

Depth, Articulacy, and the Ego

Paul Katsafanas

Draft of 1/5/2024

Note: this is an initial draft, not the final version. Comments welcome.

Forthcoming in *Iris Murdoch's Sovereignty of Good after 50 Years*, ed. Bradford Cokelet and Carla Bagnoli

1. Moral vision

Murdoch claims that two people attending to the same circumstances can have dramatically different experiences. In a way, this is obvious. Suppose that Alfred tells a joke that relies on racial stereotypes. Beatrice experiences Alfred as repulsively offensive and the situation as an egregious breach of social norms. Clarice experiences Alfred as charmingly amusing, flaunting political correctness in a playful fashion. The situation is the same but the experiences differ. Or consider an example that I think will be familiar to many of us, and which involves not different people but the same person at different times. You recall fondly some movie that you saw decades ago, as a child. Then, it seemed funny, witty, full of charm. You watch it again. You have a different experience: you notice the problematic stereotypes, the questionable norms. I loved *Goonies* as a child and watched it again recently with my own child. And while I still found the movie delightful, how strange certain aspects of it now seem, how outmoded the reliance on stereotypes of the Asian child with the camera and gadgets, the tormenting of the overweight child, the attitudes toward the disabled “Sloth” character. Those effects can be even more dramatic with older films: watch some classic movie from the fifties and, good as it may be, there will be parts that are difficult, parts that are almost unbelievable. What seemed laughable or funny at the time now seems distressingly problematic.

What’s interesting about these experiences is that they don’t simply occur in a detached reflective way. It’s true that many of my beliefs, values, and judgments are different now than they were in the eighties, when I first watched that movie. But what happens when I watch the movie now is not that I have the same experience while attaching different evaluations or thoughts to it. No, what happens is much more direct than that: my immediate, unreflective experience of the movie is different. The events depicted are the same, but changes in my beliefs, values, and judgments lead me to have a different experience of the film. It can be natural to say: my *vision* of the film has changed.

Here is Murdoch’s most famous example of this phenomenon:

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 tiresomely juvenile.... 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 D to be now absent or dead this can make it clear that the change is not in D's behavior but in M's mind. D is discovered not to be vulgar but refreshingly simple, not undignified but spontaneous, not noisy but gay, not tiresomely juvenile but delightfully youthful, and so on. (Murdoch 1997: *Idea of Perfection* 312-3)

Following Murdoch, let's express these points by saying that two people attending to the same circumstances can have dramatically different *visions* of those circumstances. In saying that, we don't have to commit to any particular view of how perception works, or which processes are occurring at the level of perception versus the level of belief. We can remain neutral on those questions, simply noting that certain experiences seem usefully described as changes in vision.

Murdoch thinks that these kinds of shift sometimes involve either changes in concepts or changes in one's understanding of concepts. Again, without putting too much weight on the particular view of concepts, which seems unimportant for Murdoch's purposes, we can see what she means. Over the thirty or so years since I first saw *Goonies*, I've acquired deeper understandings of certain concepts (*stereotype, fat-shaming, racism, equity, fairness*, and so on). And as that happened, I've come to perceive situations differently. I don't perceive them differently as a result of standing back from them and reflecting on them (though that can happen); I perceive them differently in a much more immediate, unreflective way. My grasp of these concepts, acquired in a gradual and piecemeal way that involves both direct reflection on them and repeated experiences of the things to which they relate, impacts my immediate experience of the world.

I think we can agree with all of these claims. They seem like data for a moral theory to accommodate, rather than controversial points. But Murdoch wants to do something more than note that our vision of the world can change. She wants to say that certain changes constitute improvements, whereas others constitute stagnancy or degeneration. In short: there are better and worse visions of the same circumstances.

So far, I've given examples that will strike most readers as improvements in my moral vision: Beatrice's vision is better than Claire's, my current vision of *Goonies* is better than my older vision of it, M's revised vision of D is better than her earlier vision. But we can easily imagine a case with the opposite structure. Suppose Allen is idly browsing the internet and, out of boredom, starts reading incel websites. Always a bit disaffected, he is drawn into the narratives that present women and feminist movements as wronging him, unjustly denying him expressions of his sexuality, forcing him

into submissive, alienated roles.¹ And, as a result of this, he comes to see particular women differently. His colleague Martha, who had formerly seemed to him an innocuous unremarkable woman, now appears to him as oppressive and demeaning. We want to say: that's a degeneration in moral vision, a flaw, a case of vision getting worse.

So we do seem to distinguish improvements and regressions in vision. But how exactly do we make sense of this? How do we distinguish better and worse cases of moral vision?

Below, I will argue that Murdoch appeals to four different standards in assessing the quality of a person's vision: (A) attention, (B) unselfing, (C) a form of conceptual articulacy, and (D) love. At first glance, her claim seems to be that the most attentive, selfless, conceptually articulate, loving vision is the best one. But things aren't quite so simple. I want to ask three questions about these standards:

- Are these standards directed at the same goal? (For example, are they all geared toward securing purely epistemic goals?)
- Are these standards criterial for improvements in vision? (That is, does the presence of some combination of (A)-(D) constitute or guarantee better vision?)
- Does Murdoch think that there's a single best form of vision? (Such as the one attained by the person who manifests (A)-(D)?)

In the secondary literature, the typical answers to these questions are: yes, yes, yes. But I'm going to give different answers: no, no, no.

My ultimate conclusion is that Murdoch's remarks are geared toward freeing us from defective visions, rather than as providing any substantive criteria for correct vision.

2. The standards associated with improvements in vision

Suppose we want to distinguish between *better* and *worse* visions of the same circumstances. How do we do that? Murdoch's texts associate four things with better vision: attention, unselfing, a form of conceptual articulacy, and love. Below, I will list some passages that mention each of these factors.

Let's start with attention. We might put Murdoch's claim this way:

(A) Attention: a person's vision improves when she exercises her attention

There are many passages that support (A). Murdoch writes that "attention is rewarded by a knowledge of reality" (*Sovereignty of Good*, 373). She goes on to claim that:

- "False conceptions are often generalized, stereotyped and unconnected. True conceptions combine just modes of judgment and ability to connect with an increased perception of detail. The case of the mother who has to consider each one of her family carefully as she decides whether or not to throw auntie out. This double revelation of

¹ For discussions of these kinds of websites, see for example Tietjen and Tirkkonen (2023) and Alfano and Podosky (2023).

both random detail and intuited unity is what we receive in every sphere of life if we seek for what is best.” (*Sovereignty of Good* 378)

Analogously, we can “give attention to nature in order to clear our minds of selfish care” (*Sovereignty of Good* 369). The M/D example, quoted above, makes a similar point: M attends to the situation, she “look[s] again,” and she revises her view.

A second standard is unselfing:

(B) Unselfing: a person’s vision improves when she becomes less selfish.

Sometimes, Murdoch states this point quite directly: “to contemplate and delineate nature with a clear eye,” we must “silence and expel self” (1997: *On ‘God’ and ‘Good’*, 352). Or, again: “Goodness is connected with the attempt to see the unself, to see and respond to the real world...virtue is the attempt to pierce the veil of selfish consciousness and join the world as it really is.” (*Sovereignty*, 376-377). There are many passages of this type:

- The ‘intellectual ability to perceive what is true ... is automatically at the same time a suppression of self’ (1997: 353). For the self is prone to ‘fantasy, the proliferation of blinding self-centered aims and images’ (1997: *On ‘God’ and ‘Good’*, 354).
- She presents as obstacles to correct vision “obsession, prejudice, envy, anxiety, ignorance, greed, neurosis, and so on...” (*Fire and Sun*, 426).
- “If quality of consciousness matters, then anything which alters consciousness in the direction of unselfishness, objectivity, and realism is to be connected with virtue.” *Sovereignty of Good* 369
- “The humble man, because he sees himself as nothing, can see other things as they are.” *Sovereignty of Good* 385
- “The problem is to accommodate inside moral philosophy, and suggest methods of dealing with the fact that so much of human conduct is moved by mechanical energy of an egocentric kind. In the moral life the enemy is the fat relentless ego. Moral philosophy is properly, and in the past has been, the discussion of this ego and of the techniques (if any) for its defeat.” (*On ‘God’ and ‘Good’*, 342)

The third standard is somewhat more difficult to explain. Murdoch thinks that some improvements in vision involve either changes in concepts or deepenings in one’s grasp of concepts. Let’s put the point this way:

(C) Conceptual articulacy: a person’s vision improves when she becomes more articulate about the concepts that are deployed in her experience. She uses the *right* concepts; or she understands the concepts more *deeply*.

In this vein, Murdoch writes that the conceptually articulate individual experiences “a deepening process, or at any rate an altering and complicating process” in her grasp of concepts (Murdoch 1997: *Idea of Perfection* 322). For example, “we have a different image of courage at forty from that which we had at twenty” (1997: *Idea of Perfection* 322); what at first appeared to be “daring of the spirit” or “self-assertive ferocity” is later understood as “a particular operation of wisdom and love” which “would enable a man coolly to choose the labor camp rather than the easy compromise with the tyrant” (1997: *Sovereignty of Good* 378). As our grasp of concepts deepens, we depart from the

typically superficial ways that those concepts are employed in everyday discourse. Our knowledge of the concept “is something to be understood, as it were, in depth, and not in terms of switching on to some given impersonal network” (1997: *Idea of Perfection* 322). Again, we can see this in the M/D example: M develops deeper understandings of vulgarity, snobbishness, and so on, and this leads her to revise her view of D.²

Finally, Murdoch associates love with improvements in vision:

(D) Love: a person’s vision improves when she becomes more loving

Here’s the most direct statement of that view: “love... is the discovery of reality” (*The Sublime and the Good*, 215). But passages of this sort abound.

- “Love is knowledge of the individual” (*Idea of Perfection* 321).
- “Will not ‘Act lovingly’ translate ‘Act perfectly’, whereas ‘Act rationally’ will not? It is tempting to say so” (*Sovereignty*, 384).
- “Should a retarded child be kept at home or sent to an institution? Should an elderly relation who is a trouble-maker be cared for or asked to go away? Should an unhappy marriage be continued for the sake of the children? ... The love which brings the right answer is an exercise of justice and realism and really *looking*. The difficult is to keep the attention fixed on the real situation and to prevent it from returning surreptitiously to the self with consolations of self-pity, resentment, fantasy and despair... It is a *task* to come to see the world as it is.” (*Sovereignty of Good* 375)

So Murdoch appeals to attention, unselfing, conceptual articulacy, and love. We might connect these features. Perhaps all of them need to be in place: perhaps true vision requires attention, unselfing, articulateness, and love. Perhaps some of the features entail others: genuine love might involve a form of unselfing, as well as attention to the particulars of a situation. I will have more to say about this as we go on. For now, I simply mark the four features.

3. Are these factors directed toward the same goal?

I have listed four candidate standards in terms of which we might measure improvements in moral vision. Now I want to raise some questions about these standards.

Our first puzzle is this: standards (A)-(C) can be understood in solely epistemic terms (though more on whether that’s the right way to understand (C) later.) But love is not typically associated with greater accuracy! That is, there’s often a tension between viewing someone impartially and viewing them lovingly. We can see this in the M/D example: M’s later vision is more loving, but we are given no reason for thinking that it is more accurate. Perhaps impartial observers would agree with M’s earlier vision, seeing D as vulgar, juvenile, and so on.

Does Murdoch think that love is associated with greater accuracy? Sometimes, it sounds like when Murdoch speaks of improvements in vision, she is appealing solely to epistemic criteria: “It is a *task* to come to see the world as it is” (*Sovereignty of Good*: 375; underlining added). On this reading, visions are better to the extent that they present the world as it really is. There are many passages that make that kind of claim:

² I’ve discussed this point at greater length in Katsafanas 2018.

- “Most of the time we fail to see the big wide real world at all because we are blinded by obsession, anxiety, envy, resentment, fear. We make a small personal world in which we remain enclosed’ (*Literature and Philosophy*, 14).
- “Consciousness is not normally a transparent glass through which [the person] views the world, but a cloud of more or less fantastic reverie designed to protect the psyche from pain... Even its loving is more often than not an assertion of self.” (*Sovereignty of Good*: 364)
- “By opening our eyes we do not necessarily see what confronts us... Our minds are continually active, fabricating an anxious, usually self-preoccupied, often falsifying *veil* which partially conceals the world.” (*Sovereignty of Good*: 368-369)

Those passages suggest that we have a simple task: see the world as it is. Love (along with (A)-(C)) would then be a path to doing so. But, at other times, it sounds like Murdoch is relying not just on epistemic criteria, but also on moral or evaluative criteria. M’s later vision is not said to be more *accurate*; it is said to be more just and loving: “What M is *ex hypothesi* attempting to do is not just to see D accurately but to see her justly and lovingly.” (*Idea of Perfection*: 317). And in *Sovereignty* Murdoch notes that “what looks like mere accuracy at one end looks more like justice or courage, or even love at the other” (1997: 373-4). In these passages, love is contrasted with mere accuracy.

So, we’re faced with a question: does Murdoch think that love puts us in touch with the world as it really is? Or is she appealing to distinct, potentially competing standards?

Some commentators try to eliminate this potential tension between epistemic and non-epistemic criteria. One way of reconciling the tension is to argue that love puts us in touch with reality as it is. Love opens us to accurate visions of the world. Cathy Mason writes

“Murdoch claims, then, that love has an irreducible epistemic role: it involves knowledge or perception of reality. This reality is to be understood as existing independently of being loved, but perceptible only to the person who lovingly attends to it” (Mason 2021: 10)

I doubt that this is correct.³ Murdoch often presents love as distorting: in *Sovereignty*, she writes that “love is..... the source of our greatest errors” (384). And her novels portray people who are led deeply into error by love. Consider Bradley Pearson in *The Black Prince*, who describes love as “a form of insanity. Is it not insane to concentrate one’s attention exclusively on one person, to drain the rest of the world of meaning, to have no thoughts, no feelings, no being except in relation to the beloved? What the beloved ‘is like’ or ‘is really like’ matters not a fig” (Murdoch 2003: 243). Or take Charles in *The Sea, The Sea*, who loves Hartley but cannot see her, cannot discern her feelings or preferences even when they are expressed in the clearest terms. I will return to these points below.

Of course, there’s a possible resolution: we could claim that *real* love reveals while *false* love distorts. Or we could claim that *selfless* love reveals while *selfish* love distorts. But this risks being merely stipulative: true, we could say that the fully or selflessly loving person sees reality as it is, but why should we believe this? I return to this in a moment. For now, I simply note that Murdoch explicitly rejects this approach, writing

³ Mason offers a more complex reading in her 2023. I address this below.

“Good and Love should not be identified, and not only because human love is usually self-assertive. The concepts, even when the idea of love is purified, still play different roles... Love is the general name of the quality of attachment and is capable of infinite degradation and is the source of our greatest errors; but when it is even partially refined it is the energy and passion of the soul in its search for Good...” (*Sovereignty of Good* 384, underlining added).

While this passage is complex, it is clear that Murdoch is not treating love as having epistemic significance. Even when the concept of love is purified (selfless love, real love, virtuous love, etc.), it does not play the same role as the concept of Goodness. Love is a motivational force, not an epistemic one—or so Murdoch claims in this passage.

In light of this, I think it’s preferable to read Murdoch as denying that improvements in vision are defined in purely epistemic terms. We’re not just trying to see the world as it is. We’re trying to see the world both accurately and lovingly, and those aspirations are in tension with one another. (Others who endorse this kind of reading include Mark Hopwood⁴ and perhaps Vida Yao.⁵)

If we adopt this later view, another way of reading Murdoch is possible. Suppose there are multiple visions that fulfill (A)-(C) equally well; yet suppose some of these visions are more loving than others. Then Murdoch could be saying: clear away the errors that arise from lack of attention, from “egoistic fog,” from inadequate conceptual resources. Strive to be attentive, selfless, and conceptually articulate. Once you do that, you’re still left with multiple possible ways of viewing a given situation. At that point, try to achieve the most loving vision. I’ll return to this point below, explaining it in more detail by examining one of Murdoch’s characters.

4. Are these standards criterial for improvements in vision?

But before we get to that, let’s turn to our second question: are (A)-(D) supposed to *guarantee* improvements in vision? Does the attentive, selfless, conceptually articulate, loving person always experience improvements in vision?

Commentators on Murdoch tend to think so. For example, Anil Gomes writes:

Attention, for Murdoch, is the process by which we come to see the world for how it really is. To attend to things is to look at them lovingly and justly... Attention allows us knowledge of reality; such knowledge can compel us to act in a certain way; and it is shaped by the conceptual schemes we operate within. (Gomes 2022: 143, underlining added)

⁴ “Murdoch explicitly and repeatedly contrasts the vision that is occasioned by reason and the vision that is occasioned by love.” (Hopwood 2017: 478). And, remarking on the M/D example: “The question is not which description corresponds more closely to the description that would be given by an ideally rational agent, but which description constitutes a genuine attempt to go beyond the easy patterns of fantasy to engage with D as a real individual” (2017: 496).

⁵ “As Murdoch reminds us, you need not only strive to see your friend accurately, but also, justly” (Yao 2020: 2). “According to Murdoch, the task of really seeing another person accurately and justly is a moral achievement as it takes seeing past our “fat, relentless” egos in order to recognize another person as part of a reality that exists beyond ourselves. It is to resist seeing him tainted and shaped by our fears, needs, and (typically narcissistic) fantasies.” (6-7)

Notice the underlined portion: attentive, loving vision lets us see the world as it is. Analogously, Bridget Clarke writes

For Murdoch, moral perception consists in, and results from, efforts of ‘attention’. To attend to something is to approach it with a ‘just and loving’ eye and therewith to perceive it in its unbounded particularity and complexity and so as it truly is. ... Attention issues in (more or less) veridical perceptions of its objects based upon the exercise of virtues of character such as love, justice, honesty, courage, humility, and tolerance. (Clarke 2011: 236, underlining added)

Both Gomes and Clarke suggest that manifesting (A)-(D) leads to improvements in vision. And some commentators go even further: Cathy Mason argues that Murdoch defines correct vision in terms of the view that the fully virtuous person would have. She writes,

These virtues do not only reveal an independently (non-morally) fixed prior reality. Instead, reality itself is understood as that which could be seen when such virtues are properly exercised. Virtues do not merely help us become better thinkers, enabling us to access a world the components of which could be fully specified by a complex enough computer. Rather, what is truly ‘out there’ is understood in terms of the virtuous person’s perception. (Mason 2023: 664)

So we define reality in terms of what would be seen by a fully virtuous person. As Mason puts it, “reality *is* what could be perceived by a virtuous agent” (Mason 2023: 665). If we take (A)-(D) to be an exhaustive list of Murdochian virtues, Mason would be claiming that we simply define correct vision as whatever vision the person ideally manifesting (A)-(D) has.⁶

But is that right? I think there are challenges for this interpretation, both from everyday life and from Murdoch’s novels.

Let’s start with an example from ordinary life. Imagine someone who manifests all of (A)-(D). The person becomes increasingly attentive; selfless; conceptually articulate; and loving. But he’s led further astray. One potential example is a person gripped by ideology. Imagine a woman who reads the internet sites on trad-wives.⁷ Exploring her concept of wifehood and femininity, she sincerely comes to believe that her role is to be a subservient, selfless, loving, attentive spouse. We can imagine that she does love her husband, that she thoroughly revises her concepts in a way that she would describe as deepening them, that she becomes highly attentive to her husband, and that she increasingly suppresses any tendencies that she regards as selfish. So she fulfills (A)-(D). But she seems to worsen, rather than improve, her vision of the world.

And, I’ll argue, Murdoch’s novels make the same point: they portray characters who manifest (A)-(D) but are caught in delusions. This is a harder point to defend, because what would be most persuasive is a case in which some character clearly and indisputably manifests (A)-(D) but has a deficient grasp of the world. Yet Murdoch’s characters are always complex and flawed: none of them are going to manifest (A)-(D) perfectly. And there is always going to be some room for

⁶ Mason’s list of Murdochian virtues is a bit different, though. According to Mason, Murdoch treats love, justice, patience, and honesty as virtues. More on this below.

⁷ For an introduction to these websites, see Kelly 2018 and Love 2020.

interpretive disagreement about whether the characters are attentive in the right way, loving in the right way, and so on. But I do think there's enough in the novels to suggest that (A)-(D) don't guarantee improvements in vision. One good example is Harriet from *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine*. (Another good example is Crystal from *A Word Artist*.)

Let's start with a brief summary of the plot of *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine*. Briefly, Blaise Gavender has been married to Harriet Gavender for many years. Harriet sees their marriage as happy and fulfilling. Yet Blaise has been having an affair with Emily McHugh for nine years. Blaise and Emily have an eight-year-old son, Luca, who manages to sneak off to Harriet's house, thereby setting in motion a series of events that reveal the affair. I want to focus on Harriet, who seems to me to embody (A)-(D) yet to be deluded.

First, Harriet is attentive and conceptually articulate. Even at the beginning of the novel, her attention is focused on her son (David) and her husband. She has nuanced interpretations of her son, seeing clearly the ways in which, in adolescence, he is distancing himself from her. She is incredibly attentive to her own inner life, diagnosing for example her reactions to David's distancing:

“She was visited by alarmingly precise ghostly yearnings. Feelings very like the torments of an unrequited love made her blush and tremble. It was indeed dreadfully like being in love. She wanted to hold him in her arms again, to cover him with kisses, to untangle with caressing fingers that untidy and now absurdly long golden hair.” (16-17)

These attentive skills are combined with conceptual articulacy. Consider how Harriet reacts when she learns of Blaise's affair. She tries to explore the meanings of love, to think of courage and bravery more deeply: “Now I must find out whether I am brave or not” (143), she thinks. “She summoned up a sort of fierce bravery which she had never had to use before. The pain was very great however and she could feel obscure things in the depths of her mind shifting about in order to endure it” (151). This bravery enables her to come up with new ways of conceptualizing or framing her situation:

“Hold on, she said, hold on, soldier's daughter, soldier's sister, think. What can help me, what can help him, now? I must find a way of thinking about it.” (144)

Or again, she reframes the affair as a disaster:

“It was as if Blaise had suffered some disaster, had been maimed or disfigured or subjected to some awful menace, and only Harriet's thoughts, only her unremitting attention, could save him.” (145-6)

Here, we see Harriet attentively struggling to refine her concepts, to reconceptualize her situation.

There's no doubt that Harriet is selfless. She decides to sacrifice herself unhesitatingly. When Blaise informs her of his nine-year-long affair, Harriet's initial reaction is to think “I have got to be strong” and “brave” (143). And she immediately shifts from thinking about how she's been wronged to thinking about how she can help Blaise:

“Hold on, she said, hold on, soldier's daughter, soldier's sister, think. What can help me, what can help him, now? I must find a way of thinking about it. It all happened a long time

ago. He no longer loves her. She is a hateful burden to him. He has a duty to her and to the child. Of course he ought to have told me. But how he must have suffered, with his kind truthful nature, tied to a woman whom he no longer loved and lying to one whom he loved. For amid all her sense of a world devastated and defiled Harriet did not for a second doubt Blaise's love for her. She clung to him in her heart and her thought, and as she did so she seemed to see Emily McHugh and her son drifting away as if they were upon a raft. They were drifting away and she was with Blaise upon the shore." (144)

And she continues:

"After all she had not lost him, he was not dead, he needed her now more than he had ever needed her. The warmth of Blaise's pleading began at last to stream through for her comfort. He needed her love, her extra love. Had she that extra power, that grace, to help him in his extremity? Harriet now knew that she had, she felt brimming over and faint with it. She moaned aloud with desire for the return of her husband, so that she could console and reassure him and herself. They had not lost each other, had they? They could not lose each other. There was just a new and awful pain to be suffered together." (145)

And when she sees Blaise:

"'Harriet, girl, do you forgive me?' 'Yes, of course. Oh don't worry, that's all right, that's all right.' 'You still love me?' 'Of course, of course. Don't be silly.'" (145)

Not only that: she also begins thinking about how she must benefit Emily:

'You know, you have been very cruel to her, haven't you?' Blaise mumbled 'Yes.' 'Yes. Very cruel. You loved her – yes, you did – then you ceased to love her – you neglected her. You have neglected her, haven't you?'" (148)

"All these people now depended upon her. She, and only she, could, if it were possible at all, help, heal and avert disaster." (166)

Finally, Harriet is loving. Murdoch emphasizes that Harriet wants to spill out her love, bestowing it on those around her:

"But Harriet positively and half-consciously suffered from a sheer excess of undistributed love, like having too much milk in the breasts. She suffered from having these huge resources by which she could directly benefit only her husband and her son." (19)

And the novel consistently notes that Harriet is full of love: "she was loved and loving" (16), she loves Blaise, she loves David, she loves Luca, she even tries to love Emily (192). Indeed, Murdoch notes that love is Harriet's whole existence: "What was that quotation about love being 'woman's whole existence'? It was certainly true in her case..." (17).

So Harriet looks like a good case of someone who fulfills (A)-(D). But she doesn't see clearly. Indeed, in one sense the entire novel is framed on her inability to see.

“Harriet had noticed nothing, had never for a second suspected. Her trust in [Blaise] was perfect. In the early days it had seemed inconceivable that Harriet should not have read the truth off his blazing face, off his trembling hands.” (71)

But it's not just the complete inability to detect the affair that indicates Harriet's defective vision. Notice the way in which she minimizes the troubles with her husband. She's initially tempted to describe the nine-year affair as a “scrape” (148). Her son and her friend Edgar both try to show her the ways in which she is deluded, the ways in which the situation is intolerable. As Edgar says to Harriet:

“One must be in the truth and you are not. You must come away so that he can see what he has done. As it is he sees nothing. This is a lie, this man's lie, and he must live it and undo it. But you have put him in a position where he cannot stop lying. No one here, not even you, is good enough to redeem this thing.” (210)

“Harriet, listen. Don't you see that you are putting him in a situation where he simply can't help lying to you? You have not required the truth of him. You must require him to decide. Vague tolerant pity is not true kindness here. You are trying to spare yourself—” (211)

Or, for a rather different example, when she has lost her husband, when he has gone to live with Emily, she engages in flawed grasping attempts to find other objects of love. These attempts are blind to whether the person has any reciprocal feelings for her. She starts with her neighbor Monty:

“She needed support and someone whom she cared for to confide in. This after all she had always had. Adrian was in Germany. David had his own agony and repulsed all her attempts to speak to him. She turned with increasing urgency to Monty. It now seemed to her that she had loved Monty for a long time.” (266)

She turns to Monty because “Her disowned rejected love needed another object” (266). But Monty is predictably uninterested, never having given any indication of romantic feelings toward Harriet. When Monty refuses her offer of marriage, she turns to Edgar, trying to convince him to accept her love. “you have cared and been so kind. I think I will come to you, to Mockingham. You can look after me” (303). Edgar turns her down as well. She then asks Monty for the address of one of Monty's patients, Magnus, who, unbeknownst to Harriet, is a fiction. She thinks she can love him:

“He knows all about Blaise and me, he knew from the start, Blaise told him everything, he probably told him all sorts of things he never told me, and I feel so certain that Magnus is a wise person, a sort of kind good holy man. I've felt this thing about him for a long time. Blaise belittled him but then Blaise belittles everybody. Blaise can't see any kind of greatness. I've got to talk to Magnus, I've got to, I feel certain he could help me. Blaise said I was the only woman who really existed for Magnus. He must need me. And if he needs me I need him. And he's – the last one—”

Her voice broke and she turned back to the cabinet and wrenched out another drawer.

“Oh dear!” said Monty. (307)

Monty tells her that Magnus has committed suicide. She temporarily runs away to Italy, but decides to return to Blaise: “What after all could she do? In the end she had nobody but Blaise ... There was no solution, it all came back to Blaise in the end. No one else needs me, she thought, except the

children, and they can't save me. Blaise needs me terribly, he needs my forgiveness to perfect his happiness with Emily" (333-4).

She can only understand herself as subserviently devoted to another person, as giving her life to them. As she puts it toward the end of the novel, "I lived in others and through others" (268). What is important to her is just expressing love, not attuning it to or responding to any particular object. The objects are fungible. And her view of these objects is far from clear: she cannot see that Monty can barely tolerate her, that Edgar's attentions are elsewhere, that Magnus is a fiction and that even if he were real, he would have no connection to her.

So Harriet, who is attentive, selfless, conceptually articulate, and loving fails to see the world, is a case of flawed, imperfect vision. She exemplifies the four criteria but sees unclearly. This indicates that Murdoch doesn't treat (A)-(D) as guaranteeing improvements in vision. And it also shows that (A)-(D) are not criterial for improvements in vision: we can't define correct vision in terms of the view that the agent manifesting (A)-(D) has. For that reason, I think Mason's view—that we should define correct vision in terms of the view held by the virtuous agent—cannot be right.⁸

5. Is there a single best vision?

So far, I've argued that when Murdoch speaks of improved vision, she doesn't just have epistemic goals in mind. There are non-epistemic aspects, which are in tension with the epistemic ones. I've also argued that the factors that Murdoch associates with improvements in vision don't guarantee improved vision and are not criterial for improved vision. Where does this leave us?

I think there is a tension in Murdoch. She keeps being tempted by the idea that (A)-(D) reveal, and can be understood in terms of, the unvarnished real world. But she also knows that this is too simple: especially in her novels, she keeps backing off from the jejune claim that (A)-(D) necessarily reveal the world as it is.

We've been assuming that (A)-(D) are designed to bring us closer to grasping some independently characterizable notion of reality. But Murdoch sometimes seems to deny this. The idea that we treat (A)-(D) as means to attaining a putatively correct vision of the world doesn't fit well with Murdoch's claim that exemplary individuals have uniquely *personal* visions of the world. There is a movement *away from* uniformity, rather than toward it. To see this, consider her claims that there can be increasingly personal understandings of concepts. The quotations under (C) above emphasize this. But there are many more: she writes, "the movement of understanding is onward into increasing privacy, in the direction of the ideal limit, and not back towards a genesis in the rulings of an impersonal public language" (*Idea of Perfection* 322). She goes on to say that all concepts are "infinitely to be learned, as an individual object of love," including concepts like *red*: "a painter might say, 'you don't know what 'red' means" (*Idea of Perfection* 323). In this respect, "Knowledge of a value concept is something to be understood, as it were, in depth, and not in terms of switching on to some given impersonal network" (*Idea of Perfection*, 322).

⁸ I noted above that Mason's list of Murdochian virtues is a bit different than mine—rather than focusing on attention, unselfing, conceptual articulacy, and love, Mason lists love, justice, patience, and honesty as virtues (Mason 2023: 664). I think it's even clearer that Harriet exemplifies these virtues: there's no doubt that she's just, patient, and honest.

How should we understand these claims? Marc Hopwood puts it this way:

The idea that virtuous agents will converge upon a single, shared understanding of the moral facts is one that Murdoch explicitly rejects, emphasizing the personal, imaginative aspects of moral judgment and the profound ‘differences in moral vision’ that can exist between agents equally receptive to moral reality. (2017: 484).

As Hopwood notes, Murdoch denies that improvements in vision will always tend in the same direction. The famous M/D example illustrates this: Murdoch writes: “M’s activity is peculiarly her own. Its details are the details of this personality; and partly for this reason it may well be an activity which can only be performed privately. M could not do this thing in conversation with any other person” (*Idea of Perfection* 317; underlining added). By emphasizing the way that M’s vision is personal, Murdoch suggests that there’s more than one praiseworthy vision of D. She is not claiming that everyone who reflects on D ought to converge on M’s vision of her.

Again, I think Murdoch’s novels help to illustrate this point. I’ll here consider Bradley Pearson from *The Black Prince*. Bradley is thoroughly selfish, but meets the other conditions: he is attentive, conceptually articulate, and loving. Despite being selfish, he sees clearly, thus suggesting that (A)-(D) don’t define clear or improved vision. Moreover, the clarity of his vision suggests that we should not interpret love as functioning to secure an epistemic goal. So this novel supports the points I’ve made with *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine*, and I’ll mention this in passing. But I want to use *The Black Prince* primarily to focus on the idea that praiseworthy forms of vision may not be shareable.

The basic plot of *The Black Prince* is this: Bradley Pearson, the narrator, is a 58-year-old unsuccessful writer living in London. For two decades he has been close friends with the extremely successful and prolific author Arnold Baffin. Bradley regards Arnold’s work as superficial and commercialized; Bradley sees himself as struggling to create a genuine work of literature. Early in the novel, Arnold’s wife, Rachel, declares her love for Bradley and attempts to seduce him; Bradley appears baffled, perhaps frightened, and is in any case sexually impotent. He rushes out of Rachel’s house and happens to encounter her nineteen-year-old daughter, Julian, on his way home. Although he’d previously found Julian bothersome and attempted to avoid her, he’s suddenly struck with a powerful attraction to her. He concocts a plan to meet her at a concert a few days later; during the concert he’s overcome with emotion and ends up kissing her; the next day he declares a profound love for her; she unexpectedly reciprocates; they have a brief affair, sneaking away to a seaside cabin and making plans to be married; but Julian soon flees in the night, leaving Bradley behind. Though tormented by her absence, he does not see her again.

The description that would come naturally to many of us is this: an old man who has led a monastic life has sexual desire awakened by his encounter with Rachel; he lusts after a young woman; moreover, in lusting after her, he repairs his feeling of shame at his impotence with her mother; and he revenges himself on the father, whose success he envies and resents. Julian, presented as a flighty and inconsistent person who enjoys rebelling against her parents, is swept up in the drama for a time but soon comes to her senses.⁹

⁹ I elide some further complications, such as Bradley’s repressed homosexual desires.

Bradley is an attentive observer of himself and others. He is under no illusions about the opacity of the human mind. At the beginning of the narrative, he writes “I am aware that people often have completely distorted general ideas of what they are like. Men truly manifest themselves in the long patterns of their acts, and not in any nutshell of self-theory” (Murdoch 2003: 11). And he is deeply sensitive to the complexities and opacities of others: “How can one describe a human feeling justly? How can one describe oneself?” (55). Moreover, he knows that others will see him as deluded and sexually frustrated. And he knows that his attitudes toward Julian’s parents are far from pure: “When I write of Arnold my pen shakes with resentment, love, remorse, and fear” (81).

So there’s no doubt that Bradley is attentive. He’s conceptually articulate as well, more than willing to probe the nuances of his concepts, to explore new understandings of love, friendship, what it means to be a novelist, and so on. He is loving: the novel centers on his love for Julian. But perhaps the theme that’s emphasized most clearly in the novel is that he is selfish. His concerns at the outset of the novel are entirely self-centered: he is spiteful towards Arnold, resenting his success; he attempts to elude any commitments that might infringe upon his time; his interests in his friends seem superficial and transactional. He describes himself, prior to Julian, as “solitary but not unsociable,” with “pals” but not “intimate” friends, living alone and “without drama” (16-17), devoting himself to his writing.

At first, with the initial moments of love, the selfishness dissipates:

Yesterday what had happened was simply that, through no merit of my own, I had become virtuous. And yesterday that had been enough. I loved, and the joy of love made a void in me where my self had been. I was purged of resentment and of hate, purged of all the mean anxious fears that compose the vile ego. It was enough that she existed and that she could never be mine. (232)

But this is short-lived: Bradley himself describes it as a “false loss of self”:

A common though not invariable early phase of this madness, the one in fact through which I had just been passing, is a false loss of self, which can be so extreme that all fear of pain, all sense of time (time is anxiety, is fear) is utterly blotted out. (244).

Bradley’s egoistic concerns remain: he wants to be with Julian, he is desperate to realize those goals. He deceives Julian about his age; ignores his sister, leaving her alone in a desperate moment when she is most in need of him; ignores the news that she has committed suicide, not wanting it to interfere with his opportunity to have sex with Julian; and so on.

So I’ll assume that Bradley is attentive, conceptually articulate, and loving. He fulfills those criteria. But he is selfish. Nonetheless, his vision of the world is especially acute. He is capable of perceiving people clearly, in part by attentively clearing away complicating emotions. Consider his description of his sister:

“When I think of my sister I feel pity, annoyance, guilt, disgust and it is in the ‘light’ of these that I present her, crippled and diminished by my perception itself. How can I correct these faults, my dear friend and comrade? Priscilla was a brave woman. She endured unhappiness

grimly, with dignity. She sat alone in the mornings manicuring her nails while tears came into her eyes for her wasted life.” (82)

That last description captures her. And his attempts to see Arnold clearly come across repeatedly in the book—he reflects on the review essay that he’s writing on Arnold’s work, he decides to reread all of Arnold’s books, he wonders whether he has seen Arnold unjustly or unclearly (see for example p. 81 and 219).

Now it might seem that there’s one thing that Bradley can’t see clearly: Julian, the very object of his love. Murdoch emphasizes the ways in which the other characters see Bradley as caught up in fantasies, pulled away from seeing Julian as she is. Even Julian remarks: “You talk as if there was nobody here but you... You don’t seem to know me at all. Are you sure it’s *me* you love?” (265). And there’s good reason for her remarks. Bradley repeatedly avows his love for Julian; he has no doubts that love, and love alone, is what he feels towards her. But he knows almost nothing about Julian; his thoughts about her never concern anything about her as an individual, but instead focus on abstract claims about the power and majesty of love; he is at once completely certain that Julian loves him and yet is deeply dishonest and manipulative with her, concealing facts including his real age and the fact that—just before their first successful sexual encounter—he has learned that his sister has committed suicide.

He refuses to consider alternative descriptions of Julian. Consider how Rachel (Julian’s mother) describes Julian’s feelings:

She wants to assure herself that she’s free, at the same time she wants our attention, she wants the relationship of being scolded. This isn’t the first time she’s used somebody else to upset us with. A year ago she thought she was madly in love with one of her teachers, well he wasn’t as old as you, but he was married with four children, and she made it into a sort of little “demo” against us. We knew how to take it. It ended happily. You’re just the next victim. (Murdoch 2003: 355).

And here’s Bradley’s response:

‘Rachel,’ I said, ‘you are talking about someone else. You are not talking about Julian, about my Julian.’

‘Your Julian is a fiction. This is what I’m telling you, dear Bradley. I’m not saying she didn’t care for you, but a young girl’s emotions are chaos. ... A couple of weeks ago you were kissing me passionately and lying beside me in bed. Now you expect me to believe that you’ve developed a life-long passion for my daughter in the space of four days. You expect me to believe that, and to sympathize with you, it seems!’ (Murdoch 2003: 357)

Or again, Bradley says to Julian’s father: “There are huge cosmic forces at work here. Maybe you just don’t know about them. Now I come to think of it, Arnold, you’ve never in any of your books really described what it’s like to be in love —” (281). Bradley is insisting on the purity and uniqueness of his love. And here’s Rachel, responding on Arnold’s behalf:

You talk as if you were fifteen. Of course everyone knows about being in love. That’s not the point. The details of what you so suddenly imagine that you feel are your affair. They’re

just as uninteresting as someone telling their dreams. Julian is certainly not “in love”, whatever you suppose that to mean here, with you. (Murdoch 2003: 281)

What’s interesting is not just that the other characters think Bradley is clinging to a deficient description of his emotions and actions; what’s interesting is that he *knows*, in general, that people do this. He writes that there is

an eternal discrepancy between the self-knowledge which we gain by observing ourselves objectively and the self-awareness which we have of ourselves subjectively: a discrepancy which probably makes it impossible for us ever to arrive at the truth. Our self-knowledge is too abstract, our self-awareness is too intimate and swoony and dazed. Perhaps some kind of integrity of the imagination, a sort of moral genius, could verify the scene, producing minute sensibility and control of the moment as a function of some much larger consciousness. (Murdoch 2003: 189-190)

But this is at least in part an *excuse*: claiming that the accurate description of oneself is available only to a “moral genius” enables Bradley to persist in what others see as superficial descriptions of his relation to Julian. Yet this is coupled with an ability to see other situations with exceptional, incisive clarity.

So, Bradley has fallen in love with Julian. This love definitely makes him more attentive (he becomes incredibly observant); it leads him to explore his concepts (he reflects on his envy, his resentment, the nature of love, and so on); it arguably leads him to become less selfish with others (he’s much more generous toward Arthur and Rachel immediately after he falls in love—he decides to revise his scathing review of Arthur’s books, to read his entire corpus, and so on). But does he achieve more accurate visions of the world? Yes and no. He does achieve more accurate visions of people other than Julian; but his image of Julian, and his own relation to her, seems clouded, as the descriptions above indicate.¹⁰

This bears on our previous question concerning whether love is presented as an epistemic standard. Murdoch does not present Bradley as seeing Julian clearly, if that means that he sees her as impartial observers would. But he does see her lovingly. While other people see her as a drab flighty ordinary girl, he sees her as a source of wonder, as precious and exceptional. And Murdoch leaves it open: might this be the just and loving way to view people, seeing even ordinary people as sources of

¹⁰ In her discussion of *The Black Prince*, Nussbaum argues that Murdoch’s novel presents love as “a source of egoistic fog and delusion” (2011: 137). As she sees it, Murdoch endorses the Proustian claim that “all real-life love is marred by possessiveness” (138). Yet Nussbaum argues that Bradley does retrospectively attain a truer vision of Julian, in his writing of the novel: “The proof of the truth of his vision is in the story he tells, so rich and variegated and deep, by contrast to the crudeness of the four Postscripts. And repeatedly he draws attention to moments of illusion, anxiety, and error in Bradley the man, in such a way that we do not ever have stable confidence in the vision of the man as he goes through his bewildering adventures. We do acknowledge that eros has opened his eyes; but the fruit of that initial experience, the fruit that is really valuable, is the work of art before us, and the vision that it contains. As he says in his own Postscript, ‘The book had to come into being because of Julian, and because of the book Julian had to be...This is her deification and incidentally her immortality. It is my gift to her and my final possession of her’ (389). While I find Nussbaum’s reading illuminating, I think it is marred by her assumption that Murdoch is presenting love in relation to epistemic goals. More on this in a moment.

endless fascination? It seems to me so. And if that's right, the novel also provides support for the idea that Murdoch treats love as a separate and potentially conflicting standard. If what we're looking for, in improved vision, is a kind of impartial detached description of the world, Bradley doesn't achieve improved vision. But if what we're looking for is the generous, admirable ability to see a person as a precious, unique, irreplaceable source of worth--indeed of rapture--then Bradley does attain improved vision.

Imagine a parent attentively, selflessly, articulately viewing their newborn. Full of love, they remark on the newborn's precious beauty. An impartial observer, not gripped by love, might point out that the newborn is just a slimy mass of howling flesh, no different than any other infant. That view is accurate. But it is not loving. We can admire the parent's view, seeing it as an improved version of the impartial observer's view. And just so, we can admire Bradley's view of Julian, seeing it as an improvement over the unloving gazes of others. As Murdoch elsewhere writes:

“Intense mutual erotic love ... is comparatively rare in this inconvenient world. This love presents itself as such a dizzily lofty value that even to speak of ‘enjoying’ it seems a sacrilege. It is something to be undergone upon one’s knees. And where it exists it cannot but shed a blazing light of justification upon its own scene, a light which can leave the rest of the world dark indeed.” (*Sacred and Profane Love Machine*, 261)

When we contrast Bradley's vision of Julian to the more impartial views, those impartial views can seem cramped and dull indeed. It can make sense to speak of Bradley's view as an improvement on those views.¹¹

But I want to use these claims to make an additional point: notice that Bradley is completely incapable of getting others to share his view of Julian. He tries, repeatedly—the passages I've quoted above are just a few of many. But no one can share that view of Julian, no one can see her as he sees her. His loving vision is personal. And we could make the same point about the parents of the newborn: I can describe and admire and even cherish my friend's view of her newborn, but I cannot share it.

~ ~ ~

Let me pull these threads together by contrasting two ways of reading Murdoch. On one reading, there's a best vision of the world. We have some independently specifiable notion of how the world is. (A)-(D) put us into contact with this. When Murdoch is at her most Platonic she sometimes sounds like she endorses this view.

On the more complex reading that I'm suggesting, there are better and worse ways of viewing the world, but no single best way. Visions can be better by being more attentive; less selfish; by employing different concepts, or by employing the same concepts in different ways; by being more loving. On this reading, we can employ the notion of improvements, but we detect improvements by contrasting views with one another, not by checking them against some substantively

¹¹ Continuing from the last footnote: this is why I think Nussbaum's article is somewhat misleading. Bradley's vision isn't just better at the end of the novel, when he reflects on his past from his prison cell. His vision is better even as he is swept along by his love. (And note, in this regard, that Bradley doesn't repudiate or question his earlier view of Julian. He continues to endorse it, even to the end.)

characterized best view. And even if impartial observers can experience some degree of convergence in their visions when they strive for attentive, selfless, conceptually articulate reflection, those visions are going to diverge when we introduce love.

I think this more complex view finds support both in Murdoch's philosophical writings and her novels. Start with the former. She writes,

“That ‘reality’ which we are so naturally led to think of as revealed by ‘just attention’ can, of course, given the variety of human personality and situation, only be thought of as ‘one,’ as a single object for all men, in some very remote and ideal sense.” (*Idea of Perfection* 330)

Or again:

The idea of ‘objective reality’, for instance, undergoes important modifications when it is to be understood, not in relation to ‘the world described by science’, but in relation to the progressing life of a person. (*Idea of Perfection* 320)

The world is not given to us ‘on a plate’, it is given to us as a creative task. It is impossible to banish morality from this picture. (MGM 106)

And the *Black Prince* confirms this: Bradley's vision of Julian is extremely loving, it brings out so much that is good in her; but it is not a vision that can be shared with others. He sees her as profound, incomparable, irreplaceable, whereas others see her as a whimsical mundane girl.

On this more complex reading, Murdoch is not giving us a recipe for attaining a uniquely best vision of the world. There is no uniquely best vision. There are simply techniques for shattering habitual or entrenched perspectives, and for becoming, perhaps at the same time, more loving. Notice that so many of Murdoch's examples—like M/D—speak of “imprisonment,” “confinement,” and so on. So the goal would be to become deeper, more conceptually articulate, less blinded by egoistic concerns, more receptive to other people, more open to recognizing deficiencies in our view of the world.

“It is true that human beings cannot bear much reality; and a consideration of what the effort to face reality is like, and what are its techniques, may serve both to illuminate the necessity or certainty which seems to attach to ‘the Good’ and also to lead on to a reinterpretation of ‘will’ and ‘freedom’ in relation to the concept of love.” (*On ‘God’ and ‘Good’*, 352).

It's tempting to understand the attempt to bear reality in terms of accessing a uniquely correct vision of the world. But we can resist this.

6. Conclusion

I've been suggesting that Murdoch's texts are more complex—and, I think, more interesting—than has traditionally been assumed. Murdoch's emphasis on improvements in moral vision have led commentators to think that the four factors that she notes (attention, unselfing, conceptual articulacy, love) are directed at the same goal, are criterial for improvements in vision, and yield a single best form of vision. I've suggested that this is oversimplifying. Murdoch posits two distinct

goals for moral vision, goals which are often at odds with one another; she does not treat the four factors as necessarily yielding improvements in vision; and she denies that we can converge in a uniquely best vision.

So where does this leave us? We can strive to be attentive, selfless, and conceptually articulate, and this will sometimes enable us to break out of defective perspectives. But it won't give us a unique end point: people who are equally attentive, selfless, and conceptually articulate can still diverge in their visions of the world. Some of these divergences will be explained by the differing ways in which individuals grasp concepts, or by the differences in the particular concepts that they employ.¹² And some of these divergences will be explain by love: as we see in *The Black Prince*, a loving vision can be in some senses epistemically inferior to a non-loving vision, while still being valuable. Moreover, these praiseworthy forms of vision are not necessarily shareable. No one but Bradley can inhabit his vision; and yet his vision, full of selfish concerns and biased by love, is arguably superior to those of the other characters.¹³

¹² See Katsafanas 2018 for discussion of this point.

¹³ For helpful discussions of this paper, thanks to Kyla Ebels-Duggan, Michaela McSweeney, Walter Hopp, Aaron Garrett, Daniel Star, Erin Seeba, and participants in an Iris Murdoch workshop at Boston University.

References

- Alfano, Mark & Podosky, Paul-Mikhail (2023). "Fanaticism in the manosphere," in Paul Katsafanas (ed.), *The History and Philosophy of Fanaticism*. Routledge.
- Clarke, Bridget (2011), "Iris Murdoch and the Prospects for Critical Moral Perception," in Justin Brookes (ed.), *Iris Murdoch, Philosopher*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 226-253.
- Gomes, Anil (2022). "Iris Murdoch: Moral Vision." In Mark Hopwood & Silvia Panizza (eds.), *The Murdochian Mind*. Routledge.
- Hopwood, Mark (2018) "The Extremely Difficult Realization That Something Other Than Oneself Is Real': Iris Murdoch on Love and Moral Agency." *European Journal of Philosophy*, 26: 477–501.
- Katsafanas, Paul (2018). "Nietzsche and Murdoch on the Moral Significance of Perceptual Experience." *European Journal of Philosophy* 26 (1):525-545.
- Kelly, A. (2018). "The Housewives of White Supremacy." Available online at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/01/opinion/sunday/tradwives-women-alt-right.html>
- Love NS (2020), "Shield Maidens, Fashy Femmes, and TradWives: Feminism, Patriarchy, and Right-Wing Populism." *Frontiers in Sociology* 5:619572. doi: 10.3389/fsoc.2020.619572
- Mason, Cathy (2021). "Iris Murdoch and the Epistemic Significance of Love." In Simon Cushing (ed.), *New Philosophical Essays on Love and Loving*. Palgrave-Macmillan. pp. 39-62.
- Mason, Cathy (2023), "Reconceiving Murdochian Realism." *Ergo* 10(23): 649-672.
- Murdoch, Iris (2003), *The Black Prince*. New York: Penguin.
- (1974), *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine*. New York: Penguin.
- (1997), *Existentialists and Mystics: Writings on Philosophy and Literature*, ed. Peter Conradi. New York: Penguin.
- Nussbaum, Martha (2011), "Faint With Secret Knowledge': Love and Vision in Murdoch's The Black Prince," in Justin Brookes (ed.), *Iris Murdoch, Philosopher*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 226-253.
- Tietjen, Ruth Rebecca & Tirkkonen, Sanna K. (2023). "The Rage of Lonely Men: Loneliness and Misogyny in the Online Movement of 'Involuntary Celibates' (Incels)." *Topoi* 42 (5):1229-1241.
- Yao, Vida (2020). "Grace and Alienation." *Philosophers' Imprint* 20 (16):1-18.