ROCZNIKI FILOZOFICZNE
Tom LXXI, zeszyt 2 – 2023
DOI: https://doi.org/10.18290/rf237102.13

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IRIS MURDOCH'S CONCEPTION OF MORAL DEVELOPMENT IN HER NOVEL *THE GOOD APPRENTICE*[*]

> The task of attention goes on all the time and
> at apparently empty and everyday moments we are "looking",
> making those little peering efforts of imagination
> which have such important cumulative results.
>
> (Iris Murdoch, "The Idea of Perfection," 334)

Iris Murdoch is convinced that a person's moral development is constituted not only by the ability to act rightly and make use of one's freedom but also by the ability to see and recognise the morally significant characteristics of a particular person or a particular fragment of reality that the moral subject participates in. What underlies this view of morality is the criticism of behaviourist and existentialist approaches in theories of morality. Murdoch believes that these approaches offer false explanations of human moral life. She contrasts them with her own theory of moral life, based on the concepts of attention and vision of truth (see BLUM 2012). In her opinion, this alternative conception explains moral life much more accurately and is closer to ordinary people's approach to morality.

As observed by Justin Broackes, Murdoch's conception found in "The Idea of Perfection,"[1] an essay full of extremely important intuitions, com-

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[*] This research was supported by the University of Oxford project "New Horizons for Science and Religion in Central and Eastern Europe", funded by the John Templeton Foundation. The opinions expressed in the publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the view of the John Templeton Foundation.

prises at least three theses. Murdoch believes that, (1) rather than think of will as the creator of values, we need to acknowledge the possibility of speaking of *vision* and *discovery* through attention to moral reality;[2] (2) rather than restrict the concept of morality to issues essentially associated with behaviour, we should acknowledge the significance of mental states such as moral reflection, whose aim is to get a fair view of another person's moral character; (3) rather than think of freedom as making a choice responsible for nothing but the person's unhindered will, we should acknowledge that the ideal form of freedom is, simply, doing the things we consider good "almost automatically" (IP, 29). Moral work, then, largely means the constant activity of attention that consists in building one's moral picture of people and things in the world and adjusting it to their actual nature (BROACKES 2012, 36–37); this amounts to controlling one's gaze, which has to be directed upon reality. Central to this view of morality is the concept of attention—directing it at and focusing it on elements morally significant for a given situation, which is the object of the moral subject's vision. As Murdoch writes, "this is something of which saints speak and which any artist will readily understand. The idea of a patient, loving regard, directed upon a person, a thing, a situation, presents the will not as unimpeded movement but as something very much more like 'obedience'" (IP, 331)—obedience to reality. Murdoch is convinced that—as Broackes writes—rather than regard as real only that which meets the scientific requirements of public observability or decidability for objective observers, we should allow for the moral world to include everything that meets with "a just and loving gaze directed upon an individual reality" (IP, 327; BROACKES 2012, 47).

In my opinion, her criticism seems to be justified, and the proposal she has in mind fits in well with the way she presents the characters of her novels. In the present article, I would like first (I) to focus on what view of man,

[1] "The Idea of Perfection" and two other essays ("On 'God' and 'Good'" and "The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts") make up a collection titled *The Sovereignty of Good*, published in 1970. Justin Broackes believes that these three texts pursue the same program of replacing the conceptions of moral psychology and the place of morality in the world that were known in the 1950s and 1960s with a new conception, but its analyses address different issues (BROACKES 2012, 38). I have adopted the following abbreviations to refer to these essays: IP for "The Idea of Perfection," OGG for "On 'God' and 'Good'," and SGC for "The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts." The remaining abbreviations, used in this article to refer to Murdoch's other works, are explained in the Works Cited section.

[2] This is also pointed out by Antonaccio (2000): "She … represents morality as a disciplined achievement of purified vision or consciousness" (130), "The fundamental moral problem is acquiring clarity of vision as the condition for right action" (131).

created by behaviourism and existentialism, Murdoch criticises and why, and then (II) to show that the alternative view of moral life, particularly of human moral development, based on a change in the quality of consciousness, fits in well with the picture of the protagonist of her novel *The Good Apprentice*. Murdoch supplements the view of man she proposes using (III) the concept of attention and (IV) the conception of the transcendence of persons. In the final section I reflect on whether or not the concept of transcendence of persons questions the possibility of getting to know them by means of attention and, consequently, on whether or not it makes the concept of good, which requires this attention, problematic as well. This means that what needs to be decided on is the meaning of the concept of attention itself, which, I believe, must be based on justice and mercy in the first place rather than only accurate or thorough knowledge of the other person.

1. THE BEHAVIOURIST AND EXISTENTIALIST VIEW OF MAN AND THE THEORY OF MORALITY ACCORDING TO IRIS MURDOCH

Murdoch believes that moral philosophy needs a return to "simple and obvious facts" (IP, 299). Contrary to the moral philosophy dominant in the 1950s and 1960s, she does not maintain that moral values are inexpressible and therefore impossible for the rules of language to apprehend. Referring to the works of Stuart Hampshire (but also those by Richard M. Hare, whom she does not cite in the final version of her text, however), the thinker she considers the main exponent of contemporary moral philosophy, and particularly to his view that the philosophy of mind is supposed to provide terms making it possible to express moral judgments and concepts, she refuses to agree for ethics to be based on a certain philosophy of mind and, consequently, on a certain view of man, his soul, and its relationship to the world—in short, on a certain moral psychology. Murdoch has her own moral psychology to offer. What, then, is the view of man she refuses to agree to? As Broackes observes, Murdoch takes this standard view of man from Hampshire's *Thought and Action*, and it can be summarised in several points. (1) The essence of human moral life is action. (2) Man is a subject in constant motion, moving from intention to action; even human thought manifests itself through action. (3) What should be considered true (real) is that which meets the scientific criterion of interpersonal, public recognizability. (4) That which is internal in man is given through that which is external; if it

is not related to the external, it "has 'a parasitic and shadowy nature'" (IP, 302). (5) Action is the outcome of the will and the intellect taken together (the will is autonomous and personal, whereas the intellect is governed by the impersonal rules of the public system). (6) The will, as pure choice, finds perfect expression in the morally "empty" term "good," which can be used to refer to more or less anything (BROACKES 2012, 39). According to Murdoch, in the above conception morality comes down to a visit to a shop:

> I enter the shop in a condition of totally responsible freedom, I objectively estimate the features of the goods, and I choose. The greater my objectivity and discrimination the larger the number of products from which I can select.… Both as act and reason, shopping is public. Will does not bear upon reason, so the "inner life" is not to be thought of as a moral sphere. Reason deals in neutral descriptions and aims at being the … ideal observer. Value terminology will be the prerogative of the will; but since will is pure choice, pure movement, and not thought or vision, will really requires only action words such as "good" or "right". It is not characteristic of the man we are describing … to possess an elaborate normative vocabulary. Modern ethics analyses "good", the empty action word which is the correlate of the isolated will, and tends to ignore other value terms. Our hero aims at being a "realist" and regards sincerity as the fundamental and perhaps the only virtue. (IP, 305)

Murdoch is convinced that this view of man can be described as behaviourist ("in its connection of the meaning and being of action with the publicly observable"—IP, 305), existentialist ("in its elimination of the substantial self and its emphasis on the solitary omnipotent will"—IP, 305), and utilitarian ("in its assumption that morality is and can only be concerned with public acts"—IP, 305).

As Broackes observes, the key to understanding this view is what Murdoch refers to as the "genetic" view of meaning, which Wittgenstein's attack on private mental objects stems from (BROACKES 2012, 39). Wittgenstein's argument is that the meaning of a word must be fully manifested and established in public usage and through the public rules that determine this usage. This means that concepts referring to internal mental events either (a) are useless (being private, they are incommunicable) or (b) non-existent (being private, they do not exist from the point of view of the public world) (IP, 307). Applying this to the language of psychology, Wittgenstein and his followers claimed that terms referring to mental phenomena such as "pain" or "anger" can be used only in connection with overt description of behaviour,

and applying this to the language of morality resulted in the view outlined above. According to Murdoch, the application of this theory to moral life means that,

> As the "inner life" is hazy, largely absent…, it turns out to be *logically* impossible to take up an idle contemplative attitude to the good. Morality must be action since mental concepts can only be analysed genetically. Metaphors of movement and not vision seem obviously appropriate. Morality, with the full support of logic, abhors the private. Salvation by works is a conceptual necessity. *What* I am doing or being is not something private and personal, but is imposed upon me in the sense of being identifiable only via public concepts and objective observers. (IP, 311)

In this view, with morality coming down to acting under the influence of the will, what is overlooked is that which precedes, or actually leads to, a particular choice rather than a different one and which takes place in the sphere of private experience and in the domain where mental concepts operate.

Murdoch contrasts this behaviourist and existentialist view of morality with an alternative position, which she reaches based on the well-known example of mother-in-law (M) and daughter-in-law (D).[3] M initially feels hostility towards D, considering her "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" (IP, 312). M reflects on the factors that may affect her judgment (her adherence to conventions, her old-fashioned ways, prejudice, narrow-mindedness, snobbery, and jealousy) and makes an effort to patiently and honestly focus on the object of their observation, and this activity "can only be performed privately" (IP, 317). What M does "is not just to see D *accurately* but to see her *justly and lovingly*" (IP, 317, my emphasis). It is then that she discovers that her view of D has changed. She discovers that D is "not vulgar but refreshingly simple, not undignified but spontaneous, not noisy but gay, not tiresomely juvenile but delightfully youthful, and so on" (IP, 313). Morally sig-

[3] Murdoch often uses pictures in philosophy because—as Donna J. Lazenby observes—"philosophy is *picturing*: philosophy involves the reception of, reflection on, and where necessary the re-imagining of, the images human beings use to interpret their lives. Murdoch … is concerned (to use Murdoch-critic Maria Antonaccio's phrase) with 'picturing the human'" (LAZENBY 2014, 47–48).

nificant changes occur in M's mind, not in D's behaviour (see also WIDDOWS 2016, 38–39).

Murdoch reflects on the significance of the events or activities that M engages in. One of the explanations is that M simply "decided to behave well to D and did so; and M's private thoughts will be unimportant and morally irrelevant" (IP, 313)—it is therefore possible to focus on what her outward behaviour reveals. However, as Murdoch explains, "this is one of those exasperating moments in philosophy when one seems to be being relentlessly prevented from saying something which one is irresistibly impelled to say" (IP, 316), and what we are impelled to speak about is the private decisions and inward acts that take place in M when she changes her opinion about D. This is the case when we can imagine also the internal side of the external structure of M's behaviour. A behaviourist-existentialist could say, however, that if there is no external change in behaviour then it is also impossible to attribute meaning to the work that has been done in her. From this perspective, therefore, the idea of M's internal activity turns out to be empty. Murdoch refuses to agree to this way of putting things. In her opinion, "M has in the interim been *active*, she has been *doing* something, something which we approve of, something which is somehow worth doing in itself. M has been morally active in the interim: this is what we want to say and to be philosophically permitted to say" (IP, 314). This means, as Broackes observes, that what we want to say with Murdoch about what happened in M's case must take the following issues into account (BROACKES 2012, 41):

1. There are mental acts of moral reflection that cannot be shown in outward action.

2. In the case of such acts, the representation that suggests itself is moral *vision*.

3. Such acts are not hazy or unimportant; they may be linked with the entire "fabric of being" (IP, 316) of a person like M. They should be described using the metaphor of vision: "M *looks* at D, she attends to D, she focuses her attention. M is engaged in an internal struggle. She may for instance be tempted to enjoy caricatures of D in her imagination" (IP, 317). These acts are neither odd nor hazy—on the contrary, they seem familiar and one may remember them from one's own experience or from descriptions found in many novels.

4. The contents of such perceptions are particularly well conveyed "by the use of specialised normative words, what one might call the secondary moral words in contrast to the primary and general ones such as 'good'" (IP,

317); these perceptions are therefore expressed by means of secondary words, such as "cheerful" or "straightforward."

5. M's activity, which includes her moral reflection, does not meet Hampshire's requirement that the activity must be intersubjectively observable (accessible to other observers); this, however, is not because this activity is "very odd and hazy" (IP, 317) or less true and real but because it is something personal, "her own" (IP, 317), and moral, and neither that which is moral nor that which is personal can possibly meet the requirements that Hampshire derives from the conception of science.

6. This is linked with a conception of freedom. According to Murdoch, "freedom is not the sudden jumping of the isolated will in and out of an impersonal logical complex, it is a function of the progressive attempt to see a particular object clearly. M's activity is essentially something progressive, something infinitely perfectible" (IP, 317). This portrait does not assume M's infallibility; it assumes her fallibility and the infinite nature of her task: "As soon as we begin to use words such as 'love' and 'justice' in characterising M, we introduce into our whole conceptual picture of her situation the idea of progress, that is the idea of perfection: and it is just the presence of this idea which demands an analysis of mental concepts which is different from the genetic one" (IP, 317–8) (BROACKES 2012, 41).

As Broackes observes, according to Murdoch, the idea of perfection and openness to progress in the understanding and usage of moral concepts is what makes moral concepts incompatible with the "genetic" view of meaning and the requirement of publicly verifiable usage. Why? When we consider the case of a person who is trying to internally decide if what they feel is remorse, our analysis is subject to certain public rules, writes Murdoch; however, what is more important in this analysis is the fact that this person's activity is something "highly personal" (IP, 319), as a result of which our power over it—"the *prise* [grasp] of 'the impersonal world of language'" (IP, 319)—becomes problematic. As Murdoch writes, this individual "is making a specialised personal *use* of a concept. Of course he derives the concept initially from his surroundings; but he takes it away into his privacy. Concepts of this sort lend themselves to such uses; and what use is made of them is partly a function of the user's *history*" (IP, 319). It turns out that "repentance may mean something different to an individual at different times in his life, and what it fully means is a part of this life and cannot be understood except in context" (IP, 320). The same goes for other moral concepts, such as love or courage. Even the control procedure of this change, revision,

or redefinition of the concepts may change over time and through personal experience instead of being permanently linked to the minimal public meaning that can be found in every competent use of a given term. This means, consequently, that "science can instruct morality at certain points and can change its direction, but it cannot contain morality nor, ergo, moral philosophy.… Moral concepts do not move about *within* a hard world set up by science and logic. They set up, for different purposes, a different world" (IP, 321). The indescribability of M's conduct to science "rests not simply in her moving will but in her seeing knowing mind" (IP, 321), both autonomous from the laws of science.[4]

In this way we get a new view of man as a moral subject and a new conception of morality. In this new view, "the characteristic and proper mark of the active moral agent" (IP, 327) is "a just and loving gaze directed upon an individual reality" (IP, 327). Murdoch follows Simone Weil in referring to this characteristic as attention[5] (IP, 327) or, in a neutral sense, as "looking" (IP, 328). This is a concept that has moral weight, as according to Murdoch "I can only choose within the world I can *see*, in the moral sense of 'see' which implies that clear vision is a result of moral imagination and moral effort" (IP, 329). Choosing takes place against the backdrop of a certain kind of vision that we have learned to have (I choose only in the world that I am able to see). The activity of attention and moral imagination constantly build our awareness of values, so if we are guided by them, a structure of values is imperceptibly built around us (IP, 329): "When M is *just and loving* she sees D as *she really is*" (IP, 329, my emphasis). When this is the case, "we shall not be surprised that at crucial moments of choice most of the business of choosing is already over" (IP, 329). Murdoch is therefore convinced that the choice preceded by attention takes place "almost automatically" (IP, 329). What does this argue? In her opinion, it does not argue the absence of reasons or place for arbitrary choice, but the clarity of our recognition of these reasons (e.g., recognising what must be done). From this perspective—writes Murdoch—"the exercise of our freedom is a small piecemeal business

[4] It is problematic, though, whether or not M's attention is based on the effort of the will as well. It seems that Julia Driver is right when she observes: "M is quite clearly *trying* to look at D more clearly. M is *trying* to correct for her excessive conventionality. But there need not be any contradiction. We can hold that she is really open to both ways of attending: being open to the world, and trying to see it more clearly. Her use of 'attention' can be understood to include both" (DRIVER 2020, 173).

[5] Murdoch mentions that she was inspired by the conception of attention in Simone Weil's writings also in SBR, 270 and OGG, 340.

which goes on all the time and not a grandiose leaping about unimpeded at important moments. The moral life, on this view, is something that goes on continually, not something that is switched off in between the occurrence of explicit moral choices. What happens in between such choices is indeed what is crucial" (IP, 329).

Consequently, freedom cannot be separated from the idea of cognition. Freedom means getting to know the reality that reveals itself by means of "just attention" (IP, 330). To be free means to see what is seen by a person who can see the world justly and attentively (the way M can see, for example, that D's behaviour is spontaneous rather than contemptible). Thus, we have also come to the definition of good—or, actually, goodness. Goodness as defined by Murdoch is knowledge, but not impersonal, quasi-scientific knowledge; it is "a *refined and honest* perception of what is really the case" (IP, 330, my emphasis); it is a type of vision that "is the result not simply of opening one's eyes but of a certainly perfectly familiar kind of moral discipline" (IP, 330). As Murdoch writes, what she means by that is "the idea of a *patient, loving* regard, directed upon a person, a thing, a situation" (IP, 331, my emphasis), an idea that "presents the will not as unimpeded movement but as something very much more like 'obedience'" (IP, 331)—obedience to (accurately perceived) reality. In this sense, reality is that which "is revealed to the patient eye of love … [—] an idea entirely comprehensible to the ordinary person. M knows what she is doing when she tries to be just to D, and we know what she is doing too" (IP, 332). The justice of seeing that Murdoch has in mind is supposed to consist in overcoming prejudice, controlling and restraining one's imagination, avoiding temptations (e.g., in seeing someone in a distorted way), and steering one's reflection.

2. EDWARD BALTRAM'S MORAL DEVELOPMENT

How can this view of the moral subject be translated into the concrete terms of Iris Murdoch's novels? The protagonist of *The Good Apprentice*, Edward Baltram, goes through a turbulent transformation that leads him to the awareness of other people's needs. This is suggested by the title of the first part of the novel, *The Prodigal Son*, and by its opening sentence: "I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son" (GA, 1). We meet Edward in his apartment during a meeting with a friend, Mark

Wilsden, to whom he gives a drug that induces hallucinations. He goes out for a few hours to see a girlfriend, leaving Mark alone. During that time the drugged friend jumps out of the window and falls to his death. For obvious reasons, Edward blames himself for Mark's death (even though he has been legally acquitted), and his remorse is so strong that it makes normal functioning impossible for him. Edward ends up in a hell of his own. He receives letters full of suffering and hatred from Mark's mother, who wishes him misery and death. Preoccupied with his own suffering, he takes tranquilizers, does not get up from his bed in the morning, and does not meet with anyone—all he wants is to sleep. He is trapped at the crime scene. He cannot imagine how he could live on, having committed an utterly vile and disgraceful act. Darkness clouds his eyes and paralyses him, leading to the rejection of the good he could do. Edward is convinced that he killed a friend whom he had treated like a brother and loved. He keeps telling himself: "I'm so alone…, no one helps me, no one *can* help me, I don't even want anyone's help. But what is to become of me, would I not be better dead? I am simply cumbering and fouling the earth. I am dead, I am the walking dead" (GA, 57); "I'm not worthy to live—I'm so weary of grieving and trying to cry—all I want is to be walled up in a stone cell and starve and become a little dried up animal and die" (GA, 68). At that stage, Edward is actually plunging into more and more destructive egoism, deriving illusory consolation from suffering and the vision of death.

There are people around him who want to help him, however. One of them is his stepfather, Harry Cuno, who believes that his stepson is morbidly indulging in self-pity and that wallowing in a sense of guilt actually gives him pleasure. Playing Edward's problems down, he says: "personal responsibility is a sort of pretentious notion anyway, it's a fiction.… There isn't anything deep here, God isn't watching you, your job is to make yourself function again, just get going.… Buck up, stop thinking about yourself, *that's* what's wrong, don't let this business lodge in your soul" (GA, 17). Edward's suffering is observed by his stepbrother, Stuart Cuno,[6] who tells him to seek refuge in meditation and in focusing on the concrete: poetry, a fragment from the Bible, Christ, or an azalea; it is also witnessed by a psychotherapist, Thomas McCaskerville, who explains to him that his crisis is a moment of transformation and development: "you are spiritually dying. You

[6] Stuart is—as Albert Camus called his protagonist, doctor Rieux—a saint without God, a secular type of mystic, one of many such characters populating Murdoch's novels. He certainly deserves a separate text. See SPEAR (2007, 94); see also HEUSEL (2001, 135–36).

said earlier you would have to change yourself into another person. You are doing that, and it's very painful" (GA, 70). Thomas is convinced that in the course of this spiritual journey Edward will abandon delusions and get close to the truth about himself, which partly accounts for the pain he feels. As Thomas says, "a religious believer would pray, and you must try to find your own equivalent of prayer. The word 'will' rarely describes anything perceptible, but an act of will is needed here, an act of well-intentioned *concentration*.... Truthful remorse leads to the fruitful death of the self, not to its survival as a successful liar" (GA, 71).[7] Thomas believes that Edward's self is wrapped in a series of illusions that form the basis of his imaginary identity. The situation he has found himself in is supposed to lead him to the painful acknowledgment of the truth about himself and to living in peace with his despair. Edward is observing the death throes of his self, and he is doing this from the perspective of a new, reborn self, whose existence he has no inkling of yet. It is Thomas who arranges Edward's trip to the estate of his real father, the famous controversial painter Jesse Baltram.

Edward goes to Seegard like a prodigal son, thinking that he will confess everything to his father, who will judge and absolve him. In the gloomy and somewhat bizarre house, resembling a cathedral or a big ship from a distance, he is greeted not by his father but by three women, like medieval princesses imprisoned in a castle: Jesse's wife, who has him call her Mother May, and his two stepsisters—Ilona and Bettina. He is introduced to the soothing rituals of the house, which is becoming similar to a monastery (early bedtimes and getting up at dawn, vegetarian meals, a schedule of constant work in the garden, in the kitchen, and in handicrafts), and has little time for brooding over his misery. He is so preoccupied with this "Bohemian puritanism" (GA, 128) and with the otherness of the three women around him, in whose smiles he can see beauty—their own, that of the house full of riddles, and that of the surrounding nature—that the object of his attention gradually changes. That object is no longer himself and his hell, though Edward refuses even to think that the new environment will take the burden off his shoulders, because this, in his opinion, would diminish the significance of his suffering. However, regardless of what Edward does and does not want, the internal work in him is taking place, perhaps even imperceptibly to himself, and this happens during the new-quality looking—looking at trees, plants,

[7] Thomas's words indicate that Driver's interpretation, in which she combines the effort of will with the effort of attention, seems correct (see footnote 5).

flowers, and clouds flowing across the sky—which protects him from egoistic concerns.

It is much later that he discovers his father—confined to bed, trapped in the closed tower of the house, overcome by an illness clouding his view of reality, and deprived of the help of a doctor, whom the three women refuse to allow near him. The sight of such great suffering experienced by his father, who is losing control of his mind and his senses, makes Edward stop thinking that his arrival at Seegard as a pilgrimage destination will lead to his sin being wiped out by a saint—by Jesse (HEUSEL 2001, 136; KURT 2011, 64–65). Jesse forgives him and tells him to live on, but this gives Edward no relief at that moment. He begins to understand that the house he has come to, "a house of healing" (GA, 129), may not bring him the expected solace, because it is not solace that his ongoing transformation is all about. It seems to him that the rituals he takes part in at Seegard are, once again, "a phantasm, a dream, a veil, something superficially laid over *the truth*" (ibid.); "only dealing with the truth will save me from death" (ibid.)—thinks Edward. Shortly afterwards, during a walk in the meadows, Edward meets Mark's sister, Brownie Wilsden, and falls in love with her. A conversation with her about Mark and about how he died—which amounts to facing this event—seems to bring relief to both of them, as both of them believe that the only people capable of helping them is themselves. It is to her that Edward confesses how unhappy he feels. He is convinced that she is the only person who can get him out of hell. However, as the further development of the novel's plot shows, none of the people Edward meets can do this, because when he thinks Jesse or Brownie will save him, he is, in fact, getting entangled in a network of fantasy: "the tissue of self-aggrandising and consoling wishes and dreams which prevents one from seeing what is there outside one" (OGG, 348). Confusing love with a desire to prove himself in her eyes, Edward becomes entangled in a web of wishful and comforting fancies, "anxious avaricious tentacles of the self" (SGC, 385), in order to protect his mind against suffering.

A little later, Jesse dies by drowning in the river, and Edward learns that Brownie is getting married. These seem to be further reasons to break down, but this time Edward does not give in to despair, though of course he is deeply affected by the death of his father, whom he is the one to find in the river, and reacts dramatically to Brownie's decision. What gets him out of the abyss of despair is how he begins to see and treat others. He no longer treats them as means that will serve as instruments of his purification and

bring him relief (this, presumably, is how his attitude both to his father and to Brownie should be understood); instead, he recognises them as individuals with distinct and independent points of view. He notices the suffering in them and he does so not only justly but also lovingly. One of these people is his stepsister Ilona, who escapes to London after Jesse's death in order to earn a living as a stripper in a seedy bar in Soho. Seeing her childlike nudity during a performance in front of an audience, Edward wants to help her and protect her from a pimp harassing her. Looking at her, he realises that this is his innocent sister, who cannot dance to music from loudspeakers and who is deceiving herself and him pretending to be happy. What is more, this is his sister whom he cannot help because she has rejected his help: "Her nakedness was pitiful, touching like that of a child, pallid, clammy, bare, the human form revealed in all its contingent absurdity. It was shameful and tragic. What in the other girls had seemed simply ugly and vulgar, here shone out as something sublimely obscene, like an exhibition of a deformity, which at the same time was little, pathetic, soiled and childish" (GA, 464). Looking at Ilona, Edward learns the kind of looking that is a "realism of compassion" (OGG, 354) and freedom from duplicity, namely, from the proliferation of blinding egoistic goals and ideas.

The other person Edward that manages to help without even knowing about it is his psychotherapist's wife, Midge, who, in order to end her love affair with Edward's father Harry, persuades herself that she has fallen in love with his brother, Stuart. The details of this thread of the plot aside, what Edward does is patiently listen to Midge (who, incidentally, is the sister of his late mother Chloe) and explain to her the situation she is in. It seems to Midge that her life has just come to an end, because neither her husband nor Stuart wants to talk to her; her son looks at her without consideration, too. Edward believes that, thanks to Stuart, she was able to truly discover what a hypocritical life she had lived having a love affair with Harry and deceiving her husband. This, however, is not the end of her life, Edward believes: "You can go on changing your life, you can do lots of good, after all what's stopping you, what's stopping any of us from doing lots of good— … just look around and think what real things are left, plenty I'd say" (GA, 470).

What name can one give to what is going on in Edward's mind at that time? Attaining a state of mind that can be called a vision of Midge's problem and situation, a vision of truth ("morality, goodness, is a form of realism"; OGG, 347), Edward tells her what is becoming the truth for him too. During his conversation with her he is so strongly focused on her problem

and on her person that he forgets about his self[8] and—as Murdoch would say—suppresses egoism "in the interest of seeing the real" (OGG, 352). Edward looks at her with compassion, but at the same time from a distance, not trying to ensnare her or draw her into his "greedy organism of the self" (OGG, 353). Midge becomes an object of his selfless attention, free from sentimentality. Edward seems unconsciously to achieve realism, which Murdoch understands as the ability to perceive reality that actually means self-forgetting—taming one's own self and liberating it from the influence of fantasy. What Edward perceives and passes on to Midge is a vision of truth, which "occasions right conduct" (OGG, 353), as attention becomes a source of energy for good action. Edward attains goodness, which is "ideally good perception" (BROACKES 2012, 60), achieved—in my opinion—through attention filled with justice and love, mercy and compassion, rather than through accurate and exact knowledge ("an ideally accurate presentation of … facts"; BROACKES 2012, 60).[9] This ideally good perception of the other person, amounting to a change in the quality of his consciousness, is precisely what becomes the source and basis of his good conduct. The more one has attained this level of looking, Murdoch writes, "the harder it becomes to treat a person as a thing" (OGG, 354). Guided by the new quality of consciousness, which liberates him from egocentrism, Edward already knows

[8] The problem referred to as "self-forgetting," resulting from the recognition of reality, is a significant part of moral development as defined by Murdoch. In one of her essays, SGC, she cites the well-known kestrel example: "I am looking out of my window in an anxious and resentful state of mind, oblivious of my surroundings, brooding, perhaps on some damage done to my prestige. Then suddenly I observe a hovering kestrel. In a moment everything is altered. The brooding self with its hurt vanity has disappeared" (SGC, 369). This is the example Julia Driver refers to, also citing Mary Midley's *Beast and Man*: "As Mary Midgley writes in *Beast and Man*, the pleasure one gets at seeing beauty, in the kestrel, is 'self-forgetful'—what ties being open to beauty and trying hard to see it is this self-forgetting. By self-forgetting she doesn't mean that the virtuous person forgets the things that have happened to her in the past. Instead, she 'forgets' a false view of the importance of the self" (DRIVER 2020, 176–77; see also MIDGLEY 1978, 359). The same thing, in my opinion, is happening to Edward, although in his case, naturally, it is not about deriving pleasure from looking at Ilona and Midge. It is more accurate to say that, when looking at them attentively and identifying their problem, he forgets about his self, to which he attributed false significance before, building his view of it on fantasy and illusions.

[9] Julia Driver observes: "To see another person justly we may need to adopt the perspective, or become clearer on the 'context' that another person is living in. Moral psychologists refer to this as a kind of empathy in that it involves another meta-cognitive skill—that of taking the perspective of another person. This skill is important in our interactions with others, since if we cannot see another's perspective they will be a mystery to us. But there is another kind of empathy as well. We might care about others and want to see the world from their point of view as a matter of understanding them sympathetically" (DRIVER 2020, 172).

what he is to do next, because "goodness is connected with the attempt to see the unself, to see and to respond to the real world in the light of a virtuous consciousness" (SGC, 376).

3. ATTENTION—LOVE—GOODNESS

Murdoch refuses to agree to an ethics that questions the existence and thereby negates the significance of states of mind which precede or accompany action or occur between acts of choice—of that which has come into being in the mind and is not an object of public observation. In her opinion, it is precisely what is invisible to a third party that should be the object of morality. These human states of mind can be excellently shown in literary prose—in this case in a novel, in which Edward's mind is understood in a Freudian way, as "an egocentric system of quasi-mechanical energy, largely determined by its own individual history, whose natural attachments are sexual, ambiguous, and hard for the subject to understand or control" (OGG, 341), a mind inclined towards fantasising rather than reason, objectivity, and selflessness. This "picture of the fallen man" (OGG, 341) is complemented, however, as Murdoch wants (and considers this to me a key issue in ethics) to point out certain "techniques for the purification and reorientation of any energy which is naturally selfish, in such a way that when moments of choice arrive we shall be sure of acting rightly…" (OGG, 344). These techniques, in my opinion, are successfully presented using the example of Edward's moral development, which results from work on the quality of consciousness. The techniques are: personal love understood in the Platonic sense[10] (see Plato, *Symposium*, 209e–212a), prayer recommended by religion (which Murdoch explains as loving attention towards God—OGG, 345), and loving attention towards another person or thing, recommended by Murdoch (OGG, 345),[11] which is present in Edward's case. According to Murdoch,

[10] Murdoch writes that goodness and love are closely related concepts but should not be considered equivalent. In her opinion, love is "egocentric" (SGC, 384), "self-assertive," and "capable of infinite degradation" (SGC, 384). But love "is the unmistakable sign that we are spiritual creatures, attracted by excellence and made for the Good" (SGC, 384).

[11] Murdoch writes: "We need more concepts in terms of which to picture the substance of our being; it is through an enriching and deepening of concepts that moral progress takes place. Simone Weil said that morality was a matter of attention, not of will. We need a new vocabulary of attention" (AD, 293). This new language, she believes, can be provided by belles-lettres (ibid., 295), but this is a topic for a different paper to explore. Speaking of the need for a new language in morality, Murdoch has two things in mind. The first one is that moral development does not simply consist in taking moral assertions already available to us and adjusting them to the

these techniques can be practiced by the moral subject through the contemplation of nature and art, intellectual work (*technai*, which Murdoch, following Plato, sees as including mathematics, but also, e.g., foreign language learning), and the practice of morality.[12]

How does Murdoch define attention, more precisely? She observes:

> I think there is something analogous to prayer, though it is something difficult to describe, and which the higher subtleties of the self can often falsify; I am not here thinking of any quasi-religious meditative technique, but of something which belongs to the moral life of the ordinary person. The idea of contemplation is hard to understand and maintain in a world increasingly without sacraments and ritual.… Perhaps one needs too an analogy of the concept of the sacrament, though this must be treated with great caution. Behaviouristic ethics denies the importance, because it questions the identity of anything prior to or apart from action which decisively occurs, "in the mind". The apprehension of beauty … often in fact seems to us like a temporally located spiritual experience which is a source of good energy. It is not easy, however, to extend the idea of such an influential experience to occasions of thinking about people or action, since clarity of thought and purity of attention become harder and more ambiguous when the object of attention is something moral. (OGG, 356)

Attention consists in "looking carefully at something and holding it before the mind" (MGM, 3).[13] Murdoch claims that attention, defined as the contemplation or perception/recognition and grasping of that which is significant from the point of view of morality can be an analogue of prayer. Being a source of good energy, it becomes a source of good conduct, because it amounts to the accurate recognition of what is significant, in the course of which decision and action occur automatically, as it were. Moral change, then, is a function of the changing quality of consciousness, which is able to distinguish the false world of fantasy from the real world.[14] Focusing his at-

established values (affirming or rejecting them), but rather in revising our moral concepts as such (BROACKES 2012, 34; see also ME, 72–4; VCM, 83, 89, 95), in making thinkable and speakable the things that it used to be impossible for us to think and speak about).

[12] Murdoch discusses these issues extensively in SGC, 370–74.

[13] See also GŁĄB (2013).

[14] ANTONACCIO (2000, 132). Describing this change, Murdoch refers to the Platonic myth of the cave, which shows "a progressively changing quality of consciousness. Subjects begin to see different objects; they have a deeper and wider and wiser understanding of the world. The pilgrim will not only produce a better series of acts, he will have … a better series of mental states. He can literally see better, see people's faces and leaves on trees, he will more rapidly and easily expel an unworthy thought or improper image.… Knowledge informs the moral quality of the

tention selflessly and respectfully on Midge's problem, Edward experiences a vision of truth, which brings answers to the questions he has been asking himself about what to do after Mark's and his father's death and after Brownie's leaving. His story shows that—as Murdoch writes—"what should be aimed at is goodness, and not freedom or right action, although right action, and freedom in the sense of humility, are the natural products of attention to the Good" (OGG, 357).[15] Goodness is achieved when we *recognise* that which makes up the essence of reality, and we recognise it accurately as a result of the "exercise of love" (IP, 333)—namely, in selfless care about people and things.[16] This means goodness is supposed to be an outcome of the recognition of and obedience to reality (the recognition of people's moral character and needs and conduct consistent with this recognition), and in this way it is should be associated with self-forgetting and humility, as only a humble man, who "sees himself as nothing, can see other things as they are" (SGC, 385).

4. ATTENTION AND THE TRANSCENDENCE OF PERSONS

Murdoch asserts: "Human beings are obscure to each other, in certain respects which are particularly relevant to morality, unless they are mutual objects of attention" (IP, 326). According to her, the state of mind that referred to as attention towards other people's reality builds a person's goodness, but

world, the selfish self-interestedly casual or callous man sees a different world from that which the careful scrupulous benevolent just man sees; and the largely explicable ambiguity of the word 'see' here conveys the essence of the concept of the moral. The connection between ethics and epistemology is something which we are intuitively grasping all the time in our non-philosophical lives" (MGM, 177).

[15] The (Platonic) concept of the idea of Good itself is, in my opinion, rather unclear in Murdoch, and certainly constitutes a problem that deserves much broader analyses. In the present article let me only add that, for Murdoch, the idea of Good is "a central point of reflection" (OGG, 356), but it remains undefinable "because of the infinite difficulty of the task of apprehending a magnetic but inexhaustible reality" (IP, 333). She believes that "if apprehension of good is apprehension of the individual and the real, then good partakes of the infinite elusive character of reality" (IP, 334). The concept of Good seems to approach the concept of God, but Murdoch believes we need the kind of theology that will not refer to God, although the Good she has in mind "is not the old God in disguise, but rather what the old God symbolized" (MGM, 428). See SCHWEIKER (1996) and ROWE (2010).

[16] See DRIVER 2020. She writes that, for Murdoch, "love is a form of unselfing, illustrating how close attention to another, and the way they really are, again, takes us out of a narrow focus on the self" (169).

the people we try to get to know are, in her opinion, transcendent to us—they go beyond our self and our perception (including misperception). Does this not make problematic the conception of goodness proposed by Murdoch, according to which goodness consists in ideally good cognition and attention? After all, how are we to get to know other people in an ideally good way if they elude our cognition? In the case of getting to know people, is it possible at all to get to know them accurately and thoroughly? In my opinion, what Murdoch requires is not perfectly thorough and accurate cognition (which is impossible precisely because of transcendence) but cognition based on love and justice, which is attainable to everyone. The transcendence of persons, however, makes our attention to and knowledge of others—that is, the development of our consciousness—a never-ending task that we could always do better (BROACKES 2012, 73), which means we must be prepared for our cognition to be constantly open to correction, as ideal thoroughness and accuracy are unattainable. The result of attention—just and loving—is the perception of other people's individuality and sovereignty. Referring to Edward's example again, one can say that his moral development results from the fact that, by looking beyond himself, he perceives Ilona's and Midge's individuality and sovereignty. This actually becomes salutary for him, as so far his moral life has suffered from neuroses and obsessions with his own problems, illusions, and fantasies (cf. BROWNING 2018, 57). Edward sees Ilona and Midge as independent and transcendent worlds, deserving attention and respect. His development is thus oriented towards love—towards the perception of individuals who are "substantial, impenetrable, individual, indefinable, and valuable" (AD, 294). Love, which precedes goodness, is therefore an extremely difficult realization of this in life, and at the same time the awareness that there are other people around us and that their problems are as real as ours.

Does belief in the transcendence of persons imply a metaphysical view in Murdoch's philosophy? It seems it does not. Murdoch is convinced that "[w]e need to be enabled to think in terms of degrees of freedom, and to picture, in a non-metaphysical, non-totalitarian and non-religious sense, the transcendence of reality" (AD, 293). Elsewhere, she claims:

> We are what we seem to be, transient mortal creatures subject to necessity and chance. This is to say that there is, in my view, no God in the traditional sense of that term.… Equally the various metaphysical substitutions for God—Reason, Science, History—are false deities. Our destiny can be examined but it cannot be justified or totally explained. We are simply here. And if there is any kind of

> sense or unity in human life,… it is of some other kind and must be sought within a human experience which has nothing outside it. (SGC, 364–65)

As Bridget Clarke observes, the above words prove that Murdoch rejects what has traditionally been seen as supernatural and as the basis for meaning in life or for values. At the same time, she concurs about the existence of a transcendent reality within the natural reality; she understands this transcendent reality as the heart of moral life. Clarke calls this kind of transcendence "the ordinary transcendence" (CLARKE 2018, 253). In her opinion, there is much evidence that the transcendent reality Murdoch has in mind "belongs to … the ordinary world in which … we go to work, raise children, pass strangers on the street, mourn loss, celebrate good things, age, develop new interests, and so on" (ibid.). This world, then, includes transcendence, in the sense that it is impossible ever to fully understand other people whom we share this world with. Other people go beyond—transcend—our apprehension of them at a given moment. They are never fully apprehensible. In this sense, the ordinary life we live consists in communing with something transcendent, but not supernatural or metaphysical. Murdoch is interested in the fact that reality transcends us and in the way it does so rather than in how we can transcend reality.

This means, Broackes adds, that reality transcends us and that the way in which this happens is not the same as the way in which we could transcend reality (BROACKES 2012, 35). What Murdoch has in mind here is the recognition, through attention, of "a vast and varied reality outside ourselves" (SBR, 282). According to her, "to understand other people is a task which does not come to an end" (ibid., 283)—this cognition takes place through selfless love, humility, and tolerance. Thus, Murdoch addresses the reality that was ignored both by existentialists and by behaviourists or empiricists. She criticises the model of contemporary man created by Hampshire, in which man "is rational and totally free except in so far as … his degree of self-awareness may vary. He is, morally speaking, monarch of all he surveys and totally responsible for his actions. Nothing transcends him. His moral language is a practical pointer, the instrument of his choices, the indication of his preferences. His inner life is resolved into his acts and choices, and his beliefs, which are also acts, since a belief can only be identified through its expression. His moral arguments are references to empirical facts backed up by decisions" (AD, 288). Murdoch refuses to agree to this view of man and morality. When she writes that nothing transcends the contemporary man,

what she may have in mind is that getting to know the moral reality that transcends us may amount to knowledge about the fact that, for example, someone is spontaneous, straightforward, cheerful, and delightfully youthful, to mention only those normative terms which Murdoch calls secondary moral words—as opposed to primary general words such as "good" or "right" (see IP, 317)—and which she included in the mother-in-law's description of her daughter-in-law (BROACKES 2012, 35). Looking attentively at his sister, Edward can see her sense of being lost covered up by a smile; looking at Midge, he can see despair depriving her of the will to live due to her inability to get out of the situation she got herself into. Ilona's and Midge's reality is transcendent both in the sense that it is characterised by infinite complexity, which goes beyond what we can grasp at a given moment, and in the sense that the very concepts that we use in order to understand and by means of which we try to apprehend other people's world have an infinite depth. After all, there is more in Ilona's and Midge's experiences than what Edward's partial ideas about them include (cf. BROACKES 2012, 35). As Murdoch writes, "the individual is seen as moving tentatively *vis-à-vis* a reality which transcends him. To discover what is morally good is to discover that reality, and to become good is to integrate himself with it" (ME, 70). Getting closer to the knowledge of reality (Ilona's and Midge's, and probably also his own in the end), Edward experiences a vision of truth, even if only partial—a change in the quality of his consciousness, which is a big success in his moral development on the way to goodness.

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IRIS MURDOCH'S CONCEPTION OF MORAL DEVELOPMENT IN HER NOVEL *THE GOOD APPRENTICE*

Summary

The author juxtaposes two views of morality and the views of man they imply: one represented by behaviourist and existentialist approaches in theories of morality and the other proposed by Iris Murdoch, who stresses the ability to see and recognise morally significant characteristics. In Murdoch's opinion, a person's moral development consists in a change in the quality of consciousness as a result of the activity of attention in exploring moral reality. After contrasting these two views, the author confronts Murdoch's approach with the conception of moral development understood along these lines as exemplified in a character of her novel *The Good Apprentice*. She also puts the problem of attention into the context of Murdoch's conception of the transcendence of persons.

Keywords: Murdoch; *The Good Apprentice*; attention; moral life; transcendence of persons; love.

IRIS MURDOCH KONCEPCJA ROZWOJU MORALNEGO W JEJ POWIEŚCI *ZACNY UCZEŃ*

Streszczenie

Autorka przeciwstawia sobie dwa obrazy moralności oraz wynikające z nich obrazy człowieka: pierwszy, reprezentowany przez behawiorystyczne i egzystencjalistyczne ujęcia w teoriach moralności, drugi zaproponowany przez Iris Murdoch, w którym akcentuje ona umiejętności widzenia i rozpoznawania istotnych moralnie cech. Jej zdaniem bowiem rozwój moralny podmiotu polega na zmianie jakości świadomości w wyniku działaniu uwagi w rozpoznawaniu moralnej rzeczywistości. Autorka po skontrastowaniu tych dwóch obrazów, konfrontuje podejście Murdoch z koncepcją tak rozumianego rozwoju moralnego bohatera jej powieści pt. *Zacny uczeń*, a także stawia problem uwagi w kontekście przyjmowanej przez Murdoch koncepcji transcendencji osób.

Słowa kluczowe: Murdoch; *Zacny uczeń*; uwaga; życie moralne; transcendencja osób; miłość.