Herein is section of my MScR philosophy dissertation. The topic is on Iris Murdoch’s moral philosophy generally speaking; however, I have included a section that deals with the concept of ‘imagination’, and especially how it relates to literature, art and the artist. I have also included the introduction of my dissertation to provide context for my sample.

Thank you.
Full Circle

An Interpretation of Iris Murdoch’s Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals

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Award: 1st Class Honours (with Distinction)

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List of Abbreviations

Note: This dissertation focuses heavily upon primary texts. As a result, my in-text citations are abbreviations of these texts with the accompanying page number. (Approval received by PPLS department). See bibliography for full citation information.

Iris Murdoch
SOG – *Sovereignty of Good* [consist of three essays]
  - IOP – ‘Idea of Perfection’ [first essay of SOG]
  - OGG – ‘On ‘God’ and ‘Good’’ [second essay of SOG]
  - SOGOC – ‘Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts’ [third essay of SOG]
SAG – The Sublime and the Good
SBR – Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited
AD – Against Dryness
AG – ‘Above the Gods: A Dialogue about Religion’

David Robjant
EME – ‘Iris Murdoch’s Everyday “Metaphysical Entities”’
ABC – ‘As a Buddhist Christian: The Misappropriation of Iris Murdoch’
ERM – ‘The Earthy Realism of Plato's Metaphysics, or: What Shall We Do with Iris Murdoch?’
HHV – ‘Symposium on Iris Murdoch: How miserable we are, how wicked; into the ‘Void’ with Murdoch, Mulhall, and Antonaccio’

Stephen Mulhall
CHR – ‘Constructing a Hall of Reflection’

Maria Antonaccio
PTH – *Picturing the Human: The Moral Thought of Iris Murdoch*
ITG – ‘Imagining the Good: Iris Murdoch's Godless Theology’
PLB – *A Philosophy to Live By: Engaging Iris Murdoch*
RRH – ‘Symposium on Iris Murdoch: A Response to Robjant and Hämäläinen’

Multiple Authors
IMP – Iris Murdoch, Philosopher

Charles Taylor
SS – Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity

Lawrence A. Blum
MPP – Moral Perception and Particularity

Owen Flanagan
GOM – The Geography of Morals: Varieties of Moral Possibility

Niklas Forsberg
LLF – Language Lost and Found: On Iris Murdoch and the Limits of Philosophical Discourse

Nora Hämäläinen
MMM – ‘What is a Wittgensteinian Neo-Platonist? Iris Murdoch, Metaphysics and Metaphor’

David Levy
WWV - ‘Winch, Weil, and Value’

Simone Weil
WOG – Waiting on God
HP – ‘Human Personality’
ENR – ‘Essay on the Notion of Reading’
Introduction

One might argue that, in philosophy, there exists a certain dialogue between individual genius and schools of thought. The former puts forth elaborate relations of ideas, and the latter interrogates, defends and builds upon them. Together, these two sides create a dialectic that propels the discipline. Indeed, it is difficult to see how one could exist without the other. Philosophy needs both.

If such individual genius exists, Ludwig Wittgenstein is among its ranks. There is no better example here than the Tractatus, which provided the fodder from which the Logical Positivist movement bloomed. Short, austere and ambitious, this epigram at once exalted logicism and enjoined silence in talk of value. But this is only one half of his legacy. Three decades later, and with the posthumous release of his Philosophical Investigations, Wittgenstein broke new ground: he provided a second work that was seemingly incompatible with his first.

Enter Cora Diamond, who in 1991 wrote ‘Ethics, imagination and the method of Wittgenstein’s Tractatus’, which has been subsequently treated as a seminal piece of the ‘New Wittgenstein’ movement. This movement does not relate to any specific set of ideals, and it predates Diamond herself; that said, she is seen as a key figure within it. Diamond argued for a therapeutic reading of the Tractatus, which, if plausible, means that the Investigations and Tractatus are more similar than previously thought. The orthodoxy was shaken.

This dialectic—of which Wittgenstein and Diamond represent only a snapshot—is borne in philosophy time and time again. As one of the three famous post-war women philosophers to come out of Oxford, Iris Murdoch drew attention with her 1970 monograph Sovereignty of Good (SOG). Its iconoclastic attacks on the then-current state of moral philosophy influenced the likes of John McDowell, Charles Taylor, Richard Rorty and Hilary Putnam, who constituted the first-wave of Murdochian scholarship. Yet, they did not engage directly with Murdoch; instead, they used certain elements of her thought for their own projects. An exclusive treatment had to wait until Maria Antonaccio, who, as a graduate student at University of Chicago, put together what would later become the first-wave’s magnum opus: 2000’s Picturing the Human (PTH), the first book dedicated solely to a critical interpretation of Murdoch’s philosophy.

Right now, I suggest we are on the verge of a rebirth of the dialectic I have been tracing, this time in the context of Iris Murdoch and Murdochian scholarship post-Antonaccio. This second-wave, which may be seen as a reaction to Antonaccio, includes—among many others—
A.E. Denham, Niklas Forsberg Nora Hämäläinenand, Richard Moran, David Robjant, and, if successful here, myself.

To locate my unique place, I want to draw an analogy between Wittgenstein and Murdoch on the one hand, and Diamond and myself on the other. Like Wittgenstein, Murdoch’s career is marked by two major works. The first, just noted, is the celebrated SOG. Two decades later, something strange happened: Murdoch released a sprawling, difficult and mysterious philosophical meditation called *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (MGM). Unlike Wittgenstein, traditional understanding has it that Murdoch’s works are largely compatible and coextensive, and that SOG is a better presentation of the same material. I want to challenge this understanding. Thus, like Diamond’s work on Wittgenstein, this dissertation seeks to disrupt orthodoxy. Yet, unlike Diamond, who argues that the *Tractatus* and *Investigations* are more compatible than traditionally thought, I argue that SOG and MGM contain substantial differences, and that the latter should not be ignored.

The body of this dissertation consists of three chapters, and the first chapter is further divided into two parts: (a) and (b). In part (a), I identify my central argument and describe how it shoots through my entire dissertation. Moreover, I identify my interpretive method. In part (b), I identify my sub-argument; I describe how in each of my three chapters, I present one corresponding premise of my sub-argument. In Chapter 2, I discuss Murdoch’s conception of the self by first explicating it as it appears in SOG, and then contrasting it with how it appears in MGM. In the process, I reveal meta-philosophical insights contained within MGM hitherto overlooked. In Chapter 3, I repeat this process for the concept of the Good. I conclude that MGM reveals a tension at the heart of philosophy.
Chapter 1 (b) Layout:
Before discussing the differences between SOG and MGM in chapters 2 and 3, a preliminary interpretation of MGM is in order. (SOG does not receive the same treatment because, as we shall see, it is more straightforward). This allows me to articulate, with greater clarity, the uniqueness of MGM throughout my dissertation. To this end, I suggest that the analysis provided by Stephen Mulhall’s paper ‘Constructing a Hall of Reflection: Perfectionist Edification in Iris Murdoch’s Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals’ is a useful starting place. Mulhall's paper is dedicated solely to MGM; it is my belief that Murdochian scholarship could benefit from a closer inspection of it, which I insist is convincing.

Thus, I draw on Mulhall’s work to introduce my interpretation of MGM. That said, I lay my claim with the caveat that, though Mulhall is largely on the right track, he only gets us so far. The discussion is structured as follows. In the first section, I discuss the underlying theme of MGM, which I believe is key to deciphering the book. Here I also introduce a sub-argument, separate from my main argument, that is developed step-by-step throughout each Chapter of my dissertation. Second, I illustrate the discontinuities between Mulhall’s analysis and my own. In the third and final section, I briefly foreshadow the chapters to come.

1. Mulhall on MGM
According to Mulhall, MGM expresses a tension that exists between our human tendency to engage in a unifying process of the world around us on the one hand, and the process of deconstructing these unities on the other (CHR, 232). The former activity is concerned with constructing sophisticated systems of thought, drawing relations between concepts, and unifying the disparate phenomena of the world; the latter activity directly opposes the former by challenging, deconstructing and revising these unities. Both Mulhall and I believe that this tension is central to MGM.

This evaluation is congruent with remarks concerning the nature of philosophy made earlier in Murdoch’s career. For example, in the first page of SOG, Murdoch states:

There is a two-way movement in philosophy, a movement towards the building of elaborate theories, and a move back again towards the consideration of simple and
obvious facts. McTaggart says time is unreal, Moore says that he has just had his breakfast. Both of these aspects of philosophy are necessary to it (IOP, 1).

While Murdoch shows awareness of this tension in her earlier work (as the above quote suggests), I believe that it is not until MGM that it becomes the focal point of her philosophical vision. What is this tension, exactly? In MGM, Murdoch uses many terms and phrases interchangeably, including “limited whole”, “unity”, “system of thought”, “image” and “picture”, which she pits against a general “deconstructing” activity. These former terms may cause the reader some confusion, especially in the case of ‘image’ and ‘picture’, given that Murdoch never has the artist far from her mind. Indeed, the word ‘picture’ comes from the verb ‘to paint’, and may imply—if you like—a freezing of a particular scene (like a photograph) isolated from any theory or background considerations that interpret why it looks the way it does. ‘Image’, by contrast, is more indicative of a system of thought (consider how the theological notion of imago dei implies more than a picture in its proclamation that man is an image of God). However, there is room to interpret ‘picture’ more along the lines of ‘image’, and we see this in, for example, the translation of ‘Blid’ in Wittgenstein's work, which implies elements of a certain form or model (think of Wittgenstein's ‘picture theory’). I believe this second usage is most appropriately attributed to Murdoch.

To return to the tension, consider first the image-making activity. According to Murdoch, we construct images in our efforts to obtain a better understanding of the nature of ourselves, others, objects, etc. Murdoch establishes as much in the very first passage of MGM:

The idea of a self-contained unity or limited whole is a fundamental instinctive concept. We see parts of things, we intuit whole things. We seem to know a great deal on the basis of very little. Oblivious of philosophical problems and paucity of evidence we grasp ourselves as unities, continuous bodies and continuous minds. We assume the continuity of space and time. This intuitive extension of our claim to knowledge has inspired the reflections of many philosophers (MGM, 1).
Fundamentally, limited wholes are concepts made up of at least two basic parts. When we walk through the park, for example, we may see brown bark and birds perched on broken branches and conceive the limited whole that is a tree. But the analysis need not stop there. For the bark, also a limited whole, is constructed of more basic components that constitute its unity, such as its brown color and rough texture. This analysis can be applied to the color brown and so on. Indeed, once we admit that even seemingly simple and banal concepts are multifaceted under closer scrutiny, we ought to realize that every concept is a limited whole.

Before continuing, I must make an interjection that will be explored in depth shortly below. Under my reading, while all concepts are limited wholes, not all speculation about limited wholes is metaphysical. Put another way, there is a difference between, for example, what an ornithologist does when he classifies birds into families, and what someone does when she speculates as to the nature of the self; the latter engages in metaphysical speculation while former does not. However, before turning to a discussion about what exactly constitutes metaphysical speculation, let us note a few attributes that apply to all limited wholes.

We draw relations between limited wholes; for example, during our stroll through the park, we may perceive separateness between the limited wholes of rocks, weeds and trees, while simultaneously acknowledging the common relation that they all share to an ecosystem. Our tendency to create, and draw relations among, limited wholes is a basic phenomenon of our human existence. No one lives in defiance of this unifying activity; and if such a man were to exist, he would not be intelligible to us. As we will see in Chapter 3, according to Murdoch, all concepts are similar in that they relate to the Good.

Let us now draw our attention to the dismantling activity that is in tension with the activity of constructing limited wholes. Here it is perhaps useful to emphasize Murdoch’s use of the word ‘limited’ as a careful qualifier of the word ‘whole’. For in our attempts to picture the complex nature of the world, we are prone to intellectual error, illusions of the ego and other mistakes (MGM, 321). Therefore, Murdoch believes every limited whole we construct contains an imperfection. For example, suppose somewhere in the Amazon an ornithologist is watching what he believes is an Eclectus parrot based on its distinct color pattern. However, upon paying closer attention to the particularity of the situation confronting him—that the bird’s diet nor mating call matches that of a parrot—he begins to suspect a better classification is in order (e.g., that of a Sun Conure parrot, or even a new species). Thus, he deconstructs the limited whole that
he used to conceptualize the bird in front of him, scrapping its relation to the parrot species
classificatory system (also a limited whole) in the process; and, in its place, he constructs a new
limited whole with a new set of relations.

Now I think one may reasonably ask, against Murdoch, what is the point of positing
limited wholes? After all, if limited wholes are perpetually stretched between the two-way
movement of philosophy, then one may suspect that something Sisyphean is at work. By
articulating this tension, I argue in response that Murdoch is confronting—though not solving,
*per se*—a problem that has puzzled philosophers since the very beginning, i.e. the problem of the
One and the Many. The Pre-Socratics observed that there is unity in being (the One). For
example, at a banausic level, we see a tree rather than a loose collection of bark and leaves; at a
more abstract level we, conceive of everything as unified under the umbrella of space and time.
Yet, they also noted that there exists particularity which is evident in our ability to distinguish
particulars within the unity itself, such as a particular tree or person. The problem therefore is to
determine the relation between this one unity and the many particulars that exist separate from it.
In MGM, Murdoch provides commentary on the nature of this problem. By this, I mean that she
is not seeking a resolution, but rather an expression of the truth that lies behind, or is represented
by, the tension itself.

In MGM, Murdoch is concerned with how this tension applies to philosophy, and restates
it in her preferred terms of that between metaphysics and empiricism: “Philosophy is perpetually
in tension between empiricism and metaphysics, between, one might say, Moore and McTaggart
(MGM, 211).” A correlation can be drawn, then, between the image-making activity described
above with metaphysics, and the deconstructing activity with empiricism. In other words, at least
some of our attempts to construct systems of thought, draw connections between concepts, and
unify perceptions into coherent objects are best described as metaphysical activities. Conversely,
our attempts to deconstruct said structures, relations and unities are an empirical activity. The
occurrence of the terms ‘metaphysics’ and ‘empiricism’ here raises the difficult question of how
to interpret Murdoch’s understanding of them, and signals the transition to my sub-argument
designed to address it.
1.2 Sub-Argument – Premise One

I want now to introduce a sub-argument that will be developed alongside my main argument throughout this dissertation. My sub-argument has three premises, and each chapter of my dissertation develops one premise. The first premise, which I will explicate now, posits a particular understanding of what ‘metaphysics’ amounts to under Murdoch’s thought. Certain Murdochian scholars erroneously attribute to Murdoch a conception of metaphysics that they believe is congruent with Plato’s philosophy; they offer a new, and unorthodox, reading of what Plato is up to when he engages in metaphysical speculation, and based off this they make the further move of attributing this reading to Murdoch as well. I will not tangle with the complex and separate matter of whether this understanding of metaphysics applies to Plato, but I argue that its attribution to Murdoch is a mistake.

Specifically, I have in mind Nora Hämäläinen and David Robjant—the former of which presents mostly commentary of the latter’s work. For this reason, my engagement with this view is centered on Robjant, who perhaps deserves a few words by way of introduction. Robjant sees his philosophy as a corrective of Antonaccio’s influential reading of Murdoch, and offers thorough arguments against it. His reading of Murdoch has gained notoriety, notably in the work of Hämäläinen and Niklas Forsberg; however, it is one I find wanting, and one which I reject by the end of this dissertation. That said, my reading differs from Antonaccio’s own in significant ways as well, and so my objection to Robjant is not an allegiance to Antonaccio. Indeed, my sub-argument is not best classified as a rejection of Robjant or Antonaccio (though this is a consequence), but rather as my own positive thesis about how best to read Murdoch’s thought on various aspects of what we might call ‘metaphysical speculation’—for example, whether and how we should attribute the labels ‘transcendent’ and ‘transcendental’ to concepts such as the self, the other, art, the material world and the Good. But, to present this sub-argument, I begin with an instructive contrast between Robjant’s reading of Murdoch and my own.

In ‘Iris Murdoch’s “Everyday Metaphysical Entities”’, Robjant presents his reading against what he believes is a predominant idea in philosophy, which is the belief that metaphysics is a special subject which philosophers have privileged access to. The crux of his argument is summarized in the following passage:
However, there is another tradition which understands the meaning of 'metaphysics' in a very different way, and therefore suggests a very different reading of Murdoch here. That tradition is inspired by Plato. According to this other tradition every entity is a metaphysical entity: the toe-nails I cut this morning, the thank-you letters I should have written, the emotion of love, the thoughts that go through my head as I write this - everything. Plato's metaphysics is a prime example of such an inclusive metaphysics (EME, 1).

My worry is that if all thought is metaphysical, then the tension sketched above collapses. For we lose the contrast between metaphysical and empirical speculation if both are in fact metaphysical speculation. Thus, Robjant’s reading is at odds with Murdoch’s belief that philosophy is in constant tension between these two activities because the empirical activity is lost, or swallowed up, by metaphysical activity. This empirical activity is meant to “remember the facts” of everyday experience: “In general, empiricism is one essential aspect of good philosophy, just as utilitarianism is one essential aspect of good moral philosophy. It represents what must not be ignored. It remembers the contingent (MGM, 236).” It is as central to philosophy as the metaphysical activity: they are, so to speak, two sides of the same coin. Neither has a privileged status in the pursuit of understanding, as “there are times for piecemeal analysis, modesty and common sense, and other times for ambitious synthesis and the aspiring and edifying charm of lofty and intricate structures (MGM, 211).”

By contrast to Robjant, I argue that positing transcendental arguments is central to MGM. I do not claim that this constitutes an exhaustive account of metaphysics on Murdoch’s behalf; rather, I suggest that most of MGM is concerned with furthering transcendental arguments, and that these arguments are metaphysical. The word ‘transcendental’ is closely associated with Kant, who provided anti-skeptical deductions, or proofs, to establish his categories, reject Hume’s causal skepticism and refute idealism. More generally, transcendental arguments are understood as anti-skeptical arguments that aim to establish the conditions necessary for some experienced. Typically, they have the form:
P
P → Q

Q

P is an appeal to an obvious experience that is difficult, even for a skeptic, to doubt. For example, one might appeal to our having the experience of events being in a particular sequence or order. Q, in contrast, is the very thing that the skeptic doubts; and the argument functions such that, if the skeptic accepts P, then he ought to accept Q as well. So, for example, Q might be the premise ‘time is real’. Thus, against someone like McTaggart, the transcendental argument seeks to establish what is in doubt as a condition necessary for an indubitable experience to be as it is. Of course, this is just a toy example (McTaggart has sophisticated replies to this very argument), but the point remains.

While Murdoch often disagrees with Kant, she was greatly influenced by him. Unlike Kant, she is not interested in using transcendental arguments to establish an all-encompassing framework or metaphysical theory. However, she did believe in the existence of metaphysical unities: “There is a false unity and multiplicity and a true unity and multiplicity (MGM, 165).” I believe that Murdoch employs transcendental arguments to establish “true unity”, ever mindful not to get carried away. In this respect, she is like Schopenhauer, who approved of parts of Kant’s system, but nonetheless rejected many of its conclusions. For example, he celebrated Kant’s distinction between the phenomenal world and the Thing-in-itself (which he called the ‘Will to Live’), but despised (Schopenhauer was inclined to use strong language) Kant’s claim that the noumenal showed itself in the concept of duty. In MGM, Murdoch models her approach to metaphysics after Schopenhauer. Consider:

Schopenhauer here expresses a new (modern) definition of metaphysics or metaphysical craving (one which would also be acceptable to Plato) when he speaks of our finite nature together with our passionate desire to understand ‘the world’ which we attempt to intuit ‘as a whole’ (MGM, 79).
What Murdoch means is that Schopenhauer rightly strikes a balance between empiricism and metaphysics in his approach to philosophy; he uses metaphysical unities, but departs freely from them when they affront his common sense: “Schopenhauer, often in his manifold pages the empiricist, the aspiring mystic, the advocate of common-sense, the friend of animals, the generous lively polymath, interested in everything, can also be, and at his most metaphysical, the cynic or stoic (MGM, 67).” Here Murdoch speaks to his dual nature: his cynicism—denoted by his evil deterministic noumenal ‘Will to Live’—is counteracted by simple empirical observations that lead him to conclude the importance of, for example, compassion towards animals and openness to new modes of understanding. Murdoch, I believe, takes a similar approach in MGM.

To return to Robjant, my reading differs in that I believe empiricism is indispensable to Murdoch, which is made evident by her treatment of Schopenhauer in MGM. Whereas Robjant believes that Murdoch holds that all thought is metaphysical in virtue of being about metaphysical entities, I believe that Murdoch thinks metaphysical thought is more specialized. It may be impossible to say exactly what metaphysics amounts to for her, but transcendental speculation, I suggest, is a hallmark of it. Robjant and I may agree to the extent that we both believe that any experience can be used as a premise in a transcendental argument (indeed, the first premise of a transcendental argument is a very general appeal to some evident experience); however, we sharply disagree over what constitutes a genuine metaphysical thought in that he believes that all thought is metaphysical, whereas I do not. Put another way, I do not deny the possibility that thought about clipping one’s toenails can be metaphysical, but assert forcefully that the inverse conclusion is almost always the case. Robjant cannot (nor does he want to) accommodate this fact.

2. Form and Style in MGM
I now turn to matters of form and style within MGM. A major complaint is that MGM reads like a stream of consciousness with little care given to the organization of ideas. I argue that though the book initially appears to have little coherent structure, upon closer inspection—and with the tension just noted in mind—the structure reveals itself. The book is concerned with many concepts that Murdoch believes are central to morality, and the ways in which certain philosophers, to use Mulhall’s words, “either exaggerate or deny their limited-wholeness (CHR,
Mulhall notes five, though I insist there exist six. They are the self, the other, the material world, language, the work of art, and (I proclaim, contra Mulhall) the Good.

With fluidity and ease, Murdoch demonstrates her familiarity with a wide-ranging cast of philosophers, providing insight as to where they stand on the six topics. Plato, Kant, Wittgenstein, Simone Weil, Hume, Schopenhauer, Descartes and Derrida form the main ensemble, while the supporting cast consists of Hegel, Martin Buber, Kierkegaard and Anselm (though, in some cases, they play just as significant a role as the aforementioned).

In fitting with the schema set forth, Murdoch insists that great metaphysical texts, and the philosophers who write them, are themselves limited wholes. Regarding metaphysical texts, they are constantly analyzed and re-analyzed across 500 pages filled with Murdoch’s clear prose. And while her style may initially appear needlessly repetitive, this is a well utilized rhetorical device: she is constantly returning to these philosophers in different contexts to see whether their ideas may have gone underappreciated or, conversely, overly so.

Likewise, when it comes to the metaphysician herself, and as stated by Mulhall: “the idea of a person is itself a limited whole, one of the poles around which our reality is organized: an accurate response to another human being must therefore acknowledge her fundamental integrity as an item in the world, the continuity of the selfhood that holds together but is importantly qualified by the unplumbable complexities, depths and obscurities of its consciousness (CHR, 235).” Thus, we must walk a fine line when appropriating the metaphysician and her texts, careful not to bend them to our own theoretical needs, for that would be to deny their complexity.

3. Moving Beyond Mulhall - Exploring the Tension
I think Mulhall does well to highlight the tension that exists between the metaphysical and empirical activities in which we are perpetually engaged. Furthermore, he rightly notes five limited wholes MGM is dedicated to exploring, which are the self, the other, language, the work of art, and the material world. Yet, other than a very brief discussion of the way in which Murdoch takes Derrida to exaggerate the limits of language, he does not actually examine how the tension is applied to these concepts. Instead, he simply says, without further engagement, that they are her concern. I suggest that my dissertation, in a way, carries on where he left off in that
it shall examine the nature of this tension in detail, especially within the context of contemporary Murdochian literature.

In this respect, my project mirrors elements of MGM. Whereas Murdoch brings along a cast consisting of Plato, Kant, Weil, and many others, I bring along a cast consisting of Mulhall, Antonaccio, Robjant, Hämäläinen with support from Weil and Taylor. Just as MGM examines the great metaphysicians and their texts from all sides, my dissertation examines these contemporary philosophers’ attempts to appropriate Murdoch’s thought into their own projects. Antonaccio and Mulhall are to my dissertation what Plato and Kant are to Murdoch’s MGM: the philosophers who are largely right, but who are still not entirely edifying.

To conclude this Chapter, let us foreshadow the discussion to come. The rest of my dissertation is composed of two chapters, which inspect two of the six key concerns of MGM respectively: the self and the Good. Of course, my choice to focus on these two limited wholes is somewhat arbitrary in the sense I could have just as well written a dissertation of the same length on, for example, the other and language in MGM (I suspect a full interpretation of the six phenomena of MGM would have to be book length). Yet, my choice is not without good reason. For the self and the Good interlock in interesting ways in Murdoch’s philosophy, and have the added advantage of being the stars of most of secondary literature.

To stress their close relationship, my chapters on the self and the Good are isomorphic. Specifically, Chapter 2 opens with an interpretation of the self in SOG and then transitions to an interpretation of the self in MGM and the differences between the two, while Chapter 3 begins with the Good in SOG and then transitions to the Good in MGM (as well as their differences). The order of the chapters is no accident. The keystone to my reading of MGM is the assertion that the Good exists in a different way than any other concept, including the other five phenomena of MGM. Thus, by placing Chapter 2 on the self before Chapter 3 on the Good, the structure of my dissertation allows me to assert more forcefully that the Good is sovereign over all else.
Chapter 2: The Self

Chapter 2 Layout:
In this Chapter, I further both my main argument and sub-argument through a discussion of the self. First, I introduce Murdoch’s conception of the self in SOG. Second, I introduce the self as it appears in MGM, noting its differences with SOG. Third, I present the second premise of my sub-argument via a discussion of imagination. Fourth, I consider an objection to my interpretation of Murdoch on the self before offering a response. I conclude that the reality of the self is established if we accept Murdoch’s qualifications on what a philosophical argument can accomplish.

1. The Self in SOG
In SOG, Murdoch challenges a conception of the self that identifies value with the outward conduct of a moral agent. In its place, she provides a rough outline of her alternative conception of the self as one with a robust, and morally saturated, inner life. Thus, SOG furthers two theses: one negative, one positive. The negative thesis attempts to undermine the plausibility of the (then) contemporary conception of moral agency by offering three arguments against it. However, I am only concerned with two in my discussion; the third is too general to express succinctly, and anyways shows itself in the other two arguments. After each of these two negative arguments, Murdoch provides details pertaining to her alternative—that is, positive—conception of the self. The negative arguments take up most of the paper, while Murdoch’s alternative conception of the self receives slightly less attention. Before turning to said arguments, it is useful to explicate their target to provide some context.

In IOP, Murdoch chooses Stuart Hampshire—specifically his views expounded in Thought and Action (his magnum opus) and Disposition and Memory (an Ernest Jones lecture)—as a representative of the dominant conception of moral agency. The keystone to Hampshire’s man is his value-creating, and isolated, will. This attribute can be broken down further into two parts. The first part is an inflated conception of the will, while the second is a conception of the world, itself devoid of value, in which this will operates.
Let us begin with the first part. Hampshire’s assertion that “I identify myself with my will” means that the will is at the heart of his conception of the self (IOP, 303). Indeed, a moral agent creates value through acts of the will; we can describe the will as leaping into action, introducing value into the world in the process. Moreover, the will is isolated, meaning that it is divorced from our faculties of reason, thought, feeling and all else. In other words, the will is choice alone. The other keystone to this conception of the self is the faculty of reason, which works in tandem with the will. Objectivity is the benchmark of reason; it is the standard every agent strives for in his assessment of the facts. The difference between reason and the will is that the latter is entirely subjective and non-cognitive, while the former is cognitive faculty that aims for an impersonal understanding of a given situation. Together, the choosing will and the faculty of reason produce action, which is the locus of value. Freedom, as I discuss shortly, consists precisely in the unity of impersonal reason and personal will: use your reason to survey the situation, then use your will to act either rationally or—as Hampshire says—“fly in the face of the facts (IOP, 404).”

In SOGOC, Murdoch traces this emphasis on the will to Kant: “Kant abolished God and made man God in His stead. We are still living in the age of the Kantian man, or Kantian man-god (SOGOC, 365).” According to Murdoch, we are now essentially faced with Kant’s conception of the self without his metaphysical framework—his noumenal ‘thing-in-itself’ going the way of the cogitatio and sense-datum. Despite this, Kant’s “man is still with us, free, independent, lonely, powerful, rational, responsible, brave, the hero of so many novels and books of moral philosophy (SOGOC, 365).” Morality, in Kant’s philosophy, is a matter of rational action only, and he never fully recognizes the role of the emotions—or inner life—in such matters; however, an exception to this rule is his conception of the Sublime, which is a feeling that accompanies the confrontation of the boundless and contingent nature of the world. It is often terrifying and painful, though Kant believes it can be noble and splendid when we return to ourselves with a deeper appreciation of the finitude of our own understanding. In Kant’s philosophy, “the emotions are allowed to return to the scene as a kind of allowable, rather painful thrill which is a byproduct of our status as dignified beings [italics mine] (SOGOC, 367).” Crucially, however, the Sublime is not itself under the umbrella of morality, but rather it is a subsidiary feeling, or byproduct, of the defeat of reason.
The second part of this conception of the self I wish to highlight is the image of the world, itself devoid of value, in which the will operates. This image, according to Murdoch, is the product of “an uncriticised conception of science where Hume left off (IOP, 318).” Fundamentally, Hume believed that the material world is constructed of atoms which press images—or sense data—upon our minds. These atoms are themselves devoid of value; value, according to Hume, is a uniquely human creation held together by mere custom and habit, and has no deeper basis in reality. This image of the world was informed by Hume’s admiration for the scientific breakthroughs of his time (especially those of Newton), including the emergence of a form of natural physicalism that challenged some of the mystical elements of the dominant Christian worldview. Crucially, Murdoch believes Hume’s image of the world remains the same, albeit articulated in different terms: an impersonal world of atoms has been recast by the linguistic empiricists as a world governed by publicly established, impersonal rules (IOP, 319).

1.2 Against Hampshire - Murdoch’s Alternative Sketched

The first of the two negative arguments I am concerned with is presented with help from the well-known M and D example. In IOP, Murdoch asks us to imagine a situation where a mother ‘M’ is thinking about her future daughter-in-law ‘D’ (IOP, 312). M is not impressed with her son’s partner and thinks he has married beneath him. M finds D to be unsophisticated, juvenile and even rude; yet, being the well-mannered and dignified woman that she is, M does not show any outward hostility. Instead, her judgments are contained within her own thoughts. D dies, however, and M begins a process of critical self-reflection many years later. She begins to think perhaps I was unfair, maybe D is not what I first thought—let me pay closer attention to my memories of her. Attribute-by-attribute, M begins to see D in a new light: not impulsive but spontaneous, not rude but straightforward. Through M’s acknowledgment of her own deceptive bias—that, for example, she is snobbish—M gains a better perception of D.

Murdoch argues that there are things about the M and D example that we feel “irresistibly inclined” to say, but are “relentlessly prevented” from saying due to the restrictions forced upon us by modern-philosophy-man. What we want to say, “as yet without justification”, is that there occurs morally relevant inner reflection (e.g., the attention that M retrospectively gives to D) that cannot be captured in terms of action or dispositions to act (IOP, 316). This inner reflection is not formless mental dribble, but instead shares an important relation with external reality.
Moreover, metaphors of touch and movement do not capture M’s inner reflection, but rather metaphors of vision and sight are better suited; and thick moral words and phrases like ‘spontaneous’ and ‘straightforward’ best describe D’s character. Finally, M’s understanding of concepts like fairness deepened in a way that does not lend itself to being codified in public rules of use. This deepening process has no concrete end-point, but rather continues indefinitely as we progress through life (i.e. it is infinitely perfectible). Therefore, meaning deepens in the direction of the inner and private, not the outer and public; and if we are to give an accurate account of meaning, we cannot disregard the former (IOP, 317).

I think that the argument is strong, straightforward and hinges upon our familiarity with situations like the one above. It addresses itself to our phenomenological experience, which is neither alien nor foggy, but is nevertheless excluded by modern-philosophy-man. Murdoch’s appeal to our need for a type of moral realism that can account for phenomenological experience shares interesting similarities with Charles Taylor’s philosophy, specifically his views espoused in Section One of Sources of the Self:

Theories like behaviorism or certain strands of contemporary computer-struck cognitive psychology, which declare “phenomenology” irrelevant on principle, are based on a crucial mistake. They are “changing the subject”, in Donald Davidson’s apt expression. What we need to explain is people living their lives; the terms in which they cannot avoid living them cannot be removed from the explanandum, unless we can propose other terms in which they could live them more clairvoyantly. We cannot just leap outside of these terms altogether, on the grounds that their logic doesn’t fit some model of “science” and that we know a priori that human beings must be explicable in this “science”. This begs the question. How can we ever know that humans can be explained by any scientific theory until we actually explain how they live their lives in its terms (SS, 58)?

Taylor advocates what he calls the Best Account (BA) principle, which roughly asserts that whichever terms make the most sense of our experience as moral agents in both “explanatory and life uses” ought to be included in our moral theory (SS, 58). The BA principle, then, is an attempt to vindicate approaches to moral philosophy that account for the richness of
experience—a richness that is depleted by reductive naturalism. I think we can ascribe to Murdoch something like Taylor’s BA principle as long as we are mindful of Murdoch’s warning not to accept appearances at face value.

I want to preface Murdoch’s second argument, which concerns freedom, by first considering her account of moral progress, which she understands as a Platonic pilgrimage from appearance to reality. Put in Murdoch’s preferred terminology, one progresses through the acquisition of a moral vision free from fantasy. In SOG, Murdoch associates a variety of terms with moral vision, and this has led some to criticize her account as incoherent. For example, she uses the words ‘vision’, ‘looking’, ‘seeing’ and ‘attention’ sometimes without clear delineation. Though I must admit Murdoch runs terms too closely together at times in SOG, I do not think that her view is incoherent, but instead incomplete. Indeed, in what follows, I present my reading of SOG’s philosophy of vision (as it is sometimes called), noting how it relates to moral progress and freedom.

In SOG, we are introduced to the concepts of ‘looking’, ‘attention’ and ‘unselfing’, and these remain important to Murdoch’s philosophy throughout MGM. Let us begin with ‘looking’. In IOP, Murdoch writes “I would like on the whole to use the word ‘attention’ as a good word and use some more general term like ‘looking’ as the neutral word (IOP, 329).” How we interpret ‘looking’ here depends on our interpretation of Murdoch’s description of it as a “neutral word”. It is a mistake, I think, to suggest that Murdoch believes someone can have a morally neutral take on a situation. Instead, I want to suggest that when one looks, one sees morally; however, this activity is not innately good or bad for the subject. An analogy to glasses is useful here. We might say that one is always looking through tinted glasses, and that the degree to which one’s glasses are tinted is a reflection of one’s moral effort (clearer glasses require more effort). Thus, looking is normative in the sense that we look through a lens whose shade is predetermined by our prior efforts to obtain a better vision.

To obtain a better vision, we need an activity that can lighten the shading of our glasses. To this end, Murdoch introduces ‘attention’, which is a technical term adopted from Simone Weil. When we attend to an object, we try to align better our understanding of that object with reality. By contrast to ‘looking’, the normative force of the term ‘attending’ is captured through the process of attending. Attending is an activity that is innately good for the subject: when I am attending, I am doing good. Attention is a difficult task, and Murdoch thinks most of the time we
are simply looking through our glasses instead of trying to lighten their tint. Together, these two terms make up the heart of Murdoch’s ethics of vision.

Many—including Blum, Antonaccio and more—suggest that early Murdoch’s emphasis on articulating an ethics of vision, contra modern-philosophy-man’s bloated will, results in an unsatisfactory avoidance of the will altogether. By contrast, I argue that inherent in early Murdoch’s account of ‘attention’ is a willing component. I believe this is evident when we examine the concept of ‘attention’ more closely, noting how Murdoch appropriates the term from Weil. Given that Weil is a French philosopher, it is perhaps unsurprising that Murdoch is working with a French understanding of ‘attention’ herself. Consider this passage from Weil on attention:

Our thought should be in relation to all particular and already formulated thoughts, as a man on a mountain, who, as he looks forward, sees also below him, without actually looking at them, a great many forests and plains. **Above all our thought should be empty, waiting, not seeking anything, but ready to receive in its naked truth the object that is to penetrate it** [italics mine] (WFG, 35).

Consider the use of the word ‘waiting’ in the last sentence. The French word ‘attention’ does not simply imply that one focuses intently on an object before oneself as it does in English; instead, it implies a certain kind of patience on behalf of the person who is attending. That is, to attend is to wait patiently for reality to present itself to oneself, in whatever way that might be. Now, to me, it seems implausible to suggest that this kind of waiting required by attention can be satisfied without the use of one’s will. Without flogging a dead horse, technology—especially smartphones—has decreased our tolerance for sitting quietly alone. Impatience is perhaps more common than ever before; it is, in other words, a way of being for many of us. It is not easy to change one’s ways: like any skill, patience is learned, and learning requires will. Thus, against Antonaccio and Blum, I maintain that Weil’s, and therefore Murdoch’s, use of attention entails some notion of willing.

To understand how attending leads to moral progress, it is useful to describe first that which impedes progress. In OGG, Murdoch adopts a diagnosis of human beings as innately selfish and fantasy-prone. This diagnosis may be traced to Plato and Freud, though we must
respect Murdoch’s claim that “I am not a ‘Freudian’ and the truth of this or that particular view of Freud does not here concern me (OGG, 341).” More generally, she wants to take from Freud the “realistic and detailed picture of the fallen man”, as well as our tendency to deceive ourselves about our motives (“objectivity and unselfishness are not natural to human beings”) (OGG, 341).” We construct consoling narratives to protect our egos, and this tendency clouds our ability to see things as they really are. For example, if we do not get the job we applied for, we may blame factors outside our control—such as a nepotistic employer—when it is due to our own insufficiency. The ego, in its attempt to control and consume what is before it, uses fantasy in order to defend itself against the realization that there are realities separate from it.

Murdoch suggests that we combat fantasy through a process of unselfing; salvation from the ego is a process of disconnecting from ourselves and connecting to an external reality. Through this process, we obtain a better vision, purify our psychic energy (what Plato calls ‘Eros’) and reorientate our desires. Crucially, the self is something to be wary of, even distrusted, in our search for truth: “In such a picture sincerity and self-knowledge, those popular merits, seem less important. It is an attachment to what lies outside the fantasy mechanism, and not a scrutiny of the mechanism itself, that liberates (OGG, 355).” We should not celebrate ourselves, or spend much time looking inward, because “in reality the good self is very small indeed, and most of what appears good is not (OGG, 355).”

Murdoch believes that we unself by attending to (1) beauty in nature and art, (2) disciplines and crafts (i.e. Platonic techne) and (3) other individuals (SOGOC, 372-373). As per (1), attending to beauty in nature is the easiest but least effective method, for it trivially turns us away from ourselves and towards that which is outside (mountains, lakes, etc.). Attending to beauty in art, by contrast, is more complex: while bad art is prone to fantasy (think of the way bad films have unrealistic happy endings), good art forces us to confront our own mortality and the contingency of ordinary life. For this reason, Murdoch takes Shakespearean tragedies, as well as Tolstoy’s novels, as paradigms of good art. Concerning (2), Murdoch cites the process of learning a new language. Unlike appreciating the sea, learning Russian is a process that requires dedicated attention over time, which teaches us that progress is not instantaneous.

The most challenging and important task is to give (3) disciplined and loving attention to other individuals. This involves learning to see individuals without the distortion of one’s own ego, respecting their separate perspectives on reality and subsequently forming limits on our own
actions towards them. Just like learning Russian, learning about a person requires practice and dedicated attention over time; however, there is an important difference between (3) and other pursuits, which is this: Even though Murdoch’s perfectionist account of meaning precludes the possibility of ever knowing a concept in full, we can make sense of the pedestrian claim that one has mastered a craft in the way, for example, a First Chair in the London Symphony Orchestra has mastered her instrument. Crucially, by contrast, there can be no mastery of another person. To suggest otherwise, inside or outside of philosophical contexts, expresses an arrogance that is at odds with the complexity and depth of human beings.

To return now to the third and final argument in IOP, Murdoch attacks freedom as the lonely will implicit in modern-philosophy-man, suggesting instead that we should think of freedom as consisting in understanding without illusion. The point is made best, I think, with an example.

Suppose you are faced with the decision of confronting your friend ‘T’ about his manipulative tendencies. You wrestle with the thought for weeks; you know that unearthing something so personal could hurt him badly, but you also know that such tendencies make you and others uncomfortable (perhaps T is a bad manipulator with no touch of subtlety). Initially, you lean towards withholding your grievances out of self-preservation, fearing all the ways it could backfire and how you might be labeled a prig. However, after holding T in your mind and attending to his situation, you decide that talking to him is the right choice—after all, others who are not as familiar with his positive characteristics are beginning to distance themselves from his transparent attempts at manipulation, and so the pain caused by the confrontation seems worthwhile if it salvages his relationships and forces reflection upon an ugly trait. Moreover, confrontation of this caliber is not something you encounter often (in fact, ever before), so it is unlikely that it reflects a combative character flaw deep within you. You and T agree to a time and place to meet; and with resolve, you sit down to find that at the moment of execution your words do not clamor out in a stutter, but instead flow with a certain weightlessness. The execution, in the end, was the easiest part: the inner contemplation beforehand reveals itself, in retrospect, to be the true struggle.

Freedom does not reside in your ability to survey the objective facts of the situation and choose (as the behaviorist believes); instead, it is inextricably tied to your understanding of T and his situation. Murdoch quotes Weil’s contention that “we should pay attention until we no longer
have the choice.” At first, you did not want to confront T out of fear that you would be deemed self-righteous by him and others; and in this way, your thoughts were self-centered and distorted, serving to protect your own ego rather than the pursuit of truth. After carefully attending to T and his situation, however, you deepened your understanding and were thereby freed (to an extent) from your ego—in other words, you attended until the right choice was the only one left. The more you attended, the more you obtained knowledge which set you free: “Freedom, itself a moral concept and not just a prerequisite of morality, cannot here be separated from knowledge (IOP, 330).” Thus, on this model, freedom is a matter of attending to situations, people, and things to gain knowledge, which counteracts illusions of the ego.

2. The Self in MGM – Introduction to Imagination

I want to introduce a metaphor to help describe what Murdoch’s up to in her discussion of the self in MGM. To this end, we can think of Chapters 6-11 as represented by a large painting that has been abandoned and, after many years, covered with a thick coat of dust which veils the painting behind. This dust signifies various philosophers’ characterizations of the self, while the painting itself represents the self’s true nature. In Chapter 6-9, Murdoch compares and contrasts many conceptions of the self—from Plato to Derrida—via multiple angles in order to show where they go astray, as well as capture the insights from their images of man that cannot be ignored. In doing so, Murdoch wipes away the dust to reveal large patches of painting. However, not every wipe reveals painting: some leave behind only large sections of untouched canvas and blank space. In Chapters 10 and 11, I suggest Murdoch seizes control and adumbrates what is missing with positive considerations of her own, particularly through her account of imagination. In the remainder of this Chapter, I do not provide discussion on Murdoch’s negative theses in order to provide adequate space for my reading of her positive theses, especially on imagination. I conclude this Chapter with an objection and response to my reading, in the process revealing some of MGM’s meta-philosophical insights hitherto overlooked.

The discussion is structured as follows. First, I introduce Murdoch’s conception of imagination by first noting—as she does in Chapter 11—its similarities with Kant’s conception. Using my example of ‘T the manipulator’, I describe how Murdoch's concept of the imagination relates to the concepts of will, reason and freedom. Second, I present the second premise of my sub-argument, which posits that the kind of metaphysical speculation at work in MGM is best
described as an imaginative attempt to establish the conditions necessary for human experience to be as it is. Third, I discuss how ‘imagination’ relates to Murdoch’s philosophy of vision more generally by comparing it with the concepts—presented to us in SOG—of ‘looking’, ‘attention’ and ‘unselfing’. In doing so, I argue against Antonaccio’s belief that MGM reflects a change from SOG’s philosophy of vision in virtue of the imagination’s willing component. I conclude that my reading better captures the nature of change between SOG and MGM’s conception of the self.

In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant presents the imagination as mediator between sense and thought. To provide one with knowledge of the phenomenal world, one’s imagination acts to synthesize sense and thought together into empirical objects. As Murdoch notes, the imagination is critical for Kant in that it acts at the transcendental barrier of consciousness, fusing together our experience of the world through the combination of space time (i.e. forms of perception and intuition) with the categories (i.e. forms of thought of the greatest generality) (MGM, 308). For this reason, imagining is a transcendental activity: “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 (MGM, 310).” Without it, Kant would not have been able to explain our experience of a unified world.

How this process works is a matter of great debate: “is the schema to be thought of as a sort of image or a sort of method of assembly? Is Kant’s account ‘psychological’, or ‘phenomenalist’ (MGM, 309)?” Murdoch, I think, is not after a decisive reading of Kant on this matter; rather, she wants to use him as an illustrative introduction to imagination before departing ways in favor of her own account, which I think should be understood as phenomenological. By this, I do not intend to align Murdoch with phenomenology in the style of Husserl, or any other descendent of Merleau-Ponty (she argues against such views in MGM). Instead, I mean that she is trying to account for the richness of human experience (in the same way as, for example, Charles Taylor), which so happens to require a robust account of the imagination. But first, more on Kant.

Kant’s imagination operates at different degrees of spontaneity, to be conceived on a scale: “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 (MGM, 309).” Thus, imagination not only makes our experience of the world possible at a fundamental and banal level, it also a flexible
enough concept to allow for space for invention. Kant confines this creative capacity of the imagination to the realm of the aesthetic, where he stresses the creative power of geniuses who can create new forms of understanding. Murdoch puts it thus: “Genius, or high inspiration, is a spontaneous imaginative power which enables the artist to create new unique original forms (MGM, 312).” The enemy of genius is mediocre art, which simply follows rules of convention (again, think of the way in which a bad movie follows a simple formula culminating in a happy conclusion). By contrast, fine art created by geniuses seeks truth; and to this end, it establishes its own rules of verification.

Crucially for Kant, this creative use of the imagination is not required for one to be moral. Indeed, it can be understood by way of analogy with the concept of the Sublime, which recall is not part of morality strictly speaking, but is instead a subsidiary feeling which accompanies it. To be moral, we do not have to be geniuses: we need only to be rational.

Murdoch wants to take Kant’s conception of imagination and let it out of its box, so to speak. The crucial passage is this:

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 our 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, farther 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 (MGM, 314).

Murdoch believes the creative aspects of the imagination should not be conceived as separate from morality, but instead central to it. We are constantly using our imaginations in our attempts to understand better the world and our place in it. This is not something unique to geniuses, who create new forms of understanding, but is familiar to everyone. In this way, we are
all artists: “We do not have to go as far as genius, but only as far as the category of the existing individual which Kierkegaard asserted against Hegel (MGM, 268).” The crucial move is Murdoch’s liberation of the imagination from Kant’s confines of the purely aesthetic, highlighting its moral uses.

To get a better feel for how this works, I wish to discuss the relation imagination shares with the concepts of will, reason and freedom as presented in MGM. Murdoch, I think, does not want to stray far from what we may call a pedestrian understanding of imagination; she wants to work with our familiarity to show how inseparable it is from our understanding of the world. To this end, recall ‘T the manipulator’ from earlier in this Chapter. I asked you to consider a situation where you struggle to decide whether to confront your friend T about his manipulative tendencies, and argued that this struggle is an expression of freedom itself. There I put the matter in terms of attending to your friend T, but I think the example lends itself to a discussion of imagination (I consider the relation between attention and imagination in the next section).

In your attempts to gain a better, more truthful, understanding of T, you had to imagine the various possibilities relevant to his situation. For example, you had to imagine whether he would have any friends left in the future if you kept quiet about his ugly behavior, and whether you—as his close friend—were the right one to bring such a sensitive matter to the forefront. This imaginative process was not easy and required sustained effort. Here we can already see that some element of internal willing is necessary to this imaginative process, for one does not give sustained effort to something without willing it before one’s mind. Of course, certain thoughts and feelings (usually anxieties) are brought before the mind without a feeling of being willed; yet, if we consider our response to them in the context of the T example, we see that there is a difference. Indeed, we often try to dismiss the former without exploring, or imagining, their nature; and if we do, then this indicates a genuine act of imagination because we are trying to understand the possibilities relevant to our feeling, or thinking, in such a way. Next, regarding the relation between the imagination and reason, Murdoch says that:

Imagination, if the concept is in question at all, can scarcely be thought of as morally neutral. When we settle down to be ‘thoroughly rational’ about a situation, we have already, reflectively or unreflectively, imagined it in a certain way. Our deepest imaginings which structure the world in which ‘moral
judgments’ occur are already evaluations. Perception itself is a mode of evaluation (MGM, 314).

Through such remarks, Murdoch commits herself to the idea that one’s take on a situation is imbued, or pregnant, with value as a result of imagining it in a certain way. Reason—as portrayed by the neo-behaviourist, for example—is often treated as a faculty that somehow surveys the facts of the matter simpliciter. By contrast, Murdoch suggests here that imagination is contained within, or is prior to, reason: we cannot somehow detach our reason from our prior efforts to understand the world. These prior efforts, in turn, require imagination.

With these considerations about the will and reason in mind, let us turn to freedom. Recall that, for the neo-behaviorists, there is an interplay between reason and the will such that one uses his reason to survey the situation, and then uses his will to act either rationally or irrationally. Freedom resides in the moment of choice itself. In MGM, Murdoch describes freedom as "the triumph of imagination over fantasy (MGM, 315).” This reinforces the idea from my discussion of freedom in SOG that freedom, for Murdoch, is tied to the acquisition of knowledge. As noted, I believe that Murdoch’s use of attention contains a willing component, so there is no difference between SOG and MGM in this regard. However, in MGM, Murdoch’s description of imagination is put in terms that highlight more forcefully the importance of this willing component.
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