] Plato, *Apology*, 38a.

the notion of the Good a central concept with the characteristics of the old God.[60] *Above the Gods* features a discussion of characters who, inspired by the love for one another and in particular for Socrates, consider moral philosophy rather than religion, even though the dialogue's subtitle suggest differently. The topic of religion is first proposed, but quickly replaced by moral philosophy, because none of the characters confesses to believe in god or gods, the servant and perhaps Socrates excepted.

The characters consider the task of moral philosophy now that religion has disappeared. Even though religion may not be their prime concern their (tacit) understanding of religion decides the discussion of moral philosophy. The first speakers express political concerns. Yet, the dialogue is more interested in an understanding of moral philosophy as concerned with individuals and the Good. When Plato uses 'religious' or 'religion' it is to warrant the seriousness of his moral philosophy. 'Religion' denotes here a timeless truth, exemplified in Christianity concerning an individual's relation to an absolute truth, but not something sustained by a community, or expressed in particular texts or sacraments. With the entrance of Alcibiades this understanding of 'religion' is put into question and portrayed as purely imaginary and ineffectual. Socrates' final words, as well as the presence of the slave, caution against ignoring the position of the layperson in this debate.

Above the Gods thus reveals the positions which alternately decide Murdoch's contemplation of the good, and the subsequent discussion of the ontological proof: Plato's desire to build shrines, Socrates' plea for simplicity and Alcibiades' iconoclasm, as well as the servant's presence. How can she defend the Good against Alcibiades and should she do so at all costs? How much does it matter that Murdoch forfeits most aspects of religion?

3. The ontological proof: The 'belief' that the proof tries to 'prove'

In particular Murdoch's later oeuvre affirms the importance of the proof for her philosophical thinking. It first occurs in 'On 'God' and 'Good'', where Murdoch remarks that 'the ontological proof is seen to be not exactly a proof but rather a clear assertion of faith ..., which could only confidently be made on the basis of a certain experience.'[61] In *The Fire and the Sun* she calls it 'Plato's main idea'.[62] The proof then appeared as the topic of one of her Gifford lectures in 1982. She used this text again in the Van der Leeuw lecture in Groningen, in 1987, and in 1992, in

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[59] Murdoch, 'The Idea of Perfection', p. 299-300.
[60] Murdoch, 'On 'God' and 'Good'', p. 344.
[61] Murdoch, 'On 'God' and 'Good'', p. 351, compare 349.
[62] Murdoch, *The Fire and the Sun*, p. 458.

Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals, she devotes two chapters to it. The proof is also interjected by the most mystically minded characters in her novels from *The Unicorn* onwards.[63]

The importance of this proof has been generally recognised. Conradi points out that 'the ontological proof has deep roots in Murdoch's thought.'[64] It is discussed by more than half of the contributors to *Iris Murdoch and the Search for Human Goodness*. The proof has too an important place in Antonaccio's *Picturing the Human*. She argues that '[Murdoch's] account of the good is validated by a version of the ontological proof.'[65]

The present discussion of the ontological proof starts with Murdoch's reading of Anselm in *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, while also remembering the different characters of *Above the Gods*. The contrast between the learned and the simple encountered in *Above the Gods* returns at the end of *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*' (first) chapter on the ontological proof when Murdoch writes:

> An ultimate religious 'belief' must be that even if all 'religions' were to blow away like mist, the necessity of virtue and the reality of the good would remain. This is what the ontological proof tries to 'prove' in terms of a unique formulation. This is for thinkers to look at. The ordinary fellow 'just knows', for one is speaking of something which is obvious, the unique nature of morality.[66]

In this quote Murdoch distinguishes between thinkers and ordinary fellows. The proof as well as its object - the necessity of virtue and the reality of the good - is for thinkers to look at. Thus they *are distinguished from ordinary fellows. Whoever* looks at the proof is thus identified not as an ordinary fellow who 'just knows' (in quotation marks), but as a thinker who *looks at this ultimate* religious 'belief' (in quotation marks) that the ontological proof tries to 'prove' (also in quotation marks). Murdoch thus recreates the environment of *Above the Gods* where the learned discussed religion in the presence of an ordinary believer. As in the dialogue, the ordinary fellow may be regarded as an object of ridicule or desire, or a cause of embarrassment, but more interlude than part of the discussion.

Looking at the proof is, however, a rather complicated matter, witness its many and divers interpretations. Looking at it does not at all certify that the thinker will find what the ordinary fellow 'just knows'. On the contrary, it may obscure and diffuse the 'ultimate religious

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[63] See Conradi, *The Saint and the Artist*, p. 108-109, p. 314, p. 392n.13 for references to *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine* , *The Sea, The Sea*, *Nuns and Soldiers*, *The Philosopher's Pupil.*
[64] Conradi, *The Saint and the Artist*, p. 392n.13.
[65] Antonaccio, *Picturing the Human*, p. 15.
[66] Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p. 428.

'belief' that even if all 'religions' were to blow away like mist, the necessity of virtue and the reality of the good would remain.' For various thinkers have dismissed the proof for convincing reasons.

As a way to the 'belief' then the approach of the thinker may not be the most secure one. It may not even be a feasible one. Murdoch's distinction between thinkers and ordinary fellows thus introduces an important point of debate in the reception of this proof. It has been argued that the ontological proof is not so much a proof as an affirmation of faith. If this is the case, it cannot be proven or understood from any (thinker's) faithless position.

This affirmation of faith has, moreover, been said to be personal.[67] Murdoch observes that it is 'a proof which a man can only give to himself, herein resembling *cogito ergo sum*, to which it is indeed related by Descartes.'[68] The ontological proof thus considered is different from any proof of which the outcome may be accepted by testimony. There are many such proofs, which one does not prove oneself, because it suffices to trust someone else's expertise. The ontological proof, on the contrary, has to be proven by each individual.

For Murdoch these two aspects, the importance of faith and of proving the proof individually, set the proof apart from all other proofs, but do not affect its importance:

> *Yet these reminders do not* set the Proof aside as a piece of history or items of private piety, and in spite of having been apparently demolished by Kant *it has* continued to interest philosophers and theologians. *Credo ut intelligam* (I believe in order to understand) is not just an apologist's paradox, but an idea with which we are familiar in personal relationships, in art, in theoretical studies. I have faith (important place for this concept) in a person or idea in order to understand him or it, I intuitively know or grasp more than I can yet explain.[69]

In Murdoch's explanation of *credo ut intelligam*, this faith does not belong to a specific person or group. It is not expressed by any particular religious belief, but it is 'an idea with which we are familiar in personal relationships, in art, in theoretical studies.' The faith considered by Murdoch is recognised by all. It is the faith in persons and beliefs which goes beyond explanation.

If this faith is not a specific faith, what about the 'belief' that the ontological proof tries to 'prove'? Anselm in the most famous formulation of the proof considers God to be the object of the proof. It has been pointed out that his understanding of God as 'that than which nothing

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[67] This is too very important in Antonaccio's reading of the proof. She argues that for Murdoch the proof starts in consciousness. (Antonaccio, *Picturing the Human*, chapter V and VI)
[68] Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p. 392.

greater can be thought' is not merely Christian. Steel mentions a similar phrase found in Seneca. However, he also argues that Anselm found the origin of the phrase 'that than which nothing greater can be thought' in a text by one of the church fathers: Augustine's *De libero arbitrio.*[70]

In comparison, Murdoch refers to the object of the proof as 'an ultimate religious 'belief' ... that even if all 'religions' were to blow away like mist, the necessity of virtue and the reality of the good would remain.' She provides yet another explication by twice quoting Tillich, at the beginning of both chapters on the ontological proof in *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals.* In this quotation from his *Systematic Theology* Tillich speaks of 'the acknowledgement of the unconditional element in the structure of reason and reality.'[71]

These descriptions are not the same. In Murdoch's reading, the proof is no longer considered within a particular religious tradition. The belief goes beyond different religious traditions. Here again, I understand Murdoch to be writing most of all for these unreligious believers. Similar to her reading of Kant Murdoch does not consider Anselm's concerns, but rather appropriates his ideas in order to answer the question 'How can we make ourselves morally better?'.

What then does the proof prove for Murdoch? Murdoch hesitates to describe the import of this proof, which is apparent from her abundant use of quotation marks. What kind of belief is one in quotation marks that is proven in quotation marks? How can it be called religious when it is to remain even if all religions (in quotation marks) were to blow away like mist? To what extent is Murdoch creating or ordering this belief by stating that it *must be*, not that it *is*? In answering these questions I first consider the object of the proof and then the position of the unbeliever or fool.

4. The Different Arguments in Anselm's Proslogion

Most of the writing on Anselm's *Proslogion* concentrates on only three of its 26 chapters. These three, the chapters two, three and four, constitute the famous ontological argument for the existence of God. This argument has fascinated thinkers greatly, even to the extent in which they

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[69] Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p. 393.

[70] Steel argues: 'Zo heeft men terecht gewezen op een parallelle passus by de stoïsche filosoof Seneca: 'Quid est deus? ... Sic demum magnitudo illi sua redditur, qua nulla maius cogitari potest, ...' (*quaestiones naturales*, I, 13, 7s). Het is echter bij Augustinus dat Anselmus de aanleiding voor zijn beroemde formule gevonden heeft. Zie *De libero arbitrio*, II, VI, 14: het bestaan van God zal pas bewezen zijn, wanneer aangetoond is dat er een wezen bestaat 'quo nullus est superior'.' [Along these lines a parallel passus has been pointed out in the work of the stoic philosopher Seneca: 'Quid est deus? ... Sic demum magnitudo illi sua redditur, qua nulla maius cogitari potest, ...' (*quaestiones naturales*, I, 13, 7s). However, Anselm found in Augustine occasion for his famous formula. See *De libero arbitrio*, II, VI, 14: the existence of God will be proven when it has been demonstrated that there is a being 'quo nullus est superior'.] (Anselmus van Canterbury, *Proslogion gevolgd door de discussie met Gaunilo*, ingeleid, vertaald en geannoteerd door dr. Carlos Steel (Bussum: het Wereldvenster, 1981) p. 50n.19)

[71] *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p. 391-392 and p. 431. See also P. Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Part I, section I.

felt it impossible not to take a stand, as Steel suggests. Some have tried to formulate its final refutation (Gaunilo, Thomas Aquinas, Gassendi, Kant, Russell), others to find new positive versions of the old argument (Duns Scotus, Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Hegel, Hartshorne).[72]

The fascination principally concerns these three chapters, yet by singling these out one directly enters the discussion on the interpretation of the proof. The in- or exclusion of the first chapter is especially significant. This introductory chapter, an 'Exhortation of the mind to the contemplation of God', is a prayer. Anselm laments his inability to find God and his unfortunate fate which has removed him from God's presence. He expresses his desire to see God and he asks for his help.

This prayer is a moving and beautiful piece of prose, yet is it also part of the proof? The answer to this question is decided by the importance one attributes to faith. Those who regard the ontological proof as a rational argument consider this first chapter to be merely literary ornamentation. For those who underline the importance of faith it is more truly introductory. For them the prayer reveals Anselm's intentions and argumentation. In the ontological proof Anselm looks for reasons which will support his belief. The prayer reveals his desire to come thus closer to God as well as his sorrow at his present distance to him.[73]

Murdoch quotes a few lines from this first chapter, which she calls a preface to the proof, in order to argue that possible limitations to the proof - the 'context of deep belief and disciplined spirituality'[74] - are not real limitations. That the proof is preceded by faith is nothing unusual, but in contrast something 'with which we are familiar'. 'Faith (loving belief) and knowledge often have an intimate relation which is not easy to analyse in terms of what is prior

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[72] Steel argues: 'Het is wel merkwaardig dat alle grote denkers zich genoodzaakt zagen tegenover dit argument stelling te nemen, hetzij om het af te wijzen, hetzij om het, mits gewijzigd, te aanvaarden. De stellingneming tegenover het ontologisch argument is zelfs kenmerkend voor het type filosofie dat wordt beoefend.' [It is curious that all great thinkers feel obliged to take a stand against this argument, either to reject or to accept, granted in a changed version. The stand with regard to the ontological argument characterises the sort of philosophy practised.] (Anselmus, *Proslogion*, p. 7, compare p. 26) Compare too p. 7-8, where (like Murdoch) Steel seems to suggest that the proof is for thinkers (plural) rather than for the individual believer: 'Deze tekst zal dus een zeer gevarieerd publiek kunnen interesseren: theologen en filosofen, metafysici, logici, taalfilosofen, mediaevisten en -waarom niet? - de gelovige 'die zoekt naar inzicht in zijn geloof'.' [This text may interest a very diversified audience: Theologians and philosophers, metaphysicians, logicians, philosophers of language, mediaevists and - why not? - the believer who 'seeks to understand his faith'.] See Steel (Anselmus, Proslogion, p. 9-31), A. McGill 'Recent Discussions of Anselm's Argument]' (J. Hick, A. McGill (eds.), *The Many-Faced Argument: Recent Studies on the Ontological Argument for the Existence of God* (London: MacMillan, 1968), p.33-110) for an overview of recent scholarship on the proof.

[73] Steel refers to F. Schmitt, *Anselm von Canterbury* (Stuttgart/Bad Cannstadt, 1962) as one who favours a typically rationalistic interpretation of the ontological proof and who considers this first chapter as literary ornamentation. Steel mentions in contrast two articles by A. Stolz, which give a more significant role to this chapter. Thinking is happening in speaking to God (pros-logion). See A. Stolz, 'Zur Theologie Anselms im Proslogion' (*Catholica* 2 (1933), p. 1-24) and A. Stolz, 'Das Proslogion des Hl. Anselms' (*Revue Bénédictine* 47 (1935), p. 331-347). See Steel too on the division of the remaining chapters. Murdoch follows Stolz's classical division. (Anselmus, *Proslogion*, p. 22-23 and p. 40n.10)

[74] Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p. 392.

to what.'[75] It was pointed out before that Murdoch is not referring to a specific faith here. She is most of all intent on reassuring her audience that Anselm's proof does not proceed from unfamiliar grounds. Even those without any awareness of the Christian faith can understand what it is to 'have faith ... in a person or idea in order to understand him or it'.[76] At this point in the text Murdoch disregards any difference between having faith in God and having faith in something else.

Murdoch swiftly moves to what she calls the proof's 'first formulation', in *Proslogion*'s chapter II, in which:

> 'God is taken to be the *Ens Realissimum, aliquid nihil maius cogitari possit*, the most real being, than which nothing greater [or more perfect] can be conceived.'[77]

The Latin quote is not in its entirety taken from *Proslogion* chapter II. Anselm does not use the term *Ens Realissimum*, the most real being. The addition of *Ens Realissimum* is odd, for it is in disagreement with both the logical and the transcendental understanding of Anselm's argument, to be discussed shortly. Nevertheless, I doubt it if one should attribute much importance to this addition where Murdoch's understanding of the proof is concerned. Her interest in the proof does not really concern this first formulation.

After describing God as 'that than which nothing greater can be conceived' Anselm wonders if there is 'no such nature, since the fool hath said in his heart, there is no God (Psalms XIV.I)'[78] Yet, he argues, the fool surely understands what he hears and what he understands is in *his understanding. Anselm concludes:*

> And assuredly that, than which nothing greater can be conceived, cannot exist in the understanding alone. For, suppose it exists in the understanding alone: then it can be conceived to exist in reality; which is greater.
> Therefore, if that, than which nothing greater can be conceived, exists in the understanding alone, the very being, than which nothing greater can be conceived, is one, than which a greater can be conceived. But obviously this is impossible.

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[75] Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p. 393.
[76] Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p. 393.
[77] Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p. 393.
[78] Saint Anselm, *Basic Writings: Proslogium, Monologium, Gaunilo's: On Behalf of the Fool, Cure Deus Homo*, translated by S.W. Deane, with an introduction by Charles Hartshorne (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court Publishing Company, 1962. (Second edition)), p. 7. This is the same translation as the one Murdoch uses. Other translation used is the Dutch translation with comments by Steel.

> Hence, there is no doubt that there exists a being, than which nothing greater can be conceived, and it exists both in the understanding and in reality.[79]

The crux of this argument is the negative description of God. God is not posited as a positive entity, but as something which is always different and always greater. For every positive understanding of God, it is possible to think of something greater. It is thus, Steel argues, by indirect demonstration, that one has to conclude to his actual existence. Steel also speaks of a *reductio ad absurdum* of the atheist position. If God only existed in the mind, he would not be God. Therefore he does not only exist in the mind, but also in reality.[80]

Murdoch stresses in her reading that this formulation of the proof distinguishes between existing in the mind (*in intellectu*) and existing in reality (*in re*).

> To exist *in re* is taken to be a quality (predicate), in the case of something good a perfection, which is *extra* to that of existing only *in intellectu*. It is then clear that if we can understand the idea of God, which we surely can, then we must also understand that God exists, since if he did not then he would lack one important quality of perfection, that of existence, and would fail to be that than which nothing greater can be conceived, *in intellectu* and *in re* being greater than *in intellectu* alone.[81]

The idea of God, which we, Murdoch writes, can surely understand, entails his existence. If God did not exist he would lack a quality (i.e. existence) and not be that 'than which nothing greater can be conceived.' By speaking of a quality or predicate Murdoch evokes the criticism Kant and Russell levelled at the ontological proof. She points out that they contended that '[t]he idea of existence adds nothing to a concept, existence is not a predicate'.[82]

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[79] Anselm, *Basic Writings*, p. 8.

[80] Compare Steel: '... het is ook geen 'idée claire et distincte', maar een negative omschrijving die alles uitsluit wat niet in overeenstemming is met de 'grootheid' van het object. Het object wordt zodanig omschreven dat het transcendent blijft ten opzichte van de omschrijving.' *[... neither it is an 'idée claire et distincte', but a negative description that excludes everything that does not fit the 'greatness' of the object. The object is in such a way described that it remains transcendent with regard to the description.]* Steel also remarks that it may not be correct to consider the argument as a syllogism. Anselm is concerned with one argument. What is proven is the same as the proof itself. (Anselmus, *Proslogion*, p. 48-50 n.19. See also n. 24 for the understanding of the argument as *reductio ad absurdum*.)

[81] Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p. 393.

[82] Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p. 394. See also Steel's comments, Anselmus, *Proslogion*, p. 52 n.25. Note too that Kant did not direct his criticism at Anselm directly, for he did not know his work, as Steel points out. (Anselmus, *Proslogion*, p. 26)

Murdoch discusses only briefly the way in which Kant has criticised the proof for its understanding of existence as a predicate.[83] More attention is given to the question of whether 'we can surely understand' the idea of God. Murdoch writes:

> Anselm's earliest critic, a contemporary monk, Gaunilo, who of course believed in God, anticipates such objections [i.e. the conviction that God exists is contained in the believer's initial idea of God which appears in the premises.]. He challenges Anselm's assumption that he can frame an idea of God. 'I do not know that reality itself which God is, nor can I frame a conjecture of that reality from some other reality. For you yourself assert that there can be nothing like it.' If one is going to argue from perfect essence to real existence then could one not argue anything into existence from the imagined idea of a single perfect instance (for example the idea of a perfect island?)[84]

Two objections may be distinguished in this quotation. First, it is argued that it is not possible to understand 'that than which nothing greater can be conceived'. Secondly, the argument needs not be confined to God's existence alone, but can be applied to anything. Gaunilo thus famously suggested that the existence of a perfect island may be proven in like manner.[85]

Murdoch answers this second objection first, moving on to what she regards as a clarification of the first argument. This clarification is found in *Proslogion*'s third chapter and in Anselm's answer to Gaunilo. Here Anselm argues that he is not concerned with God's incidental existence, but with God's unique, necessary existence. God does not exist in the way that other beings exist, for he cannot be thought of as not existing.[86] Murdoch writes:

> The definition of God [h]as having *necessary* not contingent existence is an important clarification for any interested party.[87]

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[83] 'Critics of the Proof (most famously Kant) argue that existence cannot so be treated. The idea of existence adds nothing to a concept, existence is not a predicate.' (Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p. 393-394)
[84] Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p. 394. Cf. Anselm, *Basic Writings*, p. 148.
[85] Anselm, *Basic Writings*, p. 150-151.
[86] See also, Antonaccio, *Picturing the Human*, p. 125. See also p. 214 n. 28 where Antonaccio remarks that 'this line of interpretation has been pursued by Charles Hartshorne and Norman Malcolm.' Steel considers Barth (1932) to be the first to make a distinction between the two chapters: 'Barth beschouwt P II en III als twee etappes in de bewijsvoering. In II wordt aangetoond dat God *in re* bestaat terwijl in III de *bijzondere* wijze van Gods bestaan wordt onderzocht.' [Barth considers P II and III as two stages in the argument. In II it is demonstrated that God exists *in re*, whereas in III the *particular* way of God's existence is demonstrated.] Steel also refers to Hartshorne and Malcolm. (Anselmus, *Proslogion*, p. 54 n.26)
[87] Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p. 395.

This important clarification moves the argument away from the indirect demonstration, and according to Antonaccio (an interested party), away from its original *logical nature, into a* transcendental argument proving a necessary structure in consciousness, where Murdoch considers the Good rather than God the object of the ontological proof.[88]

In *Picturing the Human* Antonaccio comprehensively examines Murdoch's application of the ontological proof. In the first chapter she asserts that '[Murdoch's] account of the good is validated by a version of the ontological proof.'[89] After the extensive discussion in chapter five she maintains in her sixth and last chapter that 'the proof reveals that the good is an objective principle of perfected moral knowledge that is only accessible though the medium of "personal resonance", and that 'Murdoch justifies this reflexive argument with a version of the ontological proof.'[90] Antonaccio meticulously examines possible objections to the proof and shows how Murdoch refutes these. Throughout my discussion I shall be returning to Antonaccio's interpretation, not so much because as 'validation' and 'justification' it would have pleased young Plato, but because it affects the position of the fool, which I consider later.

When examining the transcendental argument Antonaccio repeatedly argues that the object of the proof is grasped through consciousness. Murdoch, Antonaccio argues, 'reads Anselm's proof along much the same lines as Charles Taylor. God's existence is grasped as necessarily real in and through the structures of human knowing.'[91] Indeed, in Taylor Antonaccio finds two important points for Murdoch's understanding of the proof: 'the proof takes it starting point in consciousness' and secondly 'according to the proof the idea of God *must* occur to us, because it is the very condition for our consciousness of ourselves as "selves".'[92] The human consciousness while reflecting on that 'than which nothing greater can be conceived' has to acknowledge what both presupposes and surpasses all of its activities.

The transcendental argument thus conceives of God's existence as unique and necessary. The object of the proof, according to Murdoch,

> cannot be a particular, a contingent thing, one thing among others; a contingent god might be a great demonic or angelic spirit, but not the Being in question. ...
>
> God's necessary existence is connected with his not being an object. God is not to

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[88] Antonaccio, *Picturing the Human*, p. 126.
[89] Antonaccio, *Picturing the Human*, p. 15.
[90] Antonaccio, *Picturing the Human*, p. 165 and 169 respectively.
[91] Antonaccio, *Picturing the Human* p. 126. (Ch. Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 140. Compare also Ch. Taylor, 'Iris Murdoch and Moral Philosophy' (M. Antonaccio and W. Schweiker (red.), *Iris Murdoch and the Search for Human Goodness*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996, p. 3-28) in particular p. 18-28.)
[92] Antonaccio, *Picturing the Human*, p. 124.

> be worshipped as an idol or identified with any empirical thing; as is indeed enjoyed by the Second Commandment.[93]

So, the proof takes as its starting-point something that, as it turns out, is unlike all other things. Even to call is some*thing* can be misleading.[94] In order to express the singularity of this situation Murdoch uses different expressions. She remarks that God's '*non-existence is impossible*', that he exists necessarily, that only in this case 'if you can conceive of this entity you are *ipso facto* certain that what you are thinking of is real', that God is not 'one thing among others', and not an object.[95] These different phrases reinforce Gaunilo's first objection that it is not possible to understand 'that than which nothing greater can be conceived', raising the question of the meaning of the notions 'existence', 'reality', 'object' and 'ontological'.

Because Gaunilo's objection would counter the proof, as it must be possible to form such a notion in order to engage in the ontological proof, in addition to this transcendental argument a metaphysical argument is supplied. Anselm's answer to Gaunilo is strictly speaking twofold.[96] Anselm first replies by appealing to Gaunilo's 'faith and conscience to attest that this is most false.'[97] Next, he provides an answer that is 'evident to any rational mind', and even to 'the fool who does not accept sacred authority.'[98]

> Everything that is less good, in so far as it is good, is like the greater good. It is therefore evident to any rational mind that by ascending from the lesser good to the greater we can form a considerable notion of being than which a greater is inconceivable.[99]

Anselm provides a way to *infer* if not to think 'something than which nothing greater can be thought' and anyone who will try to do so will realise its reality as of necessity. It is impossible to entirely comprehend that 'than which nothing greater can be thought', but it is not beyond all recognition.[100]

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[93] Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p. 395. Compare Antonaccio, *Picturing the Human*, p. 125-126.
[94] Antonaccio, *Picturing the Human*, p. 125-6.
[95] Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p. 395.
[96] Steel considers it remarkable that Anselm first directs his answer to the Christian and not to the fool, but also notes that later in his answer Anselm 'zal aantonen dat ook voor de niet-gelovige de intelligibiliteit van 'IQM' gerechtvaardigd kan worden.' [will show the un-believer too the intelligibility of IQM can be justified] (Anselmus, *Proslogion*,140 n.117) Compare too n.149 and 145, where Steel notes on the difference between talking of God and talking of IQM in response to an argument by Gaunilo. God can only be understood by believers, IQM by all.
[97] Anselm, *Basic Writings*, p. 154.
[98] Anselm, *Basic Writings*, p.167-8.
[99] Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p. 394.
[100] See too Steel (Anselmus, *Proslogion*, p. 162 n. 147)

Murdoch similarly attributes large importance to inferring the greater good from the lesser good, and in pursuing the metaphysical argument she suggests a return from God to Good, understanding the argument within moral philosophy:

> the definition of God as non-contingent is given body by our most general perceptions and *experience* of the fundamental and omnipresent (uniquely necessary) nature of moral value, thought of in a Christian context as God. This is essentially an argument from morality not from design. It appeals to our moral understanding, and not to any of the more strictly rational considerations relied upon by Aquinas ... [Those] who feel perhaps that the Proof proves something, but not any sort of God, might return to Plato and claim some uniquely necessary status for moral value as something (uniquely) impossible to be thought away from human experience, and as in a special sense, if conceived of, known as real.[101]

Thus, Murdoch considers the proof to be about the Good rather than God. Through 'our ability to distinguish good and evil' it may prove the necessary existence of moral value. It is moreover not only rational argument, but also '[i]n learning, loving, creatively imagining, [that] we may be overcome by a sense of certainty at a particular point.'[102] Consequently, throughout her work Murdoch urges her readers to do precisely that: to learn, to love, and to imagine. As the object of the proof also surpasses consciousness as 'a distant goal of perfection'[103] it directs all imagination, learning, loving. Murdoch is not urging her readers to merely *imagine*, but to *imagine as well as they can.*

So, while properly imagining one has to acknowledge the presence of something that both presumes and surpasses one's imagination. Murdoch recognises the proof as such in the myth of anamnesis in Plato's *Meno.* What is proven is as it were remembered, a process with which we, according to Murdoch, are all familiar.[104] The 'belief' that the ontological proof tries to 'prove' urges itself upon anyone who is properly imagining with the certainty of something already known or intuited. By the recurring use of 'we' Murdoch urges 'us' to start imagining and thus to 'prove' what we already intuit. The 'belief' is religious yet independent of 'religions'.

5. The Fool

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[101] Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p. 396.
[102] Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p. 400.
[103] Antonaccio, *Picturing the Human*, p. 52. Cf. p. 128.

The position of the 'ordinary unbeliever or Fool'[105] has become rather awkward. What to think of him of her if he or she persists in denying the existence of the Good? The unbeliever must be unable or unwilling to understand. Perhaps he enjoys not understanding. He must be either stupid, unrighteous, or a sophist. Whatever he is, he is not right and does not speak the truth.

Should this then be the final word on the fool? Such a conclusion seems incongruous with much of the tone and content of Murdoch's work. Her work is hospitable to different opinions and she is seldom wholly dismissive of positions dissimilar from her own argument. (Exception is made not for ordinary but for learned fools, such as Nietzsche and Heidegger: 'As for Nietzsche and (late) Heidegger, roughly, I regard those great writers as essentially demonic.'[106] 'Possibly Heidegger is Lucifer in person.'[107] Yet, even in these strong remarks she expressed doubt ('roughly', 'possibly') and her last unfinished work was a study of Heidegger.[108])

The fool is not easily dismissed. When considering Le Doeuff as fool in the second chapter of this thesis, it was found that she was not the only fool in the history of philosophy, but rather part of a long tradition of fools. Some of them are encountered in the reception of Anselm's ontological proof, which reveals an eagerness to identify with the fool and to argue on his behalf. Gaunilo is only the first of a group of distinguished thinkers. One wonders if Anselm would have regretted the appearance of this fiction in his proof, had he realised its popularity.

With regard to Murdoch's work too, one can feel compelled to identify with Murdoch's 'ordinary unbeliever or Fool', if not in an immediate reaction, then certainly after considering limitations in her work: limitations in her understanding of religion, in the art which Murdoch refers to in her philosophical essays or in the characters she creates in her novels. The Good may be somehow inextricably bound up with the lives and thoughts of Oxford dons and London artists, but is it also with the fools outside those worlds? May one assume that the proof has convinced Alcibiades, that talking about the Good is not just imaginary and ineffectual?

I shall remain in the role of thinker and look at the proof again, especially at the position of its fool. I shall do so by resuming the comparison of Anselm's and Murdoch's understanding of the ontological argument. As pointed out before, Anselm introduces the fool when unfolding his ontological proof in the second chapter of the *Proslogion*. After stating that 'we believe that thou art a being than which nothing greater can be conceived' he wonders '[o]r is there no such nature since the fool hath said in his heart, there is no God.'[109]

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[104] *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p. 393.
[105] Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p. 410.
[106] Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p. 456.
[107] Murdoch, 'On 'God' and 'Good'', p. 358.
[108] Conradi, 'Preface', p. xxi.
[109] Anselm, *Basic Writings*, p. 7

Anselm addresses the foolishness of the fool in chapter IV. Why does the fool say that there is no God? 'Why, except that he is dull and a fool?'[110] Anselm finds the solution to this riddle by means of a semantic analysis.

> There is not only one sense in which something is 'said in one's heart' or thought, for in one sense a thing is thought when the word signifying it is thought; in another sense when the very object which the thing is is understood.[111]

In other words, the fool uses the word 'God' without giving it its proper meaning or giving it any meaning at all.[112] The fool thinks 'that than which nothing greater can be conceived' not in the way which will lead to the conclusion of its existence.

Where does this leave Gaunilo, the first to answer Anselm? That Gaunilo is no fool becomes apparent at the last part of his answer where he suggests a correction to the proof and praises the chapters in the *Proslogion* that follow after the first four.[113] And so Anselm directs his answer to 'one who, though speaking on the Fool's behalf, is an orthodox Christian and no fool.'[114] Murdoch, significantly, calls Gaunilo 'a professional holy man' and remarks that he 'of course believed in God.'[115] So, Anselm first replies by appealing to Gaunilo's 'faith and conscience'. The argument on the fool's foolishness thus enters again an impasse. The fool is nothing but a regrettable fiction. Every thinker's identification with the fool is likely to lead the thinker away from the argument and from the belief in the reality of the Good.

Yet, fools are not only in the habit of turning up when least expected, they also appear in various disguises. So far I have assumed a strict division between philosophers and their fools. Anselm and his fool, however, are not necessarily that far apart. It can be argued that Anselm needs the fool in his argument, even that the fool is indispensable in the argument. This is argued for instance by Hayen (another orthodox Christian).[116]

The fool, Hayen argues, is needed for two different reasons: first, because of Anselm's Christian perspective and secondly for the argument's sake. Anselm starts his argument not from the perspective of an unbeliever, but instead desires to understand what he believes (*fides quaerens*

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[110] Anselm, *Basic Writings*, p. 9. Steel remarks that when encountering a contradiction Anselm often looks for a solution by means of a semantic analysis. Another example he finds in chapter VIII, concerning the assertion: God can (not) do everything. (Anselmus, *Proslogion* , p. 56 n.31)
[111] Anselm, *Basic Writings*, p. 9-10.
[112] Compare Steel (Anselmus, *Proslogion*, n.104).
[113] Anselm, *Basic Writings*, p. 151, 152-3.
[114] Anselm, *Basic Writings*, p. 153.
[115] Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p. 396 and 394 respectively.

intellectum). Christian belief is never questioned in the argument. Instead, the proof is considered as a step on the way to redemption, 'of re-establishing man - at least partially - in that state from which he has fallen.'[117]

This process will not be finished until all have been redeemed, not only all Christians, but also all heretics, heathens and other fools.[118] Without the fool's redemption Anselm will not be redeemed either. Anselm does not direct his argument *against* the fool, but *to* the fool.[119] Then again, it is not correct to conceive of Anselm as the simply righteous one who teaches the fool. Anselm's fool is no absolute stranger to him, but instead he is his own fool. The first chapter of the *Proslogion*, so often omitted in the discussion on the ontological proof, reveals Anselm's desire to see God as well as his despair at God's absence.[120] Anselm's argument is directed to both his own and the fool's disbelief.

The second reason why Anselm needs the fool, according to Hayen, stems from the exercise of arguing. Anselm desires to understand what he believes. His faith is never separated from the act of reasoning, yet reason is not simply enriching faith. It is seeking its own fulfilment.[121] Reason is for Anselm, Hayen argues, not 'a mere "faculty", and still less, a mere abstraction called "Reason". It is the concrete existing reasoning'.[122] This is why Anselm allows for space for intervention of actual reasoning by the fool, but even more by Gaunilo. Anselm does not direct his reply to the fool, but to the Christian who speaks on behalf of the fool. He invites Gaunilo to *actually* reflect on his own faith and his own conscience.[123] For it is in the

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[116] A. Hayen, 'The Role of the Fool in St. Anselm and the Necessarily Apostolic Character of True Christian Reflection' (J. Hick and A.C. McGill (eds.), *The Many-Faced Arhument: Recent Studies on the Ontological Argument for the Existence of God*, London and Melbourne: MacMillan, 1968, p. 162-182)

[117] Hayen, 'The Role of the Fool in St. Anselm', p. 167 and 168. Hayen is quoting from P. Vignaux, *Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, translated by E.C. Hall (New York: Meridian, 1959) p. 39ff. Vignaux remarks on the first chapter of the *Proslogion*: 'It is a dialogue of the creature with his Creator: *quaero vultum tuum*, "I seek your face." This desire to see the face of God lies in a creature - in ourselves - who have been created precisely for that vision. Nevertheless, we have never done that for which we were made.'

[118] Hayen, 'The Role of the Fool in St. Anselm', p. 168ff: '... it is a matter of participating in the redemptive work of the first born from the dead, of entering into the struggle of Christ against the devil, into the victory achieved by Jesus, who must continue to reign "until he has placed all his enemies under the feet, so that God may be everything to everyone" (I Cor. 15: 25, 28), which is to say, so that God may be everything in the reason of the fool, just as he is everything in the mind of Anselm and the monks, and in that of the blessed who already contemplate the Father face to face.'.

[119] Hayen, 'The Role of the Fool in St. Anselm', p. 168. Compare McGill, 'Recent Discussions of Anselm's Argument', p. 63: Hayen is one of the '[s]everal Frenchspeaking Roman Catholics scholars [who] insist on the importance of faith, but question Barth's further thesis about Anselm and the fool. How, they ask, can Barth say that Anselm constantly sets himself "against" the fool, that he refuses to have anything to do with him in his belief and only "lets him go on repeating his counterthesis until the last day?"" (Compare Hayen, 'The Role of the Fool in St. Anselm', p. 168, also n. 30)

[120] 'Come then, Lord my God, teach my heart where and how to seek You, where and how to find You. Lord, if You are not present here, where since You are absent, shall I look for you? On the other hand, if You are everywhere why then, since You are present, do I not see You?' (Anselm, *Basic Writings*, p. 1)

[121] Hayen, 'The Role of the Fool in St. Anselm', p. 174.

[122] Hayen, 'The Role of the Fool in St. Anselm', p. 176.

[123] Hayen, 'The Role of the Fool in St. Anselm', p. 176ff.

concrete act of reasoning that reason may be fulfilled and find under the guidance of faith in 'that than which nothing greater can be conceived' the reasonable reality of 'that than which nothing greater can be conceived.'[124]

This last point reinforces an aspect of the proof noted before. The ontological proof is an unusual proof. It is not a proof which someone can do for, or force its result upon, another person. Instead, this proof one has to give to oneself. Hayen's understanding of reason seeking its own fulfilment as well as Antonaccio's assertion that the ontological proof has its starting-point in consciousness emphasise the necessarily personal aspect of this proof. Indeed, both in her philosophical and her fictional writing Murdoch shows a great concern for her reader's consciousness. She often addresses them directly, urging them to use their imagination, to look upon great work. In her novels the narrative reveals the presence of an author who is continuously warning her readers not to be too enchanted and not to simply accept or indulge in the story. The last sentence of *The Philosopher's Pupil* serves here as the most eminent example, where the narrator confesses to having had 'the assistance of a certain lady.'[125]

Therefore, with respect to Hayen's second point then I recognise similarity between Anselm and Murdoch in relation to their fools. However, with respect to the first point I consider Anselm's and Murdoch's position to be also very different, even though it may be that just as Hayen argues that Anselm in a way is his own fool, Murdoch is not totally dissimilar from her fool. Indeed, her writing constantly confirms her doubts about her own argument.[126]

The difference between Anselm and Murdoch is here, however, considerable. Hayen argues that Anselm in the argument never questions his Christian faith and that his proof aims at re-establishing fallen man. Even though Murdoch also considers man as fallen, this similarity is overshadowed by a more striking difference. Anselm, writing this particular tradition, does not end his *Proslogion* with the fourth chapter, but continues by establishing God's many qualities.

Murdoch does not confess to writing within a certain religious tradition. Earlier it was noted that she looks for a religion which is to remain 'if all religions were to blow away like mist', and in the discussion of the ontological proof it was repeatedly argued how she reformulates notions so as to make them comprehensible outside the religious tradition from which she retrieves them.

· One way to describe the difference between these thinkers is by introducing another fool. This fool or madman took his lantern one bright morning and looked for God on a market place.

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[124] Hayen, 'The Role of the Fool in St. Anselm', p. 180-181.
[125] Murdoch, *Philosopher's Pupil*, p. 576.
[126] I noted before how she introduces 'individuals into her text who question the argument. In 'On 'God' and 'Good'' she even admits to be 'often more than half persuaded to think in these terms myself.' (Murdoch, 'On 'God' and 'Good'', p. 359.) The use of 'we', too, includes both her readers and herself.

The people around him were not upset or angry with him, but merely amused. They laughed and made fun of his quest. The fool called out:

> Where is God gone ... I mean to tell you! *We have killed him*, - you and I! We are all his murderers![127]

Between Anselm and Murdoch one discerns the acclaimed death of God, acclaimed that is, by a fool.

Now addressing a fool who killed God would considerably change the proof. Murdoch sometimes suggests that God has to be created in order for him to exist, as for example in the quoted words of Valéry who 'with poetic, and spiritual, inspiration in mind, says that the 'proper, unique and perpetual object of thought is that which does not exist.' ... And, 'At its highest point, love is a determination to create that being which it has for its object."[128] Yet, even though Murdoch uses the phrase 'the death of God' in the 1987-introduction to *Sartre: Romantic Rationalist*, her language generally suggests a different metaphor, not that of the death of God, but rather of, what Hillis Miller has indicated as, the disappearance of God: 'God exists, but he is out of reach. ... As a result the nineteenth and twentieth centuries seem to many writers a time when God is no more present and not yet again present ... In this time of the no longer and not yet, man is "Wandering between two worlds, one dead,/The other powerless to be born."'[129] By speaking of 'the *collapse* of religion', or of religion as 'waning rapidly' Murdoch expresses her preference for the gradual disappearance of God over his violent and abrupt death. The 'time of no longer and not yet' recalls Murdoch's time of the angels, where the return of God is not impossible.

In the Good Murdoch tries a replacement for the disappeared God. In 'On 'God' and 'Good'' Murdoch describes the Good as a concept retaining the characteristics of the old God: 'a single perfect transcendent non-representable and necessarily real object of attention'.[130] In this essay it is also questioned whether the Good can appeal to any but the most mystically minded. I pointed out how Alcibiades' banter recalls this argument. Is this an argument made by a fool who does not think as he ought to? Can one love the Good?

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[127] F. Nietzsche, *The Joyful Wisdom ("La Gaya Scienza")*, translated by Th. Common, Edinburgh, London: T.N. Foulis, 1910. ('Wohin ist Gott? rief er, ich will es euch sagen! W i r h a b e n i h n g e t ö t t e t , - i h r u n d i c h ! Wir Alle sind seine Mörder!' (F. Nietzsche, *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, herausgegeben von G. Colli und M. Montinari, Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1972)

[128] *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, p. 401. Quotation from *Mauvaises Pensées et Autres*, Pléiade edition, vol. II, pp. 785.

[129] J. Hillis Miller, *The Disappearance of God: Five Nineteenth-Century Writers* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1963), p. 1-2. The quotation is taken from C.B. Tinker and H.F. Lowry (eds.), *The Poetical Works of Matthew Arnold* (London, 1950), p. 302.

Recalling the discussion of Le Doeuff, it is likely that a fool will not only stay with the argument, but look at the imagery as well. Such a fool may find that the imagery Murdoch applies to the Good often emphasises its emptiness: the Good encountered at the end of all image-making is the abyss into which one falls; Murdoch does not consider it easy to imagine what it is like to look into the sun, in Plato's allegory of the Cave, and supposes that 'to look at the sun is to be gloriously dazzled and to see nothing'[131]; *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* ends with a last chapter called 'The Void'.[132] Given such imagery would the fool not be justified in concluding that 'it looks like religious and moral anorexia all round'?[133] Can such an empty Good feed the imagination?

The doubts of the fool Murdoch cannot entirely abandon. Yet, she can continue to point out how in thinking, imagining, loving anyone can prove the proof of the necessary existence of the Good as the structuring principle of consciousness. It may be enough to be deeply in love with Socrates to do so. The importance of Murdoch's works lies in having supplied the unreligious believers with this variety of possibilities for proving the ontological proof and to have thus reintroduced an absolute value in her imaginative philosophy, even if it is only for those who want to believe.

6. Concluding Remarks

This chapter returns to the question 'How can we make ourselves morally better?'. In the discussion of *Above the Gods* it considers religion after the disappearance of god or gods. I argued that Murdoch notes the political consequences of this disappearance, but that these are not her primary interest. Instead, she reconsiders what the disappearance means for individuals in relation to some independent reality. She looks, as young Plato puts it, for a morality which is so serious it is religious. Yet, religious does not refer to any 'religion' in particular here.

In *Above the Gods* the positions of Socrates, Plato and Alcibades interest her most: Plato vehemently arguing for something necessary, Alcibiades as iconoclast and Socrates, preaching simplicity and never satisfied with any neat answer. Murdoch reminds her readers that the arguments in this dialogue, lofty as they may be, are made among friends who have much more on their minds than the disappearance of religion. She also shows that any intellectual debate is bound to be embarrassed by those who do not participate.

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[130] Murdoch, 'On 'God' and 'Good'', p. 344.
[131] Murdoch, 'On 'God' and 'Good'', p. 357.
[132] Compare Antonaccio, 'Form and Contingency in Iris Murdoch's Ethics', p. 136-7.
[133] Compare A. Loades, [review of M. Antonaccio, W. Schweiker (eds.), *Iris Murdoch and the Search for Human Goodness*] in *Literature and Theology* 13.1 (1999), p. 94-95.

These different positions return in the discussion of the ontological proof. It is a proof for thinkers to look at. The considerable discussion in this chapter also shows that the proof easily allows for long discussion. For Murdoch the ontological proof proves the existence of the Good, for all who have faith. The Good both precedes and surpasses consciousness as a principle to which to direct the imagination.

In a return to the position of the fool I questioned the assumed universality of this belief in the Good. Why does the fool continue to deny the Good's existence? It is of course always possible to reproach a fool for improper consideration of an object. This reproach does not need to be without reason, yet Murdoch's fool might rejoin by arguing that the object of the proof does not allow for much inspiration. By emphasising the timeless and universal, but also empty character of the Good, it loses its attraction for even the most mystically minded. Yet, Murdoch considers this proof possible for anyone to prove, not just in contemplating the Good, but in almost any activity.

Conclusion

This dissertation proposes a reading of Murdoch's philosophical work, which takes as its starting-point the question 'How can we make ourselves morally better?'. It argues that Murdoch believes it presently so important for philosophy to consider this question, because of what she calls the collapse of religion. In response to this collapse Murdoch develops what I have described as a form of imaginative philosophy, which draws largely on her understanding of literature and imagination, and which is inspired by the difficulties she encountered as a writer of novels.

In my discussion of Murdoch's work I have been concerned with philosophy, using the term both generally as well as in consideration of specific texts. I have questioned more and less stringent assumptions of what philosophy is or should be like. Discussing these assumptions in general terms may give rise to complications. Any general claim can be countered by mentioning a philosopher who does not hold that assumption. Is philosophy really excluding stories, imagery, etc.? Does it maintain a limited notion of reason and of argument?

Notwithstanding these doubts I have considered it necessary to present part of my argument in general terms. In doing so I have followed the two philosophers most important to this thesis. Murdoch and Le Doeuff both formulate their criticism of philosophy in these general terms and they both also continue using the term philosophy. They would acknowledge that their criticism does not apply to all philosophers. Yet, they present their criticism in general terms, because it goes well beyond individual philosophers or particular philosophical texts. The general term evinces also that Murdoch and Le Doeuff include even themselves in this criticism.

The work of Le Doeuff considers the relationship between imagery and philosophical reasoning in general terms and introduces methodological propositions for reading imagery. These propositions are considered to reveal philosophical reading habits relating to imagery as well as hidden arguments within these texts. In particular when philosophy is intend on presenting itself as independent of other disciplines or as able to sustain its own foundations, Le Doeuff argues, *it relies on imagery which is* exclusive, while maintaining a strict division between philosophy and imagery. In contrast to this understanding of philosophy Le Doeuff suggests forms of philosophical thinking which acknowledge their relation to and dependence on other disciplines. In acknowledging the importance of imagery it also recognises its own imagery.

Le Doeuff's notion of the philosophical imaginary provides this thesis with insight into reading philosophical imagery. I have discussed the different methodological propositions she provides, and argued how these affect expectations of philosophy and of philosophical argument. Le Doeuff presents herself as a philosopher-fool, and such a fool, I have argued, may undermine

his or her own discourse and ordinary explanation for reading texts. A philosopher-fool can ignore directions for reading given by an author, or by tradition, and leave concepts without much definition.`

It is helpful to reconsider philosophical reading habits when considering Murdoch's work. In this respect I regard my reading experience of *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* as the origin of this research. Like so many of its readers I have been baffled by this work's long quotations and asides, and by its unusual argumentation. It has brought the work much disparagement. Its idiosyncratic readings of Kant, or Anselm have been denounced. An overall argument has been said to be lacking.

In this thesis I have been apprehensive about considering these characteristics as vice rather than virtue. *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* has occasioned me to look for hidden assumptions and reading practices, some of them my own. I have chosen to follow Murdoch's own argument rather than pursuing the various sideways she offers.

I have first considered Murdoch's earlier work, because many of Murdoch's arguments originate in her encounter with existentialism as well as the analytical philosophy in the 1950s. I argue that Murdoch's criticism of both forms of philosophy arises from her understanding of nineteenth century literature. Existentialism and linguistic analysis for Murdoch both lack what the nineteenth-century novel exemplifies in its understanding of character: a substantial understanding of self in relation to an independent reality. Murdoch appreciates existentialism for its interest in consciousness, but criticises in the image of Antoine Roquentin its disinterest of reality outside this consciousness. In the subsequent reading of the imagery of M and D I argue that Murdoch cannot entirely evade this criticism in her own thought. In 'The Idea of Perfection' she is contending the compelling and prominent genetic argument of linguistic analysis. In doing so, I have argued, Murdoch has difficulty maintaining an understanding of a richer inner life which is at the same time related to an external reality. In her attempt to present a conclusive argument she practically removes the reality surrounding M.

From her understanding of literature in her philosophy I have proceeded to imagination. The importance of this notion is affirmed by Murdoch's conception of it, as well as by the abundant presence of imagery in her writing. In making imagination the central notion in her philosophy Murdoch confirms the importance of art for her thinking. She retrieves her notion from contemplating art as well as in reading Kant and Plato. In Kant she recognises an understanding of imagination which affects all perception and thought. Ordinary imagination she understands via his notion of genius. The subsequent reading of Plato nuances this understanding of imagination, by emphasising Plato's mixed feelings about artists. Murdoch emphasises that

Plato was an artist, and yet rather critical of art. Imagination becomes in this understanding not 'exalted', but is directed to, as well as inspired by, the Good.

Murdoch's understanding of imagination is part of a recently growing interest in this notion, also found in the interdisciplinary discussion of philosophy, theology, and literature. Murdoch's work provides different important contributions to this discussion. She challenges any strict distinction between imagination and reason. Such distinctions are found in the work of both imagination's advocates and its foes. She also doubts that imagination may be only found in art, as opposed to philosophy or theology. Imagination is for her not just the property of novelists, even though they may express it in its finest form. Imagination is not opposed to reasoning, or even philosophical reasoning. Instead, imagination is part of philosophical argumentation. Murdoch's writings, and in particular *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* testify to the acute changes the embodiment of imagination in philosophy may have, in its unusual forms of argumentation as well as in the abundant presence of imagery.

Murdoch is also cautious where imagination is concerned. In this respect she differs from thinkers who only desire to celebrate the imagination. Perhaps her practice as novelist has taught her well the dangers of imagination, which she denotes by the term fantasy. Fantasy is imagination's bad opposite. For fantasy only the ego counts and everything and everyone else is subjected to its demands and anxieties. Often it is impossible to properly distinguish imagination from fantasy. So, despite considering imagination the most important faculty Murdoch is not univocally positive about it.

Good imagination (as opposed to bad fantasy) is learned by paying attention to reality and ultimately to the Good. The notion of the Good makes most apparent that for Murdoch philosophy has to rescue values involved in the collapse of religion. She does not consider the Good as a replacement of God, but uses an understanding of (the Christian) God and of (the Christian) religion when exploring the Good. For understanding the Good it is therefore important to explore Murdoch's understanding of religion.

I have examined Murdoch's understanding of religion in a discussion of *Acastos*. In this dialogue, which is both historical and contemporary, the characters equate religion with belief in god or gods. The disappearance of this religion occasions a discussion of the continuation of religion in a form of morality which sustains an understanding of the Good. I have argued how the conversation is undermined by the characters' various exclamations of love and sexual desire. I have next discussed the validation of this notion of Good by the ontological proof. Murdoch explains this proof as applicable to all thinking and imagining, where faith is professed beyond

what is yet explained. For her the proof proves the unconditional element in such thought and imagination. This unconditional element she suggests to be the Good.

When finally turning or returning to the fool, I have asked whether this proof made the position of the fool preposterous. Perhaps a fool's position is always preposterous. I have also argued that Murdoch and the fool were not necessarily that far apart. The disbelief of a fool, like Alcibiades, is perhaps also her disbelief. In particular, the fool may consider the imagery of abyss and emptiness and thus express doubts about the Good as source of inspiration. Murdoch would counter this doubt by drawing attention back to particular things. Such attention may initiate the moral pilgrimage.

With these concluding remarks I ended the last chapter of this thesis, which began by arguing that it is not easy to characterise Murdoch's work. In the first chapter I have considered the intricate relationship between philosophy and literature. The subsequent chapters have examined the possible influence of literature on philosophy. It has been argued that Murdoch's thought is difficult to grasp, because she has a very idiosyncratic way of reading texts, and of regarding literature, which goes against general practice.

I have to become to regard Murdoch's idiosyncratic position as both the strength and the weakness of her work. Her idiosyncrasy shows in various ways: in her understanding of literature, her understanding of Kant, of religion, of Plato. I consider its most valuable insight that she takes art rather than science as a model for philosophy. In doing so, she diverts from much in the modern and contemporary philosophy. I have only started to realise the impact of this shift on philosophical reading habits.

I hope to have shown the importance of particular idiosyncrasies. Murdoch has been severely criticised for her understanding of literature, yet I hope to have shown that it enabled to take an original position in contemporary philosophy and challenge various presuppositions held without much consideration. Most important perhaps is here the distinction between fact and value. Her reading of Kant ignores more generally held concerns, but it has enabled her to place imagination in the centre of our consciousness. Her unusual interest in Plato has enabled her to posit an understanding of imagination which is not exalted, while also retaining or reintroducing the Good as an absolute standard into philosophy. Her reading of religion may disregard and misinterpret various aspects of the Christian religion, but it has enabled her to describe a form of contemplation which she considers open for everyone.

Murdoch's idiosyncratic position involves withdrawing from contemporary discussions and works. This I find to create a weakness in her thought. Murdoch attempts to find a timeless form of attention, which she recognises in both the Christian religion, and Plato. Even though

she sometimes remarks on being a child of her time, she also removes herself from contemporary discussions and works of art and she presents her readings and preferences as unqualified. Of course, such remarks should not entirely be taken at face value. Moreover, this attitude does not make her position timeless, and it is well possible to relate her preference for Tolstoy and Shakespeare, her interest in character and her understanding of religion to various stages of her (British, Oxford, philosophical) education. Thus one may argue that Murdoch is more culturally determined than she admits to be. More importantly, however, I find this preference for such timeless attention to weaken her argument and remove some of its intensity. In preferring the universal to the actual Murdoch at times appears as a philosopher who has only just returned to the cave and whose eyes still need to adjust to the darkness. This philosopher can make general observations about the particularity of things and may urge contemplation of these, but one is waiting for the eyes to adjust even more, to see the particulars themselves, their relation to one another, their history and possibilities. Or, as Virginia Woolf once put it: 'The truer the facts, the better the fiction.'

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