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RECLAIMING LOVE IN THE FACE OF THE VOID IN IRIS MURDOCH'S THOUGHT

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For Heeyoung
사랑하는 아내 희영에게
이 글을 바칩니다.

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CHAPTER ONE

RECLAIMING LOVE IN IRIS MURDOCH'S ETHICS: QUESTIONS AND CHALLENGES

1. Initial Questions

In Ecclesiastes 3 of the Hebrew Bible, there are these words: "For everything there is a season, a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die … a time to love, and a time to hate …" (Eccl 3:1-2a, 8a NRSV) As the book of the Ecclesiastes notes in its conclusion, we as time-bound, created beings can enjoy, expect, and enhance our lived realities, although often enough in the unexpected and uncontrollable harshness of reality. In short, it is a Hebrew version of *carpe diem*![1] Out of my curiosity while in research, when I googled "life, death, love and ethical question," most headings that appeared were like the following: life and death ethical issues, end-of-life cares, issues and debates, and some Christian answers, etc. Not surprisingly, everything that lives dies, but there are also incessant human endeavors to answer the following poignant questions: what, if anything, makes life, and even dying, meaningful? Can life flourish and be enhanced as it is eventually confronting a time to die?[2] Insofar as the phenomenon of life and death is not unambiguous, those questions seem to provoke further questions of human meanings, since human

[1] This phrase is a Latin aphorism, taken from book 1 of the Roman poet Horace's work *Odes* (23 BC). It is part of the longer *carpe diem, quam minimum credula postero*, which can be translated as "Seize the day, put very little trust in tomorrow (the future)". This phrase is usually understood against Horace's Epicurean background, which attempts to find security in the world by withdrawing from all the vulnerability to impact one and to form friendship which gives security and release from possible pains.

[2] I have paraphrased Daniel P. Sulmasy's words from his essay "When Can We Say That Someone Is Dying?" in *The Enhancing Life Project News*, September 27, 2016 (http://enhancinglife.uchicago.edu/blog/when-can-we-say-that-someone-is-dying). I as a University of Chicago Ph.D. candidate am privileged to receive emails and newsletters from the thought-provoking *The Enhancing Life* project supported from the John Templeton Foundation and led by William Schweiker, the Edward L. Ryerson Distinguished Service Professor at the Divinity School, and Günter Thomas, professor of theology at Ruhr-University Bochum. See more at its website: http://enhancinglife.uchicago.edu.

ambiguity gives rise to evaluations saturated with human relations, by means of which human beings (re-)orient their lives.

Reflecting upon these questions, it is crucial, if one wants to have any adequate accounts of human perception and interpretation about self, others, and the world, to examine the following reflexive and evaluative questions: how people picture the meaningfulness of the reality and goodness, how people change their inner life in relation to others and the world, and how people believe they ought to guide and orient their life. This threefold examination deepens ethical and theological reflections upon the structure of lived realities of human life, and I argue that it is possible by the idea of love reclaimed in the face of the void in Murdoch's thought. It is all the more important at the moments of "the void" when the clinging of the self is shocked into awareness of an entirely separate reality and the self-protective moral and religious imagination is challenged and shattered. So while I embark on a critical conversation with Murdoch about her conception of love in moral and philosophical thinking in the coming pages, I found some compelling questions about the idea of love in the words of a neohumanist Luc Ferry, and they run as follows: "if love is what gives meaning to our lives, what are we to do about death, which brings it to a full stop?... How can we fail to see that what claims to give meaning is, in these conditions, completely devoid of meaning?"[3] Furthermore, as I construe those questions, I reflexively ask the following question underlying my dissertation: is not the idea of reclaiming love quite simply romanticizing or even ridiculous, given the harshness ravaged by human hatred and violence in our social and political worlds? There are, of course, many attempts to figure out how life works and how love works in a romantic, fantasized way cloaked with populist, pseudo-psychological,

[3] Luc Ferry, *On Love: A Philosophy for the twenty-first century*, trans. Andrew Brown (Polity Press, 2013), 161. (hereafter indicated as *On Love*)

and pragmatic discourses that still speak to us, but at the same time they have gone awry from discussions about religious and humanistic discourses or theories charting the wide and complex sense of human self in relation to others and the world.

The principal aim of this dissertation is to revisit and reconsider the concept of love and the place of love in cognitivist, axiological, and realist moral philosopher Iris Murdoch. In my dissertation, love comes to the foreground because I reclaim it in the face of the void, insofar as Murdoch sees the most poignant problem in the modern and late modern world as clinging to the self permeated within three forms of false consolations: egoism, false understanding of God, and fantasized illusions. Here some questions loom large: why can and should love be reclaimed? And why in the face of the void?

The upshot is, I argue, that love can and should be reclaimed, paradoxically speaking, where the absence of Good is pervasively manifested. For Murdoch, love is needed when something extreme appears, and she describes this state of appearance as "void":

> A common cause of void is bereavement, which may be accompanied by guilt feelings, or may be productive of a 'clean' pain. In such cases there is a sense of emptiness, a loss of personality, a loss of energy and motivation, a sense of being stripped, the world is utterly charmless and without attraction.… what is needed here, and is *so difficult to achieve*, is a new orientation of our desires, a re-education of our instinctive feelings.[4]

Put differently, we live in a late modern world in which the decline of search for the unconditional and the loss of contact with reality are quite prevalent; in which, in turn, the return of religion in delusional and dehumanizing forms is propelled over the extent to which the multidimensional lived human reality is subsumed into self-enclosed institutions and systems defined by their own internal logic; thus, in which sheer worldlessness stripped of human capacity to think and judge is

[4] Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (New York: Allen Lane/The Penguin Press, 1992), 500, 503. (hereafter indicated as *Metaphysics*)

poignantly experienced.[5] In a world such as this neo-liberal capitalistic one, where the self and other human beings are purchased as a disposable "thing" and thus exploited as merely the means of self-serving or self-aggrandizing ends, only at the price of the human and divine goodness. Yet, as Murdoch says, although more difficult to imagine and achieve than recognition of the void, the concept of love or of "loving" is not simply construed as a romantic idea situated within the empirical human self, but rather as "an orientation, a direction of energy"[6] toward a perfectionist ideal setting a limit to the totalizing, self-fantasized impulses of consciousness.

Given the oscillation of meaning encountered in every meeting with reality, particularly with respect to the orientation of human consciousness to the Good, Murdoch tries not only to articulate adequate accounts of moral theology and philosophy, but also to affirm the significance of these scholarly disciplines by reclaiming love as a hermeneutical lens to look at self, other, and the world. In my dissertation, the idea of love and the reception of Murdoch's metaphysics are highly related and situated within her discussions about the Good, inner life, and true consolation. Let me explain how.

Recognizing these three Murdochian categories seriously, it is necessary to note why I adopt the idea of love as a hermeneutical principle, and why it is, as Murdoch points out, difficult to imagine and achieve. Current debates about love in moral life are often-times due in part to the whole concern for emotions that has brought love back into play as an ethical and social question.

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[5] I am writing this portion of dissertation, and I am faced with a tremendous shocking news about the U.S. presidential election result across the midnight on November 9, 2016 when Donald J. Trump is the president elect. It is one of the poignant and painful signs of "What's wrong with America?" Fear-politics that renders human beings "disposable" reveals "a stunning culmination of an explosive, populist and polarizing campaign." See more at the following website: Flegenheimer, Matt and Barbaro, Michael, "Donald Trump Is Elected President in Stunning Repudiation of the Establishment." *New York Times*, November 9, 2016. http://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/09/us/politics/hillary-clinton-donald-trump-president.html?action=click&pgtype=Homepage&clickSource=story-heading&module=span-abc-region&region=span-abc-region&WT.nav=span-abc-region.

[6] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 503.

There have been attempts to reduce moral obligation to natural moral feelings in certain forms of naturalism, individual or social. For example, evolutionary naturalism, insisted on by Larry Arnhart, argues for Darwinian evolution in the development of the natural feeling of obligation,[7] such as family bonds, conjugal love, and care beyond self-preservation. As compared to this naturalism simply grounded in a natural affective basis, someone like David Gauthier[8] suggests a naturalistic humanism drawing on a social contract theory of morality and the necessity of authoritative source of moral obligations, without which, as Thomas Hobbes writes, there would be a "war of all against all" and, in consequence, "human life would be solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short."[9] These naturalistic theories were cloaked in different forms of thought such as utilitarian theories and later developed as rational choice theories whose basic tenet sees human beings as "rational maximizers."

Also in the history of Christian ethics, when reflecting on the reality of love, the bifurcation of *eros* and *agape* has been on the table, ranging from Augustine to Thomas Aquinas, and in modern debates from Andre Nygren to Gene Outka and many others. Nygren,[10] for example, considers *eros* as nefarious and *agape* as the highest, normative form of love, and Outka[11] develops the idea of equal regard in relation to love, particularly because the issue of the relation of love to justice is deeply discussed in philosophical and religious, particularly Christian thought. Furthermore, these debates about love in both religious and non-religious fashion concern us more about its practical implications for our contemporary world, situated within late modern culture.

[7] Larry Arnhart, *Darwinian Natural Right: the Biological Ethics of Human Nature* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998), 8; qtd. in *C. Stephen Evans, Kierkegaard's Ethic of Love: Divine Commands and Moral Obligations*, Oxford (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 251.
[8] See David Gauthier, *Morals by Agreement* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 102-3.
[9] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Richard Tuck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 88–9.
[10] See more in Andre Nygren, *Agape and Eros* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982).
[11] See Gene Outka, *Agape: an Ethical Analysis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972).

Contemporary issues such as gun violence, hate crimes, and religious extremism certainly pose trenchant questions of how we can and should conceive of and respond to the debates about love in moral life. Some Christian ethicists such as Stanley Hauerwas and Alasdair MacIntyre make bold claims about the distinctiveness of Christian values so as to deny their intelligibility outside of the Christian community. If space allowed, it would be possible to explore the details of these various accounts of love and their naturalistic, philosophical, analytical, and even Christian claims to it, but that is not the purpose of the present dissertation. Rather, given the challenges faced in late modernity and the posthuman and postreligious world,[12] the real stake here is to understand and preserve love and its meaningfulness in the face of the void to evaluate, challenge, and combat some forms of false consolations. In other words, love is reclaimed not as a mere value tag of human choice and will subject to disposition, preference, or affection of the agent, but as a realistic hermeneutical concept for moral life and human goodness.

My contention of love as a realistic hermeneutical concept aligns well with Murdoch's thought. Consistent with her critical evaluation upon the reductive and the voluntaristic formulations of analytic and existentialist philosophical discourses, Murdoch asserts her metaphysical and realist position in *The Sovereignty of Good* and in her magisterial book *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*: Good as the formal norm is "indefinable … because of the infinite difficulty of the task of apprehending a magnetic but inexhaustible reality … good partakes of the infinite elusive character of reality."[13] The very idea of the Good for Murdoch is hard to

[12] See Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); *Varieties of Secularism in a Secular Age*, eds. Michael Warner, Jonathan VanAntwerpen, and Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010); Robert Bellah, *Religion in Human Evolution: from Paleolithic to the Axial Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011). A more recent one reflecting on Charles Taylor's works, *Aspiring to Fullness in a Secular Age: Essays on Religion and Theology in the Work of Charles Taylor*, eds. Carlos D. Colorado and Justin D. Klassen (University of Notre Dame Press, 2014)

[13] Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (London and New York: Routledge, 1971), 41.

imagine, since the Good itself is not visible. Murdoch adopts a chiefly Platonic description of the Form of the Good, and writes, "The sun represents the Form of the Good in whose light the truth is seen; it reveals the world, hitherto invisible, and is also a source of life."[14] Perceiving and knowing the good in the transcendental sense would be like gazing directly at the sun. In short, the idea of goodness and the Good can only be explained in terms of itself. She says that "[s]omething is apprehended as *there* which is not yet *known*. Then something comes; as we sometimes say from the unconscious. It comes to us out of the dark of nonbeing, as a reward for loving attention."[15]

Here we can see Murdoch's appeal to metaphysical pictures with respect to the relation between Good and love, in a way that in human pilgrimage from appearance to reality, as in Plato's words in *Republic*, love (Plato calls it *Eros*) is in place to guide and orient our gaze toward the Good. Love is not merely as a state of mind but rather conceived as inspiring that pilgrimage and moving toward what is real and true. As Murdoch contends, however, in addition to indefinability and unattainability of the Good, there is another difficulty in our human world, that is "a total absence of love."[16] She writes, "We have (gravity, necessity) a natural impulse to derealise our world and surround ourselves with fantasy." And she continues, "Simply stopping this, refraining from filling voids with lies and falsity, is progress."[17] Murdoch advises her readers to depart from the clinging of illusion and false consolations mandated by their relentless egos and to undertake a disciplined effort compelled by love and constituted by the Good, deeply mediated by the continuous activity of consciousness, and manifested in purified vision and concrete attention to the other. Love for Murdoch thus comes as the proper and challenging interrogation of the self to

[14] Iris Murdoch, "*The Fire and the Sun: Why Plato Banished the Artists*" in Existentialists and Mystics: Writings on Philosophy and Literature, ed. Peter Conradi (New York: Allen Lane/Penguin Press, 1998), 389. (hereafter indicated as "The Fire and the Sun")
[15] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 505. (original emphasis)
[16] *Ibid*., 503.
[17] *Ibid*.

the extent that love should manifest itself as a realist hermeneutical concept for moral life and human goodness.

2. The Basic Argument: Thesis

The main thread of my dissertation is to argue that love is reclaimed in Murdoch when she identifies the experience of "the void" in our moral and religious imagination and in our renewed commitment to what is really real and good. Here it is important to note, first, what Murdoch means by love, and, second, to explore why the true radical nature of love and its ethical import situated within Murdoch's thought can and should be reclaimed in the face of the void in order to picture, reflect on and evaluate the reality and goodness of life.

Love for Murdoch is chaotic, erotic desire directed toward the Good which is manifested in attention to the concrete individual. Love has the capacity to pull us out of ourselves and realize "something other than oneself is real" which demands attention.[18] That's why love is the response to the void when the self locked into fantasies and illusions is shocked into an entirely separate reality outside of the self. The dissertation thus contends that love starts not from the fullness of being or goodness but, ironically enough, from its absence, abyss, and separation. More correctly, as we are innately constituted by the presence of love and to love of life, love functions not as a merely linchpin for any "solutions" or some sorts of "blueprints" as arbitrary and assertive resort to our own will, "political" or "religious" will—false consolations and illusions in Murdoch's terms—but as a creative force, prompted by the discovery of "supersensible destiny," to accept absence as "present" and "real," and thus to embrace the universal and recognize the particular.

[18] Murdoch, "The Sublime and the Good," in *Existentialists and Mystics*, 215.

The reason I read Murdochian love in such a way is because it resists being defined as a monolithic term with respect to its relation to the idea of the Good, inner life, and true consolation. In other words, we do not understand the full meaning of love in Murdoch if we don't see how it works in all three categories retrieved from her thought. That's why I organize Murdoch's corpus in these three categories through which I explore how love helps to meet the void in true consolation rather than fantasies and illusions about self, others and the world. (I will elaborate further in the next section of chapter summaries the way I organize them with respect to love.)

The dissertation as a whole makes this point and shows why Murdoch's understanding and theorization of love remains indispensable in religious ethics and can contribute to contemporary ethics by reclaiming love in the face of the void. Thus this way of understanding of love, as I claim it, is in a sense to call into question the science of ethics which corresponds to the results of Western philosophical and theological thoughts since Plato. Philosophically speaking, discourses of the nature of love, or put more bluntly "love talk," since the time of the ancient Greeks, have been a mainstay in Western thought, producing theories in various forms: it starts from the debate about love and knowledge, which is part and parcel of the creative interchange between biblical horizon of thought and Hellenistic modes of thinking,[19] up to the medieval period, more intellectual conception of love, but superseded by what may be construed by a theological vision of love that transcends sensual dispositions like base lust and also rationalized thinking about love; during the Renaissance and Reformation onwards, pressing upon metaphysical and epistemological arguments, love talk has been related to theories of self and other, human freedom and relations, and even further towards deconstructionist theories, which are suspicious of all the metaphysical

[19] Ancient philosophy is the love of wisdom, a way of life; early Christian thinkers called themselves not theologians, but Christian philosophers because they were not interested in the gods of the Roman state or the nature or pagan myths, but rather loved wisdom incarnated in the Christ.

or religious illusions, as what they would call it. Why have these multifarious thoughts persisted and/or been related to the intelligibility and meaning of the nature of love in Western thoughts since Plato?

Its answer can derive from the nature of love itself: self-involving and self-negating. Plato himself in the *Symposium* provided us with a poignant notion about the nature of love: As Diotima explains, *Eros* as love is the son of Need and Resource and thus "it has been his fate to be always needy" (203c 4-5). Love is "always partaking of his mother's poverty" (203d 2), but love also bears traits of his father as love is "gallant, impetuous, and energetic, a mighty hunter, and a master of device and artifice" (203d 3-4). As shown in the *Symposium*, love is poor and homeless and without shoes like his mother, but brave and ingenious and aspiring like his father. Put simply, love manifests itself in a strange, contradictory condition of inner lack of balance. As Pierre Hadot puts it, love is "torn between [its] desire for carnal union with the object of [its] love and [its] yearning for the transcendent beauty which attracts [it] through the beloved object."[20] Love as a catalyst and a mediator manifests itself an erotic and spiritual desire, but it is through this mysterious dialectical energy that the good and the unconditional is reached. In this venue, Plato seems to move away from or beyond the more practically oriented or logically driven form of moral thinking found in Socrates. Platonic dialectics did not simply play out the part of the interrogator and thus was not a purely logical exercise. Instead, it was a spiritual exercise; Plato relates love to this spiritual practice or journey, in which love reflexively concerns and facilitates moral knowing, the movement from confusion to clarity, from error and ignorance to insight and vision of the good, as we can see the myth of the cave in the *Republic*. It is by the idea of love that

[20] Pierre Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy*? trans. by Michael Chase (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2002), 70.

Plato, like Socrates and not like Sophists, "attributed capital importance to living contact between human beings."[21] That's why the mysterious nature of love, self-involving and self-negating, would has to do with Platonic complex vision of morality coupled with the understanding of human existence and seeking for the unconditional. Here how can Murdoch as a Platonic realist develop interpretive strategies in her moral and religious reflection?

The dissertation here contends that Murdoch's indebtedness to Plato leads her to address love in order to construct her normative grounds for the good of human life. Following the track of the *Symposium* describing love as *Eros,* Murdoch seems to draw upon the following question: how can love navigate seemingly irreducible demand of embracing the universal and recognizing the particular? Murdoch interprets love as spiritual *and* chaotic energy that "moves among and responds to particular objects of attention… good and bad desires with good and bad objects."[22] Jonathan Rothchild points out this dynamic nature of love as follows: "Murdoch envisages *eros* as an attraction that ameliorates or exacerbates our presence in the world."[23] Neither dichotomous nor jarring aspect of *eros,* but the dynamic nature of *eros* may facilitate or obliterate its loving attention. Given this paradoxical and dynamic nature of love, however, its capacity *to see* is reclaimed in Murdoch's metaphysical conception of ethics, particularly at the moments of "the void." To be sure, Murdoch remains aware of how extremely difficult it is to recognize and realize that something other than oneself is real, as she is cognizant of the "infinite degradation" of love with respect to the quality of our attachments and attentions. But Murdoch insists that this degradation of love does not dismantle the fundamental nature and/or capacity of love to concrete

[21] *Ibid*., 60.
[22] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 496. (original emphasis)
[23] Jonathan Rothchild, *Retrieving Discarded Visions: Moral Transformation in Paul Tillich, Iris Murdoch, and Criminal Justice* (Ph.D. Dissertation: The University of Chicago, 2004), 324. (original emphasis) (hereafter indicated as *Retrieving Discarded Visions*)

attention to the others and the worlds beyond the relentless ego.[24] This discovery of reality in love leads her to reconfigure Plato's account of love to emphasize the concrete other, insofar as love enables us to address the particularities of an individual qua individual.

Love in Murdoch's account functions as the realist hermeneutical force in human life that must be properly directed in order to live a good life. Magnetically induced by its search for Good, love is reclaimed as the ability to perceive concrete others as "real" since, as Maria Antonaccio puts it, "the world is already constituted as a moral world through our perception."[25] Put succinctly, the idea of love that Murdoch underscores is closely associated with Murdoch's conception of "concrete universals."[26] Carla Bagnoli in her essay on Murdoch explicates this conception in the following way: "Moral concepts must become concrete, but they also must be deployed as universals. To say that the deployment of universals is concrete is to say that we express and manifest something particular with them."[27]

While engaging with Murdoch's thought, I came to realize that the contemporary debate on ethical universalism and particularism is also a question about the nature of love, which since Plato is also inevitably associated with the very nature of philosophy in itself. Philosophy is tragic, according to Plato, because philosophy appears as an experience of love, in which, as Hadot writes, "[P]hilosophy is defined by what it lacks—that is, by a transcendent norm which escapes it, yet which it nevertheless possesses within itself in some way."[28] Murdoch herself as a Platonic thinker conceives of and reclaims love at the moments of the void when and where the unconditional

[24] *Ibid*., 325.
[25] Maria Antonaccio, *Picturing the Human: The Moral Thought of Iris Murdoch* (New York: Oxford University Press), 96. (hereafter indicated as *Picturing the Human*)
[26] Murdoch, *Sovereignty of Good*, 29.
[27] Carla Bagnoli, ''The Exploration of Moral Life," in *Iris Murdoch, Philosopher: a collection of essays*, ed. Justin Broackes (Oxford, Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2012), 223. (hereafter indicated as *Iris Murdoch, Philosopher*)
[28] Pierre Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy*?, 47.

element seems effaced. The reason is that the object of *philo-sophia*, love of wisdom, is the absolute good that one can never attain, but can make progress in its search for human goodness, when facing and consenting to the reality of the void. Love for Murdoch is an endless and passionate task of moral imagination, and, at the closing pages of *The Sovereignty of Good*, she writes the following: "Love is the tension between the imperfect soul and the magnetic perfection which is conceived of as lying beyond it."[29] Murdoch's philosophical and moral output is manifested as the response to Plato's deep concern about the incommensurability of virtue and happiness—at the death of Socrates—due to human ignorance and false consolations. In this respect, she addresses Plato's metaphysical good as ultimate reality and, furthermore, pictures moral knowing as a journey of the soul to a vision of the good, especially in the direction of cherishing the finite and the contingent existence, or put differently, in concrete attention to the others.

Given this nature of love—which attends to the universal and to the particular, and the ultimate and the contingent dimensions of life—which asks the question of the complex realities of living in the world inescapably with these opposites—there are some questions at stake: Is it possible to sustain universal or transcendent moral truths or values such that moral evaluations and judgments can be made and justified? Is there a possible way to construct an ethic of love that questions an absolutism cloaked with religious and moralistic abstractions or challenges a relativism that renders contingency itself the ultimate principle? How can we establish, for instance, the validity of theological/ethical claims within the relativities revealed "in a time of many worlds"?[30] Keeping in mind these questions, we might be prone to think that the only thing we can

[29] Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good*, 100.
[30] William Schweiker, *Theological Ethics and Global Dynamics: In the Time of Many Worlds* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004). (hereafter indicated as *Theological Ethics and Global Dynamics*)

do is nothing but to accept one's contradictions, in other words, to simply connive in our inability to discern and choose ideals in light of which we can guide and orient life. The public discourse of moral values, for example, appears to be devoid of commitments toward the real questions of our lives, as we see them in our contemporary world.[31] Thus in our contemporary era, love should be reclaimed not as a romantic, fantasized one, but as the realist hermeneutical force to enact the moral reflexive agency of humanity and to bridge the finite to the infinite, the particular to the universal, and the existence to the essence.

The fact I am interested in Murdoch's metaphysics has more do with its relevance to the way she explores the concept of love, and less to do with a concern for explicating metaphysics as such. It is so, in this dissertation, because metaphysics in Murdoch's thought is linked with its significance for contemporary ethics in that it seeks to provide a guide to moral reflection by picturing a view of self and to discover the moral demands of being human. It is important to note that Murdoch's metaphysical conception of ethics would not derive from her own abstract philosophizing vacuum, but rather from her critique of the general trends in modern moral philosophy.

First of all, Murdoch signals the decline of the significance of moral philosophy in her *Existentialists and Mystics*: "what seems beyond doubt is that moral philosophy is daunted and confused, and in many quarters discredited and regarded as unnecessary."[32] In her essay "Metaphysics and Ethics," first published in *The Nature of Metaphysics* (1957), she offers a historical analysis on the status of modern moral philosophy when remarking on G. E. Moore's distinction of two questions: what things are good and what does the word "good" mean. Here she

[31] We have recently seen this horrendous aspect in the U.S. election, and particularly its result of Donald Trump's rise to the presidency.
[32] Murdoch, "On 'God' and 'Good'," in *Existentialists and Mystics*, 361.

points out, after pondering Moore's concern, that classical traditional metaphysics, or previous moral philosophers in general,

> because they had failed to distinguish those two questions from each other, had fallen into the error of defining 'good,' or 'valuable,' in terms of some other non-valuable entity, whether a natural entity, such as pleasure, or a metaphysical entity, such as rationality.[33]

Traditional metaphysics demonstrates its claims predicated upon rational arguments and even cosmological claims about the nature of reality, but it would not answer the question what is *good itself* in this way. It was also due to its outdated mode of viewing the world later overthrown by so-called the verificationist view of meaning, entering philosophy from the side of modern natural science or philosophical speculation challenged by what is called "disappearance of the mind" under the dominance of observable actions and patterns of behavior. Murdoch is definitely aware of the definitive breach with classical metaphysical ethics here. However, concerning the meaning of "good," this breach allows the following ramification: ethical propositions or moral philosophy in general are rendered as "*emotive*," neither having descriptive or factual meaning nor stating metaphysical facts because there were none to state.[34] At any rate, the old dilemma about whether ethical propositions or moral remarks were subjective or objective seems to be tethered in moral philosophy, and thus is, as Murdoch points out, discredited and regarded as unnecessary. While consenting on the validity of "much of the criticism of traditional metaphysics, which modern philosophy has made its task,"[35] Murdoch recognizes the trace of its ramification couched in modern moral philosophy; that is, "Modern philosophy is profoundly anti-metaphysical in spirit," based on the logical argument—you can't derive 'ought' from 'is.'"[36] It manifests poignantly in

[33] Iris Murdoch, "Metaphysics and Ethics," in *Existentialists and Mystics*, 59.
[34] *Ibid*., 60-61.
[35] *Ibid*., 71.
[36] *Ibid*., 73.

the forms of behavioristic, utilitarian, logical positivistic, and even moralistic picture of morals: turning to sheer facts, differences of choice, dogmas only.

But there is also a historical factor to reshape Murdoch's thought. Given her experience of the wars, the extreme form of destruction of humanity in Holocaust, and "the prevalence of displaced persons and refugees" depicted in her novels and her philosophy, Maria Antonaccio states that, for Murdoch, "modern moral philosophy had become 'egocentric'" coupled with "an unrealistic conception of will," and "[the loss of] the vision of reality separate from ourselves."[37] Murdoch herself notes of the parallel decline of the idea of human individual in another essay, "Against Dryness":

> We have not recovered from two wars and the experience of Hitler. We are also the heirs of the Enlightenment, Romanticism, and the Liberal tradition. These are the elements of our dilemma: whose chief feature, in my view, is that we have been left with far too shallow and flimsy an idea of human personality.[38]

Here, facing the philosophical and historical landscape that she went through, Murdoch neither wishes to simply invalidate scientific progress of moral philosophy nor to lament the horrendous war years in despair. Rather, lest the task of moral philosophy, which is the analysis of contemporary moral concepts, be too narrowly conceived, Murdoch has suggested that "the subject of investigation is *the nature of man*—and we are studying this nature at a point of great conceptual

[37] Maria Antonaccio, "The Virtues of Metaphysics," in *Iris Murdoch, Philosopher*, 172. Antonaccio is here making reference to Murdoch's essay on 'On "God" and "Good"' in *Sovereignty* of Good, 47. In her later book *A Philosophy to Live By: Engaging Iris Murdoch* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012, 5), Antonaccio further notes about the philosophical and historical landscape that Murdoch faced: "her preoccupation with the horrors of war and the dangers of tyrannical and totalitarian regimes, with questions of good and evil and the madness that can grip both individuals and societies, never (unfortunately) go out of date. More problematic, to some critics, is the fact that some of the values for which Murdoch stood—for example, the value of liberal humanism and her commitment to the traditions of moral and literary realism—came under attack and fell out of favor during the 1980s and 1990s, when deconstruction, antitheory, and antihumanist currents of thought were at their most influential. Murdoch's reputation as a writer suffered accordingly during that period." (hereafter indicated as *A Philosophy to Live By*)

[38] Iris Murdoch, "Against Dryness," in *Existentialists and Mystics*, 287.

sensibility."[39] The problem at stake in modern moral philosophy for Murdoch is, in Antonaccio's phrases, "how to articulate an adequate defense of the individual which is nevertheless grounded within a larger metaphysical account of the reality of the world and other people as separate and objective sources of value."[40] As Murdoch notes in another work, we need "[a] more ambitious conceptual picture, thought out anew in light of modern critical philosophy and our improved knowledge of the world."[41] Moral philosophy that she tries to stand for by her appropriation of metaphysics should concern itself not only with a person's moral judgments, choices, and actions, but also with what she called "the texture of a man's being or the nature of his(her) personal vision."[42] It is Murdoch's metaphysics that functions as a model for describing and analyzing the process of picturing oneself and resembling the picture by making "models and pictures of what different kinds of men are like"[43] rather than simply grasping reductive accounts of reality within the dualism of the subject-object split. In ways that we will explore throughout the dissertation chapters, metaphysics for Murdoch embodies its connection to love, particularly love of the Good, that magnetically compels and reclaims attention to the concrete other.

Through critical engagement with Murdoch, my dissertation can sharpen our gaze upon the role and the place of love in Murdoch's metaphysics that would call for adequate responses to modern philosophy and theology and to our changing world. Love guides us into the object of devotion, Good for Murdoch, which points also to the ground for the conditions of our attention and functions as the ground of criticism. In other words, a deep, or a real, or a proper love demands to be reclaimed when and where absence—"void" in Murdoch's thought —is perceived as

[39] Murdoch, "Metaphysics and Ethics," in *Existentialists and Mystics*, 75 (my emphasis added)
[40] Antonaccio, *A Philosophy to Live By*, 56.
[41] Iris Murdoch, "A House of Theory," in *Existentialists and Mystics*, 181.
[42] Murdoch, "Vision and Choice in Morality," in *Existentialists and Mystics*, 81.
[43] Murdoch, "Metaphysics and Ethics," in *Existentialists and Mystics*, 74.

unavoidably "real." To be sure, Murdoch takes seriously "the fat relentless ego" as the enemy in the moral life.[44] But Murdoch does not seek to explain away our natural moral blindness by veering it to societal, psychological, or linguistic problems. Rather, for Murdoch, roots of human anxiety-ridden, self-preoccupied fear and consolations are ontologically and axiologically present, insofar as they are "manifested as myopic (moral) perception attributable to natural selfishness and egoistic fantasy," as Rothchild puts it.[45] In other words, they are continually manifested in the form of "falsifying *veil* which partially conceals the world… profoundly connected with our energies and our ability to choose and act."[46] Murdoch argues, however, that, the very concept of morality is grounded in the metaphysical reality of the Good, which, in turn, informs human experience of the unconditioned *and* attends to the world as it really is outside the self. It is only possible by reclaiming love—I am reminded of "love as strong as death" (Song 8:6)—that we can evaluate interpretations of self, others, and the world via a true exercise of moral imagination, when faced with the reality of the void.

3. Chapter Summaries

The layout of the chapters is crafted on the central questions about love situated within Murdoch's thought: how the self pictures the meaningfulness of the reality and goodness, how the self establishes/changes its inner life in the encounter and relation to others and the world, and how the self believes (s)he ought to guide and orient their life. These questions are aligned with three conceptual categories—the idea of the Good, inner life, and true consolation—in the moulding of Murdoch's metaphysical ethics. In order to see how love functions in the face of the void, Murdoch

[44] Murdoch, *Sovereignty of Good*, 51.
[45] Rothchild, *Retrieving Discarded Visions*, 14-5.
[46] Murdoch, *Sovereignty of Good*, 82. (original emphasis)

builds a version of a post-Christian religiosity, which she transforms into a transcendental argument for the good and the religious depth of morality on human life, particularly in relation to the idea of love. Some questions are placed more concretely in light of Murdoch's thought on love respectively: "Is [love] 'ultimately' identical with good?" "How can we make ourselves morally better?" Is there true consolation, not a "consoling dream projected by human need on to an empty sky"?[47] Given these questions, the key idea of love in the agenda of Murdochian ethics, as I contend in the dissertation, plays a central role to confront the reality of the void.

Love for Murdoch is chaotic, erotic energy that can be directed or organized by attention to the Good and, more importantly, to concrete individuals by the continuing pursuit of spiritual discipline and perfection. The thought of answers, interplayed with the idea of love, to the above-mentioned questions is articulated in Murdoch:

> We console ourselves with fantasies of "bouncing back." We yield to the natural gravity (*pesanteur*) which automatically degrades our thoughts and feelings.… Instead of this surrender to natural necessity we must hold on to what has really happened and not cover it with imagining how we are to unhappen it. Void makes loss a reality. Do not think about righting the balance, but live close to the painful reality and try to relate it to what is good. What is needed here, and is so difficult to achieve, is a new orientation of our desires, a re-education of our instinctive feelings.[48]

Love as a reorientation of desires is deeply rooted in moral and religious imagination so as to attend reality around us and thereby to respond to what is good beyond the self. This dissertation extends the readings of Murdoch and her significant grip of love for constructive thought by showing an ever-progressive connection between goodness and reality as central to our moral responses to imperatives of love.

[47] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 342; "On 'God' and 'Good,'" 342; *Sovereignty of Good*, 57.
[48] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 502-3.

Chapter one presents the poignant challenges, that is, self-consoling desires for survival and protection, found in the modern and late modern world, and it serves as a *context* for exploring the idea of love embedded in the thought of Murdoch. The purpose of this discussion is to allow us to consider her philosophical and theological criticisms of modern anti-metaphysical spirit manifested in existentialism and analytic ethics. It also allows us to see a crucial difference between Murdoch and contemporary British ethics. In the following chapters, I am exploring a realist, metaphysical account in Murdoch's moral philosophy and isolating the importance of love in terms of protest against false consolations when confronting the void.

Chapter two explores Murdoch's understanding of the idea of the Good with respect to love. Love as the chaotic, erotic desire directed toward the Good demands adequate description of moral agency that underlies her defense of consciousness as the primary mode of moral being and her insistence on human experience of the unconditioned. In the first section of this chapter, I will examine the ways that Murdoch's reading of Plato, particularly the myth of the cave, which illuminates the conceptions of self and reality. In Murdoch's ethical theorizing of the human individual and its normative grounds for the good of human life, Murdoch offers a metaphysical conception of ethics that challenges dominant arrays of modern thought and moral philosophy and thereby attends to matters of ultimate concern, human experience of the unconditioned, and the reality of human goodness. The development of these ideas is followed in the second section to show how she reconstructs the primary mode of moral being, that is human consciousness in the activity of thinking.

I argue that Murdoch's reconstruction of the significant mode of moral self displays central arguments of being, value, and goodness that frame the grounds for the good of human life and thus relatedly her conception of love. Murdoch conceives of the fundamental norm of morality

within her theory of the Good, which reflects, as Antonaccio puts it, "her understanding of the self as a complex being whose individuality resides in the idiosyncratic nature of its moral pilgrimage in the light of the Good."[49] While adopting Plato's idea of the Good and perfection as objects of love, Murdoch reconceives and incarnates them in attention to particular, concrete human individuals, which culminate in Murdoch's ethics of unselfing. It is love that places the demand on consciousness to attend and to unself in light of the Good manifested in concrete others. Love as the capacity to "see" is, I contend, our primary and fundamental mode of moral being, particularly at the moment of the void as "present" and "real" which demands of being human and being moral in our self-reflexive understanding.

Chapter three attends to Murdoch's idea of inner life and its relation to love for envisioning the ways to read both the creative and the consolating forms of late modern world in Murdoch's thought. This chapter places her philosophical and theological engagement with love within her idea of the inner life of consciousness correlated to the idea of the Good. In response to the perplexity of late modern existence where the idea of depth can be too abstract or overly deterministic, Murdoch's acute recognition of "the trivialization of ultimate questions"[50] renders her metaphysical arguments into a discussion of love as a subversive force for reflection on self

[49] Maria Antonaccio, "Form and Contingency in Iris Murdoch's Ethics," in *Iris Murdoch and the Search for Human Goodness*, eds. Maria Antonaccio and William Schweiker (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 134.

[50] In a response to the modern and late modern predicament, Charles Winquist puts this phrase in his 1995 book *Desiring Theology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), x. Anthony Giddens differently construes the late modern problem of culture as "an internally referential system of knowledge and power," (See Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* [Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991]) which is manifested and tenaciously sought by those who adapt and twist the early Wittgensteinian "language-game" argument to defend the distinct "grammar" of religious traditions. See also Ludwig Wittgenstein's concept "language games," [i.e. rules for using the word] to his students, as seen in *The Blue Book* [New York: Harper and Row, 1958], 17), generally known as the preliminary studies for the "Philosophical Investigations." Regarding this poignant matter, Maria Antonaccio points out clearly, "This difficulty is only compounded by the fact that the current theological scene is dominated by proposals urging a return to church-centered forms of piety and practice and a consequent rejection of the supposedly 'faithless' world of secular culture." (Antonaccio, "Iris Murdoch's Secular Theology of Culture," *Literature and Theology*, Vol. 18, No.3 [September 2004], 272).

and the world, particularly by pondering the disappearance of depth manifested in the predicament of the void.[51]

Here we will see how Murdoch's realist and metaphysical ethic, on the one hand, engages Theodor Adorno's deepest criticisms of contemporary society (section 3) and, on the other hand, appreciates the deep sense of Anselm's argument of the ontological proof (section 4). With Adorno's exemplary ideas of consciousness and experience, Murdoch transforms Anselm's main argument into a transcendental argument for the Good that situates the Good in the activity of thinking itself, which is evaluative in nature, as Murdoch notes it, "we are always in motion toward or away from what is more real."[52] It is important to note that Murdoch shows her deep concern for the religious depth of morality which functions as her critical response to the events of "void" of late modern culture.

I contend, in the final analysis, that love can and should be reclaimed so as to invigorate the demand of moral change and attention in light of what is other than ourselves. Murdoch regards love as a realist, hermeneutical principle for engaging with self, other, and the Good, insofar as love in the face of the void becomes a subversive force in a world dominated by totalizing and disintegrating systems.

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[51] Earlier than Murdoch, Paul Tillich describes the cultural situation as nothing less than a "sacred void." In a 1946 essay, after the Second World War, in response to this sign of his times, Tillich holds that "a present theology of culture is, above all, a theology of the end of culture, not in general terms but in a concrete analysis of the inner void of most of our cultural expressions." ("Religion and Secular Culture," in *The Protestant Era*, trans. James Luther Adams (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1948), 60.)

[52] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 295. See also Antonaccio, chapter 4 "Imagining the Good without God," in *A Philosophy to Live By* and chapter 6 "Prospects for Murdochian Ethics," in *Picturing the Human*. In *Picturing the Human*, Antonaccio astutely notes regarding consciousness and its relation to love, "the good is defined as perfected moral vision or illusionless knowledge of reality. This is the inner meaning of the concept of love. Love is a form of conscious attention to the other that has been purified of egoistic illusion…. Consciousness can thus limit its own totalizing energies by imagining its own "outside."" (182)

Chapter four discusses the distinctive insights of Murdoch's idea of true consolation with respect to love. This chapter considers more deeply the notion of the unconditioned in her discussion of true consolation with love, including analysis of Good without God. Love is reclaimed as a new orientation of our desires, insofar as religion for Murdoch is to reorient consciousness. In her demythologization of God as a personification of love, Murdoch argues that we may lose "the old God in disguise," but the idea of Good is "rather what the old God symbolized."[53] What the old God symbolized is deeply connected to Murdoch's "rediscovery of religious modes of thought deep inside morals."[54]

What's at stake in Murdoch's theology without God[55] is that rediscovery of religion as "naturally moral" reclaims the idea of the absolute occurring on human life all the time. It is worth quoting at length about Murdoch's fundamental religious view: "Religion is a mode of belief in the unique sovereign place of goodness or virtue in human life. One might put it flatly by saying that there is something about moral value which goes *jusqu'au bout*. It must go all the way, to the base, to the top, it must be everywhere…. It adheres essentially to the conception of being human, and cannot be detached."[56] The attempt to recover the idea of a moral absolute is deeply rooted in Murdoch's moral ontology, which is critically concerned with the depth of the structure of human existence. With this vantage point, Murdoch moves between Kant and Plato in her claim of the idea of the Good as the constitutive ground of picturing a view of the self and discovering the

[53] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 428.
[54] *Ibid*., 304.
[55] In this demythologized and Godless theory of religion, Murdoch refers to Paul Tillich's notion of "the unconditional element in the structure of reason and reality," as seen in his *Systematic Theology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1951), 1:208). For Tillich, as religion is construed in terms of what ultimately and unconditionally concerns us, Tillich claims in the context of modern secularism that the problem in the modern world is not atheism, but too many gods, often-times imposed as a strange ideology.
[56] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 426. (original emphasis)

moral demands of being human.[57] As I identify some of the crucial concepts at stake in Murdoch's thought, the question arises of whether and in what way consciousness can be related to the spiritual life, as I paraphrase Antonaccio's words into a question: how, if at all, do we resist "the distorted (i.e., egoistic) form of human image-making that [Murdoch] calls fantasy"?[58]

In the final section of this chapter, I will discuss Murdoch's ethic of unselfing by exploring how love is situated within her thought of the void. Murdoch specify the term "attention," which is connected to the idea of "a just and loving gaze" upon "concrete universals."[59] As Murdoch herself refers to the notion of attention to Simone Weil, Murdoch develops the normative function of moral and religious imagination in relation to love. Love attends to one of the fundamental difficulties of life, which is to perceive the unconditional significance of others. As seen in the M and D case in *Sovereignty of Good*, we are naturally ego-centric and selfish, which means that we ordinarily only recognize our own unconditional significance. This reality is resonant with her conviction that "[l]ove is the extremely difficult realization that something other than oneself is real."[60] Attention is a work of imagination, which is in Murdoch's thought linked to an affirmation of the individual. Love as the erotic and spiritual desire for the Good enables us to revisit a "supersensible destiny" correlated with the tragic freedom of love as the drive for unselfing to embrace the universal and recognize the particular. Given this idea of love as the moral and

[57] I am indebted to an insightful essay by Maria Antonaccio, "Imagining the Good: Iris Murdoch's Godless Theology," (published in *The Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics*, Vol. 16 (1996)) particularly the role of imagination for understanding Murdoch's theory of religion. Antonaccio notes the influence of Plato on Murdoch's rejection of theism by the following: "the danger of the traditional, personal concept of God is that we tend to "fake it up" in our own image, using it as an object of egoistic consolation and wish-fulfillment rather than as a source of moral purification." (227)

[58] Antonaccio, "Imagining the Good," 235.

[59] Murdoch, *Sovereignty of Good*, 33, 29.

[60] Iris Murdoch, "The Sublime and the Good," in *Existentialists and Mystics*, 215.

spiritual effort in the pilgrimage from appearance to reality, I will explore the way Murdoch reclaims love at the moments of the void with the poignant question, "is there true consolation?"

Finally, chapter five as the concluding chapter of the dissertation undertakes a synthesis of how love in Murdoch's thought can only be understood comprehensively if we see it combat egoism, false understanding of God, and fantasized illusions. In doing so, I will finally delve into the meaning of acceptance of human finitude—death and suffering evoked by the presence of "the void"—and yet the belief in human capacity for moral change. In this way, I will complete the argument of the dissertation that I reclaim love, at the experience of "the void," as the hermeneutical key to awaken our moral and religious imagination and in our renewed commitment to what is really real and good.

Murdoch speaks about love as that which yearns for loving attention to concrete others within metaphysical framework. As we will explore throughout this dissertation, Murdoch has a distinctive interest in the interpenetration of three categories to aid to confront the void: the idea of the Good, inner life, and true consolation. Murdoch's love of the Good and ethic of unselfing shows the depths and unconditional claims of morality. Murdoch's understanding of love contributes to reclaiming, in the midst of "void," or "absence," a possible authentic goodness, human *and* divine, as "a vision of an absolute at the center of human existence."[61] We now turn to the final section of this introductory chapter to meet the challenges that we face in the modern and late modern world, which serves as a context for this dissertation.

4. Challenges: Self-Consoling Desires for Survival and Protection

[61] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 442.

I am faced with modifications of old, as some would argue, even discarded, questions given the challenges faced in late modernity, often named the posthuman and postreligious world: that is, how are we to think about the idea of love as it concerns human beings who can picture and change themselves, to attend to and live with others and the world, and to reorient consciousness in light of a transcendental reality, the Good? The object of my reflection in this dissertation is human moral existence. It is a hermeneutical task that evokes a theological and ethical inquiry on levels of meaning and also levels of human existence. Therefore, the hermeneutics of love I engage with in the dissertation is neither simply developing what is called "love monism,"[62] as some theologians try to do, nor delving into "the semantics of love,"[63] analyzing the distinctions between *eros*, *philia*, and *agape*, which is more often than not associated with the standard account of Christian love.[64] As noted earlier in this chapter, love is reclaimed not as a simple and ready-made recipe for all, but as a hermeneutical prism through which to perceive, reflect, and reorient the meaning and value of being human in the midst of our all-too-human claims of false consolations.

[62] William Schweiker in his D.R. Sharpe/Hoover Lecture of 2003 conference at the Divinity School of the University of Chicago puts it regarding this tendency: Love monism is the term used in an account of Christian ethics, "where love and love alone is the norm for all moral and political decisions." He continues, "On my reasoning, a distinctly Christian account of love is not meant to cover all the ethical bases, as it were. A good deal of mischief is done in ethics when we try to press one concept (such as love, virtue, narrative, or command) to cover all moral matters." (Schweiker, "Distinctive Love," in *Humanity before God: Contemporary Faces of Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Ethics*, eds. Michael Johnson, Kevin Jung, and William Schweiker [Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2006], 95.)

[63] The semantics of love is concerned with different types of love, whose primary distinction is between *eros* and *agape*. In his 1968 book *Agape and Eros*, Anders Nygren argues that Christian love is properly *agape* not *eros*, and thereby locates a sharp dichotomy between *eros* and *agape.* There are generally two responses to Nygren's work: the one is to point out his misreading of Plato or to argue that his strict distinction between divine love, *agape*, and erotic love, *eros* forestalls a constructive understanding of Christian love with both *eros* and *agape*. Both responses wittingly or unwittingly support the "semantic understandings" to conceptualize love. Given these semantics of love, Schweiker offers an alternative reading as a critique of agapiestic ethics. He rather writes, as opposed to the quite popular hold on semantic distinction of love: "the love commands are a prism through which a vision of life must be factored if any love is to attain fullness." (Schweiker, "Distinctive Love," 113)

[64] I am greatly indebted to William Schweiker's point about how to engage "discourses on love" ethically and theologically in an adequate way to face and respond to the challenges of our own day. See Schweiker, "Distinctive Loves," 91-117.

Love in itself must be tested, insofar as love is self-involving and at the same time self-negating, otherwise remaining rooted in fickle and distorted forms of will and desire.

The nature of love understood in this way is correlated to the nature of our human existence, that is "freedom" and *finite* freedom. To be sure, the replacement of "one type of certainty" (divine law or the tutelage of the past) by another (the certainty of human senses or reason) in Anthony Gidden's phrases[65] signals the autonomy of the ethical: the attempt to separate the ethical from any presumably heteronomous weight. However, bereft of a transcendental foundation to which it could appeal in times of predicament implied in human existence, the Enlightenment inevitably found in itself considerable difficulties, particularly vexing for modern thinkers continuing to encounter problems of evil, and, specifically, human evil. There is a criticism of the very task of trying to provide the rational ground for inherited beliefs and norms: can reason really do this? Or are all appeals to reason finally shown at the end of the day simply to be an assertion of the powerful over the weak? To these questions which the project of modernity was inextricably bound, Ernst Mach writes, "[T]he ego cannot be saved," by which he means that "the ego is not an unalterable, definite, sharply bounded unity."[66]

This kind of reaction is no exception to Murdoch. While Mach developed his critique of the modern ego "as a fictional label without substance denoting clusters of sensations" and "as a monad that was isolated from the world,"[67] Murdoch makes a pithy statement regarding this modernist impulse: "Subjectivist philosophies lose the object in the subject, objectivist

[65] See more in Anthony Giddens, *Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991).
[66] Ernst Mach, *Die Analyze der Empfindungen und das Verhältnis des Physischen zum Psychischen: Zweite vermehrte Auflage der Beiträge zur Analyse der Empfindungen* (Jena, Germany: Gustav Fischer, 1900), 16-17/24; qtd. In Richard Sheppard, *Modernism-Dada-Postmodernism* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2000), 46.
[67] Ernst Mach, *Erkenntnis und Irrtum: Skizzen zur Psychologie der Forschung* (Leipzig: Verlag von Johann Ambrosius Barth, 1917), 462/361; qtd. in *ibid*.

philosophies divide it irrevocably from the subject."[68] While she grants the value of the individual and individual freedom, which she vehemently developed in her notion of the irreducibility of the human self to any form of totality after her war experiences, Murdoch believes that modern moral philosophy and its assumptions failed to provide the conceptual resources necessary to preserve those values. Preoccupied with this concern about the modern problem of subject and object, Murdoch points out the key problem in contemporary British ethics: "its exclusive emphasis on act and choice, and its neglect of the 'inner life.'" [69] Far from being the autonomous or transcendental ego of the post-Kantian ethics, claims Murdoch, morality was seen to be at the mercy of more rigid moral behaviorism with linguistic turn, often shown in strict empirical terms. Morality trapped in this understanding of self and the world began to go wrong to the extent that, as Murdoch claims, cognitive human subjects tend to be reduced to "a neutral surveyor of the facts" in two ways: it either "reduces moral subjectivity to a unitary faculty such as reason or the will," seen in Kant and Sartre, or "reduces the being of the self to a mere cipher in a larger network or totality (whether linguistic or social)," seen in early Wittgenstein and Derrida.[70] We can see a good example of this Murdoch's thought in her discussion about thinking and language. Murdoch says in her essay "Thinking and Language," "The meaning-character of uttered speech often demands an awareness of gesture, tone, and so on, as well as of context, for its full understanding. The thought is not the words (if any) but the words occurring in a certain way with, as it were, a certain force and color."[71] We as moral agents speak *something* to *someone* in our world, which is always

[68] Iris Murdoch, "Hegel in Modern Dress," in *Existentialists and Mystics*, 146.
[69] Iris Murdoch, "Knowing the Void," in *Existentialists and Mystics*, 159.
[70] Antonaccio, *A Philosophy to Live By*, 40. Here Antonaccio nicely puts Murdoch's critical stance against the reductive treatment of the moral self seen in these philosophies.
[71] Murdoch, *Existentialists and Mystics*, 34. Antonaccio comments that "the world is already constituted as a moral world through our perception, which is a function of the ordinary operation of consciousness. In the light of the transcendental Good, therefore, all perception is moral perception." (*A Philosophy to Live By*, 42)

morally colored. Put differently, for Murdoch, we human beings do not confer or impose value on neutral sheer facts, lest we should fall into the trap of "naturalistic fallacy" or lose sight of a "disinterested" view of life, whose picture is simple, behavioristic, and anti-metaphysical.

It is suggestive of the challenges that we face in the modern and late modern era: staying in the cave of false certainty concomitant with the loss of self and the loss of value for the real and the true. William Schweiker problematizes the challenge for late modern society like the following: "the problem of the loss of vision in late-modern society is rooted not simply in an ego that seeks omnipotence, but, rather, in an equation of power with value."[72] The challenges are inextricably connected with the question of the origin and ground of value, but this connection is lost or denied by the philosophy of values. Its representatives manifest themselves in two forms of thought, but they are two sides of the same coin: the internalist turn and the externalist turn. They will be explained further below.

First, the internalist turn connects conferring of value with its exclusive emphasis on "what is private" internal to the agent. The conferring of value must be subject to the disposition, preference, or affection of the agent. Inner states of mind such as impulse and feeling are the guide for what is valuable to the individual. The criterion for judging the value of something is personal and unique to the individual, disconnected from any objective reality. Charles Taylor names this form of modern internalization "the expressivist turn" already seen in late 18th century Romanticism: "This notion of an inner voice or impulse, the idea that we find the truth within us, and in particular in our feelings—these were the crucial justifying concepts of the Romantic rebellion in its various forms."[73] Murdoch also considers the Romantic Movement to be "involving

[72] Schweiker, "The Sovereignty of God's Goodness," 216.
[73] Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 368-9. (hereafter indicated as *Sources of the Self*)

the liberation of the individual into an open space wherein to *construct* his morality, stirred and edified by reflection upon freedom versus necessity, passion versus reason, value versus fact."[74] With severance between fact and value, driven by the transient incitements of personal feeling and desire, however, there entails disengagement with the world outside of the self. Often-times, this turn inward does not lead to any higher, objective reality but renders ethical propositions as "emotive," neither having descriptive or factual meaning nor stating metaphysical facts because there were none to state. This turn inward manifests, before and after the Romantic Movement, in different forms of thought regarding the self as key to morality: mind, reason, will, and choice.

The status of "what is private" was taken by Rene Descartes as positing the *cogitatio*, the sense-datum. Descartes pictures a solitary *mind* having certain knowledge only of its immediate apprehensions as mental data of indubitable clarity and separable integral existence. In Descartes, the existence of one and one's world is put into "brackets" and thus one becomes pure consciousness, a naked epistemological subject, whereas the world becomes an object of scientific inquiry and technical management. Being manifested in the *cogito* alone, this idealistic conception of the thinking subject seems to render everything, even God, merely logical objects packed up inside the *cogito* and found to be indubitable.[75] This move, interestingly enough, seems to find a

[74] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 40. (original emphasis)

[75] Murdoch, in her chapter "Descartes and Kant" (*Metaphysics*, 431-60), elaborates further in detail about the development of the self and the idea of God:

> His version of the Proof in the *Third Meditation* is a complex structure. Descartes has already argued that *cogito ergo sum*. What follows, intimately connected with the *cogito*, appears as a proof that I give to myself. I am sure that I exist (now) because of the clearness and distinctness with which I apprehend *this*. This unique momentary intuition is one thing I can be absolutely certain is not an illusion. Clear distinct knowledge is also called by Descartes 'the natural light.' (Metaphors of vision.) The truths of mathematics also stand out clearly in this light. Could I be deceived about these? Descartes is reluctant to believe that such clearly and distinctly perceived notions could be false. Mathematics enters as a cautious support to the idea that what is clearly and distinctly perceived is true. Descartes is certain that he possesses the idea of God. He reflects that as the idea of substance has more objective reality than the idea of accidents, so the idea of God has more objective reality than any other idea. I know myself to be imperfectly yet I have this idea of

stronger empirical concern more friendly to science than to ethics or religion. Different from Descartes, but disturbed by the Humian datum as an epistemological starting point, Kant, in another idealist turn, sought to establish a framework of understanding on all of our experiences by the *rational* will. Murdoch writes, "Kant, turning the problem round (the 'Copernican Revolution') started from evident truths of empirical experience and science and *deduced* a complex knower or metaphysical subject who must *exist* as their counterpart."[76] Kant's distinction of the self as knower and as moral agent evidently renders Kant's division of fact from value. While he acknowledges that our perception of reality is structured by characteristics of the human mind, Kant in his *Grundlegung* assumes freedom and a rational will because of the existence of the moral law, and then proves the reality of the moral law through the concept of freedom. Murdoch notes, "Kant's man as knower of the phenomenal world (exercising theoretical reason) is to be distinguished from his man as moral agent (exercising practical reason)."[77] Kant's concept of the free and autonomous will is the sole determiner of its world and what is right and good in that world. Thus rationality in this internal turn is not merely an individual phenomenon, but a transcendental condition, not limited by specific, empirical events, under which every rational person can make sense of experience, particularly moral principles for action.

Another way of placing the criteria for moral judgement solely within the choosing will (in one's own bosom) of the individual is offered by the existentialists. The origin of existentialism derives from the protest against the vicious abstraction of reason from any vision of a value-laden universe and apart from any given situation of the self. That's why existentialism, as often-times

> perfection, so must it not be derived from elsewhere, and must not the cause be at least as great as the effect? The idea of what is so great must have come from as great an origin. (*Metaphysics*, 434)

[76] *Ibid*., 148.
[77] *Ibid*., 149.

famously, but not exclusively, is summarized by Kierkegaard's attack on Hegel. What is denied in existentialism is that thought can be reduced to a rational, objectifying, and thus theoretical activity. In existentialist thought, to be or to exist in any form of life is not a matter of thinking, but a matter of passion, choice, and will; thus, the human is pictured as randomly thrown into a meaningless world condemned to decide to be a self, "authentic" self. To use Jean-Paul Sartre's words, "man is condemned to be free: condemned, because he did not create himself, yet nonetheless free, because once cast into the world, he is responsible for everything he does."[78] Freedom as an act of the will, free from any given set of values and beliefs, is central to the existentialist self. What's at stake in existentialist thought, Murdoch points out, is the equation of the empty moral words with the emptiness of the will: "The empty moral words correspond here to the emptiness of the will. If the will is to be totally free the world it moves in must be devoid of normative characteristics, so that morality can reside entirely in the pointer of pure choice."[79] After "immense care is taken to picture the will as isolated from reason"[80] and to deprive reason of the use of normative words, morality in this account resides at its exclusive emphasis on act and choice, and its neglect of the "inner life" that existentialism professed to defend. The more extreme form of existentialism may turn "towards determinism, towards fatalism, and even towards regarding freedom as a complete illusion."[81] The trajectory of these ramifications manifests in more rigid moral behaviorism with a linguistic turn, which degenerates into further rigid separation between fact and value.

The existentialist thought identifies the unfettered will as discontinuous with the outward movement, only turning to sheer facts and differences of choice. This effectuates a radical turn to

[78] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, trans. by Carol Macomber (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 29.
[79] Murdoch, *Sovereignty of Good*, 40.
[80] *Ibid*., 7.
[81] *Ibid*., 35.

empiricist and positivist philosophies. A. J. Ayer, for example, a leading representative of logical positivism, insists that "in saying that a certain type of action is right or wrong, I am not making any factual statement, not even a statement about my own state of mind. I am merely expressing certain moral sentiments."[82] While he presents a verificationist view of meaning as the only valid basis for philosophy, Ayer argues that moral or religious statements, insofar as logical or empirical verification of them is not possible, cannot be translated into non-ethical, empirical terms, and then discards appeals to non-empirical moral truths as "worthless." In response to the distinction between non-normative and normative descriptions of ethical terms, Murdoch writes regarding Ayer's positivistic stance:

> Ayer's use of the distinction between fact and value deliberately removes value. His 'explanation' of truth, his 'elimination' of the transcendent, not least his claim that philosophical thought can only concern uses of language, are more suggestive of the reductionist ruthlessness of the followers of Derrida than of the milder reflections of the empiricist tradition.[83]

Murdoch continues to comment that his thought "diminishes the human scene to the scale of a logical puzzle."[84] This Murdochian response to the key problem in contemporary British ethics evinces that human existence is not always open to strict empirical verifications. Let's turn to the other side of the philosophy of values, that is, the externalist turn.

Second, the opposite side from the internalist options is the view that the self and its values are constituted and located completely outside the choosing and valuing self. The externalist move in much recent philosophy—analytical and poststructuralist—comes up to the foreground to challenge and remove mistaken views about the "contents of the mind." Murdoch notes about this

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[82] A.J. Ayer, *Language, Truth, and Logic* (New York: Dover Publications, 1952); reprinted in "Critique of Ethics and Theology," in *Essays on Moral Realism*, ed. Geoffrey Sayre-McCord (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), 31.
[83] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 43.
[84] *Ibid*.

trend of a linguistic determinism external to the individual: "as in other metaphysical 'totalities,' system obliterates a necessary recognition of the contingent."[85] To be sure, poststructuralists like Derrida and other postmodern thinkers in their thoughts acknowledge something, external to us, that is not under one's immediate control. It can be called "turn to the other"—the vast linguistic region of *archi-écriture*, something infinitely deferred in Derrida; the face of the other in Emmanuel Levinas; difference, not representation, in Gilles Deleuze—to name a few. In these "externalist, other-turn" attempts, the individual self is subsumed into the linguistic system or constituted by the other, completely other than the self. This metaphor of the wholly other than the self, determining every part of the reality and the self, is notable and impressive. However, I contend that these turns are already defined by and situated within the self-world relation, and they are another name for "*ergo sum*," or "being *qua* being," that Descartes or Kant seeks to uphold.

There is another externalist turn that I want to note here finally: the narrative-communitarian turn. In this view, our moral self is pictured and re-shaped by "its embeddedness in complex historical, social, and narrative contexts," as Antonaccio points out.[86] One must in

[85] *Ibid*., 194. Murdoch has a complex and critical reflection, for example, on Derridean notion of *différance* that defers our judgments upon differences of the other selves. However, Murdoch's reading of Derrida seems controversial when she criticizes "so sort of plausible amoralistic determinism" that she associates with Derrida. Tony Milligan writes about the ambiguity of Murdoch's targeting for criticism: "Murdoch's reading of Derrida is at times so loose that it is no longer clear that he is the main object of her criticism" ("Murdoch and Derrida: Holding Hands Under the Table," in *Iris Murdoch: Texts and Contexts*, eds. Anne Rowe & Avril Horner [London and New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2012], 77). David Tracy also notes this controversial aspects of Murdoch's reading of Derrida: "Her reading of Derrida is especially severe—and, in my judgment, uncharacteristically unfair at times. Perhaps a reading of Derrida's recent work on ethics (e.g., Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, trans. Peggy Kaumf [London: Routledge, 1994]) might help to modify Murdoch's reading" ("Iris Murdoch and the Many Faces of Platonism," in *Iris Murdoch and the Search for Human Goodness*, eds. Maria Antonaccio and William Schweiker [Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996], 62). I am not going into the debate about the adequacy of her reading, which is beyond the scope of this dissertation. But the point I want to make is that Murdoch sees in analytic and poststructuralist philosophies an interpretation of the world where the being of the self is reduced to a mere cipher in a vast system or sign structure. This is for Murdoch a linguistic determinism; if this is the case, there is a loss of value in this metaphysics of meaning in which the unconditional significance of the individual self are deprived in a mutual relationship of signs and its network of meaning systems. See more Chapter 7: Derrida and Structuralism in *Metaphysics*.

[86] Antonaccio, *Picturing the Human*, 176.

some manner be a member of the specific community in order to understand its claims about reality and its moral values; that is to say, communitarians and narrative ethicists hold that a moral worldview coupled with values and norms and moral worldview is specific to a community and its forms of life and discourse. Alasdair MacIntyre makes this kind of turn in his book *After Virtue,* where he writes: "[i]t is because we all live out narratives in our lives and because we understand our own lives in terms of the narratives that we live out that the form of narrative is appropriate for understanding the actions of others."[87] The key question in this view is "Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?" in order to approach the question of what ought I to do.[88] The matrix of value or meaning of the individual life is and should be situated within a larger narrative framework that is not of our choosing or making.

Stanley Hauerwas and other post-liberal theologians make bold claims about "a turn to language," in Schweiker's words, and to the particularity of their community and thereby rejection of cosmopolitanism or universalism found in much modern Christian thought. Hauerwas argues that "Christians believe that God has made available to us friendships and practices correctly embodied in a community called church that supplies such "externality.""[89] In this narrative ethics, rather than primarily valuing from rational will or choice or even a leap of faith, the self is constituted and enmeshed by the incommensurable narrative and practice of the community. Hauerwas' position can be called "conventional ethics" insofar as there is no warrant for the norms and values beyond the convention and forms of character found in the specific community, and that is why these thinkers often-times appeal to Aristotle.

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[87] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 212. (hereafter indicated as *After Virtue*)
[88] *Ibid*., 216.
[89] Stanley Hauerwas, "Murdochian Muddles: Can We Get Through Them If God Does Not Exist?" in *Iris Murdoch and the Search for Human Goodness*, eds. Maria Antonaccio and William Schweiker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 207. (hereafter indicated as "Murdochian Muddles")

To be sure, these options, either internal to the self or external outside of the self, are concerned with what confers value in our everyday life. Despite their insightful claims on their own obviousness, however, they tend to fall prey to problems with "the equation of power and value"[90] and thus with moral subjectivity or result in an overly diminished view of self or moral agency. Tillich speculates about the problem of modern philosophy of values in this way:

> Its representatives think in terms of a hierarchy of values.… For our problem, this means first of all that values lie above and below each other and that there can be no immanence of one within another. The value of the holy, for example, cannot be immanent in the value of the good, and conversely. The relationship is external and may lead to the elimination of one or the other—most frequently, in this case, the value of the holy.[91]

Murdoch, of course, appeals to our experience of gradation or degrees of value; she however understands this hierarchy of value as qualitative distinctions of value in relation to the real. The idea of moral value, that is the Good, is at once transcendent and immanent on the cognition of the ubiquity of value in the world, as we perceive it everywhere. Murdoch thus points out the philosophical difficulties with respect to the reality of self and the world: "Philosophical difficulties may arise if we try to give any organized background sense to the normative word 'reality.'"[92] The issue at stake is not about different moral outlooks based on different codes or frames, as the German sociologist Niklas Luhmann notes that "[m]odern society is a polycentric, polycontextual system."[93] Rather, it is about an evaluative task to go beyond any felt discrepancy between a valuating individual or group and the search for the norm or the ground of value. It must be, I judge, followed up with these questions: how, if at all, can we escape an illusion or a fantasy that resides solely in a formula, a center, or hierarchy centered in the human or divine or even the

[90] Schweiker, "The Sovereignty of God's Goodness," 216.
[91] Paul Tillich, *Morality and Beyond* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 25.
[92] Murdoch, *Sovereignty of Good*, 39.
[93] Niklas Luhmann, *Theories of Distinction: Redescribing the Description of Modernity*, ed. William Rasch (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 52.

dyad of the self and others; how can we reclaim the sense of transcendence which attends, at the same time, to concrete individual and social existence in our lived reality. William Schweiker, in his essay "Humanizing Religion," proposes a need of more complex and yet also coherent accounts of moral knowledge in the welter of dispute on "strident humanistic or fanatic religious outlooks centered on man or God."[94] He further writes, "Knowledge is multidimensional, I contend, and is constituted by the interaction among codes and frames rather than being organized through a "center" or a "hierarchy," whether that center is the man of humanism, the god of religion, or the deconstruction of those binaries."[95] The relationship between knowledge and values which correspond to it is deeply rooted in a conviction, *limited* to be sure, expressed to the extent that, as Murdoch puts it, "we are not free in the sense of being able suddenly to alter ourselves."[96]

The modern and late modern intense longing for a center or a hierarchy—the "internalist turn" to the self or the ensuing "externalist turn" outside of the self—signifies the shift to "explicit choices" incommensurable with competing moral beliefs. It leads, on the one hand, to the rigid emphasis on a hierarchy of values where all appeals to reason or will finally be shown to be simply an assertion of the powerful over the weak. On the other hand, preoccupation with otherness and difference as the hallmark of postmodern reflection are being absorbed into the habitual objection in the name of "deconstruction." The hegemonic emphasis on deconstruction, however, leads to another type of "center" that subordinates the complexity of life in the "nightmarish prophetic

[94] William Schweiker, "Humanizing Religion," in *The Journal of Religion*, Vol.89, No.2 (April 2009), 226. This essay is a published version of Schweiker's inaugural lecture as the Edward L. Ryerson Distinguished Service Professor of Theological Ethics delivered at the University of Chicago Divinity School on April 24, 2008. It is reprinted in Dust That Breathes*: Christian Faith and the New Humanism*s (Chichester, West Sussex; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010). (hereafter indicated as *Dust That Breathes*) I am deeply indebted to Schweiker's thought on the relation between power and value to respond to the modern and late modern challenges. I found deep resonance of Schweiker's theological ethical stance to Murdoch, but in a much developed and refined form as an adequate response to the 21st-century world-situation that we now face.

[95] *Ibid*., 226-7.

[96] Murdoch, *Sovereignty of Good*, 38.

theorizing," as Murdoch puts it.[97] It is what some critics of postmodernism call "anti-humanism," which would negate the priority of human agency in orienting life, and at the same time deny the unconditional character of the moral altogether.

Murdoch in her construal of the sources of values in morality notes the unconditioned element in morality that cannot sever morality and religion: "High morality without religion is too abstract, high morality craves for religion. Religion symbolizes high moral ideas which then travel with us and are more intimately and accessibly effective than the unadorned promptings of reason."[98] Murdoch thus sees clearly the relation between the transcendence and immanence of values saturated within the multidimensional lived reality. In doing so, I contend, Murdoch identifies the experience of "void" crucially important for a renewed commitment to some objective good because "void" is the state of not being determined by human reason or will, nor under its immediate control either by internal or external to the self. It is manifested by Murdoch's interpretive notion of "necessity." I further contend that love is reclaimed where difficult and painful choices of values are faced in the experience of void and where power is not construed as any impulse to console and elevate ourselves but, rather, rendered subservient to what respects and enhances all that which exists.[99]

The significant gesture toward moral challenge in the modern and late modern era—and our present era—is not simply about which entity is valuable in the dyad between the subject and the object, thought and being, or lover and beloved, but rather about how to orient our power to what is important to us, what we love, and, to use in Tillich's words, what ultimately concerns us.

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[97] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 472.
[98] *Ibid*., 484.
[99] I have paraphrased what Schweiker offers a compelling insight in the relation of power and value: "An act of power is then not value-conferring; power has value when it respects and enhances finite existence." ("The Sovereignty of God's Goodness," 229).

One of the deep worries of Murdoch is that human beings are not always valued as they should be, due to the inner-thought-outer-thing dualism, the validity of which is simply dependent on either internal or external conditions. Murdoch shows her deep concern about the problem of that dualism in moral philosophy:

> We are not 'most certain' of our momentary concentration upon our private self-experience. We cannot 'know' in a solitary instant. Knowing involves concepts, context, surroundings. 'A great deal of stage-setting in the language' must be presumed. (*Investigations* 257). What is primary is an awareness *already* in the world.… 'An "inner process" stands in need of outer criteria.'(*Investigations* 580)[100]

Later Wittgenstein's notion of the impossibility of private language would illuminate the fact that private language, even private *moral* language, seems to be impossible apart from human content, insofar as the human world is already saturated with sense-felt meaning-making values. The moral challenge to our present era is when we tend to be and sometimes are forced to be blind to see the depth in a world, the world that is structured and saturated with manifoldness of meaning. This moral blindness enmeshed in the intrinsic split of logical claims with respect to the subject and the object hinders and disregards "an exercise of justice and realism and really *looking*."[101]

Now I have envisaged these self-consoling desires for survival and protection enmeshed in our world, but before going a little further with these challenges, one argument that I have just made begs question. If modern and late modern lives are themselves richer and more varied than ever before, but torn between contradictory values and aspirations, then the question is how to orient our power to what we care about and what we love. This statement may sound like another kind of subjectivistic theory about value, if it is presumed at all that our moral choice and act would

[100] Iris Murdoch, "Wittgenstein and the Inner life," in *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, 270. (original emphasis) See Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte (Chichester, West Sussex, UK; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).
[101] Murdoch, *Sovereignty*, 89.

be determined by "what we love." However, it is also a definite reason why love is reclaimed with respect to the question of the source and ground of value. Let me explain briefly how.

I reclaim love as the capacity to discern the significance of mediation between the person who values and the beloved, but also to test the claim itself of what we love, otherwise degenerating into either wooden absolutism or absolute relativism. Love should be reclaimed within a moral ontology that recognizes the claim of Good as *sine qua non* criterion for morality, insofar as we are innately constituted by the presence of love and to love life. "What we love," properly construed, points not to the knowledge of the beloved, particularly the knowledge of analysis and calculating manipulation, but rather to our power to resist the forces of disintegration and to integrate our existence. William Schweiker, the eminent thinker who places the activity of valuing and love at the center of morality, points out the key moral problem in our era: the proper direction of the human power to act in the world.[102] In his book *Responsibility and Christian Ethics*, he advocates that "the power and dignity of human agents ought to respect and enhance the integrity of life" in the midst of the variety of goods in life.[103] The critical issue for Schweiker is that we cannot make the other person an object within the self-world relation. This objectification, as our world has seen, causes an explosion of the effects of human power on other human beings, the environment, the global economy, and even the threat of mass destruction.[104] The way this power has been objectified and privatized places it more in the hands of institutions, whether cultural, economic, political, or even religious, than individual persons, making it all the more difficult to connect power with moral evaluation and thus to live responsibly.

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[102] William Schweiker, *Responsibility and Christian Ethics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995). Also See David. E. Klemm and William Schweiker, *Religion and the Human Future: An Essay on Theological Humanism*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008).
[103] *Ibid*., 30.
[104] *Ibid*., 24.

The reason I draw on "modernity" issue about moral identity and reasoning is because the poignancy of this challenge revolves around the claim about human existence and the question of normativity. Occupied with an act of creative, imaginative human will, the modern world signals the decline of appeals to authority as the ground for normative claims; however, at the same time, as human power increases in the modern and even late modern world, people become increasingly confused about the bases of morality and attempt to find reductionist forms of secularism and/or religiosity. Modern humans are threatened by a world created by themselves. In other words, "the reflexivity of knowledge systems" witnessed in Anthony Gidden's words renders moral identity and self-reflection impervious to what is other than the self, or averts our attention to locate a good beyond subjective dominance "in relation to the linguistic community or some other "whole.""[105] This challenge regarding the modern and late modern predicament has been manifested also in different forms of false consolations that also pose an immediate and pressing concern to us in our lives: what is the relation of inner life to the Good? what is true consolation rooted in the face of the void? These questions are clearly found in Murdoch, and she develops the cognitive, realist, and axiological reflection/interpretation about the diversity of values that permeate life and the imperative of love.

With the severance between fact and value, driven by either "the transient incitements of personal feeling and desire" or "the severity of anonymous requirements of eternal reason,"[106] there entails the loss of unconditional depth and the loss of the depth of meaning. Relatedly,

[105] Antonaccio, *Picturing the Human*, 178-9.
[106] Harry G. Frankfurt in his *The Reasons of Love* argues that the origins of normativity do not lie in those drives quoted here, but rather in "the contingent necessities of love." He continues, "These move us, as feelings and desires do; but the motivations that love engenders are not merely adventitious or (to use Kant's term) heteronomous. Rather, like the universal laws of pure reason, they express something that belongs to our most intimate and most fundamental nature." Harry G. Frankfurt, The Reasons of Love (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004), 48.

Sigmund Freud in his *Civilization and Its Discontents* succinctly writes the following, a wry conclusion about modern humanity:

> Today [humanity] has come very close to the attainment of this ideal, he has almost become a god himself… But in the interests of our investigations, we will not forget that present-day man does not feel happy in his Godlike character.[107]

Far from being rational, human beings were seen to be innately irrational. Far from being inherently moral, human beings were seen to be fundamentally *animal*, as Alain Badiou once noted.[108] This modern, which sadly enough continued into the late modern, development of human self-creation manifests itself into two dangerous extremes, as Isaiah Berlin points out: irrationalism and nationalism. The notion of self-creation with the associated concept of the right to self-expression led, in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, to the wilder excess of irrationalism and nationalism. At the individual level, Kant's concept of the self-legislating nature of rational will and Fichte's concept of the Ideal self ironically paved the way for the extreme individualism of the "romantic hero" and eventually to the later nineteenth century nihilistic irrationalism: "irrational forces are now set above rational, for what cannot be criticized or appealed from seems more compelling than what reason can analyze."[109] On the other hand, at the collective level, self-creation involved in the self-expression of the nation took the form of nationalism coupled with the neo-rationalism of Hegel and Marx, that is the laws of social evolution in the exorable forces of history. In one-sided and dangerous nationalism, the value of the individual becomes insignificant in relation to the state or nation, and war and terror can be justified in the name of progress of humanity in history.[110] This rampant conversion of this reflexive totalization into these

[107] Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1989), 91-92.
[108] Alain Badiou, *Logics of Worlds: Being Event 2*, trans. Alberto Toscano (London: Continuum, 2009), 1.
[109] Isaiah Berlin, *The Crooked Timber of Humanity: Chapters in the history of Ideas*, ed. Henry Hardy (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997), 195.
[110] *Ibid*., 198.

dangers is coupled with the following social and worldly features: economic horror where greedy speculation and unbridled competition alone make the rules and drag us down to hell.[111] Globalization, far from being a happy state of affairs, has, it is claimed, merely made the poor poorer and the rich richer, in contempt of any ethical consideration. The world of money creates a society of hyper-consumption and no sense of fellow-feeling, which leaves us completely indifferent to our next-door neighbor. Antonaccio shows this failure of modernity in Murdoch's moral theory: neurosis and convention. Antonaccio writes,

> The first danger Murdoch calls "neurosis," which she relates to the construction of self-absorbed myths or fantasies that inflate the importance of the self and obscure the reality of others. The second danger she calls "convention," which she relates to the loss of the individual in the face of a larger social totality.[112]

These two types are actually two sides of the same coin, both being late modern pathologies. Murdoch herself imagines the concept of freedom beyond Kant and Hegel, which is tragic in a sense of "freedom as an exercise of the imagination in an unreconciled conflict of dissimilar beings."[113] It is related to her concept of love via imagination or its exercise, because "love is the extremely difficult realization that something other than oneself is real."[114] In this respect, Murdoch articulates "a nonegoistic form of consciousness" beyond the idea of both identity and totality and on grounds other than self. Here, for Murdoch, love is pictured as "a subversive force"

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[111] Hell Chosun (Korea's previous dynasty) is satiring word for the disparity of wealth in Korean society, something like "1% has money, 99% has people."

[112] Antonaccio, *Picturing the Human*, 101.

[113] Murdoch, "The Sublime and the Good," In *Existentialists and Mystics*, 217.

[114] *Ibid*., 215. Parenthetically speaking, Paul Tillich has a similar point in a theological viewpoint. While accepting the irreversibility of the emergence of modern selfhood, Tillich seeks to identify within modernity ways of challenging and disrupting any one-sided conformist tendencies seen in the religious and the secular, and exemplifies love as follows: "Love, as the ultimate principle of morality, is always the same. Love entering the unique situation, in the power of the Spirit, is always different. Therefore love liberates us from the bondage to absolute ethical traditions, to conventional morals, and of authorities that claim to know the right decision perhaps without having listened to the demand of the unique moment. The Spirit is the Spirit of newness. It breaks the prison of any absolute moral law, even when vested with the authority of a sacred tradition. Love can reject as well as utilize every moral tradition, and it always scrutinizes the validity of a moral convention." *Morality and Beyond*, 43. See also *Systematic Theology*, 3:272-4.

toward the condition of late modernity and as a breakthrough against the fake promises in the name of moral and religious abstractions.[115] These challenges delineated thus far are so closely intertwined in a complex, dynamic way that Murdoch would admit that, if what claims to give meaning is shorn of the unconditional element, or in other words, religious import, then no genuine understanding of the human existence would be possible. How does Murdoch confront and challenge these challenges in her post-Christian religiosity, then?

Murdoch questions an assumption "virtually axiomatic of modern moral philosophy that ethics is autonomous of religious claims and beliefs."[116] While her thought resists totalizing frameworks that subsume human activity within preconceived patterns of thought and action, Murdoch seeks to overcome the narrow conception of religion—i.e., the traditional Christian image as God the Father—and thereby reclaims the idea of the absolute as a more broadly construed conception of religion coherent to her demythologized notions of truth and goodness. I will further flesh out the ways Murdoch is in search for true consolation with respect to love in chapter four, but it is sufficient to note here that Murdoch strives toward a sense of the unconditioned, which, in turn, recognizes and attends to the particular and concrete reality of another person beyond the self. This merits attention to the following questions: how one could speak of the unity of all that is, and, at the same time, how one could speak of the irreducibility of the self.

Over the course of the twentieth century and onwards, the death and rejection of religion by ardent secularists with the "secularization thesis" have been widely noted, but we are also faced

[115] Antonaccio, *Picturing the Human*, 181, 190. See more in her section "The Return to Consciousness: Neurosis and Convention Revisited" in this book and Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, in a sociological anthropological perspective.
[116] Maria Antonaccio and William Schweiker, eds., *Iris Murdoch and the Search for Human Goodness* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), xiv.

with the worldwide resurgence of religions and a dizzying array of other spiritual options such as Wicca, Buddhist Zen yoga and Scientology. James A. Beckford comments on this aspect of religion seen in modernity: "religion has come adrift from its former points of anchorage, but is no less potentially powerful as a result."[117] In granting this point, but with a distinctive gaze upon the status and the place of religion in modern world, Charles Taylor in *A Secular Age* writes: "we have moved from a world in which the place of fullness was understood unproblematically outside or 'beyond' human life, to a conflicted age in which this construal is challenged by others which place it … 'within' human life."[118] The modern and late modern intense longing for this "within," in one sense, tells us of a strongly "expressive individuation"[119] seeing each individual as having his or her own mode of being human, as described in *Sources of the Self*, but in another sense, gives rise to and fosters a "false certainty of closure,"[120] as noted in *A Secular Age*. Cautious about reductionist forms of secularism, Taylor says,

> "Too much reality is not only destabilizing; it can be dangerous. It will be so to the extent that we try to overcome our disorientation by the false certainty of closure, and then try to shore up this certainty by projecting the chaos and evil we feel in ourselves onto some enemy… But this is particularly so if we respond to these perils by premature closure, drawing an unambiguous boundary between the pure and impure through the polarization of conflict, even war."[121]

Though he is ambivalent about his secularization thesis—what he calls "cross pressures and fragilization" to describe key features of the modern religious landscape—Taylor has a caveat

[117] James A. Beckford, *Religion and Advanced Industrial Society* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 170.
[118] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 15.
[119] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 376. (hereafter indicated as *Sources of the Self*)
[120] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 769.
[121] *Ibid*. The *Time* magazine in a special edition, "2016 PERSON OF THE YEAR DONALD TRUMP" came up with the subtitle, which evinces one of the features of the false certainty of closure, clearly seen in religious mood and politics: "Donald Trump, the president elect of the *Divided* States of America."

about "abuses and distortions" of the call to the transcendence. Why are these abuses and distortions at issue in our present era?

These abuses and distortions are the by-products of the all-too-human desire to subject the world to one's own will and power. David Klemm and William Schweiker call into question the internal distortions of theism and humanism, as the challenges for our contemporary religious life and human future. They are manifested as what they call "overhumanization" and "hypertheism":

> Ironically, they are both forms of over-reach on the part of human beings, either in terms of the radical extension of human power beyond bounds or in terms of claims to know without failure or distortion the will of God.[122]

If religion renews the questions, "what does it mean to be human," and "what ultimately concerns us," then how can we counter the lure of over-reach illusion and idolatry? Conversely, why is it so difficult to stop the lure of false certainty of closure?

Three words would lure us into this trap: spiritlessness, indifference, insensibility. These three words indicate the escalating features of disclaimer about being human. Spiritlessness is the state when all human individuals have become equally superfluous. In our world, driven by the impulse of a neo-liberal capitalistic system, self and other human beings are fragmented into, purchased as a disposable "thing," and thus exploited as merely the means, not the end. This system fosters "hierarchical" goods, not "multidimensional" goods, in the network of repulsive competition and eventually abolishes individual freedom and eliminates human spontaneity, which is considered the distinctive feature of late modernity. At the same time, in hypertheism, human life must become enfolded and reduced within the ecclesiocentric system to a bundle of reactions without personality and character. "I can't do it," "there is no worth within me"—spiritlessness is

[122] David E. Klemm and William Schweiker, *Religion and the Human Future: An Essay on Theological Humanism* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008), 15. (hereafter indicated as *Religion and the Human Future*)

at the heart of these words which rarely endeavor to seek for higher good but rather propel one to find the false certainty of closure that they believe comforts them. This radicality of the mood of spiritlessness goes into the next level: indifference.

Indifference is the state of apathy. Latched onto self-preoccupation with spiritlessness, indifference would shirk the sense of responsibility toward other individuals "outside" of the self, insofar as people remain untouched by other positions and take for granted that their own position is unquestionably correct. Indifference easily falls into a disengaged stance toward the world and, particularly, toward the suffering and evil in the world. Charles Taylor writes,

> the liberal self, benevolent towards all mankind, but within the limits of the reasonable and possible, is capable of facing the facts of unavoidable suffering and evil, and writing them off inwardly.[123]

Spiritless indifference pushes us to feel excused from worrying about what confronts us on our way, most often-times swamped in a code of rules institutionalized and enforced by boundaries to which we belong. Sometimes the longing for closure cloaked in "code fetishism,"[124] as Taylor calls it, can take the form of religiously motivated violence. Then spiritlessness and indifference, key ills of modern society and religion, lead to the next point, insensibility.

Insensibility is the apex of sheer thoughtlessness. With respect to the variety of goods which the rules and norms are meant to realize, insensibility tends to make us obtuse and blind to the reality of self and the world and even to the call to transcendence. The Kantian term, *Achtung*, respect for the moral law, is wiped off before humanity and before God. Passivity and withdrawal, without sense-felt responsibility, would numb us down morally, politically, and spiritually. Hannah Arendt witnessed the Eichmann trial and wrote terrifyingly,

[123] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 682.
[124] *Ibid*., 707.

> [S]uch remoteness from reality and such thoughtlessness can wreak more havoc than all the evil instincts taken together which, perhaps, are inherent in man—that was, in fact, the lesson one could learn in Jerusalem.[125]

The phrase "the banality of evil," coined by Arendt, suggests such remoteness from reality coupled with thoughtlessness possesses neither depth nor any demonic dimension. Insensibility, indelibly bound by code fetishism, makes us lose sight of the ordinary, contingent goodness, because it can only see contingency as an obstacle, even an enemy and threat. Klemm and Schweiker explain it incisively: "the appeal to conform to God's will has too often and too readily been used to destructive ends."[126] The distortion in religion seems to be more detrimental to the flaw in humanization.

Love—all religions publicly profess to incarnate within and act out but do not always accomplish[127]—is and should be reclaimed when spiritless, indifferent, and insensible forces drive us to be obsessed with codes, either solely and ruthlessly reason-determined or faith-determined. Love should be reclaimed at the center of our spiritual lives "beyond the code, deeper than the code, in networks of living concern."[128] For Murdoch, religion is not like codes or rules, but designates critical, realist inquiry into things as they are, and thus: "It's not abstract, it's all here. It's not retiring from the world, it's knowing the world, the real world, this world as it really is, in all its details."[129] Given her interest in effectuating love, Murdoch attends to the ubiquity of moral goodness and value in human life for directing attention to concrete individuals. Good without

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[125] Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Penguin Books, 1994), 288.
[126] Klemm and Schweiker, *Religion and the Human Future*, 14. In similar vein, Richard M. Gula, a Roman Catholic theologian, explains about the greatest danger that we face in modern world as follows: "Our greatest danger [in doing Christian ethics] is to stop too soon and to claim too much on the basis of too little." In *Reason Informed By Faith: Foundations of Catholic Morality* (New York and Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1989), 20.
[127] We hear daily news of violence, implicitly and explicitly, related to religion incessantly. In my experience of teaching college courses of religion and Christian ethics, "religion and violence" is the most popular theme on the table, ironically enough.
[128] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 743.
[129] Murdoch, "Above Gods: A Dialogue about Religion," in *Existentialists and Mystics*, 516.

God is the significant notion I take to be a "divine pedagogy" toward these modern and late modern challenges in our world.

5. Concluding Remark

"To be or not to be; that is the question," asks Hamlet in one of William Shakespeare's tragedies. It is one of the most widely known and quoted lines in modern English literature and has been referenced in innumerable works of literature and music.[130] In this soliloquy, I picture Hamlet as anguished before the conflict of making an existential decision about life and death. Very self-absorbed with ambivalent feelings toward death, Hamlet was conceived as a romantic hero but is also somewhat manic-depressive because of his fear of death. However, there is more to see in Hamlet: his mind reflexively returns in its deep subjectivity to the issue of what is "nobler" or "higher" than himself. In its parallel relationship to "conscience," the word "thought" has something to do with cowardly fear. Hamlet stands before me as a Murdochian man who is struggling to establish a vision of an absolute, not false certainty, in the center of his existence. He has intense longing for life but is also aware of his finitude. Hamlet is not bent on sheer vengeance, but is in continual *aporia*, yet seeking for the unconditional claim of conscience beyond good and evil. Here in our present era, there are many Hamlets living in our world who want to see the truth and serve goodness. I would like to take Hamlet's question "to be or not to be" to have an alternative meaning: by "to be" I mean to remain unchanged as it is (e.g., to stay in the cave or even in false certainty of closure), and by "*not* to be" I mean to challenge, negate, and transform the former (e.g., to get out into the sunlight).[131] Whatever *telos* we might have, our ethical task,

[130] The year 2016 when I have engaged fully with writing this dissertation was 400 years after Shakespeare's death on 1616.
[131] See Joonkyu Sul, *Hamlet: a Korean translation* (Changbi Publishers, 2016).

here and now, is to seriously question where we stand and how properly to direct our power to act in the world. It is where our fundamental, moral and religious concern attunes to "what we love."

CHAPTER TWO

THE IDEA OF GOOD AND CONSCIOUSNESS

1. Introduction

In the introduction chapter, I have identified Iris Murdoch and her moral philosophy in terms of how love is reclaimed to evaluate interpretations of self, others, and the world. While reflecting upon the idea of love and the place of love crucial to the proper direction and orientation for human life, the previous chapter construed love as the prism and the hermeneutical force to perceive, reflect, and reorient the meaning and value of being human in the midst of our all-too-human claims of false consolations. Preoccupied with the challenges to our moral and theological inquiries, Murdoch is deeply concerned with the absence of depth in the modern and late modern world, often-times manifested in the forms of obsessive clinging to falsehood and illusions. As to the challenges, therefore, Murdoch's thought is placed and reclaimed as a form of reflexive moral realism which differs from arrays of modern thought and moral philosophy—internalist and externalist turns—regarding the conception of self and reality, particularly by understanding of love in the face of the void.

In this chapter, I will turn to Murdoch's construal of the idea of the Good with respect to love. Love as the chaotic, erotic desire directed toward the Good demands adequate description of moral agency that underlies her defense of consciousness as the primary mode of moral being and her insistence on human experience of the unconditioned. In the first section of this discussion, I will delve into the distinctive ways in Murdoch's view in ways that moral theory requires an area of conceptual exploration which involves the use of complicated heuristic images of human life:

Murdoch's reading of Plato's myth of the cave and *Timaeus*. This chapter will attend to her understandings of images as the central categories for envisioning the relationship between moral perception and imagination and between pictures of self and the imageless Good with respect to truth, value, and meaning.

Then, the second section will attempt to demonstrate how her methodical approach, metaphysics, entails two significant moves externally and internally: first, her retrieval of metaphysics derives from her critical reflection on modern moral philosophy's anti-metaphysical spirit that dismisses the original intent of metaphysics; second, not surprisingly, this external move entails an internal move of her own thought by reconstructing the primary mode of moral being as consciousness. For Murdoch, consciousness, something more than the direct apprehension of bare facts, involves a "two-way" movement for building up structures of value and for grasping the sense of "directedness" through which we *see* ourselves, others and the world. However, as Murdoch is aware of the nature of being human, as we will see in her example of M and D, clear perceptions or cognitions of self and the world do not readily appear within the purviews of human consciousness which is easily clouded by their own self-consoling views and beliefs.[1] In granting these matters at hand, I will contend that love is reclaimed in Murdoch's thought insofar as her reconstruction of the significant mode of moral self does signal central arguments of being, value, and goodness that, in turn, frame her conceptions of love. In the final section of the chapter, we can comprehend the ways that her central arguments, reclaimed by love, lay the foundation for Murdoch's distinctive ethics: ethics of unselfing as the disciplining of the self in order to see others as valuable in themselves. I will conclude that Murdoch's hermeneutics of love points to the idea of Good which serves as the ground of all being and value.

[1] Rothchild, *Retrieving Discarded Visions*, 36.

2. Murdoch's Platonic Idea of the Good

Murdoch's metaphysical view, predominantly informed by the writings of Plato, but also influenced by Kant, Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard, and Freud,[2] functions as a fulcrum for her basic understanding of human beings: "Human beings are valuable, not because they are created by God or because they are rational beings or good citizens, but because they are human beings."[3] Deeply concerned with Plato's more realistic metaphysical concept of morality, Murdoch's following questions manifest in bold relief: "whether we are able to think systematically at all about morals… and what kind, if any, of expression we can give to a belief, if we hold it, in the sovereign status of morality."[4] In incorporating Plato's ideas, she conceives moral life as a spiritual effort of "see[ing] the world, nature, and its laws, in the light of the good, and experience[ing] a purified suffering which is a unique form of rapture" particularly with loving attention to the concrete other.[5] In doing so, Murdoch appropriates the imagery of Platonic myths, considering it "neither as a scientific fact nor as a divine revelation akin to the biblical account"[6] in Judeo-Christian tradition, but as "instructive *pictures"* that are intended to make possible "an inspired interpretation into the realm of practical life of a deep and certain moral insight."[7] Murdoch writes, "He [Plato] recounts myths, and invents his own myths. But he cannot be said to have taken any form of myth literally, and constantly draws attention to its status of an edifying or hermeneutic

[2] David Tracy, in his essay entitled "Iris Murdoch and the Many Faces of Platonism," finds Murdoch's retrieval of Plato "more expansive, daring and subtle" than other contemporary retrievals because she uses the insights of Freud to complicate and enrich her Platonism. In *Iris Murdoch and the Search for Human Goodness*, eds. Maria Antonaccio and William Schweiker (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996).
[3] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 365.
[4] *Ibid*., 38.
[5] *Ibid*., 109.
[6] Antonaccio, *A Philosophy to Live By*, 189.
[7] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 10 (original emphasis), 11.

'as if'."[8] Myth is not fiction simply "thought away"; it is to be thought of as an "allegory of the soul" rich and pregnant "in terms of everyday morals."[9] Let's turn to Plato's myth of the cave in the *Republic* and then see how Murdoch reclaims, hermeneutically, the status and meaning of human agency (being human) for her own purposes.

The myth of the cave is introduced at the opening of the Book VII of the *Republic*, and it goes like the following:

> Picture men in an underground cave-dwelling, with a long entrance reaching up towards the light along the whole width of the cave; in this they lie from their childhood, their legs and necks in chains, so that they say where they are and look only in front of them, as the chain prevents their turning their heads round. Some way off, and higher up, a fire is burning behind them, and between the fire and the prisoners is a road on higher ground. Imagine a wall built along this road, like the screen which showmen have in front of the audience, over which they show the puppets.[10]

The cave myth itself begins with its striking picture of human condition as imprisoned in a world of darkness and shadows. As a myth the cave carries with it these implications and comparisons: "the Cave-World" is the realm of *eikasia*, the shadow world of the cave, with the fire in the cave, which is mistaken for the sun, and where one may comfortably remain or linger, imagining oneself to be enlightened; "the Visible World, whose light and source of both phenomena and perception of phenomena is the Sun," where one can and must be led up to the level of the real objects, while still being within the cave; and finally, "the Ideal World," where one becomes able to see the sun itself that represents the Form of the Good in whose light the truth is seen, and it is the source of life.[11] The myth serves in part to explain more fully the myth of the divided line (in the Book VI)

[8] *Ibid*., 402.
[9] Murdoch, "Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts," in *Existentialists and Mystics*, 377; *Metaphysics*, 510.
[10] Plato, *Republic*, 514a, b
[11] John Henry Wright, "The Origins of Plato's Cave," in *Harvard Studies in Classical Philosophy*, vol. 17 (1906), 132.

and also to cohere with the myth of the sun. The three allegories themselves all deal with related aspects of the need to turn from the senses to the intellect. The myth of the divided line offers a more detailed picture, an exhaustive classification of the various degrees of reality in the world, in other words, objects of knowledge and their respective stages of knowledge. However, it does not acknowledge an external source of intellectual insight or security, and so for this reason is less relevant for the purpose of this chapter than the allegories of the sun and the cave. It is also beyond the scope of this chapter to overview competing interpretations of Plato's myth of the cave, for example, the orthodox camp's and contra-orthodox camp's debate over the matter of whether its meaning is either exclusively epistemological or political.[12] Rather, suffice to say, for the purpose of this chapter, that it concerns how Murdoch pictures human consciousness in the activity of thinking, in light of the Form of the Good, pictured in the cave myth as the sun, and thus focuses on the moral nature of human life.

Plato's myth of the cave becomes the primary metaphor by which Murdoch pictures the orientation of human consciousness to the Good. In her essay "The Fire and the Sun," she writes, "escape from the cave and approach to the Good is a progressive discarding of relative false goods,

[12] See Dale Hall, "Interpreting Plato's Cave as an Allegory of the Human Condition," in *Aperion: A Journal for Ancient Philosophy and Science*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (December, 1980), 74-86. While he goes over the competing interpretations of the *Republic*'s allegory of the Cave, Hall delineates some representative thinkers analyzing the meaning of the Cave, either epistemological or political. For instance, while R. L. Nettleship, the foremost interpreter of the orthodox epistemological camp, finds a one-to-one correspondence between the levels of individual belief, A. S. Ferguson, Nettleship's greatest critic, contends that the cave symbolizes only one existing political state and would no longer exist under philosophical rule. N. R. Murphy and J. E. Raven take in-between position similar to and different from Nettleship and Ferguson. Hall concludes his essay by arguing Plato's myth of the Cave as to show the human predicament like the following: "Just as Christianity supposes that man is both a sinful, proud creature and the consummate creation of God, so Plato's disenchantment with our condition presupposes the sublime character of our natures." Hall continues, "[w]e might be perverse and wretched because our lives are turned from the Good, but our natures remain those of exalted rational beings capable of imitating perfection." (82) As we will see Murdoch's understanding of Platonic thoughts more in details throughout the dissertation, Murdoch is insistent upon the two-way workings of consciousness as crucial to present an adequate account of morality as engaging both epistemological and political implications. Murdoch in her *Sovereignty of Good* (93) writes, "In so far as goodness is for use in politics and in the market place it must combine its increasing intuitions of unity with an increasing grasp of complexity and detail." See also Myles Burnyeat, *The Theaetetus of Plato*, trans. M. J. Levett and revised. Myles Burnyeat (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1990).

of hypotheses, images, and shadows, eventually seen as such."[13] Upon reflection on the myth of the cave, Murdoch puts a strong emphasis on the distinctions which Plato draws concerning the different levels of consciousness; she puts it like this: "His cave image suggests the levels of consciousness rising from illusion to truthful reality. This indeed offers us a recognizable picture of the human scene."[14] She continues; "the lowest part of the soul is egoistic, irrational, and deluded, the central part is aggressive and ambitious, the highest part is rational and good and knows the truth which lies beyond all images and hypotheses."[15] It is interesting to note that, for Murdoch, Schopenhauer's world seems to consist of the lower levels (so-called the Cave-World), in which the Will manifests itself as miserable perpetual struggle. By contrast, the Ideal world is symbolized by the Good and the Truth. Or, the distinction between the lower levels and the higher levels of consciousness can be readily captured by the literal meaning of the two Greek words that Plato uses: *eikasia* and *aletheia*.

First of all, when Plato describes the mind clouded by selfish dream life (he uses the world *phantasia* in this sense), Murdoch notes, "Plato uses the word *eikasia*, best translated here as 'illusion,' or 'fantasy,' to indicate the most benighted human state, the lowest condition in the Cave.… He connects egoistic fantasy and lack of moral sense with inability to reflect … (*mimesis* without *anamnesis*) … at the bottom of the scale."[16] By contrast, *a-letheia*, literally meant, is the state of not (*a*) being oblivious or forgetful (*lethe*), which denotes disclosure or truth. Unlike *eikasia*, *aletheia* is the state of mimesis *with* anamnesis, which has significant import, as found in *Phaedo* 75d: "if we acquired this knowledge before birth, then *lost* it at birth, and then later by the

[13] Murdoch, "The Fire and the Sun," 442.
[14] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 58-9. Also see Murdoch, "The Fire and the Sun," 389.
[15] Murdoch, "The Fire and the Sun," 389.
[16] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 317. (original emphasis)

use of our senses in connection with those objects we mentioned, we *recovered* the knowledge we had before, would not what we call learning be the recovery of our own knowledge, and we are right to call this *recollection*?"[17]

Plato's account of recollection or *anamnesis* has an important parallel: "Opinion (*doxa*) is concerned with becoming, intellect (*noesis*) is concerned with being."[18] While *eikasia*, or *doxa*, has to do with matters of becoming and is therefore bodily and corporeal (*somatikon*), intellect, or knowledge, has to do with matters of being (*to on, ousia*). Insofar as recollection is related to the recovery of our own knowledge, in other words, what the soul knew before birth—before physical embodiment—but has forgotten,[19] true knowledge for Plato is to leave the realm where the mind succumbs to its dreaming or deceived tendency towards egoistic illusions (*eikasia*) and uninformed opinion (*doxa*) and to proceed to grasp the ultimate forms through the mind itself (*noesis*). It is readily possible for the enlightened knower, although few to turn around, see the light, and scramble out of the cave. Here some questions loom large: does Murdoch via Plato "devise a philosophy of the Good that can appear monolithic, as if seeking some untenable unity"?[20] Is the pilgrimage conveyed in Plato's myth of the cave rather drawn in a linear trajectory in which lesser degrees of goodness are to be conflated into the transcendental Good? Is not it construed as Platonic idealistic elitism or only applicable to some mystics? What is Murdoch's philosophical orientation in reading Plato?

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[17] Plato, *Phaedo*, 75d, in *Plato: Completed Works,* ed. John M. Cooper (Hackett Pub., 1997), 66. (my emphasis added)
[18] Plato, *Republic*, 534a.
[19] Plato, *Meno* 81c-d; *Phaedrus* 248a-e; *Phaedo* 72e. In *Meno* 82a-86b, there is an example of a slave boy who is able to solve the geometrical problem.
[20] Antonaccio, *A Philosophy to Live By*, 4. I adopted Antonaccio's words into my question here, when she recaptures the issues in the critical reception of Murdoch's thought at the introduction of this book. As to the question of whether Murdoch's metaphysical thought is too outdated to give any relevant contribution to the contemporary intellectual landscape, Antonaccio argues that "despite her commitments to humanism and realism, recent interpreters have found her work as a novelist and literary theorist remarkably resonant with postmodern developments." (6)

There are some critics of Platonic views and concomitantly Murdoch's views on the following grounds: first, on Don Cupitt's view, for example, transcendent values are not relevant in this world. He asks, "[W]hy should we suppose that the question of who I am and how I should live can be more satisfactorily determined from the standpoint of eternity than from my own standpoint?"[21] It supports a popular misrepresentation of Plato as an "idealist" or "intellectualist" philosopher who thought that "nothing was real except objectified abstract ideas lodged somewhere in heaven."[22] This view can be related to certain strands of innerworldly or lateral humanism that life cannot be judged from outside, quite simply because we are in life, immanent to it.

Second, and relatedly, there is another concern that "Murdoch's belief in a Platonic Good commits her to a position that threatens to devalue finite, contingent reality," as Antonaccio notes.[23] Elizabeth Burns remarks on her view, *en passant*, that "Murdoch dismisses human love too readily" and doesn't give further details of her criticism.[24] Martha Nussbaum develops her charge against Murdoch in that Plato and Murdoch "connect the love of persons with the love of impersonal goodness [which] may contain too little room for the real-life human individual, with its recalcitrant tendency to refuse identification with any piece of the impersonal good…. somewhat impatiently bypass this individuality in search of the good."[25] Nussbaum writes further,

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[21] Don Cupitt, *The Long Legged Fly* (London: SCM Press, 1987), 42; qtd. in Elizabeth Burns, "Iris Murdoch and the Nature of Good," in *Religious Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 3 (Sep., 1997), 306.

[22] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 177. It is interesting to see the ambivalent view of Murdoch about Don Cupitt. In *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, Murdoch does admire Cupitt in that he "reminds us that mankind is just emerging from its mythological childhood" (452), and he "speaks directly, as few do, about the necessity of new thinking about God and religion as something which concerns us all." (456). Yet, Murdoch also denounces Cupitt's anti-Platonic conception of philosophy: "I am not so happy with Cupitt's attitude to Plato and to philosophy generally" (455).

[23] Antonaccio, *A Philosophy to Live By*, 185.

[24] Elizabeth Burns, "Iris Murdoch and the Nature of Good," 312.

[25] Martha C. Nussbaum, "Love and Vision," in *Iris Murdoch and the Search for Human Goodness*, eds. Maria Antonaccio and William Schweiker (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 38. Antonaccio comments on Nussbaum's view in the following: Nussbaum believes "the dominance of Murdoch's "Platonic mysticism" over her "Aristotelian many-sidedness" leaves Murdoch unable fully to acknowledge the reality and value of individuals….

"[T]he reason for this, quite clearly, is that Plato is not at all fond of these features of human love and thinks of love as uplifting only to the extent that it sets its sights elsewhere."[26] The contour of these criticisms of Plato and Murdochian Platonism reminds us that controversial arguments over one versus many, center versus periphery, and the universal versus the particular have been persistently embedded in the Western thought. It is not surprising, therefore, to be reminiscent of an insightful, biting remarks of Alfred North Whitehead in his Process and Reality: "The safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato."[27] Antonaccio succinctly acknowledges the above-mentioned criticisms: "In short, if finite reality is deemed valuable only in relation to (or as a reflection of) some more ultimate or primordial Good, then finite life is consequently devalued or only derivatively valuable."[28] The reason I briefly remark on these criticisms in passing is because, in this chapter, I don't intend to offer a detailed reply to these critics or to mount a full-scale apologetic stance of Murdoch's view. Instead, I will provide an alternative context in which to revisit and reclaim the deepest sources and impulses of Murdoch's thought on morality in relation to love, in which the uninterrupted demand of the Good remains grounded in the ongoing pursuit of the good at every moment of life. Look how she writes in a pithy manner: "Every moment matters, there is no time off."[29] This indicates the nuances of Murdoch's moral theory for at least two reasons.

First, understood in its context, the phrase is suggestive for understanding Murdoch as a reflexive realist. Antonaccio elucidates the perception of value in reading Murdoch's realism

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The problem with the Platonic view, she [Nussbaum] suggests, is that loving the ideal good blinds us to the reality of others." (*A Philosophy to Live By*, 260)

[26] *Ibid*., 47.

[27] Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (Free Press, 1979), 39.

[28] Antonaccio, *A Philosophy to Live By*, 185. Particularly in discussion of the idea of Good and religious thought of Iris Murdoch, Antonaccio attends to contemporary theological responses to Murdoch's thought in three forms: the conciliatory, the confessional, and the constructive responses. (179-186)

[29] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 484.

reflexively well in a figurative way: it is not something like a spigot that can be turned on and off; "perception of value is constant and inescapable for human beings," no matter "what we perceive as real or true is always at least partly our own fabrication, both for good and for ill."[30] Murdoch's moral realism is *reflexive* because we cannot catch the whole of reality at once; we are involved. Murdoch conceives thereby realism reflexively to make pictures of ourselves, then come to resemble the picture in our moral perception *always* mediated through the structures of consciousness *and* language.[31] We human beings build up "perceptions of what the world is like" that "make[s] us responsible, to some extent, for our ways of seeing and their practical consequences."[32] Murdoch writes,

> Our pilgrimage (in the direction of reality, good) is not experienced only in high, broad or general ways …, it is experienced in all our most minute relations with our surrounding world, wherein our apprehensions (perceptions) of the minutest things (stones, spoons, leaves, scraps of rubbish, tiny gestures, etc.) are also capable of being deeper, more benevolent, more just (etc.).[33]

In short, there is no Platonic "elsewhere." Value is omnipresent, according to Murdoch, "incarnate at various levels in our cognitive and emotional experience."[34]

Second, the phrase is also indicative for Murdoch's understanding of morality and knowledge, which is a continuous effort of moral change or progress. It is neither a matter of luck nor second-hand reactions but rather "a sort of morally disciplined attention," as seen in the act of seeing and remembering (*anamnesis*).[35] "*Anamnesis*, spiritual memory," Murdoch writes, "belongs to the individual who 'remembers' pure Forms of goodness and beauty with which he

[30] Antonaccio, *A Philosophy to Live By*, 175, ix.
[31] Antonaccio astutely points out a hermeneutical implication of "Murdoch's affirmation of a reflexive relation between consciousness and language in the face of contemporary claims for the primacy of language over consciousness." In "The Virtues of Metaphysics," in *Iris Murdoch, Philosopher*, 159.
[32] Antonaccio, *A Philosophy to Live By*, 46.
[33] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 474.
[34] *Ibid*., 57.
[35] *Ibid*., 23.

was familiar 'face to face' (not 'in a glass darkly') in another existence."[36] For Murdoch, how we see the world is a moral act. In other words, the way we see the world discovers the demands of being moral in a reflexive way, and thus guides and limits our choices to the extent that "at crucial moments of choice most of the business of choosing is already over."[37] Moral progress therefore has to do with the continuous evaluative activity of consciousness, which is manifested in "the ascent from illusion to reality is at the same time an ascent toward goodness or virtue."[38] More specifically, it has to do with the "transformation of energy," which transforms "base egoistic energy and vision (low Eros) into high spiritual energy and vision (high Eros)."[39] It is crucial to see in the context of Murdoch's reflexive realism how love is reclaimed in the pilgrimage of consciousness, not "by an occasional leap, into an external (empty) space of freedom, but patiently and continuously a change of one's whole being in all its contingent detail, through a world of appearance toward a world of reality."[40] This will situate me to discuss about another Platonic dialogue, *Timaeus*, with respect to the relationship between the Good, consciousness, and *Eros*, love.

Murdoch's appeal to the later dialogue of Plato, *Timaeus*, reverberates on a crucial concept *Eros*, love, which is "active at all levels in the soul and through which we are able to turn toward reality."[41] The Demiurge, Plato's cosmogonic mythical figure, is pictured itself as love,[42] looking with love toward a perfect model, *paradeigma*:

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[36] *Ibid*.
[37] Murdoch, *Sovereignty of Good*, 36.
[38] Antonaccio, *A Philosophy to Live By*, 111.
[39] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 24.
[40] *Ibid*., 25.
[41] Murdoch, "The Fire and the Sun," 415.
[42] Jonathan Rothchild in his dissertation comments on some ambivalence in Murdoch's interpretation and on remnants of debate by some scholars of Plato—Arthur Lovejoy and Francis Conford—over the enigmatic nature of the Demiurge. Murdoch considers the Demiurge, "a high but not the highest being, as also *Eros*" (Metaphysics, 146); but, in "The Fire and the Sun," Murdoch says that "the Demiurge is not Plato's Eros, though he is related to him" ("The

> Plato's mythical God is a restless imaginative creative artist, *Eros*, seen in the *Timaeus* as the *Demiurge*, the spirit who, looking with love toward a higher reality, creates an imperfect world as his best image of a perfection which he sees but cannot express … a power working at a barrier of darkness, recovering verities which we somehow know of, but have in our egoistic fantasy life 'forgotten.[43]

Murdoch's interpretation of the creative work of the Demiurge in Plato's *Timaeus* resonates with her readings of the myth in the *Symposium* (203) and also with the myth of the cave in the *Republic* in that "what is desired is desired as, genuinely, good; though many desires reach only distorted shadows of goodness."[44] Murdoch follows the trajectory of works of love in Platonic myths: Eros as an ambiguous spirit, the child of Poverty and Ingenuity (*Symposium*), Eros as the desire for the Truth which draws us out of the Cave (*Republic*), and Eros as a creative force looking toward a perfect model, the Good (*Timaeus*).

Murdoch's reading incorporates realistic, axiological, and moral elements excavated from Plato that build up her metaphysical rendering of how we, as fallible, limited, but still searching human beings, can picture and reflect on ourselves, others and the world. It seems evident to me that Murdoch's reading of Platonic myths would lay the comprehensive groundwork for the critical connections between metaphysics and morality, as she writes: "Myth is not fiction; it consists of facts that are continually repeated and observed over and over again. It is something that happens to man.… Plato's work is full of images and myths at which we must work to see what they mean

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Fire and the Sun," 430). Francis Cornford's words are well noted regarding the intermediate status of Eros: "In mythical terms, Eros is neither god nor mortal, but a *daimon* intermediate between the two…. Eros lends to Psyche the wings that will carry her across the boundary. But the point here is that desire, in itself, is neutral, neither good nor bad; it takes its value from its object." ("The Doctrine of Eros in Plato's Symposium" in *Plato: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Gregory Vlastos, [Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1978], 122-3) In this context, Rothchild explicates Murdoch's reading of the Demiurge in relation to Eros in the following way: "the ambiguity related to the status of Eros does help explain the reasons why Eros itself is an enigmatic figure capable of both inspiration and chicanery." He continues to point out that Murdoch understands Eros as a "*pharmakeus* (alchemist, magician), an energy potentially good or bad, pictures the infinite variety of human experience" (*Metaphysics*, 56); qtd. in Rothchild, *Retrieving Discarded Visions*, 116-7.

[43] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 320.

[44] *Ibid*., 343.

in terms of everyday morals."[45] I now turn to the salient features of the *Timaeus*; then I will take up each of these points in more detail.

Timaeus, a learned astronomer from southern Italy, delivers a long speech, what he calls both a "likely myth" (*eikos muthos*) and a "likely account" (*eikos logos*)" (*Timaeus* 29c-3, 30b). The Demiurge (*demiurgos*), the only good mimetic artist, creates the cosmos "modeled after that which is changeless and is grasped by a rational account, that is, by wisdom." (29a) The Demiurge, free of jealousy, undertakes his creation with a symphony of proportion of four elementary constituents (earth, air, water, and fire—32b-c). In doing so, the Demiurge creates the soul of the world (*Anima Mundi* is called "divine," 36e), then the inner band (movements of the *Different*, called wondering stars such as planets) and the outer band (movement of the *Same*, the fixed stars) by circling round upon itself in a spherical structure (35a-37c). Time, "an image of eternity which moves with number," is created next (37d), then the living creatures are brought forth: gods, birds, animals, and human beings. The fact that the universe "has come into being, originating from a principle," by a craftsman, a mythical god, and all sensible things are generated (28b-c) would occasion different interpretations about the ambiguous word 'becoming' and the status of creation in general.[46] The point that I want to make is that the trait of goodness, in relation to the meaning of *gegone* (becoming, coming into being) that defines the Demiurge and its desire to make things

[45] *Ibid*., 134, 510.

[46] There have been literalist vs. non-literalist disputes about whether the universe has a temporal beginning. Literalists such as R. Hackforth (1959), T. M. Robinson (1970), and others count on the textual assertion that it took place in a fixed time, whereas F.M. Cornford (1937), A.E. Taylor (1928) and others affirmed the contrary that the process itself can be conceived as going on perpetually, without beginning or end. Gabriela Roxana Carone, in her essay "Creation in the 'Timaeus': The Middle Way," contests bifurcated interpretations and constructs a middle-way interpretation which is more viable, when she writes, "[T]o judge by the way these two interpretations have been posed, it would seem that they are irreconcilable.… there is no need to take one side or the other. Instead, a *via media* is possible between these two opposing interpretations.… there are some other passages where creation by god is depicted not merely as having taken place in the past, but also as occurring *in the present*, something that would again support the view of creation as a perpetual process" (In *A Journal for Ancient Philosophy and Science*, 37 [2004]; 216). While not entirely relevant for my current project, I have to note that Carone's essay is well-balanced and insightful.

good as far as possible (29e-30a), meets Murdoch's reading of the Good and her claim of the ubiquity of value that have come into being "for all time." The *Timaeus* presents ample evidence and sources that Murdoch appropriates into her assessment of human agency and human valuing and into her theory of a correlation between consciousness and the Good, insofar as the myths, she believes, provides a paradigm for anyone wishing (through discourse or in their actions) to create and sustain a *kosmos*, a world that is always morally "colored." Now I turn to consider two sets of issues: goods (limited) and the Form of the Good, and the causality of necessity and the causality of order (the necessary and the divine in a broad sense).

For Murdoch, the Demiurge creates with his unselfish nature, "out of contingent given material into an imperfect copy," only by seeing the world "illumined by Good."[47] Murdoch muses on the role of the Demiurge as the mediating figure, as she writes:

> The Creator is looking at the world 'as a limited whole.' But he is also looking *away* from it at the perfect original and seeing the world in its *light*. The Forms are untainted, separate, and eternal. The copy is imperfect but illumined by Good. Creation, which is both activity and contemplation, evokes joy. One might perhaps pursue the thought about the *Timaeus* by saying that the Demiurge looking at his creation is like the perfect spectator looking at the perfect tragedy.[48]

Though the Demiurge is the divine thus good, but not omnipotent being, there are two factors crucial for the creation activity: a model and a material. It seems to show that the Demiurge is called "creator" (*poietes*, 28c) not so much in the sense of a god who created the world "once upon a time," as, rather, the *efficient cause*, the principle of orderly motion in the universe which is perpetually generating and in that way sustaining the order of the universe. It is presented as a cause of the generation of all things, in-between a model and a material, with an emphasis on its function of ordering or brining goodness to a state of affairs. Here, we have good reason to believe

[47] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 107.
[48] *Ibid*. (original emphasis)

that the Demiurge belongs to the order of what Timaeus calls "primary" or "divine" causes (46c-e), those causes which, by using intelligence (*nous*), are artisans of fair and good effects (46e). These causes are in turn distinguished from "secondary" or "necessary causes," which "occur by other things being moved and in turn moving other things by necessity" (46e), pertaining to the order of the bodily (46c-d). The latter causes become "errant" without *nous*, in which case they can be characterized as those "causes which, if/when deprived of intelligence, produce random and disorderly effects" (46e).

On Murdoch's reading, the Demiurge as the "perfect spectator" is "doing the best he can with the alien matter at his disposal, which already has inherent properties."[49] The creating Demiurge looks at "the world 'as a limited whole'" constituted with the recalcitrant, errant necessity of the inherent alien and non-rational material, while he also looks "*away* from it" to ponder the "*light*" of the Forms that are "untainted, separate, and eternal."[50] This shows itself the tension between a model and a material, and a paradoxical image of distance between them. In terms of the unresponsive, motionless, and ineffable nature of the Forms of the Good, Antonaccio suggests the distinction between Platonic pictures of Good and the Christian symbol of God as Father, as she quotes Murdoch's words: "a more profound image of moral and spiritual reality than the picture of a personal Father, however good. The Forms represent the absolute and gratuitous nature of the moral demand, so splendidly though so differently emphasized by Kant, who also separated God from our knowledge of moral perfection."[51] Antonaccio continues to interpret the remoteness, distance of the Forms seen in the *Timaeus* as picturing the unconditioned reality of

[49] *Ibid*.
[50] *Ibid*. (original emphasis) I will later discuss how much Murdoch's concern for concrete embodied persons becomes important not to devalue the material world.
[51] Murdoch, "The Fire and the Sun," in *Existentialists and Mystics*, 52.

the moral demand: "This portrayal recalls the argument of Murdoch's ontological proof, in which she relates Plato's conception of an authoritative good to Kant's categorical imperative, eschewing the symbolism of a personal God in order to preserve the rigor and inescapability of the moral demand from being infected or evaded by egoistic fantasy."[52] The transcendental status of impersonal, separate Forms aligns with the notion of an imageless Good. The notion of the imageless Good enables Murdoch to elucidate the possible misreading of the myth, and she writes: "We yearn for the transcendent, for God, for something divine and good and pure, but in picturing the transcendent we transform it into idols which we then realise to be contingent particulars, just things among others here below."[53] The Good in itself for Plato as for Murdoch is not visible, but which represents "the omnipresent background condition for morality which renders all of reality a moral reality."[54] The Demiurge's work, therefore, is pictured as a moral work, insofar as he, who belongs to the order of divine causes and perceives the Forms directly, must struggle against the resistance of the irreducibly recalcitrant material.

This distance is also symbolized by the creation of time after the Demiurge's initial work, and Murdoch puts it like this: "After this success, the Demiurge, realizing that he cannot confer upon the cosmos, because of its mixed nature, the eternal being of the Good, invents, 'a moving image of eternity,' our time."[55] The image of distance ironically implies presence of the Forms of

[52] Antonaccio, *A Philosophy to Live By*, 190. To be sure, there are some counter-arguments against the unresponsive or nonreciprocal nature of the Form of the Good from a Christian perspective, as Antonaccio points out. Some theologians such as Stanley Hauerwas and Jennifer Spencer Goodyer "rejects Murdoch's so-called pagan worldview as a potentially dangerous rival to Christianity." (180) In emphasizing the contrast between Plato's cosmogony and the Christian doctrine of creation, Hauerwas charges, as Antonaccio puts it, "Murdoch holds a view of "necessity" that denies the free act, and hence the giftedness, of God's creation." Goodyer also worries, as Antonaccio notes, that "Murdoch's failure to endorse a theological worldview leads to nihilism, pessimism, and despair" (181) See more in details Hauerwas, "Murdochian Muddles"; Goodyer, "The Blank Face of Love: The Possibility of Goodness in the Literary and Philosophical Work of Iris Murdoch," in Modern Theology, 25, no. 2 (April, 2009), 217-237.
[53] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 56.
[54] Antonaccio, *A Philosophy to Live By*, 111.
[55] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 108.

the Good *in time*, whose magnetic goodness unescapably active in the universe. To be sure, Plato's Forms remain separate and unresponsive in creation as they are ideals, but they impact creation, although away from there, because they are "actively incarnate all around us" as "they are *essentially* objects of love."[56] Thus, the universe, our world, according to Plato, is not an inert product of craftsmanship but embedded within a moving image of eternity, a living being itself (30d, 32d), which bespeaks "the reality of our situation as mortals."[57] Our world in time is constantly being renewed, and its order is the result of constant intelligent rule over its necessary tendencies (48a, 53a-b). Interestingly enough, the creative dynamic of a model and a material manifests clearly in an event that happened after the creation of time: creation of human beings.

In the *Timaeus'* account, the Demiurge himself fashioned the human soul, symbolized as nous, while the task of fashioning the generation of those that were mortal was assigned by his own progeny (69c). Their mimetic work consists of fashioning the human beings as a mixture of soul and necessity. As observed in the *Timaeus*, human beings are endowed with a divine and rational soul for the purpose of "guiding those of them who are ready to follow [the gods] and the right,"[58] but they are also given—due to the fact the soul "is encased within a round mortal body [the head] and in the entire body as its vehicle" (69c)—what Timaeus calls "dreadful but necessary disturbances" (69d). Like the cosmos the human beings come about "through reason *persuading* necessity."[59] Without it, the mortal elements would become the source of disease and disharmony (69d). Given the nature of the Forms of the Good and its magnetism to the whole human being, Murdoch writes, "The Good is distant and apart, and yet it is a source of energy, it is an active

[56] *Ibid*, 478, 146. (original emphasis)
[57] *Ibid*., 108.
[58] Plato, *Timaeus*, 41c.
[59] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 107; *Timaeus* 48a

principle of truthful cognition and moral understanding in the soul.… It is a 'reality principle' whereby we find our way about the world."[60] What's at stake in Murdoch's thought in this venue is how we are to value the goodness of the finite, as pervasive in the material world, given the fact of the ambiguities of our created and mixed nature.

There is another feature of the *Timaeus'* description of the act of creation that merits our attention: the causality of necessity and the causality of order (the necessary and the divine in a broad sense). As noted earlier, one of the central motifs in the *Timaeus* is ordering. The ordering enacted by the Demiurge fashions an imperfect copy, yet illumined by the Good, out of the contingent material at his disposal. Thus, the dilemma faced by the Demiurge derives from the problem that "the contingency of matter resists the Demiurge's attempt to impose upon it a rational order or form," as Antonaccio puts it.[61] Put differently, the creative work accomplished by the Demiurge lacks precision because "the raw stuff of creation has inherent causal tendencies… is also not made by the Demiurge."[62] This errant, recalcitrant material already possesses inherent properties, so-called secondary or necessary causes. Here love via the role of the Demiurge is reclaimed to "seek the necessary for the sake of the divine."[63] With respect to Murdoch's reading of the two causalities, the following words are worth noting: "We may seek to 'be with' the divine cause, as exhorted by Plato, but we cannot avoid necessity, and indeed need it (as he tells us) to force upon us the reality of our situation as mortals."[64]

The fact that we as created beings are subject to conflicting causalities reveals a remarkable and captivating insight for Murdoch's conception of the self and of morality,

[60] *Ibid*., 474.
[61] Antonaccio, *A Philosophy to Live By*, 175.
[62] Murdoch, "The Fire and the Sun," 433.
[63] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 477.
[64] *Ibid*., 108.

particularly when Murdoch states that "[t]he contingent can become spiritually significant."[65] Rather than viewing necessity as "haughty stoicism" (stoicism) or "detached passivity" (Schopenhauer), Murdoch follows Simone Weil and understands necessity as an image of the void and obedience that prompts purification and love.[66] Antonaccio puts well the place of necessity in human life in relation to love, which leads to Murdoch's transformation of the Platonic concept of necessity respectively: "that human beings inhabit a mixed world that originated in *love* and is patterned after divine reason but is only an imperfect copy of the original"; "[Murdoch] transforms Plato's conception of necessity, the errant causality at work in the cosmos, into a positive valuation of contingency and finitude."[67] Necessity functions as an indispensable force in Murdoch's thought that demands acknowledgement of "our situation as mortals" actually structured within a larger metaphysical account of the reality.[68] This necessity, Murdoch speculates, has the positive

[65] *Ibid*., 477.
[66] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 109, 477.
[67] Antonaccio, *A Philosophy to Live By*, 191-2 (my emphasis added), 192. Murdoch herself puts it, "what must be endured, what makes and breaks, and to purify our imagination so as to contemplate the real world (usually veiled by anxiety and fantasy) including what is terrible and absurd." ("The Fire and the Sun," 456)
[68] Antonaccio comments on the term "necessity" in her chapter "Religion and the Ubiquity of Value" and notes that Murdoch uses it in multivalent ways, and "its meaning is determined by the particular context in which it appears in her thought." Murdoch associates necessity with the idea of contingency and chance, as shown in the above case, but there is a different way to understand it. Sometimes necessity appears as "the *opposite* of chance or contingency"; in other words, necessity is equivalent to the form-giving activity. Antonaccio writes regarding this matter,

> In this context, she associated necessity with the form-giving activity of art (or the one-making activity of intellect more generally), whereas chance or contingency represents the formlessness or recalcitrance of the reality that the artist (or the creative intellect) is attempting to shape. It should be noted that what Murdoch means by necessity in this context actually seems to be the opposite of Plato's meaning in the *Timaeus*. As a form-giving or pattern-making activity, this first meaning seems closer to what Plato means by the divine intelligence of the Demiurge. Similarly, what Murdoch means by "contingency" or "chance" in this context (i.e., formlessness) seems closer to what Plato means by "errant causality" (i.e., what he calls necessity), which as we saw earlier is irrational and indeterminate…. In effect, Murdoch transforms Plato's picture of the Demiurge … into a portrait of the human artist struggling to impose an appropriate degree of form on the contingency and randomness of reality. (*A Philosophy to Live By*, 193)

moral implications that "[a]n appreciation or image of necessity as law of nature can exhibit the futility of selfish purposes."[69]

Given this contingent necessity in our life, Murdoch take a characteristic example marked by this ambiguity as well: the World-Soul, or *Anima Mundi*. The *Anima Mundi*, an image of incarnate mind, resembles Christ or *Logos*,[70] but it partakes of its "deficiencies" and imperfection.[71] On Murdoch's reading, "[t]he World Soul as Logos can also represent ordinary human activity, sunk in contingency and confusion, yet also vitally connected with the power of the spirit."[72] As a miniature of the World-Soul, the human condition is one in which we are subject to these forces of causality and yet "the situation of intuiting or glimpsing something beyond through what is here."[73] The imperfection given the contingent necessity in our life does not count against the worth of human beings. Put differently, the human condition for Murdoch is "spiritually inspired but irrevocably limited."[74]

In her reading of Platonic myths, Murdoch interprets the acceptance of necessity as the capacity "to *see* in a pure just light the hardness of the real properties of the world, the effects of the wandering causes, why good purposes are checked and where the mystery of the random has to be accepted."[75] Note that Plato exclaims that "vision is the most uplifting of human senses

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[69] *Ibid*., 109.
[70] Murdoch notes that "Plato's Trinity (Forms, Demiurge, World Soul) may be seen reflected (surely not by accident) in the Christian Trinity as God the Father (Form of the Good), Holy Spirit (Demiurge) and Christ (Anima Mundi). She continues to point out crucial differences between Plato's mythical Trinity and the Christian one like the following: "the supreme figure in the *Timaeus* (Good as sovereign Form) is impersonal and separate, the divine creator makes a fundamentally imperfect world, and the World Soul, fallible incarnate creature, is not wholly rational." (*Metaphysics*, 145). One more interesting comment goes later on: "The mystical Trinity of two persons, Creator and Soul, and impersonal Absolute, is in my view more morally and spiritually eloquent than the mystical Christian Trinity of which it is surely a forerunner. I do not know who baptized the *Timaeus*." (478)
[71] *Ibid*., 145, 478.
[72] *Ibid*., 145.
[73] *Ibid*., 478.
[74] *Ibid*., 228.
[75] Murdoch, "The Fire and the Sun," 456. (my emphasis added)

(47b)."[76] The primacy of vision and attention cannot be emphasized enough in Murdoch's moral philosophy. True morality for Murdoch is a morality of love to orient our attention and imagination to the Good that still remains at the reality of the necessity, at the moments of the void. Love is reclaimed when "all was subject to mortality and chance, and yet we continue to dream of unity."[77]

We now turn to the question of the relation between moral agency and the Good in Murdoch's thought: what resonates in the self with respect to the claims of Good. In other words, what is the primary mode of moral being in Murdoch? Murdoch correlates Good with consciousness. In the next section, I will explore how Murdoch pictures the human in relation to her claims about the idea of Good. Finally, I will draw upon Murdoch's ethic of unselfing with respect to the concept and the place of love in her moral and philosophical framework.

3. Murdoch's Primary Mode of Moral Being: Consciousness

Murdoch sees consciousness as a primary mode of moral being in relation to the metaphysical reality of the Good. This metaphysical reality of Good is evident throughout Murdoch's writing in her repeated appeal to "one-making" endeavor to provide a guide to moral reflection. Situated within the Platonic image of the Good, all of human life is lived in its "light which reveals to us all things as they really are."[78] Here consciousness for Murdoch is a horizon where knowledge and morality are connected in such a way that "consciousness is a form of morality: what we attend to, how we attend, whether we attend." [79] The reality of the Good is mediated through our consciousness as it discerns and evaluates the reality it confronts. Here Murdoch's reflexive

[76] *Ibid*., 435.
[77] Murdoch, *Sovereignty of Good*, 92.
[78] *Ibid*., 68.
[79] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 167.

realism is palpable, as Antonaccio notes, in that "the good provides the condition for the possibility of moral knowledge because it is the "light" or the aspect under which moral consciousness regards anything as good… [Thus] goodness can only be apprehended through the reflexive activity of cognition."[80]

In *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, Murdoch has chapters on "Consciousness and Thought" (I and II), where she makes her argument for consciousness as our primary mode of moral being. In response to the modern moral challenges, as noted in the previous chapter, Murdoch seeks to adopt a capacious conception of consciousness in her critique of the loss of consciousness. She declares that the dominant (anti-metaphysical) philosophical perspective renders

> the moral life of the individual [as] a series of overt choices which take place in a series of specifiable situation. The individual's 'stream of consciousness' is of comparatively little importance, partly because it is often not there at all (having been thought to be continuous for wrong reasons), and more pertinently because it is and can only be through overt acts that we can characterize another person, or ourselves, mentally or morally.[81]

To be sure, Murdoch remains aware of the fact that human existence is clouded by contingent rubble, accident, and unsystemized detail beyond our control, but she doesn't think this state of human existence precludes a transcendental claim of the Good and an inner life of consciousness. As evidence of the moral individual with a moral inner life, Murdoch points to consciousness as a cognitive mode of moral being where a self-reflexive awareness is revisited and evaluated to see

[80] Antonaccio, *Picturing the Human*, 128.

[81] Murdoch, "Vision and Choice in Morality," 77. With her recognition of current moral philosophy's profound anti-metaphysical spirit located in analytic, behavioristic, and poststructuralist thoughts, Murdoch in Metaphysics asks, "[O]ur present moment, our experiences, our flow of consciousness, our indelible moral sense, are not all these essentially linked together and do they not *imply* the individual?" (80, original emphasis)

matrix of affections, attachments, notions of value, and experiences of self in relation to self and to others:

> Our ordinary consciousness is a deep continuous working of values, a *continuous present and presence* of perceptions, intuitions, images, feelings, desires, aversions, attachments. It is a matter of what we 'see things as,' what we let, or make, ourselves think about, how by innumerable movements, we train our instincts and develop our habits and test our methods of verification. Imagery, metaphor, has its deep roots and origins in this self-being, and an important part of human learning is an ability both to generate and to judge and understand the imagery which helps us to interpret the world.[82]

This is the work of picturing the self, others and the world that is the constant activity of consciousness. It defines, according to Murdoch, how we see and value the world around us, which is the basis for all moral activity. Let us dedicate considerable attention to those above-quoted passages with respect to how Murdoch's notion of consciousness proceeds the way it does.

First of all, it is helpful to note again, as already noted before, that Murdoch does not reclaim consciousness as *the* single organized background sense of reality, as she writes, "My argument wants to focus attention upon the experiential stream as a cognitive background to activity, without suggesting that it is in any idealist (Hegelian, Husserlian) sense primary, or that it is the only place to which we need to look to assess moral quality."[83] Rothchild comments nicely on this Murdochian stance: "Consciousness pertains to the inner life, but Murdoch interprets this inner life as outwardly focused and thus tantamount to an external but realist metaphysical "total vision of life.""[84] This Murdochian stance is also sharply distinguished from Sartre's worldview, for example, which isolates the individual in an imaginative solipsism.[85] Murdoch's ways to

[82] *Ibid*., 215.
[83] Murdoch, Metaphysics, 267.
[84] Rothchild, *Retrieving Discarded Visions*, 225. Interestingly enough, Rothchild finds parallel concepts of this total vision of life in other philosophers such as "Paul Ricoeur's "life-plans," Bernard Williams' "life project," William Schweiker's "radical interpretation," and Charles Taylor's "strong evaluation." (*Ibid*.)
[85] See Murdoch, *Sartre: Romantic Rationalist* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1987), 78-95.

reclaim consciousness raises the question of the relationship between consciousness, will, freedom, and imagination; she thereby seeks to "integrate consciousness into models of the self,"[86] and it is what Murdoch often-times calls the continuous working of consciousness. Thus Murdoch pictures the moral life in the following way: "The moral life … is something that goes on continually, not something that is switched off in between the occurrence of explicit moral choices."[87] Rothchild rightly argues that although "Murdoch seemingly overlooks the affinities between her thought and William James',"[88] we see Murdoch's naming of the continuous working of consciousness concur with a stream of consciousness coined and found in William James, as he quotes the following in this regard: "[t]he volatile variegated *force*, the ever-flowing *energy*, the temporal *pressure*, the unfailing *presence* of what we call 'the stream of consciousness'—surely this is something fundamental, surely if we are searching for 'being' this is it?"[89]

Granting this, Murdoch acknowledges "awareness of ourselves as ancillary, relative and not wholly real," although she pictures the conscious self as "a value-bearer or value-donor."[90] Despite her repeated critique of "anti-metaphysical spirit" in contemporary moral theories—"relativism, cynicism, doubts about morals, doubts about *order*"[91]—Murdoch concedes that the movement of understanding is clouded by "gaps and dark spaces"[92] which can be manifested as

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[86] Rothchild, *Retrieving Discarded Visions*, 227.
[87] Murdoch, *Sovereignty of Good*, 36.
[88] Rothchild, *Retrieving Discarded Visions*, 227.
[89] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 172-3 (original emphasis). See more on William James, Principles of Psychology (New York: Dover Publications, 1950); William James, "The Stream of Thought," in *The Writings of William James: A Comprehensive Edition*, ed. John J. McDermott (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1977). James' view of consciousness finds a metaphor of a "river" or a "stream," which sounds similar to Murdoch, as James writes: "Consciousness, then, does not appear to itself chopped up in bits.… It is nothing jointed; it flows. A 'river' or a 'stream' are [sic] the metaphors by which it is most naturally described. *In talking of it hereafter, let us call it the stream of thought, of consciousness, or of the subjective life*." (*Principles of Psychology*, 239; *The Writings of William James*, 33, original emphasis).
[90] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 230, 256.
[91] *Ibid*., 258.
[92] Rothchild in this context of discussion comments on some strands of thought that challenges a continuous stream of consciousness, that are Derek Parfit and Daniel Dennett. For example, Dennett's thought goes like this: "One of

> a slipped connection, between the moment-to-moment flow and the procedure, however continuous, of the inner monologue or inner life. Here, so far from raising doubts about morality, it seems to me that morality is 'proved' by its indelible inherence in the secret mind. As for the loss of 'items' this is an aspect of our radically contingent nature, the bit which the Demiurge blotted out. We have to confront mysteries. We are not gods.[93]

These gaps for Murdoch suggest neither a kind of discontinuity or nor the disunity of the life latched onto our brain or mind; they rather alert, as Rothchild remarks, "the moral nature of finite creatures who experience ambiguous images and chaotic energy, and yet who resiliently continue to construct coherent images of self and reality."[94] Coupled with her acknowledgement about the fictive and slipping nature of our thoughts, Murdoch, however, considers the image of the stream as a moral indicator that demands of "what it is to be human, the enigma at the center"; as a moral dimension where "[o]ur speech is a moral speech, a constant use of the innumerable subtle *normative* words whereby (for better or worse) we texture the detail of our moral surround and steer our life of action."[95]

Consciousness further relates to the will, interestingly enough, which situates the distinction between Murdoch and voluntarists/existentialists. To be sure, Murdoch does not simply jettison the voluntarists and existentialists' focus on upholding the inviolability of the individual, but actually concurs with it. However, the difference lies in between "voluntaristic creation of value in the world" and recognition of "a moral world *already* saturated with value," as Rothchild succinctly puts it.[96] Murdoch is deeply concerned with a critical moral psychology that can bridge

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the most striking features of consciousness is its discontinuity—as revealed in the blind spot, and saccadic gaps, to the simplest examples. The discontinuity of consciousness is surprising because of the apparent continuity of consciousness." In *Consciousness Explained* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1991), 356; qtd in Rothchild, *Retrieving Discarded Visions*, 228. Here Rothchild find some resonance between Dennett and Murdoch in light of our contingent nature even in relation to the notion of consciousness.

[93] *Ibid*., 259.

[94] Rothchild, *Retrieving Discarded Visions*, 229.

[95] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 258, 260 (original emphasis).

[96] Rothchild, *Retrieving Discarded Visions*, 230, 231 (original emphasis).

the breach just mentioned.[97] Murdoch's deep worry centers at a position that buttresses the centrality of the will which reduces the self and reality into "the worldless act of the will," in Schweiker's phrases, with its exclusive emphasis on act and choice discontinuous with the world outside of the self.[98]

Søren Kierkegaard, for instance, regards consciousness as a deterministic machine obliterating the concept of the solitary responsible moral person, and then preferably uses the image of a leap, emphasizes discontinuity symbolically termed "a teleological suspension of the ethical," and thus transcends the ethical in its immediacy to the sacred. Later Sartre, on the other hand, refute consciousness as getting in the way of free moral choice, and Sartre rather pictures the self and reality rooted on the radical subjectivity of the choosing will. Murdoch considers Sartre's picturing the self as "a solipsistic picture": "Sartre's man is described as an isolated non-historical consciousness, like Kant's man, and as being anguished and doubtful like Kierkegaard's man—but he is unlike both in that he inhabits a universe which contains no transcendent objective truth…. Sartre's man like a neurotic who seeks to cure himself by unfolding a myth about himself."[99]

Murdoch is raising a philosophical and a moral objection to the ways in which the self has been pictured in recent moral philosophy. The crucial problem here for Murdoch is that the

[97] It is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss in depth about the development of moral psychology. However, it is important to note that Murdoch's analysis of consciousness and will is influenced by G.E.M. Anscombe's work, illustrated in her article "Modern Moral Philosophy" (in *Philosophy*, 33 (1958), 1-19) in that in order to make sense of the experience of moral duty and obligations, the discovery of "an adequate philosophy of psychology" is necessary in moral philosophy. It is interesting to note that Murdoch dedicates *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* to Elizabeth Anscombe. See Charles Mathewes, "Agency, Nature, Transcendence, and Moralism," in *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 28 (2000), 297-328.

[98] Schweiker, "The Sovereignty of God's Goodness," 221.

[99] Murdoch, *Existentialists and Mystics*, 134, 268. Besides, Murdoch accuses Wittgenstein and structuralist thinking of similarly dismissing consciousness as irrelevant to morality: It is one thing to present sound anti-Cartesian critical arguments about sense data, momentary inner certainties, or the role of memory images in remembering; it is quite another to sweep aside as irrelevant a whole area of private reflections, which we may regard as the very substance of our soul and being, as somehow unreal, otiose, without relevant *quality* or *value*. (*Metaphysics*, 157)

voluntarist and existentialist strands of thought render agency into the isolated and freely choosing will to the extent that "in a world of its own making, a world of self-serving fantasy," value becomes "a matter of power."[100] Consciousness "soaked in value" does rather imply for Murdoch's emphasis on the cognition of the ubiquity of value in the world. To be sure, she thinks that consciousness is the primary mode of our very being with an exercise of will in the shaping of moral agency, but not placing "the isolation of the will as the exclusive seat of moral agency," as Rothchild notes it.[101] Consciousness for Murdoch is the place where reflection on morality begins with perception of value. Hence, Murdoch insists that "value, valuing, is not a specialized activity of the will, but an apprehension of the world, an aspect of cognition, which is everywhere."[102] Given her emphasis on the cognition of the ubiquity of value in the world, how does Murdoch construe freedom in her retrieval of consciousness?

Relatedly to her concerns about the will, Murdoch also holds a more non-dogmatic understanding of freedom than the recent moral worldviews. Her understanding of freedom is coherent with her understanding of being human: we are creatures that picture ourselves and then come to resemble those pictures. In musing upon the concept of freedom, Murdoch wants to question whether these pictures of the self are pictures that are true, or whether they simply mirror what we *want* to become or *will* be. Freedom for Murdoch is not the ego's quest for omnipotence, "an inconsequential chucking of one's weight about," but "the disciplined overcoming of the

[100] Schweiker, "The Sovereignty of God's Goodness," 221. Schweiker offers a compelling analysis on the problem of "the equation of power and worth" found in our current moral landscape, and he writes, "We do not see value in reality because value is a matter of power, and power too easily conceals itself behind its workings—the workings of desire, political institutions, and economic systems…. The problem we face in ethics is then the ground of value has shifted from being to power, or, more precisely put, being itself, the source of value, is conceived in terms of power." (*Ibid*., 217)
[101] Rothchild, *Retrieving Discarded Visions*, 234.
[102] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 265.

self."[103] True conceptions situated within freedom, Murdoch continues, "combine just modes of judgment and ability to connect with an increased perception of detail."[104] Freedom is not simply whimsy, willy-nilly exercise of will for the smorgasbord choice among indifferent goods, but, for Murdoch, entails redirection of vision and change of the images of self to which we attend.

As an alternative way of understanding of freedom, Murdoch turns to Platonic views on consciousness and the idea of perfection. In her fictive dialogue "Above the Gods," Murdoch finds this understanding of freedom in Plato's words: "We have to change ourselves, change what we want, what we desire, what we love, and that's difficult. But if we even try to love what's good our desires can improve, they can change direction, *that's* what I call freedom. *That's* becoming morally better, and it's possible and that's why it's possible."[105] Murdoch sides with Plato and examines his views of consciousness to see if they make more sense of our actual experience and of what we think the moral life should be about. Pierre Hadot points out clearly why this is so:

> For Plato, science and knowledge are never purely theoretical and abstract knowledge, which could be placed "ready-made" within the soul. When Socrates said that virtue is knowledge, he was not using "knowledge" to mean pure, abstract knowledge of the good. Rather, he meant knowledge which chooses and wants the good—in other words, an inner disposition in which thought, will, and desire are one. For Plato, too, if virtue is knowledge, then knowledge itself is virtue.[106]

In Murdoch's numerous references to the myth of the Cave in the *Republic*, virtue in relation to knowing the good and doing the good is pictured as an ascent from appearance to reality but also a descent and return to the cave that remembers the contingent and the particular. Murdoch comments further on this Platonic understanding of freedom in "On 'God' and 'Good'":

> Freedom is not strictly the exercise of the will, but rather the experience of accurate vision which, when this becomes appropriate, occasions action. It is what lies behind

[103] Murdoch, "The Sovereignty of Good over Other Concepts," in *Existentialists and Mystics*, 378.
[104] *Ibid.*, 379.
[105] Murdoch, "Above the Gods," in *Existentialists and Mystics*, 515. (original emphasis)
[106] Pierre Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, 65.

> and in between actions and prompts them that is important, and it is this area which should be purified. By the time the moment of choice has arrived the quality of attention has probably determined the nature of the act.[107]

Murdoch relates freedom to virtue, and fundamentally to moral knowledge where she sees consciousness as the fundamental mode of moral being. Here Murdoch's freedom refers to another crucial aspect of Murdoch's thought on consciousness, and that is her empirical argument about consciousness as "truth-seeking" activity, compared to the "one-making" nature of consciousness.

While the one-making nature of consciousness is fundamentally correlative to the metaphysical attempt to impose unity or order in light of the Good, consciousness as "the truth-seeking activity" is related to "movement on a moral scale" with different degrees of goodness as it carries out its evaluative activity.[108] This Murdochian argument is deeply rooted in her insistence that value is omnipresent, "incarnate at various levels in our cognitive and emotional experience."[109] Murdoch identifies the two-way movement, as Antonaccio remarks, revolving around "the question of how far the concepts, images, and formal strategies of discourse are able to capture the reality of individuals."[110] In other words, as I read it, moral concepts for Murdoch should be understood as "concrete universals."[111] With respect to the two-way movement of consciousness, this means, according to Murdoch, that universal concepts are learned in relation to both the individual consciousness and the reality of individuals to which consciousness attends. This does not mean that Murdoch is suggesting that morality harkens back to a turn inward. Rather, for Murdoch, the two-way movement lies at the juncture of "the double revelation of both random detail and intuited unity."[112] It means that value is not invented by the knowing mind, nor is it

[107] Murdoch, "On 'God' and 'Good'," in *Existentialists and Mystics*, 354.
[108] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 56.
[109] *Ibid.*, 57.
[110] Antonaccio, *A Philosophy to Live By*, 61.
[111] Murdoch, *Sovereignty of Good*, 29.
[112] *Ibid.*, 93.

immediately apprehended, but the consciousness perceives concrete confrontations of reality at any given particular moment, which attends to the inherent value of things seen in the light of the Good. This insight of Murdoch's empirical argument can be best seen in the famous example of M and D in *Sovereignty of Good*.

Murdoch illustrates the importance of consciousness and "vision" for morality in the example of a mother-in-law (M) and a daughter-in-law (D). Briefly put, the mother sees D as unpolished, lacking in dignity, pert and familiar, sometimes rude and always tiresomely juvenile.[113] Here we see M's perception of D stemming from her attachment to her son and her feeling about him "married beneath him." M is inclined to view D in terms of her own thoughts/feelings for her son, rather than to really see who D is in herself. M's desire to protect her own image of herself and her son renders her enough to perceive reality at hand. Murdoch recognizes here a rather depressing reality about our natural morality: "The chief enemy of excellence in morality… is personal fantasy: the tissue of self-aggrandizing and consoling wishes and dreams which prevents one from seeing what is there outside one."[114] In this example, Murdoch hypothesizes a possible discrepancy between the inward mind and the outward behavior of M despite of her observation of D. M's outward behavior is morally appropriate because of M's fantasy of herself as a proper mother-in-law rather than out of true concern and love for D. Conversely, the moral energy behind an act may arise, although remain obscure, when M says to herself, "I may be prejudiced and narrow-minded. I may be snobbish. I am certainly jealous. Let me look again."[115] To be sure, it is possible to suppose that some effort of M to "look again" D in a different light results in that M's vision of D has altered, and in other words, the latter view is a

[113] *Ibid.*, 16-7.
[114] *Ibid.*, 59.
[115] *Ibid.*, 17.

more appropriate one. Although she makes many complicated observations about this example, Murdoch intends to show that this effort to see D more clearly is a *moral* effort that is progressive and perfectible.[116]

This analysis, however, encounters some difficulties parsing through the M and D example. As noted earlier, Murdoch relates freedom to virtue as a disciplined overcoming of the self, but she also submits that freedom is half-sidedly true: she identifies freedom as a "mixed concept" where "the true half" represents virtue and the clarification of vision and "the false and more popular half" represents "self-assertive movements of deluded selfish will."[117] In this example, Murdoch's point is to suggest that moral activity is at least partly, if not mostly, a matter of consciousness and vision; we cannot escape our evaluative mode of consciousness. Yet, part of the nature of our egoism is a false understanding of the extent of our freedom, seen here as our capacity to free ourselves from evaluation of the world. M decided to behave well to D outwardly for some reason, and M's private thoughts would be unimportant and irrelevant. Or M says privately or overtly, "I have decided" but one who never acts has not decided at all outwardly.

With respect to the inner will/mind and the outward action/behavior, Murdoch charges, on the one hand, the problem of "conventional consciousness"[118] (empiricist, behaviorist, neo-Kantian) picturing the self absorbed in a socio-linguistic by selling out freedom to "the conventional structures of society and its language."[119] As to the conventional self, Murdoch says, "I have tried to 'exhibit' the inner; and resist tendencies which give value and effective function only to the other (thought of as 'moral acts' or as linguistic activity), or regard the 'inner life' as

[116] *Ibid*., 23.
[117] Murdoch, "The Sovereignty of Good over Other Concepts," in *Existentialists and Mystics*, 382.
[118] Murdoch, "The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited," in *Existentialists and Mystics*, 270.
[119] Antonaccio, *Picturing the Human*, 181.

fantasy and dream, lacking identity and definition, even as a fake illusory concept."[120] On the other hand, this juxtaposition between the inner life and external moral acts manifests itself in another form, called "neurotic consciousness"[121] (Sartrean/Hegelian), picturing the self enclosed in its own solipsistic fantasy, wholly free from any social or other context.[122] To the neurotic self, other people "are not real contingent separate" person, but simply as "organized menacing extensions of the consciousness of the subject."[123] Murdoch names these forms of egoistic consciousness into "Ordinary Language Man" and "Totalitarian Man" respectively, and she considers both of them as "the enemies of love," as she writes why so:

> Neither pictures virtue as concerned with anything real outside ourselves. Neither provides us with a standpoint for considering real human beings in their variety, and neither presents us with any technique for exploring and controlling our own spiritual energy. Ordinary Language Man is too abstract, too conventional: he incarnates the commonest and vaguest network of conventional moral thought; and Totalitarian Man is too concrete, too neurotic: he is simply the center of an extreme decision, man stripped and made anonymous by extremity."[124]

These views of the self are not simply misplaced, but morally problematic, as Murdoch would not consent to such reductions of the human self. The key moral problem for both of these views is that the pictures of the self escape from freedom entrapped in either solipsistic freedom or absolute determinism to the extent that we as fantasizing imaginative animals "want to transform what we cannot dominate or understand into something reassuring and familiar" because "[w]e fear plurality, diffusion, senseless accident, chaos."[125] Murdoch calls this state of being "reassuring and familiar" habitually caught up in the "dazzling object" of the self. She notes, "Neurotic or vengeful fantasies, erotic fantasies, delusions of grandeur, dreams of power, can imprison the mind,

[120] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 348.
[121] Murdoch, "The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited," 270.
[122] Antonaccio, *Picturing the Human*, 180.
[123] Murdoch, "The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited," 269.
[124] *Ibid.*, 268; 269-270.
[125] *Ibid.*, 1-2.

impeding new understanding, new interests and affections, possibilities of fruitful and virtuous action."[126]

Love is reclaimed, as seen in M and D example, as an endless task. Love as "knowledge of the individual"[127] is a continual effort to embrace the universal and recognize the particular. This Murdochian love is placed in her cognitivist realist model that demands the self as freedom related to "the existence of other people and their claims."[128] It is where the interdependence of both aspects of consciousness—one-making and truth-seeking—will not be simply explained away through magic and fantasy. The task of authentic moral living for Murdoch, as Rothchild astutely puts it, is "to disengage fantasy, which is self-generated and precludes genuine perceptions of reality and of otherness, from imagination, which is compelled by the Good and allows the self to transcend its myopia and to conceptualize the real."[129] In the final section of this chapter, we will engage how Murdoch's metaphysical ethic discloses the basic human mode of being in the world and how love is reclaimed gradually to embrace the Good and to "unself" through attention, vision, and imagination at the reality of "the void."

4. Murdoch's Metaphysics and an Ethic of Unselfing

As noted in previous sections, Murdoch offers a cognitivist and realist model of moral agency that captures consciousness as the primary mode of human being. Murdoch's metaphysical perspective sets up pictures of reality where value is grounded in the transcendent Good and inherent in individual, finite being. As we have explored in the earlier section, Murdoch is insistent upon the

[126] *Ibid*., 322.
[127] Murdoch, *Sovereignty of Good*, 27.
[128] *Ibid*., 57.
[129] Rothchild, *Retrieving Discarded Visions*, 184.

two-way workings of consciousness as crucial to present an adequate account of morality as engaging in a continuous journey from appearance to reality. To be sure, Murdoch acknowledges that we are faced to the limiting conditions with "a continuous *sense of orientation*" to the world around us, to a greater or lesser degree.[130] The journey of the human soul, as seen in *Phaedrus,* is pictured as the charioteer (reason) attempting to harness two horses, one beautiful and good (*thumos*) and the other of the "opposite character" (*appetite*) so that the "driving of our charioteer is difficult and troublesome" (*Phaedrus*, 246b). A charioteer can err by either failing to hitch one of the horses to the chariot altogether, or by failing to bridle the horse, only letting him run wild. The problem of moral life in this Platonic dialogue is the proper ordering of one's soul. Likewise, the problem of moral life for Murdoch is the proper direction of the consciousness to the Good. Murdoch demonstrates this point: "The problem about philosophy, and about life, is how to relate large impressive illuminating general conceptions to the mundane ('messing about') details of ordinary personal private existence."[131] Given Murdoch's understanding of the human as selfish, illusion-ridden, and compulsive in its attachments, what motivates us to "look again"? How do we carry out the effort to act in response to a reality that is outside of ourselves? How can we make ourselves better?

We can revisit Murdoch's quite pessimistic account of our natural orientation to be and to do in the world. Here's how she describes it at length:

> That human beings are naturally selfish seems true on the evidence, whenever and wherever we look at them, in spite of a very small number of apparent exceptions. About the quality of this selfishness modern psychology has had something to tell us. The psyche is a historically determined individual looking after itself. In some ways it resembles a machine; in order to operate it needs sources of energy, and it is predisposed to certain patterns of activity. The area of its vaunted freedom of choice is not usually very great. One of its main pastimes is daydreaming. It is reluctant to face unpleasant realities. Its consciousness is not normally a transparent glass through

[130] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 260.
[131] *Ibid*., 146.

> which it views the world, but a cloud of more or less fantastic reverie designed to protect the psyche from pain. It constantly seeks consolation, either through imagined inflation of self or through fictions of a theological nature. Even its loving is more often than not an assertion of self. I think we can probably recognize ourselves in this rather depressing description.[132]

Moral failure for Murdoch is a failure neither to respond to a divine command nor to create value bound by one's rational will or choice, but a failure to see things as they are, valuable in themselves and undistorted by egoistic fantasy. Hence, Murdoch does not ask the question of what causes our egoism or of what structures underlie for moral failure; rather, she prefers a simple explanation of selfish fantasy by seeing it for what it is. We begin in the Cave, as Murdoch uses to illustrate our situation, where we are chained to a wall, watching shadows as if they were the only reality. Murdoch seems to take the theologically traditional view of original sin as egoism not as "fate or genes" but as "a reminder of our frailty, of death and of vain suffering of the frustrated ego."[133] On this reading, moral progress for Murdoch requires the perfecting of "seeing," the ability of consciousness to turn away from shadows and to move toward the light of the sun, or the Good.

For Murdoch, moral fault and moral progress have largely to do with the quality of consciousness, and it is through attention that we learn to redirect our focus and attention to reality. Morality is how we *see* the world, and "in the moral sense of 'see,'" Murdoch implies, that "clear vision is a result of moral imagination and moral effort."[134] Not surprisingly, it is why beauty in nature and art, particularly good art, are fascinating for Murdoch. One example she finds is of "a hovering kestrel,"[135] which we might notice outside of our office or home window. In the moment

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[132] Murdoch, *Sovereignty of Good*, 79.
[133] Murdoch, "On 'God' or 'Good,'" in *Existentialists and Mystics*, 341. Murdoch has some caveat about the dangers for this concept of original sin as follows: "The concept of original sin, the crime of existence itself, may be seen as a reasonable generalization about the natural selfishness of humans. No one is without sin. It may of course also be used as a fantasizing protection of the ego, a deterministic myth, concealing chance and obliterating freedom, and making everything we do seem innocent because inevitable" (*ibid*.).
[134] Murdoch, Sovereignty of Good, 37.
[135] *Ibid*., 82.

of beauty everything is altered. It draws us away from anxious brooding about our situation, say, the worry about the bank balance or debt, self-absorbed fretting against family members or colleagues, or in my case, seemingly endless work of dissertation writing. Such moments of the experience of natural beauty are helpful to really see something beyond the self to make a breathing room to hold off self-serving concerns behind. She notes that the experience of beauty, "the only spiritual thing we love by instinct,"[136] is a good indicator for the moral life. It underlies, for sure, Murdoch's preference for sight and attention, which she borrows from Simone Weil, "to express the idea of a just and loving gaze directed upon an individual reality."[137]

There is another instance of a "clue" to the moral life regarding the notion of attention for Murdoch: good art. We are all artists, she insists, either the artist or the spectator. Murdoch writes, "[G]reat art teaches us how real things can be looked at and loved without being seized and used, without being appropriated into the greedy organism of the self." Furthermore, in contrast to the bad art, she continues,

> Good art reveals what we are usually too selfish and too timid to recognize, the minute and absolutely random detail of the world, and reveals it together with a sense of unity and form. This form often seems to us mysterious because it resists the easy patterns of the fantasy, whereas there is nothing mysterious about the forms of bad art since they are the recognizable and familiar rat-runs of selfish daydream.[138]

With respect to art, attention can be applied to both to the artist, who strives to depict the world as it is, and to the spectator, who attempts to see that reality revealed by the artist rather than using art as a kind of consolation such as the thriller or pornography. Although there are different degrees of reflexivity on the images that we are open to picture and come to resemble, the unselfing involved here via art, particularly good art, points to our being confronted by an external reality

[136] *Ibid.*, 83.
[137] *Ibid.*
[138] *Ibid.*, 64, 84.

that is completely independent of the self. At the same time, upon returning to the self, these experiences help to "pierce the veil of selfish consciousness and join the world as it really is."[139] This is the task of morality, and it is what Murdoch's reflexive realism clearly manifests in the importance of attention and vision when perceiving the world.

Grounded in this conception of reflexive realism, consciousness is a horizon where our perception and interpretation of the world around us are connected and mediated. As a realist, Murdoch understands a reality not as something we create or construct but as something external and objective to human making, where attention plays a crucial role here: "By looking at something, by *stopping* to look at it, we do not selfishly appropriate it, we understand it and let it be."[140] At the same time, as a reflexive cognitivist, Murdoch emphasizes the working of consciousness to seek continually to perceive, interpret, and reinterpret reality according to our best picture and best evaluation of it, although often infected by egoistic self-concern: "The world is not given to us 'on a plate,' it is given to us as a creative task. It is impossible to banish morality from this picture. We *work*, using or failing to use our honesty, our courage, our truthful imagination, at the interpretation of what is present to us, as we of necessity shape it and 'make something of it.'"[141]

In other words, Murdoch takes seriously the point that reality is always mediated through consciousness, and yet she also seeks to uphold claims of goodness and value against which all of our moral effort is to be judged. While morality for Murdoch is primarily about what goes in our minds, in the "system of energy," or put it simply, "consciousness," she interprets this inner life as outwardly focused and directs attention outwardly from the "fat relentless ego" to other concrete selves and to the world. To act morally, she means, is to act in response to a reality that is external

[139] *Ibid*., 91.
[140] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 462. (original emphasis)
[141] *Ibid*., 215. (original emphasis)

to us, that is not clouded by our own self-serving concerns. However, the difficulty here is the fact that we "lost the vision of a reality separate from ourselves."[142] In other words, the difficulty is to alter the spirit of self-deception in the formation of moral agency, especially when and where the void caused by the corporate and individual expressions of evil in modern and late modern world—the Holocaust, September 11, the *Sewol* ferry accident, to name a few—is simply filled in by the "reassuring and familiar" attachments. These attachments are inscribed in the form of deceptions and illusions about survival that is only internalized to the extent that we just see what we want to see, not what is out there, that is, the truth of the world. Only in this way is the sense of moral agency, the power to act responsibly and truthfully, wiped off and can make us blind to the reality of self, others, and the world. It is evil, whether manifested in individual or collective form, if and only if those self-consoling illusions and fantasies trapped in their own moralistic and religious cause prioritizes their survival and, in turn, renders others into a means for their own ends, and eventually disrespects and diminishes the wholeness of life and goodness.

The fundamental difficulty in human life is the orientation of our consciousness and attention. Here, then, what drives us to make the effort to see the world more truthfully? In a response to the question of moral motivation and moral progress, what moves us to strive for Good rather than simply being imprisoned in moral blindness to the reality of others? I argue that love is reclaimed in Murdoch's thought to reorient and purify consciousness and attention to the Good that still remains at the reality of the void. Murdoch puts it this way: "it is in the capacity to love, that is to *see*, that the liberation of the soul from fantasy consists."[143] It is in and through love

[142] Murdoch, *Sovereignty of Good*, 46.
[143] *Ibid.*, 65.

where human attention and imagination are purified to the extent that Murdoch's ethic of unselfing is instantiated. Let me explain how.

Murdoch envisages love as the knowledge of the individual, thus placed in a special relation to the Good. In reflecting on Platonic images, in the *Republic* as well as in the *Timaeus*, Murdoch explores Plato's conception of *Eros* as "the desire for good and joy which is active at all levels in the soul and through which we are able to turn toward reality."[144] Love, pictured as the intermediary Demiurge itself, is "the force that joins us to Good and joins us to the world through Good."[145] In this sense, Good and love should not be identified, according to Murdoch; thus, love is the force to attend to the Good that magnetically compels and reclaims attention to the concrete other. While Good is the magnetic center towards which love naturally moves, Murdoch is aware of the nature of love that is "capable of infinite degradation and is the source of our greatest errors."[146] Then in what sense does Murdoch identify the work of love in the face of the void?

As Good is for nothing, love is for nothing. The Good does not provide a cause or concrete description of the overarching meaning and goodness of life, but acts as the sun, a source of light, only as it illuminates the goodness in individual reality. Murdoch's appeal to this way of conceiving the Good prevents it from being corrupted by self-serving or selfish ends and concerns and thus orients the effort of unselfing. Although Good can be described as a spiritual goal, it has nothing to do with an external point in the sense of an "externally guaranteed pattern or purpose" and thus ensuing consolations to be expected, but is "truly gratuitous."[147] "The indefinability of the Good" is "mysterious because of human frailty and because of the immense distance" between

[144] Murdoch, "The Fire and the Sun," in *Existentialists and Mystics*, 415.
[145] Murdoch, *Sovereignty of Good*, 100.
[146] *Ibid*.
[147] *Ibid*., 77; qtd in Julia T. Meszaros, *Selfless Love and Human Flourishing in Paul Tillich and Iris Murdoch* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2016), 143.

it and our reality.[148] It does not mean for Murdoch, however, that all our failures to recognize and see the Good must be condemned and rejected, but rather means that the finite and contingent necessity in human life should be respected. That's why Murdoch associates goodness "for nothing" with an acceptance of death and chance. Put negatively, "we cannot dominate the world."[149] In other words, this is not to say, however, that "Murdoch is pessimistic or nihilistic but that death and chance are the things that the ego finds most challenging to its illusions of control," particularly in attention to the void where "the center of significance is suddenly ripped out of the self, and the dreamy ego is shocked into awareness of an entirely separate reality."[150] In terms of the void, Murdoch adopts Simone Weil's notion of *malheur*, "affliction," which prompts purification and love. Simone Weil writes on this point in her *Notebooks*: "The loss of contact with reality—there lies evil, there lies grief…. The remedy is to use the loss itself as an intermediary for attaining reality."[151] Love as unselfish attention attends to the loss itself and breaks the barrier of egoism that always consoles us with fantasies of "bouncing back." Murdoch appreciates Simone Weil's image "of becoming empty so as to be filled with the truth,"[152] not with the desire to dominate and manipulate others.

Love takes place as exposure to the state of the void. Here Murdoch points out the difference between *dianoia* and *noesis* in Plato: "between (good) discursive thinking and (mystical) imageless attention to what is conditioned."[153] Love functions at the void where no individuals or events are not determined by impersonal logic or substanceless wills; rather, love functions where, recalling Simone Weil's terms, they are perceived without reverie or attended without thinking

[148] *Ibid.*, 96.
[149] *Ibid.*
[150] Antonaccio, *A Philosophy to Live By*, 195; Murdoch, "The Fire and the Sun," 417.
[151] Simone Weil, *Notebooks* (London: Routledge and K. Paul, 1956); qtd. in Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 502.
[152] *Ibid.*, 301.
[153] *Ibid.*, 108.

about. Murdoch notes on moral change as follows: "Change of being, *metanoia*, is not brought about by straining and 'will-power,' but by a long deep process of unselfing."[154] Love for Murdoch is an extremely difficult realization, and therefore is gradual and endless as a moral effort. If our vision of the world sees individual reality in its own goodness rather than clinging to the fat relentless ego, we will act without lies and fantasy. Murdoch puts it thus: "If I attend properly, I will have no choices and this is the ultimate condition to be aimed at."[155] Thus love is deeply connected with the self-perfecting activity of consciousness grounded in the drive for unselfing: "Goodness is connected with the attempt to see the unself, to see and to respond to the real world in light of a virtuous consciousness."[156]

In Plato's reading, "love is the desire for the perpetual possession of the good" (*Symposium*, 206 A) and is construed as a moral effort with attention and imagination. First, seeing is loving, and vice versa in Murdoch's sense. Our inclination towards an egoistic vision of the world is overcome through seeing with love. Freedom from fantasy is unselfing because our fantasies are naturally geared toward establishing walls of protection trapped in our self-absorbing fear, thus self-serving vision of the world, as pictured, for example, in William Golding's novel *Lord of the Flies*. However, Murdoch's ethic of unselfing seems to deny the possibility for dramatic moral change, since she pictures consciousness as a continuous flow of energy, naturally directed by egoism and selfishness, that can only be incrementally changed in its direction towards or away from the Good. So also with attention: "[t]he 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

[154] *Ibid*., 54. (original emphasis)
[155] Murdoch, *Sovereignty of Good*, 38.
[156] Murdoch, "The Sovereignty of Good over the Other Concepts," in *Existentialists and Mystics*, 376.

which have such important cumulative results."[157] Murdoch insists that the work of attention goes on continuously, as it "imperceptibly builds up structures of value round about us."[158] Our continuous sense of orientation is always morally colored, and, compared with the immediate exposure to the beauty of nature, the task of attention requires a disciplined effort such as M's experience of finding a new way to look at D. Based on the Platonic insight about moral motivation illumined by the light of the Good, Murdoch sees the importance of "seeing" in moral life:

> The moral life in the Platonic understanding of it is a slow shift of attachments wherein *looking* (concentrating, attending, attentive discipline) is a source of divine (purified) energy. This is a progressive redemption of desire.… The movement is not, by an occasional leap, into an external (empty) space of freedom, but patiently and continuously a change of one's whole being in all its contingent detail, through a world of appearance toward a world of reality.[159]

Here we see that looking, attention, is a source of energy and a redemption of desire. Thus moral failure is a failure to love, a failure to see: "[t]he refusal to attend may even induce a fictitious sense of freedom."[160] It is only in seeing patiently that we can overcome our natural egoistic energy.

Second, love also involves the use of imagination "not to escape the world but to join it."[161] The imagination is implicated by Murdoch in two senses, negative and positive, but actually in related terms. Murdoch speaks of fantasy as an imagination in negative, self-serving light. Marked by "fat relentless ego," Murdoch notes, "[O]ur minds are continually active, fabricating an anxious, usually self-preoccupied, often falsifying veil which partially conceals the world."[162] This false certainty of imagination resides in the spirit of egoistic fantasy in the formation of moral agency, and, in turn, truncates our moral imagination. Murdoch calls this state of being caught up in egoism

[157] Murdoch, *Sovereignty of Good*, 42.
[158] *Ibid*., 36.
[159] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 24-5. (original emphasis)
[160] Murdoch, *Sovereignty of Good*, 89.
[161] *Ibid*., 88.
[162] *Ibid*., 82.

"unimaginative."[163] The negative sense of imagination renders us self-imprisoned in selfish fantasy. One does not need an elaborate moral language in our perception and interpretation of any situation. There is no need of moral progress other than words about individual choice and action "on my plate." Unimaginative egoism causes us not only to have a distorted view of others; it causes us to have a false view of the self. Here, Antonaccio in her chapter "Imagining the Good without God" points out succinctly the problem of egoism in Murdoch's view as "a problem of redirection of vision" but also of "the transformation of psychic energy or desire" fabricating our *images* to which we attend.[164]

In response to this state of the unimaginative gratification about self and the world, Murdoch articulates the other side of imagination that is more correct and conducive to the development of consciousness. Murdoch's emphasis on imagination contextualizes the struggles of the ego to break itself and attends to concrete others in light of love that entails self-reflexive change and attention to the Good. Creative imagination and love are carried out by a concrete human individual to a concrete human individual in the battlefield of our existence.[165] Murdoch holds that one of the disciplined activity of imagination is well manifested in good art, and it is what connects art with morality. It reminds us of a good artist—the Demiurge symbolizing *Eros* in the *Timaeus*—and his work to seek the necessary for the sake of the divine. It is what connects

[163] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 322. Murdoch fleshes out this kind of imagination by the following: "Vanity (a prime human motive) is composed of fantasy. Neurotic or vengeful fantasies, erotic fantasies, delusions of grandeur, dreams of power, can imprison the mind, impeding new understanding, new interests and affections, possibilities of fruitful and virtuous action. If we consider the narrow dreariness of this fantasy life to which we are so addicted the term 'unimaginative' seems appropriate." (*Ibid*.)

[164] Antonaccio, *A Philosophy to Live By*, 114. (my emphasis added)

[165] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 425. The following words of Murdoch merits our attention: "A consideration of the place of imagination in morality also makes clear the need for a reflective 'placing' of consciousness. Imagination is an (inner) activity of the senses, a picturing and a grasping, a stirring of desire. At a more explicitly reflective level, in everyday moral discussion as well as metaphysics, we deploy a complex densely textured network of values round an intuited center of 'good.' We imagine hierarchies and concentric circles, we are forced by experience to make distinctions, to elaborate moral 'pictures' and a *moral vocabulary*." (*Ibid*., 325, original emphasis)

love with imagination in Murdoch's thought. Particularly and importantly, love is reclaimed in seeking the necessary for the sake of the divine, where the moral life is understood as a pilgrimage from enslavement by self-consoling images to the apprehension of the real, *albeit* hardly grasped in images. That's why the transcendental status of the idea of the Good goes with its being an imageless concept. With respect to the notion of the imageless Good, Murdoch astutely contends that "[t]he spiritual life is a long disciplined destruction of false images and false gods until (in some sense which we cannot understand) the imagining mind achieves an end of images and shadows."[166] Murdochian love is inseparable from the work of moral imagination, insofar as love is reclaimed in seeking the necessary for the sake of the divine, where the "void" is and should not be determined by human reason or will, nor is it under the immediate control by what is either internal or external to the self, but in the lived reality and the suffering or afflictions therein.

Love prompted by purified imagination attends to the reality of the void, which demands the acceptance of necessity. This acceptance, or love, is the ability "to see in a pure just light the hardness of the real properties of the world, the effects of the wandering causes, why good purposes are checked and where the mystery of the random has to be accepted."[167] Murdoch relates this acceptance of necessity with the notion of obedience. Following Simone Weil's necessity with an image of obedience, obedience to the void prompts purification and love.[168] Morality in relation to this understanding of love, in Murdoch's sense, involves "a particular acceptance of the human condition and the suffering therein, combined with a concomitant checking of selfish desire."[169] Obedience for Murdoch is not indicative of passivity or submissiveness to certain forms of

[166] *Ibid*., 320
[167] Murdoch, "The Fire and the Sun," 456.
[168] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 109, 477.
[169] *Ibid*., 109.

authority but rather is "the freedom wherein the good man spontaneously helps and serves others."[170] The acceptance of necessity, as Rothchild puts it, can "converge in obedience of duty and acceptance of suffering in the human condition," which also suggests that "[a]n appreciation or image of necessity as law of nature can exhibit the futility of selfish purposes."[171] Furthermore, rather than a flight from contingency or particularity, love reclaims the ubiquity of value present in the most random, contingent, and particular features of reality. Hence, Murdoch's ethic of unselfing, as Antonaccio points out, "effects a transvaluation of the Platonic concept of necessity as the prerequisite for unselfing and moral-spiritual enlightenment."[172] Unselfing, prompted by love, occurs through a cognitive awareness (seeing) engendered by shock whereby individuals gain knowledge that the other is real, which requires no further justification than this: human beings are valuable because they are human beings. By identifying love as that which can free us from fantasy and move us toward the "realism of compassion,"[173] Murdoch redresses the Platonic concept of necessity in the direction of a positive valuation of finite and contingent existence, especially with a realistic attention to the void.

5. Conclusion: Reflexive Self on the Moral Life

Having examined the problem of the self and self's grounding in a metaphysical conception of ethics, it is apparent that Murdoch as a reflexive realist maintains the claim that morality and value are grounded objectively in a reality that is external to the self, but also seeks to understand the human grasp of real moral value to be mediated through the inner life of consciousness. As noted

[170] *Ibid*.
[171] Rothchild, *Retrieving Discarded Visions*, 114; Murdoch Metaphysics, 109.
[172] Maria Antonaccio, *A Philosophy to Live By*, 196.
[173] Murdoch, *Sovereignty of Good*, 65.

throughout this chapter, Murdoch has a mediating position, and she insists that consciousness and the notion of the individual self remain indispensable if we are to understand morality, and refers to consciousness as "the fundamental mode or form of moral being."[174]

Murdoch's argument for consciousness, and its response to a world that is always morally colored, is a metaphysical argument, an attempt to perceive, reflect, and evaluate reality and the nature of human existence. In doing so, she attempts to analyze and describe the way we conceive ourselves, others and the world "in the making of models and pictures of what different kinds of men are like."[175] Therefore, for Murdoch, consciousness is a way of seeing and interpreting the reality beyond the self, but, in turn, reflecting on the self, as she insists that "[t]he ubiquity of value demands a link between consciousness and cognition. A good quality of consciousness involves a continual discrimination between truth and falsehood."[176] This effort renders itself as moral, insofar as it is placed within individual consciousness, and yet it is correlated to the concept of the Good for Murdoch.

Valuing, Murdoch notes, is "an apprehension of the world, an aspect of cognition, which is everywhere,"[177] and not something in our own making. Thus consciousness and valuing are intertwined in the formation of human moral agency in the sense that our moral perception is mediated through consciousness through which our commitment to value is enacted. And yet, for Murdoch as a moral realist, this mediation of consciousness is outwardly focused to the reality of concrete others and the world in light of the magnetic pull of the Good. In other words, the simple awareness of sheer facts or the reference to ideals is not sufficient to describe the self's relation to

[174] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 171.
[175] Murdoch, "Metaphysics and Ethics," in *Existentialists and Mystics*, 74.
[176] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 250.
[177] *Ibid*., 265.

the Good. Given her moral realism—there is a reality transcendent to the self that claims attention—the metaphysical picturing of the self and reality enables Murdoch to reclaim love as a realistic hermeneutical concept for moral life and human goodness.

I contend that it is love that makes this mediation of consciousness possible. To be sure, consciousness consists in our perception and apprehension of value, as necessary for seeing the good. However, I argue that love is the fundamental mode of human experience, which demands of being human and being moral in our self-reflexive understanding. Love is reclaimed as "the knowledge of the individual"[178] in the face of the void when the fat relentless ego in the flow of consciousness is shocked into awareness of an entirely separate reality, thus into the moral demand of the discovery and appreciation that someone other than the self is real and valuable. Love as the capacity "to see" is our primary and fundamental mode of moral being, particularly at the moment when the void, prompted by epistemological shock, is to be accepted as "present" and "real" which demands "a making a spiritual use of one's desolation."[179]

Love entails the self-involving and self-negating aspect of individual consciousness with the metaphysical question of the source of values. As I reclaim the role and the place of love in Murdoch's thought, love is the beginning of *moral* consciousness when we are stunned with the cognition and realization of the values we are confronted in the world and other beings in light of the Good. It is love that places the demand on consciousness to attend and to unself in light of goodness manifested in concrete others. Otherwise, the other is reduced to a replication of fantasized self or the self can be dominated by the "otherness" of another being without moral sensitivity to "concrete universals" that Murdoch would envision. Love, I contend, is our

[178] Murdoch, *Sovereignty of Good*, 27.
[179] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 503.

fundamental realization of something other than oneself and thus is the realist hermeneutical force for consciousness which demands the living with evaluative reflection in the face of a variety of moral goods we encounter in finite reality.

I am arguing in this juncture of discussion about love and Murdoch's notion of the Good that *God* properly understood within the Christian tradition is a more plausible, fitting, and effective norm for morality. Murdoch's argument about the Good "frees from the burden of establishing the necessary existence of a personal God" in favor of the impersonal Good.[180] In Murdoch's vision, the Good demands *our* recognition of the ubiquity of value in all reality that we simply see things as they are. What might be needed here, however, is to address the question of "what confers value on individuals"[181] and the world, as Schweiker notes. In other words, this question is grounded in another question of "how the Good symbolizes the real."[182] Murdoch's concept of the magnetism of the Good, which pulls consciousness toward it, does not seem to have a strong element of moral demand, in other words, "to bind its power to finite and created life," as Murdoch herself upholds "the image of a morally perfect but *not all-powerful* Goodness."[183] By contrast, God is not simply a name of some depersonalized higher force or being, but the ground and power of all that is; in other words, "God is ultimate value creating power," a power that confers and "binds itself to the actual worth of finite existence."[184] The symbol God is to empower the created worth of all reality, thus "the Good is not all that God symbolizes," as Schweiker puts it.[185] Put differently, Murdoch's insistence on attention to individual reality and its worth can and

[180] Schweiker, "The Sovereignty of God's Goodness," 224. I am greatly indebted to Schweiker's argument about the sovereignty of *God's* goodness over Murdoch's sovereignty of Good.
[181] *Ibid*., 225.
[182] *Ibid*., 229.
[183] *Ibid*., 231; Murdoch, "The Fire and the Sun," 431. (my emphasis added)
[184] *Ibid*., 230.
[185] *Ibid*., 227.

must be enhanced in relation to the Christian insistence of the idea of God that is central to the transformation of value for the concrete picture of the meaning of finite and created reality of life. Furthermore, it is in the respect and love *before God* that we experience the demand to embrace the universal and to recognize the particular. I will explore further this comparison of Good and God in context in chapter four, section 4.

For now, given this note, I am not seeking or launching a defense of Christian ethics. I am also not offering a definitive proof of a Murdochian position. Rather, I am engaging Murdoch's thought through which I am isolating the importance of love for current thought that helps us fight forces of fake consolations. I will argue that love is our primary and fundamental mode of moral being, wherein the objective goods encountered in self, world, and Go(o)d are mediated. Murdoch's metaphysical pictures retrieve the frequently jettisoned "depth" of the self where I reclaim love in her thought. Love identifies our mediating capacity to picture moral knowing as a pilgrimage of the soul to the transcendent source for all value, particularly in concrete attention to the others. This distinctive understanding of reflexive self on the moral life in Murdoch's thought is also manifested in her reference to the role and the place of love reclaimed with the categories of the inner life of consciousness and true consolation, as the following chapters will address.

CHAPTER THREE

INNER LIFE AND MURDOCH'S RENDITION OF ONTOLOGICAL PROOF

1. Introduction

In this chapter, I will attend to Murdoch's engagement with some of the central concepts for envisioning the relationship between love and inner life. I contend here that love is reclaimed in Murdoch's thought as a subversive force for reflection on self and the world to radically transform the ways we see and interpret our world in light of our turn to the ubiquity of value.

In doing so, I will turn to Murdoch's insightful strands of thought against the problem of late modern world because she develops her distinctive arguments that reclaim love as our capacity to invigorate the human and cultural processes of reflexivity in light of what is other than ourselves. In contrast to dominant philosophical and theological positions, Murdoch is distinctive in revisiting seriously the depth of the self and reality wittingly *and* unwittingly abstracted and separated from any given situation of the self. What's at stake for Murdoch in her reflection on the human situation is that modern humans were threatened by a world, and concomitantly too many gods, created by themselves. Not surprisingly, the whole idea of depth has been under considerable criticism in our time, particularly invoked from the quarters of poststructuralists such as Jacques Derrida and Mark C. Taylor, arguing that the idea of depth can be too abstract or overly deterministic. They even reject a certain strand of theology espousing the stagnant comfort of the ecclesiocentric community, insuring a semblance of security through assurance of immortality, and thus making of life "a living death."[186] The dangers that they identify and do away with are the patterns of alienation and

[186] See more in Mark C. Taylor, *Deconstructing Theology* (New York, NY: Crossroad; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982); *Erring: a postmodern a/theology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984).

domination, cast in the rules of binary logic of religious sensibility, where someone sees our spiritual situation as the absence of God and simply leaps in re-rendering and contending God. James H. Olthuis, a relational psychotherapist, describes a similar assessment on par with the poststructuralists: "[e]fforts to still the reality of flux by chanting a master name and constructing man-made islands of safety are inherently violent."[187]

Partly resonant with these poststructuralist claims, Murdoch, however, do not simply renounce the notions of depth or foundation, only to affirm "an insistent sense of finitude,"[188] but rather to reclaim the depth of metaphysical self-awareness in some relationship to the unconditioned element of morality, which enables her to explore the ways to read both the creative and the consolating forms of modern and late modern world. First of all, it is helpful to note the problem of secular existence, which Charles Winquist calls "the trivialization of ultimate questions."[189] Given the predicament that Winquist describes, Murdoch is poignantly concerned with the late modern problem, with what Murdoch dramatizes the human scene "with far too shallow and flimsy an idea of human personality."[190]

In order to challenge and test these features of current life, Murdoch's impassioned defense of the idea of the individual and its value develops a hermeneutic of love, coupled with her deep concerns about reflexivity situated within the conditions of late modernity. Here I will identify her repeated appeals to Theodor Adorno's assertion of individual experience framed in significant two words—"consciousness and experience"—that are "constantly used by Adorno in a metaphysical sense to indicate the deep places of human existence."[191] In this respect, Murdoch's thought

[187] James H. Olthuis, "A Cold and Comfortless Hermeneutic or a Warm and Trembling Hermeneutic: A Conversation with John C. Caputo," in *Christian Scholar's Review* 19, No.4 (1990), 345.
[188] Charles E. Winquist, *Desiring Theology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 138.
[189] *Ibid.*, x.
[190] Murdoch, "Against Dryness," 287.
[191] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 373.

demonstrates what Adorno calls "the priority of the objective"[192] in her idea of contingency and moral perception: "An emphasis upon consciousness as *perception*, and awareness of detail, presents it as the property of the individual."[193] While we will continually see Murdoch appreciate Adorno's deepest criticisms of contemporary society, we will explore how Murdoch articulates the importance of "ordinary individuals engaged in the ambiguity of day-to-day moral struggle," not "at the level of grand theoretical systems"; at the same time, however, we will find it crucial that Murdoch's concern for the other is located in the context of "a transcendent good which casts human life within a wider compass."[194]

Pondering upon the disappearance of depth in the late modern world, Murdoch's realist and metaphysical ethic correlates the idea of the inner life of consciousness with the idea of Good through her appropriation of the ontological proof. While appreciating the deep sense of Anselm's ontological proof, Murdoch builds on *moral*, not theistic, ontology, in which she transforms it into a transcendental argument for the Good, and thus the religious depth of morality: "a mode of belief in the unique sovereign place of goodness or virtue in human life."[195] In the "supposedly faithless world" of secular world in Terry Eagleton's phrases—what Murdoch calls this predicament as "the void"—love is wanted where we feel and are stunned by the moral demand as responsive to the demonic impulses in culture and religion to the extent that consciousness can "limit its own totalizing energies by imagining its own "outside.""[196]

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[192] Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialektik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1966), English translation: *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E.B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 1973), 184-9. Murdoch calls it "the primacy of object" in her *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*.
[193] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 378.
[194] Antonaccio, *A Philosophy to Live By*, 63; "Iris Murdoch's Secular Theology of Culture," 276.
[195] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 426.
[196] See more in Terry Eagleton, *Culture and the Death of God* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014); Antonaccio, *Picturing the Human*, 182.

I will conclude that love in the cultural dimension of human life can be understood as a subversive force in a culture dominated by totalizing and disintegrating systems. It is where our primary moral commitment to love is felt and enacted as we seek to reorient our lives in the face of the void.

2. The Perplexity of Late Modern Existence

Paul Tillich does not see the problem of the modern situation as the absence of God or the death of God but as the separation from what is always and already present; not Godlessness, not fully protest against the world, but separation from what is most near to us. Deeply cautious about our inability to affirm meaning, heightened by "the loss of a spiritual center, of an answer, however symbolic and indirect, to the question of the meaning of existence,"[197] Tillich claims that the absence of orienting contexts of meaning is responsible for alienation and domination experienced in our late modern world. However, at the same time, Tillich in his sermon "The Depth of Existence" suggests that a yearning for truth is also related to an expectation "that the truth which does not disappoint dwells below the surfaces in the depth."[198] With reference to Tillich, Charles Winquist has summarized the current modern climate as "the trivialization of ultimate questions," but he also urges us to consider that "at the end of the twentieth century there is still a desire for a thinking which does not disappoint."[199] This double-sided response to the predicament of our situation parallels Murdoch's central worry but also her resilient return to an idea of goodness. In her words, her central worry points to certain patterns of thinking or theorizing that "quietly [efface]

[197] Tillich, *The Courage To Be* (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 2000), 47.
[198] Tillich, *The Shaking of the Foundations*, 53.
[199] Winquist, *Desiring Theology*, x and ix.

any close view of moral lives as lived by ordinary individuals."[200] However, she does not hesitate to appeal to a transcendent source of goodness: "The human scene is one of moral failure combined with the remarkable continued return to an idea of goodness as unique and absolute.… This is where we press language to express the ubiquitous importance of the concept of morality, when it is seriously and strictly considered."[201]

What's at stake in Murdoch is, however, not simply honest observations and diagnostics of the predicament of modernity or late modernity as possible cultural orientations; the difficulty is marked more poignantly by the fact that the current scene is explained away or even dominated by certain patterns of theorizing or proposals, for example, urging a fervent protection of religion from the supposedly impure and faithless influence of secular world or dismissing religion as a useful dialogue partner in our mundane conversation.[202] It is beyond the scope of this chapter to delineate in full length the different arrays of criticisms of depth seen from historical progression, but it suffices to note briefly some contemporary reactions in which the notion of depth has become philosophically problematic and in which the ethical force of theology of culture became eclipsed. I am suggesting in advance that Murdoch, while framing the problem of secular existence, reclaims the unconditioned depth of morality, and thus widens the scope of her philosophical and theological reflection on the "inner life" in which the depth of value and meaning-giving power in human life is written.

William Schweiker once notes, with reference to the arguments of Max Weber and Ernst Troeltsch, that the modern world is the "social condition in which the social spheres function by

[200] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 159.
[201] *Ibid*., 427.
[202] Antonaccio, "Iris Murdoch's Secular Theology of Culture," 272.

their own logics, values, and norms free from religious domination."[203] It is what Weber calls "disenchantment of the world" where the gradual differentiation of secular systems functions as separate from religious symbolism. Their concern is with ways in which religious inspiration and enthusiasm are institutionalized, are revived from time to time, but are eventually routinized in forms which compromise their vitality or purity. In this spirit, the feature of modernism has its optimistic expectation that the self as an intentional or rational subject applies rationality to a reality outside of the self without the imposition of church authority or dogma. Intellectual independence encapsulated in subjective dominance, say in the *cogito* alone or within the idealized self, grants freedom from the tyranny of ignorance, superstition, and dogmatic religious conviction, but the subject-object dichotomy cannot make contact with what is other than the self, only enfolding the "other" within self-conception. Winquist describes it as the process of totalization whereby the world shrinks to the dimensions of the subjective self, and its ramification is the loss of our perception of others and goodness.[204] This modern predicament was escalated by the horrendous wars and their unjust forces upon the destruction and demeaning of existence in last centuries and onwards, which mirrors the loss of depth and ensuing considerable perplexity found in human and non-human lives. Regarding many developments in recent thought, Antonaccio notes that they "signal a persistent suspicion or unsettling of the notion of 'depth'" or a flight back into a language community or a tradition.[205] She continues to situate these developments

[203] William Schweiker, "Theology of Culture and its Future," in *The Cambridge Companion to Paul Tillich*, ed. Russell Re Manning (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 144.

[204] Winquist clearly notes in his *Desiring Theology* as follows: "the subject is the measure of all things and the subject knows itself in the production of a signifying system that ideally is universalized and closed. This is a process of totalization" (11). Furthermore, what is lost here is "the *other* of both the world and the self. It is the loss of a pluralistic world and a variegated self" (10).

[205] Antonaccio, "Iris Murdoch's Secular Theology of Culture," 273. Well aware of these phenomena of late modern culture, Mark C. Taylor in his *Erring* addresses his observation of "marginal people" who are "[s]uspended between the loss of old certainties and the discovery of new beliefs" (5).

characterized by "various forms of moral scepticism and anti-realism" within her analysis of Murdoch's grasp of their ramifications.[206] How so?

First, while the notion of depth has become a recurring object of modern and postmodern debates, the metaphor of depth seems to be now measured in a language of surface in a poststructuralist drift. The shift from depth to surface is basically implicated in that which is other than subjectivity, origins or foundations: "The experience of originality without origins and serious thinking without foundations," Winquist notes, "keeps us bound to surfaces that are the space and theater of meaning."[207] An increased attention to the importance of "surfaces" in this drift reveals "the creative and expressive possibilities that have been released by relinquishing the notions of depth, reference, and foundation."[208] This poststructuralist move, interestingly enough, turns to the movement toward alterity, insofar as the intense valuation of the other recognizes and speaks of finitude in its truth. The view of alterity—the face of the other and experience of otherness—in the dissemination of meaning across surfaces, particularly in the text, empowers Derrida and other postmodern thinkers to deny something that is under one's immediate control. Antonaccio understands its implications as "an emancipation not only from the imperatives of previous intellectual and cultural traditions, but also from the inevitable disappointment that is thought to result from any attempt to transcend the finite and self-reflexive conditions of human thought and existence."[209]

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[206] *Ibid*., 274.
[207] Winquist, *Desiring Theology*, 138.
[208] Antonaccio, "Iris Murdoch's Secular Theology of Culture," 273. Mark C. Taylor in his book *Hiding* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), for example, suggests that "[i]f depth is but another surface, nothing is profound…. This does not mean that everything is simply superficial; to the contrary, in the absence of depth, everything becomes endlessly complex." (18).
[209] *Ibid*., 273-4.

It is interesting to note here that Winquist points out the deconstructivist impulse of theological thinking as "a continuous pressure against the totalization and closure of a dominant discourse"[210] and he further relates it to the discourse of love as an intense valuation of finitude and necessity: "When a discourse denies the truth of finitude, it denies love. It denies the truth of love in the repression of difference. Identity in difference is a condition for love. It is a condition for all becoming that is consciously recognized in the valuation that is love."[211] The critique of the notion of depth is also manifested in the following claim: to preserve sameness in text is exposed as sheer folly, because the text itself is enmeshed with its own lines of fissure and forces of disruption. In an interview with Richard Kearney, Derrida makes the following claim:

> "Deconstruction is always deeply concerned with the 'other' of language. I never cease to be surprised by critics who see my work as a declaration that there is nothing beyond language, that we are imprisoned in language; it is, in fact, saying the exact opposite. The critique of logocentrism is above all else the search for the 'other' and the 'other of language.'"[212]

In his indebtedness to Derrida, Taylor describes Derrida's understanding of *différance* in *Erring*: "The signified is a signifier. Consciousness, therefore, deals *only* with signs and never reaches the thing itself. More precisely, the thing itself is not an independent entity [be it 'real' or 'ideal'] to which all signs refer but is itself a *sign*."[213] In this context, Taylor goes on to claim that his a/theology is a "radical christology,"[214] where the divine word "is" the incarnate word, and thus the word is embodied such that "the God of writing is manifested as the writing of God."[215] The

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[210] Winquist, *Desiring Theology*, 143..
[211] *Ibid*., 149. In terms of the truth of finitude, Antonaccio observes Winquist musing on Nietzsche's notion of a*mor fati*: "That our lives come to nothing is transvalued when nothing more is needed, nothing left to do. The nothing is transvalued. The something of life can be valued because nothing more is needed. There is here an affirmation of necessity that Nietzsche will later call amor fati." (Desiring Theology, 140 (original emphasis); qtd, in Antonaccio, "Iris Murdoch's Secular Theology of Culture," 274)
[212] Richard Kearney, Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1984), 123.
[213] Taylor, *Erring*, 105. (original emphasis)
[214] *Ibid*., 15.
[215] *Ibid*., 116.

metaphor of an otherness in and of writing seems to open spaces for a radical naming of the otherness of God in the technique of "deconstruction," but, as I noted in chapter two, the individual self and its singular particularity that Taylor seeks to uphold is subsumed into the linguistic system or even by his religious language as signs. His deconstructivist epistemology prescribed by the limits of the language-bound mind seems to retain the controlling attitude that Taylor criticizes in modernity. Antonaccio musing on Murdoch astutely comments on this: "The denial of depth, perceived as a liberation by many, may, ironically, impose its own burdens and limitations on human life by repressing values and effacing commitments and aspirations that give our lives their density and weight."[216]

Second, regarding the lack of depth in late modern world, there has been another prominent strand of thought in the current theological scene: narrative, tradition-dependent ethics. The core idea of this position is that moral norms, values, and worldviews are specific to the community and its forms of life and discourse. In the attempt to understand its claims about reality and its moral values, contemporary narrative ethicists such as Stanley Hauerwas and Alasdair MacIntyre, as Antonaccio puts it, "call into question the "unencumbered" modern self by insisting on its embeddedness in complex historical, social and narrative contexts."[217] This turn to the community and its specific language is significant in its purpose in the late modern predicament, and Schweiker notes on this point: the purpose of this turn to language is "to counter the axiology and theory of moral knowledge found in modern ethics" and "to challenge the modern enthronement of the self" whose hegemonic emphasis on reason and will jettisons the unconditional character of

[216] Antonaccio, "Iris Murdoch's Secular Theology of Culture," 275.
[217] Antonaccio, Picturing the Human, 176.

the moral imperative in western ethics.[218] In this externalist turn to community and language as the search for a good in a larger narrative framework beyond our own choosing or making out of an inner voice or impulse—not for the sake of a celebration of sign-systems as seen in poststructuralism—we are constituted into roles *via* language of the narrative communities in which we find and realize a certain way of being in the world.

It is interesting to note that Hauerwas has used Murdoch's thought—specifically, her view of how moral identity is socially formed and linguistically mediated—in the service of a Christian ethic of character in his earlier career. This position, which is also called "moral particularism," specifies its epistemic condition, the condition within which one is situated in order to understand the claims of values and norms of that particular community, and in this case, the Christian church.[219] Stanley Hauerwas and other Christian particularists make bold claims about the distinctiveness of Christian values so as to deny their intelligibility outside of the Christian community. Hence, these narrative ethicists, or what other commentators call "post-liberal" thinkers, draw a sharp line between the Church as a people of peace and the world, a domain marked by unending war and violence. John Howard Yoder, another tradition-dependent thinker, writes, "The distinctness is not a cultic or ritual separation, but rather a nonconformed quality of ("secular") involvement in the life of the world. It thereby constitutes an unavoidable challenge to

[218] William Schweiker, "Consciousness and the Good: Schleiermacher and Contemporary Theological Ethics," in *Theology Today*, vol. 56, No.2 (July, 1999), 188; qtd in Antonaccio's *Picturing the Human* (176-7). Antonaccio reminds us of Charles Taylor's thought on this by quoting: "language does not only serve to *depict* ourselves and the world, it also helps *constitute* our lives…. Language not only depicts, but also articulates and makes things manifest, and in so doing helps shape our form of life." (*Human Agency and Language* (Cambridge [Cambridgeshire] & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 10 (original emphasis)) See also Seyla Benhabib, *Situating the Self: Gender, Community, and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

[219] MacIntyre contends, for example, in his work *After Virtue*, "[T]he key question for men is not about their own authorship; I can only answer the question 'What am I to do?' if I can answer the prior question 'Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?'" (216).

the powers that be and the beginning of a new set of social alternatives."[220] Seen in this light, our ability to see, understand, and evaluate the world is utterly dependent upon the stories as the crucial eschatological facts that have shaped us, as the bearer of the stories of God's action in the Christian community and in the world. Yoder continues: "What matters is the quality of the life to which the disciple is called. The answer is that to be a disciple is to share in that style of life of which the cross is the culmination."[221]

Their argument of situating the self within the incommensurable language of Christian community poses some cautions for contemporary thought. It is particularly associated with the issue of what Schweiker calls the practice of *inscription*. This act of inscription, as a moral and hermeneutical practice, designates, as Schweiker notes, "a kind of myth-making found in strands of Christian ethics, one that presents an account of the world and time by interweaving strata of an inherited textual tradition." He continues, more critically, "But the aim of inscription is not simply to give a picture of reality; its aim is moral and social formation."[222] I am suggesting that narrative ethics is the most recent form of the moral practice of inscription. To inscribe life within church-centered forms of piety and practice is to reduce diverse strata of texts into one linguistic form. The activity of inscription germane to character formation in narrative ethics enables Hauerwas, for example, to insist that the Bible is the "church's book" doctrinally, not textually. These

[220] John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus: vicit Agnus noster* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans; Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 1994), 39.
[221] *Ibid*., 38.
[222] William Schweiker, "Love in the End Times," in his *Theological Ethics and Global Dynamics*, 87. Here Schweiker engages with an exemplary early Christian text, the *Didache*, and explains how life became Christianly "textured" in the act of inscription. He presents certain dilemmas about this practice of inscription with respect to the double love command, particularly "wherein sharp lines are drawn between the saved and the damned" which can lead to "a kind of moral madness" (87). Schweiker suggests in this writing, "The challenge is to live within the vision of life opened by the double love command and its interpretation in the life and teaching of Christ. It is to live beyond the dangerous logic of the way of life and the way of death, the saved and the damned, that runs from the days of the *Didache* to the fanatical terrorism of the present time" (106).

ecclesiocentrically constructed and interpreted narratives may serve well for their reading community, but I contend, to use Schweiker's words, that this practice of inscription falls into easily "a Christianized version of overhumanization, the enfolding of life within one symbolic horizon and framework… an odd fascination with the unity of "form.""[223]

There are some related problems in narrative ethics from a Murdochian perspective. Antonaccio points out a poignant problem by the following: "if one only becomes a subject by virtue of one's membership in a linguistic community, the question left unanswered by this account is whether subjectivity or moral agency becomes wholly reducible to the linguistic community," the church, that it is part of.[224] She continues that it seems for Murdoch to "lead to a loss or diminution of the idea of the individual and the inner life."[225] Second, this monistic form of inscription is to enfold Christian identity within the Christian story as a seamless whole, pictured as "Noah's ark" in evangelical Christianity, and further to politicize the text. The vision of life presented by the text for most, if not all, narrative ethicists is not so much to form and test the lives of Christians, as to block them against the world, the arena of violence. It is not surprising to me, for example, that Hauerwas' works are popularly translated and read much for many Asian (particularly Korean) evangelical Christians and for their theological seminaries. Biblical consumerism, Prosperity Gospel, and politically warped utopianism, to name a few, are the recent forms seen in our late modern world. The return of religion in demonic forms is propelled by this practice of inscription where the multidimensional lived human reality is subsumed into self-enclosed institutions and systems defined by their own internal logic. Anthony Giddens, in his book on the status of self and society in the late modern world, notes on this point, "The

[223] *Ibid*., 98.
[224] Antonaccio, *Picturing the Human*, 177.
[225] *Ibid*.

sequestration of experience means that, for many people, direct contact with events and situations which link the individual lifespan to broad issues of morality and finitude are rare and fleeting."[226] These two features in a different guise that I have noted above—poststructuralism and narrative ethics—have intensified the problem of totalization along with the critique of depth under the conditions of late modernity and have analogous ramifications of the separation between self, others and the world.

The critique of depth tends to "make the erroneous, and nihilistic, assertion that morality itself is the problem."[227] The late modern age, as I noted earlier, is increasingly characterized by various forms of moral scepticism and anti-realism that resist reflexive criticism and lead to the wholesale denunciation of the moral dimension of culture: ranging from the claim that there are no knowable, objective moral truths to the claim that late modern world manifests itself as "a happy cacophony of moral beliefs."[228] Moral values are here seen as a minimal public moral attitude and thus "a purely human social construction or phenomenon" rather than, in Murdoch's words, as "written into the fabric of the world."[229] To be sure, in this minimalist and even ironic perspective on moral beliefs, there is a double-edged potential: liberating and protesting. One can gain the freedom, on the one hand, to hold one's own cherished beliefs, but one cannot and should not linearly equate those beliefs about human goodness with others.[230] This freedom, on the other

[226] Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, 8.
[227] I here paraphrase William Schweiker's words seen in his chapter "On Moral Madness," as he notes that "[i]nsisting on the moral depth of cultural life and violence is not to make the erroneous, and nihilistic, assertion that morality itself is the problem." (in *Theological Ethics and Global Dynamics*, 173)
[228] Schweiker, "On Moral Madness," 175.
[229] Antonaccio, "Iris Murdoch's Secular Theology of Culture," 274. Here Antonaccio clearly sees the rendition of values in these forms of theory and philosophy as "either a function of personal preference or self-interest, or as serving the ends of communal identity-formation and social well-being, or as tools for the repression of difference or dissent by those in power." (*Ibid*.)
[230] Schweiker critically notes on a challenge to the Golden rule that "rests on a suppressed premise, namely the good will." ("On Moral Madness," 191) The Golden Rule—do unto others as you would have done unto you—is the supreme moral principle in Judaism and Christianity (i.e., "In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets," Matthew 7:12 NRSV). There is always a challenge to this rule, because it

hand, allows one to "criticize and relativize inherited values that have been used to legitimatize oppressive social arrangements." Antonaccio continues to consider the point of this argument as "to free human beings to pursue their own sense of fulfilment and authenticity and to offer some relief from the oppressive effects of the moral demand."[231]

This contemporary argument points out the critique of depth in our secular world, although it tends to render morality the very root of our problems. However, the appeal to minimalist and ironic detachment about values may obscure the extent to which "human life is constituted by patterns of dependence and indebtedness that may rightly limit the drive to self-fulfillment and affirm our capacity to recognise values *beyond* self-fulfillment."[232] In other words, it becomes a hollow argument, insofar as it may blur or invalidate the reflexive power of moral imagination embedded within the cognition of the ubiquity of value in human life and thus remain only to deflate our ideals and their moral demands that they make upon us. The more serious problem in this critique of depth is to erode moral vocabulary and to foster the ensuing inarticulacy about the depth of morality. Antonaccio astutely puts it like this:

> The problem is that the critique of depth in the moral sphere has had the effect of eroding the very terms and concepts with which a protest against the disappearance of depth could be lodged. It has fostered a certain silence and inarticulacy in all contemporary ethical discourse that is part and parcel of what Winquist calls 'the trivialisation of ultimate question.'[233]

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should not be applied literally. Schweiker notes with reference to Paul Ricoeur: for Ricoeur, this rule "emphasizes the fundamental asymmetry between what someone does and what is done to another." Here the other is "potentially the victim of my action as much as its adversary" ("Ethical and Theological Considerations on the Golden Rule," in *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination,* trans. David Pellauer and ed. Mark I. Wallace [Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995], 294). Schweiker continues: "The Golden Rule, centered on interaction, presupposes not only intersubjectivity and basic goods, but also the power to act and the potential exercise of power over others. The Golden Rule aims to thwart the tyranny of power on and over others" (Schweiker, "on Moral Madness," 191). Particularly, if this rule is couched in moral madness under the banner of righteousness, the deleterious result seems to be evident: "The evil will can endorse ill to itself and thereby legitimate violence under the requirement of universalizability… An 'evil will,' the fallen conscience, can use the most glorious moral principle to horrific ends." (*ibid.,* 191-2)

[231] Antonaccio, "Iris Murdoch's Secular Theology of Culture," 274.

[232] *Ibid.,* 275.

[233] Antonaccio, "Iris Murdoch's Secular Theology of Culture," 275.

In one sense, this anti-moral realist stance is often motivated by a desire to lighten the burdens that confront and challenge the self as inextricably related to an ideal of Goodness, "evidently and actively incarnate all around us," apart from destructive heteronomy.[234] However, it condemns us to be, as I noted in the end of chapter one, morally spiritless, indifferent, and insensible about being human and being moral, particularly about the corporate and individual wickedness that blinds us not to see the depth of what is "really real."

Murdoch might concur, on the one hand, with the poststructuralist theological thinking to accept the challenge of necessity and finitude, but do not jettison the question of ultimacy. She also concurs with the ethics of alterity that resists this trivialization and lack of depth, but Murdoch's ethics does so through a reclamation of the idea of the Good. Murdoch, on the other hand, might concur with the narrative ethicist thinking to consider the way in which moral identity is socially and linguistically mediated, but she grounds moral identity and the status of moral claims transcendentally in a metaphysical realist framework, insofar as "the authority of morals is the authority of truth (i.e., reality), and not the authority of social convention" where the account of the moral self tends to be effaced and repressed.[235] Finally, while Murdoch is deeply concerned with the experience of "the void" where we feel the moral demand for a renewed commitment to the painful reality and its relation to what is good; what is left out of the moral sceptic and anti-realist perspective is that it is not simply perceived as a liberation, even claiming that morality itself is the root problem in our late modern world; rather, a contingent, particular judgment about an aspect of life is unescapably rooted in values and aspirations that demand a new orientation of

[234] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 478.
[235] Antonaccio, *Picturing the Human*, 171.

our moral attention, and thus is articulable in the whole of larger account of the reality of the world and other people, ultimately Good and God as the condition for human moral experience.

Given these considerations, I am claiming that love reclaimed in Murdoch's thought is the reflexive power of moral imagination and is also the subversive force to evaluate and potentially challenge the logic of totalization and the consequent consolating forms in late modern world. The absence of ethical responses to the trivialization of ultimate questions found in certain forms of modern ethics and theology are precisely what Murdoch takes up in her secular theology of culture, whereby the fateful gap between morality and culture, between culture and religion, can reconcile concerns which, in Tillich's words, "are not strange to each other but have been estranged from each other."[236] Let's turn to Murdoch's articulation of her thought in her repeated appeals to Theodor Adorno in her criticisms of contemporary society and in her development of hermeneutic of love in relation to the inner life of human consciousness.

3. Murdoch and Adorno on Late Modernity

Murdoch and Adorno, a member of the first generation of critical theory, are not ordinarily thought to have much in common and are thus rarely treated together. But Murdoch's recognition of the distortion and alienation of consciousness discloses her complex mediations that interconnect the individual and society and consciousness and cultural imagination that the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School was also deeply concerned with. Given the complex reflection on the role of consciousness and the unconditional demand of moral striving, Murdoch provides a standpoint for viewing false consciousness as consciousness out of accord with concrete worth of goodness, especially in the midst of "the void" encountered in modern and late modern world. While in

[236] Tillich, *Theology of Culture*, 29.

rejecting positivism as a naïve metaphysics truncating moral vocabulary, say, the continuation of critique—Horkheimer and Adorno's constructive response to the dissolution of human freedom and conscience—Murdoch points the way toward loving attention to reality and the world beyond the self. Now I turn to Murdoch and her reference to Adorno's thought, particularly in her *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, for her longstanding concern for the idea of contingency and moral perception.[237]

Theodor Adorno, a leading figure among the first generation of critical theorists at the Institute for Social Research at the University of Frankfurt, saw the disenchantment with the world because human knowledge knows no limits as the cause for "alienation," alienation from each other and from God. Adorno, working with Max Horkheimer, puts forth a rather poignant claim against Enlightenment seen in his days: "anything which does not conform to the standard of calculability and utility must be viewed with suspicion.… Enlightenment is totalitarian."[238] In his own essay, "Subject and Object," Adorno further presents stark objections to the views of both Kant and Hegel and his eloquent view of "the priority of the objective." It is worth quoting at length:

> The subject's key position in cognition is empirical, not formal; what Kant calls formation is essentially deformation. The preponderant exertion of knowledge is destruction of its usual exertion, that of using violence against the object. Approaching knowledge of the object is the act in which the subject rends the veil it is weaving around the object. It can do this only where, fearlessly passive, it entrusts itself to its own experience. In places where subjective reason scents subjective contingency, the primacy of object is shimmering through—whatever in the object is not a subjective admixture. The subject is the object's agent, not its constituent; this fact has consequences for the relation of theory and practice.[239]

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[237] In her *Metaphysics*, she writes, "there is no complete self-reflection, no final unity of subject and object, our world is irreducibly contingent" (370-1).

[238] Max Horkheimer and Theodore W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: *Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. by Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 3-4. Originally published in German as *Gesammelte Schriften: Dialektik der Aufklärung* 1940-50.

[239] Theodor Adorno, "Subject and Object," in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, eds. Andrea Arato and Eike Gebhardt, (New York: Urizen Books, 1978), 506. Murdoch has this passage in her *Metaphysics as a Guide to the Morals* (378-9). Right after quoting this passage, she succinctly adds her comments: "The 'rending of the veil,' the

Adorno's negative dialectic tries to alter Kant's and Hegel's pictures of the relation of subject and object, and rather introduces contingency and doubt into this picture. While retaining the necessary connection between subject and object as "an unsystematic dialectical tension," Adorno portrays the object as primary in the sense, as Murdoch notes, that "[t]he object must not be swallowed by the subject; equally it must not be set up as if entirely independent of the subject."[240]

To be sure, Murdoch's defense of the idea of the individual as morally basic shows a point of contact with Kant's anthropology, namely, his claim that the unconditional demand of morality, and his connection between the experience of being an individual agent and respect for the moral law, the *Achtung*. Furthermore, Kant's thought serves the shaping of her godless, secular theology of culture because, as Antonaccio notes it, "for him the inner certainty of the sense of duty obviates the need for a direct appeal to [personal, theistic] God" by quoting: "Kant thus puts us, and deliberately puts us, in the best possible position for denying that God is there at all."[241] Murdoch continues, "We are ourselves moral sources, able to be sure about morality and to be confident judges of our spiritual life. Kant's metaphysics is a model of demythologization, wherein God, if present at all, is secluded."[242] In spite of her awareness of Kant's emphasis on the self-legislating nature of rational will, not imposed from any presumably heteronomous weight—I will revisit Murdoch's indebtedness to Kant in terms of her notion of moral freedom and imagination later in this chapter—Murdoch aligns herself with Adorno in her critique of late modern pathologies: the

'fearlessly passive' trust of 'experience,' these phrases express a deep, and indeed familiar, moral and moral-religious insight; and the last sentence separates the writer from the prime tenets of Marxist theory and practice" (379).

[240] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 370.

[241] Antonaccio, "Imagining the Good," 225; Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 442.

[242] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 438.

loss of the individual in neurosis and convention. In Murdoch's view, these two totalizing forces make us fail to see the individual

> because we are ourselves sunk in a social whole which we allow uncritically to determine our reactions, or because we see each other exclusively as so determined…. Or … because we are completely enclosed in a fantasy world of our own into which we try to draw things from outside, not grasping their reality and independence, making them into dream objects of our own.[243]

The two-faced fantasy is the enemy of art and morals, which truncates our true imagination. These two failures can thus be regarded as two different sides of the same problem: "how difficult it is in the modern world to escape from one without invoking the help of the other."[244] While she articulates a nonegoistic form of consciousness beyond the idea of both identity and totality, and on grounds other than self, Murdoch traces both dangers to what she construes as the "corrupting influence" of Hegel's thought on the autonomy of moral subjectivity of Kant: "Hegel's correction of Kant over-privileges the subject, or *per contra* abolishes the subject by envisaging an ultimate totality in which subject and object merge."[245] She as a novelist also points out these dangers manifested in the modern novels and succinctly notes, "We are offered things or truths. What we have lost is persons."[246] For Murdoch, as Antonaccio puts it, "what breaks the drive [of subjective

[243] Murdoch, "The Sublime and the Good," in *Existentialists and Mystics*, 216.
[244] Murdoch, "The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited," 268.
[245] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 370. Antonaccio points out this view in her book *A Philosophy to Live By*, 57.
[246] Iris Murdoch, "The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited," in *Yale Review* 49 (December, 1959), 265. When Murdoch explains romantic freedom that belongs mainly to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, though it has its roots earlier, that is Kantian freedom. "Hegel makes the Kingdom of Ends into a historical society; while the Romantic concludes from the unhistorical emptiness of Kant's other rational beings that in face one may as well assume that one is alone" ("The Sublime and the Good," in *Existentialists and Mystics*, 217). With respect to the history of novels, Murdoch writes, "The novel fails to be tragic because, in almost every case, it succumbs to one of the two great enemies of Love, convention and neurosis. The nineteenth-century novel succumbed to convention, the modern novel succumbs to neurosis. The nineteenth-century novel is better than the twentieth-century novel because convention is the less deadly of the two" (*ibid*.).

dominance or] of consciousness to totality" is [neither an appeal to a solipsistic fantasy] "nor an abstract social or linguistic whole, but an encounter with a concrete other person."[247]

Here I will identify her repeated appeals to Adorno's assertion of individual experience framed in significant two words—consciousness and experience—that are constantly used by Adorno in a metaphysical sense to indicate the deep places of human existence. Like Murdoch, Adorno is concerned with quality of consciousness, not simply as "pure cognition," or even as the state of mind dominated by instrumental rationality. In his *Minima Moralia* he writes, "In the face of totalitarian unity, which cries out for the elimination of differences directly as meaning, something of the liberating social forces may even have converged in the sphere in the individual. Critical theory lingers there without a bad conscience."[248] Adorno's emphasis upon consciousness as perception denotes his picture of the individual as "a non-sacrificial, non-identity of the subject,"[249] which bases his critique of modern subject in self-reflection as an act of narcissism and of the society and culture of twentieth-century capitalism. What does that mean? In what sense is Adorno's "the priority of the objective" related to Murdoch's portrayal of the moral life? Two things must be noted.

First, for Adorno, reason is governed by an identity logic, and the Kantian categorical imperative, despite its unconditional demand for the moral law, discloses "the steady instance of the I which remains self-same."[250] In Adorno and Horkheimer's understanding of the psychic archaeology of the self, the fundamental drive of autonomy derives from the fear of the self from

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[247] Antonaccio, *Picturing the Human*, 181. I have paraphrased this passage by noting two problem of neurosis and convention together.
[248] Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: reflections from damaged life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 1978), 13. Originally published in German as Minima Moralia: *Reflexionen aus* dem *beschädigten Leben* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkampf Verlag, 1951).
[249] Seyla Benhabib, *Critique, Norm, and Utopia: A Study of the Foundation of Critical Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 212. (hereafter indicated as *Critique, Norm, and Utopia*)
[250] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 268.

the "other." They see in Kantian morality, as Seyla Benhabib notes, "the contradiction between duty and inclination, between the moral law and the affective-emotive constitution of the individual."[251] The gist of Adorno's critique of Kant in the *Negative Dialectics* is contained in the following statement:

> The I (ego) … is not immediate but mediated; in psychoanalytic terms, one that emerges, one that is split off from the diffuse energy of the libido. It is not only the specific content of the moral law that depends upon factual existence, but its presumably pure, imperative form does as well. This imperative form presupposes the internalization of repression, as the I which remains self-same develops into a steady instance; Kant absolutizes this I as the necessary condition of ethical life.[252]

Under conditions of domination and repression, the disjunction between virtue and happiness cannot be reconciled, as Kant saw. In light of Kant's conviction based on his moral psychology, similar to Murdoch, "men are made of so crooked a wood"[253]—humans are egotists and bound by this condition—as Benhabib nicely puts it, "the question of whether humans can have an interest in the moral law which contradicts their [self-inclination and] self-interest is unsolvable, and thus becomes a transcendental fact of reason (*Faktum der Vernunft*)."[254] For this reason, Murdoch observes Adorno's critique of Kant as follows:

> As Adorno sees it, Kant's subject, composed of rigid rules prescribing the form of the object, cannot be regarded as an original spontaneous upsurge of subjectivity, but is really an object itself, framed in the image of the object which it constitutes. The Kantian Thing-in-itself, the inaccessible 'given,' is attractive as suggesting the contingent independence of the object, but is not a genuine object for the subject because of its lack of relation with it.[255]

This means that if autonomy of reason is a mixture of domination and repression only in the service of self-preservation, then the Kantian project of critique in its self-reflexive sense has to face its

[251] Benhabib, *Critique, Norm, and Utopia*, 188.
[252] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 268.
[253] Immanuel Kant, *On History*, trans. L.W. Beck, R.E. Anchor, and E.L. Fackenheim (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1963), 17-8; trans. of "Ideen zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in *weltbürgerlicher* Absicht." In *Werke in zehn Bänden* (q.v.), vol. 9, 41.
[254] Benhabib, *Critique, Norm, and Utopia*, 80.
[255] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 370.

own trauma. Benhabib rightly observes that "[t]his contradiction between duty and inclination reveals … the secret bond between autonomy and self-repression, between the ideal of a community of reason and the egoistical practices of individuals."[256]

Against this narcissistic interest in reflection, whereby the world and otherness disappear, Adorno criticizes reflection based upon identity logic that falls into what Adorno calls "reflex-like" regression. To be sure, Kant remains true to the absolute demands of the moral law incompatible with the domination of our sensible nature, and on this Kantian conundrum, in respect for the moral law, Murdoch notes, "[W]e feel pain at the thwarting of our sensuous nature by a moral requirement, and elation in the consciousness of our rational nature; that is, our freedom to conform to the absolute requirement of reason."[257] The opposition between human inclination and duty is transformed by Kant into a metaphysical dualism between the phenomenal and noumenal realms. Adorno puts it this way: "According to the Kantian model, the subjects are free, insofar as, conscious of themselves, they are identical with themselves; and in such identity they are once more unfree, insofar as they stand under its compulsion and perpetrate it."[258] For Kant, morality does not find its roots in maxims, internal principles of actions often times driven by self-interest, but on the basis of the moral law wherein the power of reason is to legislate maxims of action that should become a universal law binding on everyone including the self.[259] In order to reconcile this moral antinomy, say, between our desire for happiness and the demand for virtue, Kant had to give it a metaphysical basis for establishing the supreme principle of morality. Nonetheless, in Kant's view, as Schweiker nicely puts it, "the demand of reason extracts one from [the contingent and

[256] Benhabib, *Critique, Norm, and Utopia*, 188.
[257] Murdoch, "The Sublime and the Good," in *Existentialists and Mystics*, 208.
[258] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 295.
[259] See Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Practical Reason*, paragraph 7.

complicated and even eccentric course of] history and the messiness of actual life."[260] Murdoch puts it succinctly: "Kant's view of ethics contains no place for the idea of tragedy."[261] This is the point where Murdoch departs from Kant, and that is the second thing to note about Adorno's aesthetic turn, which is resonant with Murdoch's notion of tragedy, a paradoxical art.

Adorno's assertion, against the totalizing metaphysic of idealism and structuralism, affirms the particularity and contingency of the individual. Murdoch, with reference to Adorno, makes a related comment on the modern problem of subject and object in one stroke:

> 'The given' (contingent, unordered, unconceptualised reality), made inaccessible by Kant except as processed by a rigid subject made in the image of its constituted object, swallowed up by Hegel's evolving all-powerful subject, degraded by Sartre into unassimilable matter inducing disgust and despair, dissolved by structuralists into the 'objective' network of language, and in vulgar dogmatic Marxism ground up by the inevitable historical process with its Utopian culmination, should be restored to the position accorded to it by common-sense and by art.[262]

Consistent in the true negation of identity logic, Adorno believes that identity logic can only be stopped when the difference and otherness within and outside the self is in favor of the primacy of the object, and this is only the case when our object is another subject or self. Then, some questions merit our attention, as Benhabib raises them accordingly: what could be a genuine "being-by-oneself-in-otherness," as found in Hegelian definition of freedom? "How can the self find itself in otherness, without losing itself in it?"[263] For Adorno, the picture of the individual as a non-sacrificial, non-identity of the subject is "not a social ideal but an aesthetic one."[264] There is a deeper reason that can explain Adorno's reluctance to locate a moment of non-identity in the social realm. It evinces, counterintuitively, in addition to his critique of identity logic in the service of

[260] Schweiker, *Dust That Breathes*, 148.
[261] Murdoch, "The Sublime and the Good," in *Existentialists and Mystics*, 215.
[262] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 376-7.
[263] Benhabib, *Critique, Norm, and Utopia*, 211.
[264] *Ibid*.

self-preservation, his critique of modern industrial mass-productive society. Benhabib writes, "The continuous reduction of everything to something other than itself, which is the secret of money and later of the commodity form," is institutionalized in the course of late modern culture.[265] It is where everything is demeaned by being public, and where the immediate disappears or at best becomes part of what Adorno calls "the culture industry."

Adorno's primacy of the object therefore marks a path through a recognition of the aesthetic. The recovery of the non-identical is the task of the true work of art: "That moment in the art work by means of which it transcends reality… does not consist in the attained harmony, in the questionable unity of form and content, inner and outer, individual and society, but rather, in those trances, through which discrepancy appears, and the passionate striving toward identity is necessarily shattered."[266] Interestingly enough, for this redemptive appeal to a utopian moment of the non-identity, Adorno and Horkheimer reconsider the concept of "mimesis." The model of autonomy which Adorno and Horkheimer aspire to must be sought in the aesthetic realm *via* mimesis. While they are concerned with the very notion of representation itself in Western thought—say, from the biblical account of *imago Dei* and imitation, Plato's mimetic cosmology on one and many to the modern identity logic culminated in Hegel's mimetic theory of history—mimesis and totalization seem inseparable.[267] In particular, critical theorists such as Adorno, Horkheimer, Herbert Marcuse, and others attempt to develop their dialectical thoughts to combat the distortion and alienation of consciousness cloaked within the identity-mimesis logic of modern moral philosophy. For example, when he turns to art as a place where to see the meaning of respect

[265] *Ibid*., 385.
[266] Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 117.
[267] To explore more in the discussion of mimesis, see William Schweiker, *Mimetic reflection: A Study in Hermeneutics, Theology and Ethics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1990); Rene Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. by Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977); *Curing Violence*, eds. Mark I. Wallace and Theophus H. Smith (Sonoma, California: Polebridge Press, 1994)

for the object, Adorno attempts to overcome the reification of reason as a single logic of explanation, be it the predominance of identity logic or instrumental reason.

Adorno distinguishes between mimesis and mimicry, "between a relation to otherness that acknowledges otherness and a relation to otherness that imitates without acknowledgement."[268] The aesthetic experience implied in mimesis anticipates a new, non-dominating mode of relation to inner and external nature: "a new mode of being with the other within and outside the self."[269] Against false projection of identity logic, "pleasure-loving late capitalism," and "oppressive truth-denying Marxist states," in Murdoch's phrases, Adorno's mimesis is not seeking total mediation, but rather reflexive in the sense that world is not the mimicry of transcendent ideas located in rigid subject-object relation, but a dynamic reflection that interrelates consciousness and experience as crucial to understanding the other within and outside the self.[270] Mimesis and the aesthetic turn in Adorno envision a non-sacrificial non-identity of the subject intimated in the non-compulsory relation to otherness. Critical theory then was confronted with the task of overcoming the Enlightenment and its distorted logic of mimesis which culminates in making otherness disappear; this overcoming via a true sense of mimesis beyond mimicry for Adorno can be a matter of giving back to the suppressed and the dominated their right *to be*. For Adorno, truth is not simply imitative correspondence of idea to reality but is the mimetic process of perception and "waiting" in the expectation of the new, "an entirely other" (*ein ganz Anderes*). In Horkheimer's words, "[t]he hope

[268] Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 167; qtd. in Benhabib, *Critique, Norm, and Utopia*, 219. Adorno and Horkheimer point out the false projection of mimesis in Western reason, particularly fascism and German Nazism that they went through: "If mimesis makes itself like the surrounding world, so false projection makes the surrounding world like itself. If for the former the exterior is the model which the interior has to approximate [*sich anschmiegen*], if for it the stranger becomes familiar, the latter transforms the tense inside ready to snap into exteriority and stamps even the familiar as the enemy" (*ibid*.).
[269] Benhabib, *Critique, Norm, and Utopia*, 220.
[270] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 374.

that earthly terror does not possess the last word is, to be sure, a non-scientific wish."[271] Murdoch, despite her caveat about the idea of Utopia, concurs with Adorno's emphasis on the aesthetic experience evoked in the "Naturschöne"—"the naturally beautiful," the antithesis of society and the antithesis of determination.[272] Murdoch writes, "Adorno is (was) a metaphysician and a moralist.... He regarded good art as a redeemer of society. By good art he did not mean art which preached a revolutionary creed… but free individual art which, through its aesthetic honesty and power, could (incidentally) criticize society by exhibiting the deep horrors and sufferings of the human lot."[273] How are art and morals discerned in Murdoch, then?

In her essay "The Sublime and the Good," Murdoch forcefully speaks of the relation between art and morality:

> Art and morals are … one. Their essence is the same. The essence of both of them is love. Love is the perception of individuals. Love is the extremely difficult realization that something other than oneself is real. Love, and so art and morals, is the discovery of reality. What stuns us into a realization of our supersensible destiny is not, as Kant imagined, the formlessness of nature, but rather its unutterable particularity; and most particular and individual of all natural things is the mind of man. That is incidentally why tragedy is the highest art, because it is most intensely concerned with the most individual thing.[274]

While Adorno along with Horkheimer worries about the "fate" of those human instincts and passions repressed and displaced by modern civilization, Murdoch has similar concern about the "fate" of actual persons and characters both in the artistic realm of "fiction" and also in the moral realm where "the human ego denies the reality of others," or in other words, with Schweiker's words, "makes them "fictions" in its picture of itself."[275] As Murdoch notes, art as the discovery of reality is difficult and tragic because while, musing on Plato, "the aesthetic is the moral since it

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[271] Max Horkheimer, Foreword, in Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1973), xii.
[272] Theodor Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie*, in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970), 7:101-113; qtd. in Benhabib, *Critique, Norm, and Utopia*, 211-2.
[273] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 371.
[274] Murdoch, "The Sublime and the Good," in *Existentialists and Mystics*, 215.
[275] Schweiker, *Dust that Breathes*, 147.

is of interest only in so far as it can provide therapy for the soul," "[a]lmost all art is a form of fantasy-consolation and few artists achieve the vision of the real."[276] The enemies of art and morality are, as Murdoch insistently reminds us, neurosis and convention, both of which hinder attentive responses to reality and other people. Here love is reclaimed in art and morals, and particularly for Murdoch in the tragic freedom. She writes, "The tragic freedom implied in love is this: that we all have an indefinitely extended capacity to imagine the being of others."[277] It is tragic because "others are, to an extent we never cease discovering, different from ourselves,"[278] which is what Murdoch calls "our supersensible destiny," and because our sensible desire and supersensible destiny collide.

Tragedy as a paradoxical art exemplifies the dilemma which every author, and the ordinary person as a live spectator, faces when attempting to picture reality and the world. This dilemma is expressed in Antonaccio's words: "How does one reconcile one's own powerful creative [imagination or] fantasy with the realist demand to describe a reality other than oneself?"[279] It is clear that art, like morals, imposes a form on our experience, but there are "forces of disunity and disorder which are essential to a realistic portrayal of human [person and] life."[280] We have seen this dilemma in Timaeus' creation account and it is what Murdoch calls the tension regarding the genuine feature of tragedy: "What makes tragic art so disturbing is that self-contained form is combined with something, the individual being and destiny of human persons, which defies form. A great tragedy leaves us in eternal doubt. It is the form of art where the exercise of love is most like its exercise in morals."[281] Good art, especially tragedy for Murdoch, can "break the ego,

[276] Murdoch, "The Fire and the Sun," 396; *Sovereignty of Good*, 63.
[277] Murdoch, "The Sublime and the Good," in *Existentialists and Mystics*, 216.
[278] *Ibid*.
[279] Antonaccio, "Form and Contingency in Iris Murdoch's Ethics," 119.
[280] Antonaccio, *A Philosophy to Live By*, 58.
[281] Murdoch, "The Sublime and the Good," in *Existentialists and Mystics*, 219.

destroying the illusory whole of the unified self,"[282] whose work of unselfing purges our egoistic need for consolation: "Art makes places and open spaces for reflection, it is a defense against materialism and against pseudo-scientific attitudes of life. It calms and invigorates, it gives us energy by unifying, possibly by purifying, our feelings. In enjoying great art we experience a clarification and concentration and perfection of our own consciousness."[283] Like Adorno's fascination about the primacy of the object, particularly via the true work of art, Murdoch notes that art transcends reality as it allows individuals to unlock themselves "to silence and expel self, to contemplate and delineate nature with a clear eye."[284] Good art is about such reality where the messiness and contingency of human life can defy and shatter the self-aggrandizing desire toward fantasized thoughts and actions.

Murdoch nevertheless delimits the absolutizing importation of art for morality. Art functions as a possible pointer to the goodness and "gives sense to the notion of a reality which lies beyond appearance."[285] It is something like Thich Nhat Hanh's words: a finger pointing at the moon is not the moon itself. The finger is needed to know where to look for the moon, but it should not be mistaken for the object of our attention, the ultimate reality to be aimed at. Rothchild puts nicely on this by stating that art functions "as a means to subjugate the self and intensify intention, but it cannot fully replicate one's own pursuit of the relationship between truth and reality, or truthfulness" situated within one's recognition of our supersensible destiny and moral conflict.[286]

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[282] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 104. Murdoch mentions true artists, among which she includes Schonberg's *Pierrot lunaire* and *Erwartung*, Beckett's *Endgame* and *Waiting for Godot*, and Picasso's *Guernica*.
[283] *Ibid*., 8.
[284] Murdoch, *Sovereignty of Good*, 63.
[285] *Ibid*., 86.
[286] Rothchild, *Retrieving Discarded Visions*, 200. Schweiker points out with respect to the role of art in Murdoch's thought, "Great art tries to render or express through its medium and style, its form, what cannot be presented. And it wrestles with this problem. It enacts in *form* the struggle of the moral life" ("Goodness and Fictive Persons," 149). He continues, however, "Any actual human being cannot be reduced to artistic form, or to some social totality, or to

The fact that human beings defy form explains for Murdoch why the moral life cannot be subsumed in artistic forms or forms of abstraction but, rather, must be "a sustained and never-ending adventure of attention and love under the idea of a perfect Good."[287]

There is another serious problem when human beings defy form. Schweiker notes, "We fail to see that consciousness is always producing form, always at work making pictures of ourselves and others. We defy the real for the imaginary. We are all artists. That is the problem."[288] Murdoch worries so much about fantasy as an imagination in a negative, self-serving light. While we are *continually* confronting something other than ourselves, we are caught up in the fat, relentless egoistic spirit of self-sufficiency that, in turn, truncates our moral imagination. To counteract this relentless tendency, Murdoch insists that "we all, not only can but *have to*, experience and deal with a transcendent reality, the resistant otherness of other persons, other things, history, the natural world, the cosmos, and this involves perpetual effort.… Most of this effort is moral effort."[289] Thus for Murdoch love is reclaimed as the essence of art and morals insofar as "the most important thing to be revealed is that other people exist"[290]; it also suggests that love is where we are stunned with the realization of a "supersensible destiny," which demarcates the difference between art and morals, and thus articulates the distinctly human perpetual effort to unself. Murdoch's claim that the Good is manifest nowhere else than in loving attention to concrete other individuals requires a "double revelation of both random detail and intuited unity."[291] I contend that for Murdoch love is the capacity to hold the two-way working of

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a political agenda, because … to be a human being is to have a supersensible destiny that exceeds all sensible form." (*ibid*.)

[287] Schweiker, "Goodness and Fictive Persons," 149.

[288] *Ibid*., 150.

[289] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 268. (original emphasis)

[290] Murdoch, "The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited," in *Existentialists and Mystics*, 271.

[291] Murdoch, *Sovereignty of Good*, 93.

consciousness—one-making and truth-seeking—in tension where the depth of consciousness and the reality of persons must be reclaimed in the midst of the endless profaning of existence in late modern world, which I will discuss next.

The distinctive structural features of *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* are permeated with the two-way movement of consciousness. Within this movement, according to Murdoch, universal concepts are learned in relation to both the individual consciousness and the reality of individuals to which consciousness attends. In her essay "The Idea of Perfection," Murdoch describes this two-way movement in philosophy as follows: "a movement towards the building of elaborate theories, and a move back again towards the consideration of simple and obvious facts."[292] This movement that Murdoch undertakes for both her moral philosophy and her literature coheres with her claim that moral concepts should be understood as "concrete universals." This movement not only cuts across the form and contingency distinction, but also, more significantly, responds adequately to the "far too shallow and flimsy an idea of the human personality"[293] and to the consequent moral blindness about the depth of morality that Murdoch faced and experienced in late modern world.

Murdoch's enduring project can be seen as an attempt to reclaim a metaphysical framework for the moral life while defending the value and irreducibility of the individual. In her letter after World War II and its aftermath, she writes that "everyone's lives are being mucked up…. it disturbed all one's feelings of the future very profoundly."[294] As an administrative officer with the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, Murdoch worked in refugee camps and

[292] Murdoch, "The Idea of Perfection," in *Existentialists and Mystics*, 299.
[293] Murdoch, "Against Dryness," 287.
[294] Peter J. Conradi, *Iris Murdoch: A Life* (New York: Norton, 2001), 213. It was her letter to David Hicks on January 1944. Also found in "Art of Fiction cxvii: Iris Murdoch," *Paris Review* 115, 1990, 209.

witnessed firsthand the devastating effects of totalitarian regimes to efface and nullify human lives. She writes, "Society itself has become problematic and unreliable. So it is that the person who is literally an exile, the refugee, seems an appropriate symbol for the man of the present time. Modern man is not at home, in his society, in his world."[295] It is interesting to know that during this time, in early November of 1944, Murdoch met Jean-Paul Sartre in person and by December 1945 read his book *Being and Nothingness*. Against this personal experience as well as the intellectual landscape in her days, the question of the value and reality of the individual became the central issue in Murdoch's thought: "the notion of the fundamental existence and value of the individual should not be, need not be, and ultimately cannot be obliterated."[296]

Murdoch refers to the two-way movement as the distinction between metaphysics and empiricism. It is what she pictures the evaluative activity of a thinking consciousness. Antonaccio puts it thus: "Murdoch draws between the aesthetic dilemma of the novelist, who tries to shape the narrative into an orderly form while still allowing for the freedom of the characters, and the philosophical dilemma of the metaphysician, who tries to create a unified philosophical whole that can also capture the particularity and contingency of human existence."[297] As I noted in chapter two, Murdoch's numerous references to Plato's views of consciousness, particularly seen in the myth of the cave in the *Republic*, attempt to see if they make more sense of our actual experience and of what we think the moral life should be about. Moral life, in relation to being good and doing good, is pictured as an ascent from appearance to reality, but also a descent and return to the cave that remembers the contingent and the particular. While she sees the need for a "one-making" endeavor of metaphysical system to picture reality, Murdoch does not hesitate to insist on the re-

[295] *Ibid*., 239. Also found in BBC European Productions, *Meeting Writers*, no. 5, ref. no. 4222, 4 February 1957.
[296] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 365.
[297] Antonaccio, *A Philosophy to Live By*, 12.

discovery of the density of human life, "the real impenetrable human person."[298] She writes, "[E]mpiricism 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."[299] In other words, the tension in this two-way movement between metaphysics and empiricism can be summarized in Murdoch's words that I quoted earlier: "Love is the perception of individuals…. What stuns us into a realization of our supersensible destiny is … its unutterable particularity."[300] This awareness of our supersensible destiny reclaims an idea of depth, even in eccentric activity of personal consciousness.

Indeed, Murdoch's appreciation of the real and particular human person concurs with the fundamental tenet of liberalism.[301] Particularly experiencing the aftermath of world wars and treacherous human forms of violence, Murdoch also appreciates "the force of existentialist-behaviorist view in supporting a notion of the value and freedom of the individual," as Antonaccio notes.[302] Even more, as noted earlier, Murdoch's recognition of otherness of the other persons seems resonant with the poststructuralist emphasis on the ethics of alterity in the technique of "deconstruction." Despite her keen awareness of her contemporaries' concern and *Angst*, however, Murdoch argues that the "totalizing" philosophies could not respond well to what is going on in the world when a cultural hermeneutic may lose sight of "a renewed sense of the difficulty and complexity of the moral and life and the opacity of persons."[303] Here, Antonaccio finds Murdoch's poignant cultural diagnosis illuminating and writes, "the stripped-down picture of moral choice

[298] Murdoch, "Against Dryness," 294.
[299] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 236.
[300] Murdoch, "The Sublime and the Good," 215.
[301] Murdoch, "Against Dryness," 294; "This person substantial, impenetrable, individual, indefinable, and valuable is after all the fundamental tenet of Liberalism."
[302] Antonaccio, "Iris Murdoch's Secular Theology of Culture," 278.
[303] Murdoch, "Against Dryness," 293.

and moral language offered by analytic linguistic philosophy and existentialism alike could not, in fact, support the very values these philosophies so staunchly championed."[304] Murdoch judges that they fail to maintain the reality of the individual in the face of the identity logic of self-preservation, the impersonal reasons or substanceless wills, or the network of linguistic systems.

In response to this situation, Murdoch attempts to suggest what she calls a "rival soul-picture which covers a greater or a different territory."[305] It is through tragic freedom implied in love as the rival soul-picture that her adequate defense of the individual is clearly manifested. Love is reclaimed when we feel the moral demand arising from tragic freedom in our consciousness to call for "a new vocabulary of attention."[306] This freedom and our supersensible destiny are correlated *via* love insofar as "[f]reedom is not strictly the exercise of the will, but rather the experience of accurate vision."[307] Hence, Murdoch's freedom refers to another crucial aspect of Murdoch's thought on consciousness, and that is her empirical argument about consciousness as "truth-seeking" activity, compared to "the one-making" nature of consciousness. It is also tragic in a Murdochian sense: "Tragic, because there is no prefabricated harmony, and others are, to an extent we never cease discovering, different from ourselves."[308]

Here Murdoch's two-way movement of consciousness concurs with Adorno's concern to expound a new philosophy of consciousness by resisting identity logic and distorted mimesis. Tragic freedom in Murdoch's thought, rooted in the old Platonic question of the one and the many, thereby poses the challenge of the moral fate of fictive persons in two ways: the Good as the one-making drive, not "equivalent to discrete individuals," defies self-enclosed consciousness and yet,

[304] Antonaccio, "Iris Murdoch's Secular Theology of Culture," 279.
[305] Murdoch, *Sovereignty of Good*, 2.
[306] Murdoch, "Against Dryness," 293.
[307] Murdoch, "On 'God' and 'Good'," in *Existentialists and Mystics*, 354.
[308] Murdoch, "The Sublime and the Good," in *Existentialists and Mystics*, 216.

in turn, is perceived and manifested in concrete individuals who "break open, defy, the form-making power of consciousness."[309] Murdoch's attempt to mediate the tension between metaphysical pictures of goodness and the empirical perception of finite reality necessitates the value orientations of the personality and the meaning structures of the culture which situates the moral life within a perpetual journey from appearance to reality. Particularly in a situation called "the void" encountered in late modern culture which makes loss a reality, Murdoch argues with reference to love that "[w]hat is needed here … is a new orientation of our desires."[310] This new orientation propelled by loving attention to reality and the world beyond the self is the core of morality, which provides the context for Murdoch's claim that the core of morality is best conceived as something "religious." That's why her secular theology of culture is a form of reflection which retrieves an idea of the religious depth of morality. She writes,

> The human scene is one of moral failure combined with the remarkable continued return to an idea of goodness as unique and absolute.… This is where we press language to express the ubiquitous importance of the concept of morality, when it is seriously and strictly considered. This fundamental importance, this kind of (*realissimum*) reality, is what religion in all sorts of ways… reveals and celebrates.[311]

With respect to the problem of the depth of human existence manifested in late modern world, Murdoch attempts to develop a more ambitious conceptual picture of reality and seek our improved knowledge of the world by revisiting and reappropriating Anselm's argument of the ontological proof. In doing so, Murdoch correlates the idea of the inner life of consciousness with the idea of Good, which we will explore in next section.

4. Murdoch and Ontological Proof: The Inner Life of Consciousness

[309] Schweiker, *Dust That Breathes*, 154.
[310] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 503.
[311] *Ibid*., 427.

Deeply concerned with the value orientations of the individual and the meaning structures of the world, Murdoch attempts to link the reflexive turn to consciousness with the religious depth of morality in the secular late modern world. This Murdochian concern is clearly manifested in her interpretation of the ontological proof. In keeping with the hermeneutical principle, the two-way movement between metaphysics and empiricism that we have been tracing earlier in this chapter, this dialectic reappears more critically in the structure of Murdoch's interpretation of the ontological proof. Her retrieval of the ontological proof enables her to synthesize the "one-making" and "truth-seeking" aspects of goodness in her model of self and reality.

There are two reasons I explore her rendition of the ontological proof, which will determine the scope and purpose of my arguments in this section. First, Murdoch's revisiting the deep sense of Anselm's ontological proof evinces her worry about the disappearance of depth in modern secularism. With reference to Tillich at the beginning of her chapter entitled "The Ontological Proof," Murdoch insists that the proof, though often treated as an absurdity, is important as "an especially apt voice," now, due to the technological and instrumental modes and conceptions of human existence, when "the idea of the responsible moral spiritual individual is being diminished."[312] In her essay "On 'God' and 'Good,'" Murdoch responds to the landscape of modern moral philosophy: "Our picture of ourselves has become too grand, we have isolated, and identified ourselves with, an unrealistic conception of will, we have lost the vision of reality separate from ourselves, and we have no adequate conception of original sin."[313] With ontological proof language, Murdoch envisages what the old God symbolized, "the 'feel' of reality" "when we connect what is real with what is good."[314] Second, and related to the first, my concern here is

[312] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 426.
[313] Murdoch, "On 'God' and 'Good,'" in *Existentialists and Mystics*, 338.
[314] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 429.

not to assess the ontological proof or Murdoch's rendition of it as philosophically true or accurate. Rather, I want to discuss the ways in which Murdoch transforms it into a transcendental argument for the Good and builds on moral, not theistic, ontology as her critical response to the problem of late modern world.

As a formal argument the ontological proof was proffered by St. Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109) as an argument for the existence of God in his *Proslogion*. In chapter 2 of *Proslogion*, Anselm conceives of God as the *Ens Realissimum, aliquid quo nihil maius cogitari possit*, "the most real Being, than which nothing greater can be conceived."[315] Distinguishing between what exists in understanding (*in intellectu*) and what exists in reality outside the mind (*in re*), Anselm demonstrates the necessary existence of God if the idea of God has to be properly understood: "So truly a being than which nothing greater can be conceived to exist, that it cannot even be conceived not to exist."[316] Murdoch notes, "It is then clear that if we can understand the idea of God, which we surely can, then we must also understand that God exists, since if he did not then he would lack one important quality or perfection, that of existence, and would fail to be that than which nothing greater can be conceived, *in intellectu* and *in re* being greater than *in intellectu* alone."[317]

The statement that God and God alone exists necessarily, not contingently or accidentally, implies God's not being an object. With reference to Tillich on this point,[318] Murdoch contends

[315] Anselm, *Proslogion*, Chapter 2; qtd. in Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 393.
[316] Anselm, *Proslogion*, Chapter 3.
[317] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 393.
[318] Tillich criticizes the scholastic arguments and methods solely in the form of a rational proof that demonstrates logically the existence of God. Tillich contends, rather, that "to argue the God exists is to deny him" and that "[t]he method of arguing through a conclusion also contradicts the idea of God" (*Systematic Theology*, 1:205). In *Systematic Theology* Volume 1, Tillich notes that "theology cannot accept the support of technical reason in 'reasoning' the existence of a God. Such a God would belong to the means-end relationship. He would be less than God" (74). For Tillich, as we have seen, God is the ground and power of being or being-itself, and not the highest being. Tillich therefore envisages the ontological arguments not as a proof for the existence of God, but, consistent with his ontological method, that "man discovers *himself* when he discovers God; he discovers something that is identical with himself although it transcends him infinitely" (*Theology of Culture*, 10 [original emphasis]).

that God has been understood as one being among others, and further is seen as personal, and thus not retain the mystery and transcendence that Murdoch sees in the ontological proof. To be sure, as Rothchild points out, for Murdoch, transcendental images and concepts of what the old God symbolized are situated within the ontological argument "not strictly as a logical syllogism, but as a spiritual exercise" when he quotes that "Anselm's formulation emerges from a context of a deep belief and disciplined spirituality [and] Anselm's passionate certainty springs from his personal communion with God."[319] Elsewhere Murdoch herself states on this point that "the ontological proof is seen to be not exactly a proof but rather a clear assertion of faith… which could only confidently be made on the basis of a certain amount of experience."[320] Murdoch thinks that the proof is less effective as a logical argument than as a description of a mystery of reality which operates to unify our moral activity, insofar as, she argues, the proof is about "necessity and certainty and goodness."[321] Thus Murdoch shifts her attention to the idea of the Good rather than the idea of God, more often than not associated with "a personal God and other supernatural beliefs."[322] In other words, replacing God with Good, Murdoch judges, "saves the proof in an age that is skeptical of" (mostly in the modern period) and obsessive with (in our current late modern period) "traditional religious dogma and imagery," as Antonaccio comments.[323]

More important for our discussion here, Murdoch's rendition of the ontological proof signals the Good as a magnetic center that conditions our perception of being and goodness. In her repeated reference to the Platonic image of the Good as the source of light, Murdoch says that the Good "reveals to us all things as they really are."[324] With this picture of the transcendental status

[319] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 392; qtd. in Rothchild, *Retrieving Discarded Visions*, 152.
[320] Murdoch, *Sovereignty of Good*, 61.
[321] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 426.
[322] *Ibid*., 396.
[323] Antonaccio, "Imagining the Good," 229.
[324] Murdoch, *Sovereignty of Good*, 68.

of the Good, distant and impersonal while being an imageless concept, Murdoch herself questions the ontological proof from another angle: "How do we know about him [God] then, and from whence do we derive the unique idea of good which can be extended into a concept of perfection?"[325] Here this question is related to Murdoch's way of conceiving the Good "for nothing." It is worth quoting in length, as Murdoch states:

> The Good has nothing to do with purpose, indeed it excludes the idea of purpose. 'All is vanity' is the beginning and the end of ethics. The only genuine way to be good is to be good 'for nothing' in the midst of a scene where every 'natural' thing, including one's own mind, is subject to chance, that is, to necessity. That 'for nothing' is indeed the experienced correlate of the invisibility or non-representable blankness of the idea of Good itself."[326]

When musing on Anselm's reply to Gaunilo's reasonable doubt about whether we can conceive of God, Murdoch identifies this ontological argument grounded in God (or Good for Murdoch), "some uniquely necessary status for moral value as something (uniquely) *impossible to be thought away from human experience*."[327] In other words, as Rothchild nicely puts it, "Murdoch does affirm Anselm's experiential stance vis-à-vis the proof. Murdoch asserts that the true meaning of the ontological argument does not therefore pertain to proper logic but rather to the experience of a necessarily existing absolute."[328] More convincing for Murdoch than the logic of the proof is the evidence of everyday morality, which indicates anything at all in terms of degrees of perfection. This way of Murdoch's reading of "argument from experience" is manifested in her emphasis on the experience of "noticing *degrees of goodness*,"[329] which is closely related to the two-way workings of consciousness for the concept of the good. How so?

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[325] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 395.
[326] Murdoch, "On 'God' and 'Good,'" 358.
[327] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 396. (my emphasis added)
[328] Rothchild, *Retrieving Discarded Visions*, 153. It reminds us of the following Murdoch's words: What is fundamental here is ideal or transcendent, never fully realized or analyzed, but continually rediscovered in the course of the daily struggle with the world, and the imagination and passion whereby it is carried on.… We *know* of perfection as we look upon what is imperfect.… The human scene is one of moral failure combined with the remarkable continued return to an idea of goodness as unique and absolute. (Metaphysics, 427; original emphasis)
[329] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 396. (original emphasis)

The ontological proof in Murdoch's reading seeks to prove the reality of the Good in two ways. The ontological argument, on the one hand, illustrates the inexhaustibility of the Good in that "the idea of Good cannot be compromised or tainted by its inclusion in actual human proceedings.… Good is unique, it is 'above being.'"[330] On the other hand, Murdoch's emphasis on the dimension of "experience" entailed in the ontological argument coheres with the empirical, truth-seeking nature of consciousness "by noticing *degrees of goodness*, which we see in ourselves and in all the world which is a shadow of God."[331] Murdoch succinctly summarizes as follows: "So we find God both, and inextricably both, in the world and in our own soul.… We have instinctive faith in God, and also conceive of him by looking at the world."[332] Here Rothchild rightly notes that Murdoch understands the argument "cognitively and phenomenologically," as she moves between Kant and Plato. The cognitive meaning relates to the one-making activity of consciousness and thus to its "transcendental aspects in the Kantian sense," in the sense that it provides the grounds for the possibility of moral knowledge. The phenomenological meaning, the one overlooked by Kantians and others who mistakenly conceptualize the argument primarily in rational or logical terms, refers to "the consciousness' discernment of the degrees of goodness," something "the ordinary fellow 'just knows,'" and something that all of life proves.[333] Murdoch pictures it having Plato in mind, "We are moving through a continuum within which we are aware of truth and falsehood, illusion and reality, good and evil."[334] The workings of consciousness is pictured as a pilgrimage toward the "Good… on both sides of the barrier" whereby "we can combine the aspiration to complete goodness with a realistic sense of achievement within our

[330] *Ibid*., 399.
[331] *Ibid*., 396. (original emphasis)
[332] *Ibid*.
[333] Rothchild, *Retrieving Discarded Visions*, 154; 155; Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 428.
[334] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 250.

limitations."[335] Antonaccio helpfully summarizes these meanings of the twofold structure of her ontological proof:

> Murdoch unified the countervailing impulses of metaphysics and empiricism under a single principle of the Good. The Good is at once transcendental (providing the conditions for our conscious perception of value in the world), and it also orients us toward perfection (providing the standard for the evaluation of particular values in the moment-to-moment pilgrimage of consciousness).[336]

Good both acts as the transcendental light in which we see and exists within concrete reality.

Murdoch's metaphysical pictures of the Good, particularly in her reformulation of the ontological proof, fashions what she calls a theology which can continue without God. The diagnosis of the depth of the human problem in late modern culture leads Murdoch to defend the idea of the good as a transcendental condition for all moral experience *and* as an idea of perfection in the experiential dimensions of moral perception. Taking the two-way workings of consciousness together, we can conclude that for Murdoch, as Antonaccio succinctly puts it, "there is no human experience, no activity of consciousness, apart from the Good."[337] Morality and demythologized religion are concerned "with what is absolute, with the unconditioned structure, with what cannot be "thought away" out of human life, what Plato expressed in the concept of the Form of the Good, and Kant in the Categorical Imperative."[338] Once again, Goodness for Murdoch is a magnetic mystery that conditions our perception of concrete beings in their own reality and goodness.

With this Murdoch's rendering of the ontological proof for the reality of the Good and how it functions as magnetic and transcendent in the empirical perception of finite reality, we are left with the question of what this concept of the Good means for culture. What's at stake here is how the "necessity" of the Good connects with the contingent "necessity" of our life and with the

[335] Murdoch, *Sovereignty of Good*, 90.
[336] Antonaccio, *A Philosophy to Live By*, 42.
[337] Antonaccio, "Imagining the Good," 232.
[338] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 412.

intractable and contingent reality of individual human fates. I will engage below with the ambivalent meanings of the term "necessity" that reside in Murdoch's thought and contend that love is and should be reclaimed for Murdoch as "the desire for good and joy which is active at all levels in the soul and through which we are able to turn toward reality," particularly the reality of the void.

Murdoch's use of the term "necessity" and its meanings cohere with Murdoch's fundamental conviction about human consciousness: "The unity and fundamental reality of goodness is an image and support of the unity and fundamental reality of the individual."[339] Necessity, in the first sense, is equivalent to the form-giving, one-making activity. Necessity as the form-giving impulse represents the artist's "desire to unify, to impose a general order" with a strong internal structure or form "on the random materials with which she is working": "Without some kind of strong form there isn't an art object present."[340] Like the claim of the necessity of God shown in Anselm's ontological proof, the "one-making" endeavors have been pursued to impose a "consoling formal (aesthetic or conceptual) unity to a formless, contingent world."[341] Murdoch says in the first pages of *Metaphysics*, "intellect is naturally one-making" and continues to say that "[It is] a deep emotional motive to philosophy, to art, to thinking itself.… We fear plurality, diffusion, senseless accident, chaos, we want to transform what we cannot dominate or understand into something reassuring and familiar, into ordinary being, into history, art, religion, science."[342]

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[339] *Ibid*., 428.
[340] Murdoch, in interview with Christopher Bigsby, in *The Radical Imagination and the Liberal Tradition: Interviews with English and American Novelists*, eds. Heide Ziegler and Christopher Bigsby (London: Junction Books Ltd.,, 1982), 228; qtd. in Antonaccio, *A Philosophy to Live By*, 58.
[341] Antonaccio, A Philosophy to Live By, 62.
[342] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 1-2.

Bearing in mind Kant's rejection of traditional theism, Murdoch recognizes Kant's appeal to the necessity of the moral law as analogous to that of God in the proof, insofar as it expresses the primordial nature of the moral claim on human life. Murdoch notes that there is an "one-making" impulse in Kant's rendering of the proof, which shows "his own superb certainty about the fundamental and unconditional nature of the moral demand and the reality of the goodness which this contains."[343] Murdoch has affinities with Kant's claim that "the unconditional demand of morality is inextricably tied to the experience of being an individual agent," as Antonaccio notes.[344] In this respect, Murdoch's metaphysical "one-making" endeavor for the defense of the idea of the individual finds resonance with Kant. While Murdoch rejects voluntarist conceptions of moral agency and moral freedom in her critique of "the Kantian man-God" in the *Sovereignty of Good,* Murdoch notes her sympathy with Kant in picturing "the moral being of the human as necessarily related to some absolute."[345] Murdoch notes on Kant, "What is absolute and unconditional is what each man clearly and distinctly knows in his own soul, the difference between right and wrong. It is something intimate, deep in consciousness, inseparable from one's sense of oneself, like the Cartesian sense of one's own existence and as directly grasped.… the unconditional is seen to belong to the structure of human reality."[346] With respect to the unconditional nature of the moral demand, "the magnetism of the Good" (Murdoch) or "the claim of the moral law" (Kant) imposes a kind of "necessity" on us.[347] However, the way that this

[343] *Ibid*., 442.
[344] Antonaccio, "Imagining the Good," 226.
[345] Antonaccio, *A Philosophy to Live By*, 108.
[346] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 439.
[347] William Schweiker, "The Moral Fate of Fictive Persons: On Iris Murdoch's Humanism," in *Iris Murdoch and Morality*, eds. Anne Rowe and Avril Horner (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 188. Schweiker continues to note on this kind of necessity: "Our inner life is open to self-transcendence in and through encounters, perceptions and relations with others. This fact imposes a kind of *necessity* on us from within freedom: the necessity of virtue." (*Ibid*.; original emphasis)

necessity is conceived differently in Kant and Murdoch: for Kant "under the category of the will as practical reason" and for Murdoch "under the category of consciousness."[348] This difference entails significant departure from Kant and turns Murdoch to Plato, particularly with her attention to the contingent "necessity" of our life and moral conflict.

Holding the idea of the necessity of God's existence as central in the proof, Anselm joins it with his argument from experience, which is omnipresent in Plato. Murdoch notes,

> The argument from the idea of a series, as conveying the idea of the most perfect, is an abstract form of the full Platonic degrees-of-reality argument, the appeal to which provides us with contrasts between illusion and reality as contrasts between good and bad. Anselm resorts to St. Paul, and implicitly to Plato, as providing a proof from all the world, proved by the whole of human experience.[349]

Murdoch famously notes, for Plato, value is omnipresent, "incarnate at various levels in our cognitive and emotional experience."[350] As seen in the myth of the Cave, Plato draws distinctions concerning the different levels of consciousness and the different degrees of goodness to be looked at. In other words, as Antonaccio puts it, "Plato's understanding of the activity of thinking shows that ordinary modes of phenomenal awareness are morally relevant."[351] Necessity, in the second sense, as chancy and incomplete, represents the formlessness or recalcitrance of the reality. What Murdoch means by necessity here seems to be the opposite of a form-giving or pattern-making impulse; rather, this meaning of necessity derives from what Plato calls "necessity," which implies "errant causality" pictured as irrational and indeterminate in the account of *Timaeus*. In this context, Murdoch connects this idea of necessity with the ideas of death and chance: "we cannot dominate the world."[352] Because of human frailty, because of the distance between reality and the Good,

[348] Antonaccio, "Imagining the Good," 227.
[349] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 404.
[350] *Ibid*., 57.
[351] Antonaccio, *A Philosophy to Live By*, 109.
[352] Murdoch, *Sovereignty of Good*, 96.

"what we see are scattered intimations of Good," as Murdoch writes.[353] It is in the context of such limitations, or recognition of "the necessity," that, Antonaccio notes, "Murdoch reinstated her initial paradox of metaphysics and empiricism at the end of the book [*Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*] in order to remind us of what always escapes theory: the intractable and contingent reality of individual human fates."[354] It manifests in the extreme form of necessity, and Murdoch calls this predicament of late modern culture "the void," where any self-totalizing and self-consoling drive to disregard the messy and the contingent in a reality are resisted.

There are the empirical and "actual" realities that we face in our current era: Donald Trump's political lies and fantasies, and South Korean President Park Geun-hye's inherited and ineradicable illegalities and corruption, to name a few.[355] Had Murdoch lived long enough, Murdoch would have addressed these issues and brought her words in a more critical fashion than even this: "The average inhabitant of the planet is probably without hope and starving. It is terrible to be human…. Can one go on talking about a spiritual source and an absolute good if a majority of human kind is debarred from it?"[356] She claims further, "Christ on the cross is an image so familiar and beautified that we have difficulty in connecting it with real awful human suffering."[357]

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[353] *Ibid*., 97.

[354] Antonaccio, *A Philosophy to Live By*, 43.

[355] While I have been writing this dissertation, the President Park Geun-hye in South Korea has been finally ousted from the Blue House, impeached on March 10, 2017. Personally to me as a theological ethicist (and publicly to the oppressed for justice and freedom in Korea), it is one of the most important existential and ethical moments in Korean history for my theological reflection in light of a future Korean theology of culture. The *Washington Post* on March 11 reported this breaking news like the following: "The agility to make the hard decisions and hand off the baton without a bloody coup is a sign of strength that distinguishes democracy from dictatorship. Much credit goes to the spirit of nonviolent protest that filled the months-long street demonstrations." In Editorial Board. "South Korean's democracy does the right thing—but that won't solve all its problems." *The Washington Post*, March 11, 2017. https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/south-koreas-democracy-does-the-right-thing--but-that-wont-solve-all-its-problems/2017/03/11/8aadde4a-05c4-11e7-b1e9-a05d3c21f7cf_story.html?utm_term=.38d959f02780.

[356] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 498-9.

[357] *Ibid*., 499. Murdoch names the social problems that she encountered in her times: "Loathing for our society, for its injustice, its vulgarity, its low moral standards, its permissiveness, its hedonism, its materialism, its indifference to the crippled lives which its arrangements bring about, can make people impatient with the weak muddled procedures of

Is there any way to restrain from simply filling in "the void" beyond the metaphysical and empirical impulses? How is it possible for consciousness to transcend egoism and see reality apart from the self?

In the middle of her rendition of the ontological proof, Murdoch cites an interesting remark from Simone Weil: "Ontological Proof is mysterious because it does not address itself to the intelligence, but to love."[358] If the proof of God's existence is rendered into the necessity of the idea of the Good in Murdoch's thought, then it could mean that the dialectical meanings of "necessity" addresses itself to love. Love is reclaimed, I contend, when we are confronted with the moral demand arising from the dialectical tension between the presence and the absence of the Good. Love can thus be a "disturbing experience"[359] when we are forced to withstand and accept the weight and force of "the void." Death and chance for Murdoch are "the things that the ego finds most challenging to its illusions of control,"[360] particularly in attention to "the void" where the fat relentless ego is stopped to see an entirely separate reality beyond the self. Here love, as Murdoch conceives of it, is where we are stunned with the realization of a "supersensible destiny" by the fact that something as existing outside of us is "its unutterable particularity."[361]

Hence, for Murdoch, love is reclaimed to orient the force of imagination for good or ill. Imagination is therefore an effort but also can be dangerous if and only if it is utilized as the engine of egoistic fantasies and distorted perceptions that often diminish the reality of others to make them "fictive" in its picture of self-conception. Rowan Williams mentioning the words of Simone Weil offers a compelling reflection on imagination: "the danger of imagination was that it filled

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democratic government, and angry with the numerous forces, overt or hidden, which tend to keep things as they are." (374)

[358] Simone Weil, *Notebooks*, 375; qtd. in Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 401.

[359] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 400.

[360] Antonaccio, *A Philosophy to Live By*, 195.

[361] Murdoch, "The Sublime and the Good," 215.

up the void when what we need is to learn how to live in the presence of the void. The more closely we bind God to our own purposes, use God to help ourselves avoid our own destructiveness, the more we fill up the void."[362] Hence, moral imagination, she recommends, must be attuned with the act of remembering (*anamnesis*) as a spiritual memory. Murdoch writes, "The creative artist is like the slave, he attends to the dark something out of which he feels certain he can, if he concentrates and waits, elicit his poem, picture, music: it is as if he remembered it or found it waiting for him, veiled but present."[363] Murdoch continues, "Here indeed we come back to the Ontological Proof in its simpler version, a proof by perfection, by a certainty derived from love. The good artist, the true lover, the dedicated thinker, the unselfish moral agent solving his problem: they can create the object of love."[364] The point to be emphasized is that as an exercise of imagination, the act of waiting, when faced with "the void," is crucially important in the expectation of the new, because "[w]hat is awaited is an illuminating experience, some kind of certainty, a *presence*: a case of human consciousness at its most highly textured."[365] In other words, love is reclaimed, for Murdoch, with respect to the religious depth of morality, as "a mode of belief in the unique sovereign place of goodness or virtue,"[366] deeply present in human life, albeit clouded and imprisoned by our egoistically motivated mode of consciousness.

Murdoch asserts that "the central concept of morality is 'the individual' thought of as knowable by love."[367] With respect to the quest for a religious depth of morality, Murdoch, to be

[362] Rowan Williams, Writing in the Dust After September 11 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002), 10-11.
[363] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 400-1.
[364] *Ibid*., 506.
[365] *Ibid*., 419. (original emphasis)
[366] *Ibid*., 426.
[367] Murdoch, *Sovereignty of Good*, 29.

sure, does not simply shore up the Good as the biggest consolation of all. She adamantly warns against the dangers of false consolation in her own critical self-scrutiny:

> To speak of Good in this portentous manner is simply to speak of the old concept of God in a thin disguise. But at least 'God' could play a real consoling and encouraging role…. 'Good' even as a fiction is not likely to inspire, or even be comprehensible to, more than a small number of mystically minded people who, being reluctant to surrender 'God,' fake up 'Good' in his image, so as to preserve some kind of hope.[368]

The question now is how can the Murdochian rival soul-picture be translated to the cultural processes of reflexivity? How can this idea of the individual be specified as the moral good on a collective level, as it is on a reflexive account of consciousness?[369]

The tragic freedom implied in love as the rival soul-picture is not identifiable with the good, but rather aspires to a good beyond the drive toward totalization in a culture of reflexivity. It can also function as a subversive force to respond to the threat to the very notion of the human person as something real and valuable. As we have noted earlier in this chapter, poststructuralism and narrative ethics have intensified the problem of totalization along with the critique of depth under the conditions of late modernity. Albeit in different guises, both totalizing dynamics of self-referential systems, as described by Giddens and others, have less to do with "sequestering certain depth experiences from consciousness" than with reconfiguring experience altogether in terms of either the linguistic structures and information networks or ecclesiocentric communities.[370] Thus the locus of reality and value on these views is not the individual self but the system or the community's narratives and ethos. There is no normative idea of reality "outside" these internally referential systems. One stark example is the pervasive development of the social network systems, say, in the form of technology-enabled panopticon, where the individual self has been dissolved

[368] *Ibid*., 70.
[369] Antonaccio, *Picturing the Human*, 189.
[370] *Ibid*., 188.

under the name of social, cultural, and political creed, dogma, and ideology. Although almost unavoidable in our current everyday life, these self-inferential systems may exhaust our awareness and imagination of a good beyond itself and efface the centrality of the individual and moral change by their exponential and overwhelming external social forces, better or worse, on a minute-to-minute basis in the late modern culture industry, as Adorno calls it.

Murdoch here emphasizes the significance of evaluative freedom mediated through the structures of language and reflexive thinking consciousness: The truth-value of language depends not on simple conformity to "the way things are" but on "the struggle of individuals creatively to adjust language to contingent conditions outside it."[371] Furthermore, Murdoch continues, "We all, not only can but have to, experience and deal with a transcendent reality, the resistant otherness of other persons, other things, history, the natural world, the cosmos, and this involves perpetual effort.… Most of this effort is moral effort."[372] Giddens' diagnosis about the dynamics of late modernity seems resonant with Murdoch: "Modern social life impoverishes individual action, yet furthers the appropriation of new possibilities; it is alienation, yet at the same time, characteristically, human beings react against social circumstances which they find oppressive."[373] Despite the reality of human moral failure, love for Murdoch envisages the merits of "a reflexive moral realism as an interpretive response to our cultural situation."[374] Borrowing and transforming the ontological proof for the existence of God, Murdoch grasps the dialectical meanings of "the necessity" in relation to the Good, which is distant and incorruptible, yet thus germane and integral to the idea of the individual. Tragic freedom implied in love and its imagining for moral change

[371] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 216.
[372] *Ibid*., 268.
[373] Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, 175-6.
[374] Antonaccio, *Picturing the Human*, 189.

depend on "a notion of distance or separation between the grasping, dominating ego and a reality that exceeds the ego."[375] Antonaccio further notes, "This distance is defined as the reflexive power of moral imagination, the ability of consciousness to escape its own totalizing energies by imagining a good beyond itself."[376] This freedom and our supersensible destiny are correlated *via* love to be the force of unselfing in the continuous pilgrimage of every individual consciousness from appearance to reality. I will explore further the relationship between love, imagination, and true consolation in Murdoch's thought in the next chapter.

5. Conclusion: Godless Theology of Culture in Murdoch

Given an ethical and religious urgency seen in our situation, Murdoch's "argument from experience," the experience of goodness, brings a new light on the unconditional nature of the moral demand and, particularly, defends the idea of the individual and its value as a critique of late modern world. The immanence of the religious in the moral implied in love compels Murdoch to cite Tillich in *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* in her rendition of the ontological proof: "The limits of the ontological argument are obvious. But nothing is more important for philosophy and theology than the truth it contains, the acknowledgement of the unconditional element in the structure of reason and reality."[377] With respect to the unconditional nature of the moral demand, Murdoch pictures the magnetism of the Good as the ground of value, goodness and life and reclaims an idea of the religious depth of morality, especially pondering on the depth of the human self and cultural forms.

[375] Antonaccio, *A Philosophy to Live By*, 193
[376] *Ibid*.
[377] Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 1:208; qtd. in Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 391.

It is also interesting to note that Murdoch's cognitive and realist encounter with art points to one of the most profound and creative dimensions of reality that is other than ourselves. To be sure, Murdoch's perceptive orientation about art coheres with her emphasis on "seeing" and attention outwardly from the "fat relentless ego" to other concrete selves and to the world. It is, as Rothchild points out well, expressed in Murdoch's conception of art as a reflective space that "consists of constructing a huge hall of reflection full of light and space and fresh air, in which ideas and intuitions can be unsystematically nurtured."[378] This is significantly implied in her practice of metaphysical philosophy in that this creative force "extends the limits of language and the realm of human experience, thereby further underscoring the nexus between culture, morality and religion" although it is confronted with the moments of the void where our images and pictures are attenuated or thwarted.[379] Murdoch sees the importance of art as a channel of reflection which critically analyzes true and/or false consolations as an indicator of what is deep and important in human life. As Murdoch notes, "the essence of art and morals is love"; love is reclaimed in the face of the void where a creative and consolating force common to both anxiety and despair as well as the expectation of the new, as love makes tragic law of freedom rooted in the supersensible destiny.

Consenting to the reality of the void in Murdoch's models of reality is part and parcel of the absoluteness of love.[380] Particularly, the encounter with the shock of "the void," either secular or sacred or both, invites and challenges us for the anticipation of the new: Murdoch conceives of this "pain" as the shock of the self-absorbed ego's awareness of the reality of others and the world.

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[378] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 422; qtd. in Rothchild, *Retrieving Discarded Visions*, 125.
[379] Rothchild, *Retrieving Discarded Visions*, 209.
[380] It is exemplified in Tillich's thought as well: "the absoluteness of love is its power to go into the concrete situation, to discover what is demanded by the predicament of the concrete to which it turns." (*Systematic Theology*, 1:152)

Good or God is immanent in the world as its permanent creative ground and is transcendent to the world through tragic freedom in love. Love for Murdoch signifies a reorientation of consciousness without reverting to a specific grammar of religious traditions. The next chapter considers more deeply the notion of the unconditioned in her discussion of true consolation with respect to love, including analysis of Good without God.

CHAPTER FOUR

DEMYTHOLOGIZATON AND TRUE CONSOLATION

1. Introduction

Murdoch speaks in distinctive ways about love as that which demands attention to concrete others within metaphysical frameworks. Murdoch's love of the Good and ethic of unselfing show the unconditional claims of morality in the midst of the loss of unconditional depth and the loss of depth of meaning. Her understanding of love in the face of the void, I contend, contributes to reclaiming a possible authentic goodness, human *and* divine, retained and manifested in all our concerns. In this chapter, building upon those previous chapters' themes—the idea of the Good and the inner life—I will delve into the category of true consolation with respect to love. Murdochian version of post-Christian religiosity makes possible a search for true consolation by reclaiming love in the face of the void.

Near the end of Murdoch's *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, she refers to Tillich and appreciates the experience of the unconditioned: "We need a theology which can continue without God. Why not call such a reflection a form of moral philosophy? All right, so long as it treats of those matters of 'ultimate concern,' our experience of the unconditioned and our continued sense of what is holy."[1] Murdoch builds on moral, not theistic, ontology, which she transforms into a transcendental argument for the good and the religious depth of morality on human life. In an age of vanishing backgrounds Murdoch is critically concerned with, as we have seen her rendition of the ontological proof in chapter three, the depth of human existence in her metaphysical picture of reality, a reality which depends upon a fundamental correlation between the notion of the self or

[1] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 511-2.

consciousness and the idea of Good. The first section starts with a series of questions posed by a fictional Socrates in her Platonic dialogue *Acastos*: "Can we distinguish religion from belief in gods? Could there not be a good religious way of life without the supernatural beliefs?"[2] While she engages with Plato with respect to the ground of moral character, insofar as she locates the dignity and value of the individual in the experience of consciousness rather than in Kantian self-legislating capacity of the rational will, Murdoch is deeply concerned with the orientation of consciousness to the Good as essential to being a functional human agent. In and beyond this respect, her demythologization of God with respect to love is manifested as an endless task against clinging to false consolations, illusions and/or fantasies about the self and the world, insofar as religion for Murdoch is to reorient consciousness.

The second section discusses Murdoch's ethic of unselfing by raising some questions as follows: how can we become morally better, and is there true consolation? Murdoch's envisioning thought manifested in her rival soul-picture seems penultimately to respond to her own critical self-scrutiny about self and the world: "Almost everything that consoles us is a fake."[3] Despite the deep suspicion of Murdoch against consolation, as Antonaccio astutely notes, "this important qualification"—*almost* everything, but not everything—"suggests that some consolations may be true." The ultimate stake here for Murdoch is "how to tell which ones are which."[4] Clear moral and religious vision can be conceived, in Murdoch's view, when guided by imagination, to stop our self-obsessed fantasies and to "see more." Here, in an ultimate sense, the capacity of love is forcefully reclaimed with a realization of "our supersensible destiny" that there are sources of

[2] Iris Murdoch, "Above the Gods: A Dialogue About Religion," in *Acastos*: Two Platonic Dialogues (New York: Viking, 1986), 79. (hereafter indicated as "Above the Gods," in *Acastos*)
[3] Murdoch, *Sovereignty of Good*, 58.
[4] Antonaccio, *A Philosophy to Live By*, 198. I am indebted to Antonaccio's argument about "the shape of truthful consolation" situated in Murdoch's thought, particularly in relation to my contention of love.

value outside of the self. Religion for Murdoch is the love of the Good, which magnetically compels and reclaims attention to the concrete other. Religion is "above the gods.… [I]t's beyond us, it's more real than us, we have to come to it and let it change us, religion is spiritual change, *absolute* spiritual change."[5]

I will conclude that love in the face of the void points to the question of true consolation. In our age where individual and collective forms of human existence are crumbled and crippled, by the logic of "survival" enmeshed in religious convictions, to the extent that would render the ultimacy of the moral imperative into a conditional calculation for demeaning of human beings into things. I reclaim love open to embrace the sense of the unconditioned and the universal but also, in turn, to recognize "the transcendent reach and dignity of finite life," in Schweiker's words, which should not be purchased at the cost of human lives within our human, moral and spiritual, pilgrimage.[6]

2. Murdoch's Demythologization of God and the Platonic Conception of the Good

Having probed in the previous chapter Murdoch's interpretation of the ontological proof, we can see that Murdoch transforms Anselm's argument into a transcendental argument for the Good which locates the Good in the structure of human consciousness itself. The ontological proof proves, according to Murdoch, that the Good, not any sort of God, is the condition for human moral experience. Murdoch expresses this point by saying that the Good "adheres essentially to the conception of being human, and cannot be detached."[7] As she understands it, the proof supports a concept of religion as an expression of the absolute claim of morality on human life. In other

[5] Murdoch, "Above the Gods," in *Existentialists and Mystics*, 514. (original emphasis)
[6] Schweiker, *Dust That Breathes*, 160.
[7] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 426.

words, Murdoch detaches religion from theism to the extent that she sees religion as "a mode of belief in the unique sovereign place of goodness or virtue in human life" rather than as a belief in a personal or supernatural deity.[8] Religion for Murdoch is something that is, like conscience or moral recognition, a fundamental human capacity to seek what is absolute and its magnetic pull to see the Good within every moment in human life, or as she puts it, "[e]very moment matters, there is no time off."[9]

While Murdoch does envisage some resonance between Good and God, as noted in her words—the Good is what the old God symbolized—Murdoch is critical of the ego-consolations and "cosy sentiments" of the personal and literalistic belief when people come to symbolizing God. She writes, "[I]t is time to say goodbye to the old literal personal "elsewhere" God."[10] In the modern and late modern world where "the loss of religion as something taken for granted" is quite prevalent, Murdoch does address this poignant issue, "not by entering into specifically theological debates about the processes of secularization, but rather by focusing on the elements of religion and spirituality which are connected to her vision of the moral life."[11] That's why Murdoch has been welcomed by theologians and has been described as "a friend to theistic *religion*" in the contemporary philosophical setting, as Franklin Gamwell states.[12] Yet, certainly she would not be described as a friend to the personal theistic God. Murdoch herself parts ways with Christianity's

[8] *Ibid*.
[9] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 484.
[10] *Ibid*., 420.
[11] Murdoch, "Art is the Imitation of Nature," in *Existentialists and Mystics*, 255; Heather Widdows, *The Moral Vision of Iris Murdoch* (Aldershot, Hampshire, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), 140.
[12] Franklin Gamwell, "On the Loss of Theism," in *Iris Murdoch and the Search for Human Goodness*, eds. Maria Antonaccio and William Schweiker (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 175. (my emphasis added) Maria Antonaccio notes, nonetheless, that "some theological commentators have treated Murdoch's aversion to theism as a kind of puzzling blind spot in an otherwise compelling ethical position, suggesting that her Godless theology cannot provide answers to the human dilemma that her moral theory so eloquently poses." ("Reconsidering Iris Murdoch's Moral Philosophy and Theology," in Iris Murdoch: A Reassessment, ed. Anne Rowe (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 19.)

commitment to the idea of a personal deity, with respect to God the Father, for example. It is worth quoting in length:

> 'God' is the name of a supernatural person…. the really existing elsewhere, father figure. It makes a difference whether we believe in such a person, as it makes a difference whether Christ rose from the dead.… Perhaps (I believe) Christianity can continue without a personal God or a risen Christ, without beliefs in supernatural places and happenings, such as heaven and life after death, but retaining the mystical figure of Christ occupying a place analogous to that of Buddha—a Christ who can console and save, but who is to be found as a living force within each human soul not in some supernatural elsewhere.… [T]he attractive figure of Christ … appears in Christianity as a mediator, but might in some sense be regarded as an idol or barrier.[13]

Murdoch's critique of hypertheistic beliefs—colored with hopes of reward and fears of punishment either in this life or the next—is here presented "as part of an attempt to depersonalize or demythologize traditional Christianity."[14] Stephen Mulhall helpfully notes on this regard: "[o]ne might say: the problem with God the Father is that, since He is divine, He is too much like a person, whereas the problem with God the Son is that, since He is a person, He is too much like a divinity."[15]

This Murdochian thinking about religiosity aligns well with a series of questions broached in her Platonic dialogue *Acastos*, as earlier mentioned: "Can we distinguish religion from belief in gods? Could there not be a good religious way of life without the supernatural beliefs?"[16] To be sure, the diagnosis of the noticeable decline of religious belief, particularly Christianity, so-called "hollowing out" of the churches in parts of Western Europe—where she lived and experienced first-hand—seems to work fittingly with Murdoch's discussion about a godless theology. However, Murdoch's religious thought may seem "outdated, ill-suited" to an era that is now deemed as

[13] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 419-21.
[14] Stephen Mulhall, "'All the World Must Be "Religious"': Iris Murdoch's Ontological Arguments," in *Iris Murdoch: A Reassessment*, ed. Anne Rowe (Basingstoke [England]; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 31.
[15] *Ibid*.
[16] Murdoch, "Above the Gods," in *Acastos*, 79.

postsecular where religion has disappeared nowhere but changed everywhere.[17] As Heather Widdows points out in similar vein that "perhaps more damaging to Murdoch… the type of religious belief that is currently growing is not the individual, intellectual, mystical religious path" that Murdoch reckons as adequate for the moral quest, "but rather the fundamentalist, more literal [and narrative] forms of religious belief."[18] Antonaccio is justified in commenting on the hostility to a positive reception of Murdoch's religious thought in the following way:

> Adding to the perception of irrelevance is the fact that current trends in theology and religious studies have made it virtually impossible to venture any general claim about religion or human religious experience without inviting the charge that one is ignoring the historical and cultural specificity of religious traditions, or unwittingly perpetuating an oppressively modern and Western conception of religion in the guise of a purportedly neutral category.[19]

Given this observed phenomena of religion that would provoke disputes about what counts as religion, Antonaccio and other thinkers have further questions regarding Murdoch's religious thought: "is her conception of a demythologized religion too [broad and] abstract to constitute a viable option for religious life and practice," particularly to religious adherents who would deny Murdoch's proposed godless religion? Or, is Murdoch's vision only an option for ethical transcendence, not divine transcendence, to those who find exclusive otherworldly religious claims

[17] Antonaccio delineates some challenges that some contemporary theorists of religion would raise with respect to Murdoch's appeal to the general category of religion: "To any reasonably informed observer of the global scene, aware of religious pluralism both within and across cultures and mindful of the violence and social conflict often generated by religious differences, Murdoch's appeal to the general category of religion, without any identifying qualifier (such as Christian, Buddhist, Jewish, etc.), not to mention her apparent conflation of religion with morality or goodness, might seem wildly implausible." (*A Philosophy to Live By*, 176-7) As I noted in previous chapters, the religious landscape has been changed since late modernity. With the "secularization thesis" we were told of the death and rejection of religion by ardent Enlightenment thinkers and modern sociologists of religion, but we are now faced with the worldwide resurgence of religions. Diogenes Allen notes, "[F]or a time it was generally held that religious beliefs had been "thought away" by Hume and Kant. We have recently learnt that they did not succeed" ("Review of *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* by Iris Murdoch," *Commonweal* (April, 1993): 24)

[18] Heather Widdows, *The Moral Vision of Iris Murdoch*, 155. She continues to say that "[B]elief in a personal God prevails both inside and outside institutional religion and, for many, even sophisticated believers (in Murdoch's sense of regarding images as spiritual guides rather than truths) continue to believe in a personal God, and the possibility of a relationship with Him is at the heart of their religious belief." (*Ibid*.)

[19] Antonaccio, *A Philosophy to Live By*, 177.

implausible? Does her proposal of the possibility of any form of non-literal Christian spirituality end up endorsing the Enlightenment critique that "organized, institutionalized religion is an enemy of morality"?[20] To be sure, one doesn't have to be religious or even to be Christian to be moral. However, for Murdoch, morality and religion cannot be simply disengaged from each other, insofar as both morality and religion have "no time off from the demand of good," as Murdoch sees "the most evident bridge between morality and religion" as the "idea of virtue."[21] Here in this chapter I will not make an apologetic argument either for Murdoch's view on religion or Christian outlook. Instead, I will try to revisit and reclaim the deepest sources and impulses of Murdoch's thought on the abiding significance of religion for ethics that signifies "a religious attitude and form of life, not a literalistic adherence to a particular dogma."[22]

In this respect, it is helpful to note Antonaccio's argument that Murdoch's rejection of the narrow traditional belief in God "does not embrace two assumptions frequently associated with the contemporary rejection of theism" and she puts it as follows: "first, that rejecting theism means rejecting the idea of a moral absolute; and second, that it means rejecting the idea of the self or individual as moral agent."[23] In contrast to these truncated rejections of theism as something like throwing the baby out with the bathwater, Murdoch acknowledges that religion makes use of transcendental images and concepts of what the old God symbolized because they remain deeply relevant for the self and also point to the notion of a moral absolute. The problem is that the idea of a moral absolute seems to be simply explained away via the myths and symbols of religion that turn into the consoling magic or fantasies of the ego. As to this possible danger of religious

[20] *Ibid*., 178; Ann Loads, "Iris Murdoch: The Vision of the Good and the Via Negativa," in *Culture, Education and Society*, 40, 1986, 147-55; Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 487.
[21] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 482, 481.
[22] *Ibid*., 301.
[23] Antonaccio, "Imagining the Good," 224.

imagination, Murdoch reclaims "a rediscovery of religious modes of thought deep inside morals," not rendered as "a dangerous possibly heteronomous property of religion."[24] This is why demythologization is necessary for "a fundamental correlation in her thought between the notion of the self or consciousness and the idea of the Good" and thus a corollary for her ethics of unselfing and moral change.[25]

For Murdoch, morality and demythologized religion move in the "intermediate zone between philosophy, secular morality, and religious belief," as Stephen Mulhall observes.[26] This means, as Antonaccio comments on Mulhall's observation and writes, that "the legacy of Murdoch's thought on religion may be more difficult to discern" than her philosophical attention to human capacities such as vision and imagination and her engagement of states of consciousness for morality.[27] It is partly because Murdoch's moral philosophy seems to be arbitrary or even meaningless for those who inhabit a community of faith can claim a unique or exclusive hold on moral insight"; It is also partly because while Murdoch is wary of religion, particularly due to its capacity for consolation and delusion, Murdoch challenges "those who seek to flee into the claims of morality" by a wholesale rejection of the religious worldview, which denies many realities essential to human existence.[28] While she seems to endorse the characteristic theistic claim, manifested in the ontological proof, that we see "everywhere in the world" the One who is beyond or above all of the world, Murdoch's metaphysics moves "from 'God' to 'Good,' taking 'religion' along too."[29]

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[24] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 304.
[25] Antonaccio, "Imagining the Good," 224.
[26] Stephen Mulhall, "'All the World Must Be "Religious"': Iris Murdoch's Ontological Arguments," 23.
[27] Antonaccio, "Reconsidering Iris Murdoch's Moral Philosophy and Theology," 19.
[28] *Ibid*., 20; *Ibid*.
[29] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 398, 426; qtd. in Franklin Gamwell, "On the Loss of Theism," 177.

The demythologizing process, on the other hand, recurs in her fiction and Murdoch's ambivalence towards Christianity gets more complicated, and particularly in her treatment of religious themes in the novels; as Suguna Ramanathan puts it, "Iris Murdoch's philosophy says one thing and her fiction another; while her philosophy denounces deconstruction, the later novels deliberately offer, in the process of exploring and dismantling Christian theology, an ambivalence antithetical to a centre."[30] It is interesting to note that Murdoch was exposed to and influenced by the demythologizing of the fifties and sixties by theologians like Rudolf Bultmann and Tillich.[31] But Murdoch went further than these: she demythologizes, and "the result in the fiction is a dismantling unacceptable to traditional Christian theology."[32] As a case in point, one can refer to her 1976 novel *Henry and Cato* where the interpretation of Christ bears a non-theistic coloring and where the Catholic priest Brendan Craddock has no clear answer to Cato's question of whether he believes in God, and only retorts saying "*neti, neti*" (not this, not this): "The point is, one will never get to the end of it, never get to the bottom of it, never, never, never. And that never, never, never is what you must take for your hope and your shield and your most glorious promise."[33] Ramanathan says of Murdoch's intent of demythologizing religious beliefs as follows: "Murdoch is anxious, not to sustain religious belief, but to preserve a desire for a moral universe. While the usual Christian consolation of redemption through a Savior is not acceptable, Christ is the most

[30] Suguna Ramanathan, "Iris Murdoch's Deconstructive Theology," in *Iris Murdoch: A Reassessment*, 35.
[31] Although Tillich is in agreement with the large part of what Bultmann is proposing, the theory of demythologization, Tillich is critical of Bultmann's program of demythologization in his existential and ontological use of symbols: "Even the existentialist interpretation—in this I would agree with his critics—needs symbols.… Even existentialist interpretation cannot get away from the use of symbols because every talk about God uses symbols.… I would say that demythologization should be: (1) An act in which the symbolic is recognized as symbolic and literalism is undercut.… (2) It should be related … to our experience of estrangement and reconciliation. Without this existential relation of the biblical symbols, they should not be used and preached.… (3) We should not be afraid, if we have done all these things, to use symbols as the only language in which religious truth can be expressed" ("The European Discussion of the Problem of the Demythologization of the New Testament," *Faith and Thought 2*, no.1, 1984, 46).
[32] Ramanathan, "Iris Murdoch's Deconstructive Theology," 37.
[33] Iris Murdoch, *Henry and Cato* (New York: Viking Press, 1976), 339.

effective way available to her in her novels of communicating the change of consciousness that she regards as significant."[34] Elizabeth Dipple makes a similar remark in this respect: "In an increasingly secular world, one central use of literature as practiced by Iris Murdoch is to detach us from the illusion of determinate meaning, in both fiction and the spiritual life."[35] While her other fictions such as *Nuns and Soldiers, The Good Apprentice,* and *The Message to the Planet* indicate, albeit in different plots, that this Christ is a Christ who is neither redeemer nor savior, these works, notes Ramanathan, "speak with certainty of only one thing—a change of consciousness and a purification of mind and desire, which of course guarantees nothing outside itself."[36]

Murdoch's religious thought, I judge, can be located and permeated with the two-way movement of consciousness, thus culminating in the reorientation of consciousness. It is against the dangers of fantasy and illusion, concretely shown in her novels, "in the face of the apparently supernatural, especially because of the human tendency to find miracles and quasi-divine comforts everywhere."[37] Identifying the two-way movement with respect to the reality of individuals to which consciousness attends, Murdoch pictures the spiritual life as a central feature to challenge enslavement to false images and false goods: "The spiritual life is a long disciplined destruction of false images and false goods until (in some sense which we cannot understand) the imagining mind achieves an end of images and shadows (*ex umbris et imaginibus in veritatem*), the final *demythologization* of the religious passion."[38] What interests me here is that as a self-declared

[34] Ramanathan, "Iris Murdoch's Deconstructive Theology," 38.
[35] Elizabeth Dipple, "The Green Knight and Other Vagaries of the Spirit; Or, Tricks and Images For the Human Soul; Or, the Uses of Imaginative Literature," in *Iris Murdoch and the Search for Human Goodness*, eds. Maria Antonaccio and William Schweiker (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 145.
[36] Ramanathan, "Iris Murdoch's Deconstructive Theology," 35-6.
[37] Elizabeth Dipple, "The Green Knight and Other Vagaries of the Spirit; Or, Tricks and Images For the Human Soul; Or, the Uses of Imaginative Literature," 139.
[38] Murdoch, *Metaphysics,* 320. (original emphasis)

atheist, Murdoch's demythologized religious thinking can inspire the moral pilgrim situated within this two-way movement of consciousness: first, by broadening the one-making aspect of consciousness beyond a constricted view of unity or order, and second, by reclaiming the ubiquity of value, a positive valuation of contingency and finitude, in the truth-seeking aspect of consciousness. Let me explain.

First, Murdoch relates her demythologizing argument against theism to Kant's critique of theism. Murdoch construes Kant's metaphysics as a model of demythologization and puts it like this: "[a]ny God we would meet or see would be a demon, a mere idol. Even looking at Christ can be dangerous, Kant tells us. Christ can lead back to self. The consoling forgiving figure may weaken the moral fibre and serve as a substitute for moral will."[39] On Murdoch's reading, Kant's thoughts about God opened a new era where morality should be defined in terms of an unconditioned demand to escape forms of thinking that enslaved human beings to illusion and heteronomous powers including previously talking about God; as Kant notes in his *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone* (1973), "Whatever, over and above good life-conduct, man fancies that he can do to become well-pleasing to God is a mere religious illusion and pseudo-service of God."[40] Religion for Kant is the recognition of the transcendental condition for the possibility of experience of duty, "which consists in respect for the moral law [that] we have never been able to lose."[41] It is not imposed as sanctions, that is to say, arbitrary contingent ordinances of a foreign will, but rather presupposed as essential laws of any free will as such. Here Kant raises the question of moral absolutes and hence tries to show that there is an absolute principle of morality, at the

[39] *Ibid*., 441.
[40] Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, trans. Theodore Green and Hoyt Hudson (New York: Harper and Row, 1960 158.
[41] *Ibid*., 42.

center of human existence, binding on all human beings. Antonaccio comments on Murdoch's adoption of Kant's appeal to the categorical imperative, "eschewing the symbolism of a personal God," in ways to "preserve the rigor and inescapability of the moral demand from being infected or evaded by egoistic fantasy," as analogous to Murdoch who says that religion may be nothing more than "private egoism."[42]

Kant wants to show the errors of previous ways of thinking, and in particular in his *Second Critique*, the previous error he wanted to wipe out is that morality can be defined by our search for happiness: all eudaimonistic (εὐδαιμονία) ethics is obliterated, as not yet really moral. Murdoch concurs with Kant's point, when writing that "[a] search for happiness … would be for Kant heteronomous, a surrender to egoistic desires. Happy love can be an ingenious moral cheat. Happiness is not our business, and speculations about what God might do about it are not only empty, but likely to mislead us into giving it a value."[43] Going beyond the eudaimonistic ethics and later theologically encrusted claims, ready-made by society, priests or tradition in the medieval forms of thought, the real task for Kant, aside from spelling out all illusions, is to uncover the conditions for the possibility of being moral. His demythologized "vision of an absolute at the center of human existence" sought not so much a constricted focus on moral obligation or certain forms of naturalism as the transcendental condition for the possibility "clearly and indubitably visible to all in the categorical imperative of duty."[44] For Kant, this transcendental condition for the possibility of experience of duty is freedom, which constitutes the self to be an agent and respects other human beings. It is transcendental for Kant in that something that we cannot directly experience is nonetheless presupposed in order to make sense of being human and "moral."

[42] Antonaccio, *A Philosophy to Live By*, 190; Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 248.
[43] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 438.
[44] *Ibid*., 439, 438.

Murdoch writes with reference to Kant's categorical imperative: "the moral confidence which can only be consulted in each individual bosom, not blindly accepted on external authority, and his Ideas of Reason, which constantly inspire us to seek truths which we intuit but have not yet fully discovered."[45]

The respect for the moral law, the *Achtung*, in Kantian thought tells us that we human beings are not merely determined either by the laws of nature or by our own desires. At the end of his *Critique of Practical Reason*, "two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe, the oftener and the more steadily we reflect on them: the starry heavens above and the moral law within," Kant states.[46] This indicates that the demand of reason arises from a supersensible unconditioned reality which goes beyond we can sense or know: "[T]he moral law is holy (inviolable). Man is indeed unholy enough; but he must regard *humanity* in his own person as holy," as he puts it.[47] Schweiker notes on it well: according to Kant "the holy is what we find inviolable in ourselves and in others, namely, the law-giving power of reason"—the autonomy of a person's freedom—that makes a person subject to the moral law.[48] When she acknowledges the supersensible unconditioned reality of the moral law, as Kant imagined, Murdoch writes, "[W]e feel pain at the thwarting of our sensuous nature by a moral requirement, and elation in the consciousness of our rational nature; that is, our freedom to conform to the absolute requirement of reason."[49] Granting this, do these concepts such as the categorical imperative in its most formal sense and the respect for the moral law work out well with respect to postulating freedom? One further point needs to be made in relation to Kant's model of demythologization.

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[45] *Ibid*., 435.
[46] Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. T. K. Abbott (New York: Prometheus Books, 1996), 191.
[47] *Ibid*., 109. (original emphasis)
[48] Schweiker, "Goodness and Fictive Persons," 148.
[49] Murdoch, "The Sublime and the Good," in *Existentialists and Mystics*, 208. (original emphasis)

For Kant, "the realization of the *summum bonum* in the world is the necessary object of a will determinable by the moral law."[50] Kant's argument of experience, however, admits that we ourselves, if we are honest, know that we are not holy, not virtuous enough to be truly happy, as Kant writes, "Now, the perfect accordance of the will with the moral law is *holiness*, a perfection of which no rational being of the sensible world is capable at any moment of his existence."[51] We normally think that virtue should be rewarded with happiness and wickedness should be somehow punished. But in our human existence, we of course experience rupture between them: we see the virtuous often-times suffer; someone tries to live a good life, but it isn't necessarily happy; the virtuous do not always flourish, but sometimes the wicked do. How are we then to make sense of that? With respect to this endless task of the moral life to make oneself virtuous and worthy to be happy, Kant had to postulate the ideas of God and also immortality, as seen in his second critique. To be sure, as he explicitly rejects the ontological proof and thus rejects traditional theism, Kant asserts that we are deeply mistaken if we can claim any certain knowledge of God and immortality, which are the errors of speculative metaphysics and traditional theology. And yet those ideas are pointing to deep human problems, namely, the clash with respect to the synthetic notion of the *summum bonum*, that is, the true problems of making ourselves worthy of happiness and also our intuition about the highest good, situated within "the supposition of an *endless* duration of the *existence* and personality of the same rational being (which is called the immortality of the soul)."[52] Here Kant goes on to say that while we cannot know and experience in the strict sense God or immortality, we are rationally justified in postulating the ideas of God and immortality: we postulate God, that is, we postulate the ideas of an all-knowing, powerful judge, which is to avoid

[50] Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 147.
[51] *Ibid*., 148.
[52] *Ibid*.

moral despair over injustice; we postulate immortality, that is, we postulate an endless amount of time to make ourselves worthy of happiness, but otherwise we fall into despair or would not care about the moral life. The idea of God and immortality of the soul are postulated as pure practical reason implied in our moral freedom and are thus in the service of morality. God for Kant, as Murdoch puts it, "is not an external substance [i.e., a consoling loving divine father], but a moral idea in our minds."[53] She continues, "The idea of God is nothing but the inescapable fate of man."[54]

Murdoch, as we have observed, remains indebted to Kant, especially Kant's rejection of theism and his vision of an absolute at the center of human existence. Kant's critiques and his work on religion are the inquiries into the conditions for the possibility of knowing, morality, religion, and our humanity in order to renew and broaden our understanding of them, not simply denying or negating something. There is a "one-making" impulse in Kant beyond a constricted view of unity or order, as Murdoch notes: "when we discipline selfish desire in respecting the moral law,"[55] that is, "when, with sublime emotion, we turn from fear of the violence and huge inconceivability of nature to consciousness of our sovereign dignity as rational beings."[56] Kant's demythologizing philosophy tries to uncover and shatter illusion from the human mind, then to escape heteronomy, namely, traditional theological claims and political authorities in the age of reason dedicated to human freedom. Rather than constricting morals to the operations of moral rationality to choice and action propelled by self's own maxims, Kant is more interested in the motive of human action, thus raising questions about the transcendental conditions that make moral action possible at all. This is where Murdoch is deeply indebted to and resonant with Kant when demonstrating the

[53] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 440.
[54] *Ibid*.
[55] *Ibid*.
[56] *Ibid*.

models of transcendent goodness, value, and truth meaningful for individual existence: "[t]he unity and fundamental reality of goodness is an image and support of the unity and fundamental reality of the individual."[57]

While she concurs with Kant in a sense that what is fundamental here is ideal or transcendent, and thus never fully realized or analyzed, Murdoch chooses a different path to find an absolute principle of morality binding on all human beings. With respect to the supersensible destiny and human freedom, Murdoch rejects the demand of reason in Kantian formalism because she pictures and reclaims the individual self in terms of "a pilgrimage toward the good conditioned in and through freedom—a freedom not to self-legislate abstractly but to experience the world through concrete perceptions," as Rothchild puts it.[58] Here Murdoch's demythologized religious thinking unhesitatingly embraces the other pole of the two-way movement of consciousness, that is, truth-seeking aspect of consciousness by turning to Plato's conception of the Good.

Second, the pilgrim through metaphysical pictures of reality places Murdoch's argument of demythologization in the context of Plato's critique of theism as well. Before revisiting below the influence of Plato on Murdoch's rejection of theism, as we have previously discussed to some extent in chapter two, it is salutary to note her remark on the difference between Kant and Plato: "Kant and Plato are alike in their intense certainty of the reality of a pure moral source. They are unlike because Kant has no moral role for what Plato calls Eros, the high force which attracts the soul toward Good. Plato's Good is not personal but it is magnetic. Kant had no philosophical concept of Eros, but he has enormous philosophical Eros."[59] Murdoch conceives of both thinkers as trying "to picture the moral being of the human as necessarily related to some absolute," as

[57] *Ibid*., 427.
[58] Rothchild, *Retrieving Discarded Visions*, 257.
[59] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 442.

Antonaccio nicely puts it,[60] but Murdoch's moral realist point of view, inheriting views of Plato, manifests itself in two ways: she advocates the sovereignty of the Good as the ideal of perfection under the evaluative activity of consciousness rather than under the rational will, and she is at the same time keenly aware of the messiness and contingency of human life which bespeaks "the limits and failures of humans as moral agents."[61]

Given her emphasis on the orientation of consciousness to the Good, Murdoch aligns well with Plato's thought "by acknowledging the difficulty of moral change," as Rothchild points out by quoting the following: "Plato does not imagine that dialectic can save us, and indeed it will not be possible, unless the whole soul, including its indestructible baser part, is in harmony. Plato in this respect a relentless psychological realist and more than once describes the soul as governed by mechanical gravitational forces which make change for the better very difficult."[62] This difficulty of moral change derives from Plato's conception of Eros as spiritual and chaotic energy: "'Eros' is the continuous operation of spiritual *energy*, desire, intellect, love, as it moves among and responds to particular objects of attention, the force of magnetism and attraction which joins us to the world, making it a better or worse world: good and bad desires with good and bad objects."[63] Particularly in her reflection on religion, Murdoch warns of the danger of the narrow traditional belief in God the Father as a consoling figure. Murdoch in following Plato asserts that "[w]e can lose God, but not Good."[64] While she does not purge religious concerns from ethics, her critiques of religion, particularly traditional theism, enable her to criticize the traditional, personal concept of God, particularly the picture of Jesus Christ found in current evangelical Christianity,

[60] Antonaccio, "Imagining the Good," 227.
[61] Rothchild, *Retrieving Discarded Visions*, 305.
[62] Murdoch, "The Fire and the Sun," in *Existentialists and Mystics*, 419; qtd. in Rothchild, *Retrieving Discarded Visions*, 305.
[63] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 496. (original emphasis)
[64] *Ibid*., 473.

using it as an object of clinging to false consolations, illusions and/or fantasies about the self and the world that may render "the need for a reflective 'placing' of consciousness" unnecessary: "What Christians call love may on closer inspection appear to be shot with egoism and delusions. The figure of Christ *means* love, but this meaning is regularly degraded by its uses."[65] However, as Rothchild rightly notes, for Murdoch, "this degradation of love does not disqualify the foundational role of love,"[66] particularly seen in her contention about human experience of the unconditioned and the reality of human goodness that I will address later below.

Instead of the image of the personal God, as I noted before, Murdoch like Plato envisages the imageless concept of the Good, "a mystical religious vision… [not] with a personal God or gods."[67] The transcendent status of the idea of the Good evinces the vision of a reality that can hardly be ascertained in images, and thus defies self-serving vision of the world in our attachments and attentions. In this respect, Murdoch states that the fact that one can escape from the Cave does not lessen to the extent that the distance one must overcome is "very great." [68] Plato's understanding of the activity of consciousness shows, however, that "ordinary modes of phenomenal awareness are morally relevant."[69] Here Murdoch's reading of Plato's ascent from illusion to reality is radically redressed into the religious metaphor "pilgrim" for our human life where consciousness as a value-bearing continuum "construe[s] the difference between the apparent and the real in accessible terms which do not detach him from the continuum of the world."[70] Furthermore, with respect to the truth-seeking aspect of consciousness that Murdoch upholds, the pilgrim from the cave "where illusions are not only rejected but understood" entails

[65] *Ibid*., 325, 248. (original emphasis)
[66] Rothchild, *Retrieving Discarded Visions*, 325.
[67] *Ibid*., 399.
[68] *Ibid*., 402.
[69] Antonaccio, *A Philosophy to Live By*, 109
[70] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 62-3.

virtue and moral change in relation to knowing the good and doing the good.[71] Virtue in this respect is pictured as an ascent from appearance to reality, but also a *descent and return* to the cave that remembers the contingent and the particular. It also symbolizes the return to the self where value is always and already present "incarnate at various levels in the self's cognitive and emotional experience."[72]

The problem at stake in Murdoch's attempt to replace God with Good is not the one-making reality of goodness, but an one-making egoism that hinders truth-seeking activity of consciousness: "Our most obvious unifying feature is methodical egoism, the barrier which divides the area of our interests and requirements from the rest of the world. Morality thought of as the achievement of virtue, 'becoming good' (anyway becoming better), involves the breaking of that barrier."[73] Given her deep worry about self-serving egoism, Murdoch turns to Freudian moral psychology and writes, "He sees the psyche 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… Objectivity and unselfishness are not natural to human beings."[74] To be sure, as Mulhall notes, "Freud's caustic scepticism would be entirely justified, and the threat of moral infantilization," often compelled by the consolation of religion (i.e., personal belief in God the Father), individually and/or collectively imagined and mimicked away, would be "all-but-unavoidable."[75] Psychoanalysis can debunk the mechanism of the psyche, and, according to Murdoch, is "to break down false self-pictures only in so far as these impair the efficiency of the ego."[76] It is interesting to note, however, as Rothchild astutely remarks, that

[71] *Ibid*., 477.
[72] *Ibid*., 57.
[73] *Ibid*., 296.
[74] Murdoch, "On 'God' and 'Good.'" In *Existentialists and Mystics*, 341.
[75] Mulhall, "'All the World Must Be "Religious"': Iris Murdoch's Ontological Arguments," 31.
[76] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 22.

"Murdoch admonishes her readers about the consoling perils of psychoanalysis that present facile answers to complex questions of the self." Despite its analytic power to suspect the false unity of the self, he continues, "Murdoch castigates the reductive tendencies of psychoanalysis to explain away" a person's moral judgments, choices, and actions "with technical jargon and deterministic categorizations."[77] Instead, Murdoch herself maintains that "[w]hen we apprehend and assess other people we do not consider only their solutions to specifiable practical problems, we consider something more elusive which may be called their total vision of life.… one may call the texture of a man's being or the nature of his personal vision."[78]

What Murdoch is seeking here is to ensure that the two-way movement of the "one-making" and "truth-seeking" activity of consciousness is textured essentially to the conception of being human. In everyday discussions as well as metaphysics, it manifests itself in the reality of moral value, which involves the sense of "directedness" through which we see ourselves, others and the world. In her words, value "must go all the way, to the base, to the top, it must be everywhere, and is in this respect unlike other things.… It adheres essentially to the conception of being human, and cannot be detached."[79] Deeply indebted to Plato's notion of consciousness, Murdoch wants to recognize the reality of moral value by picturing a view of self and thus by discovering the moral demands of being human. In her essay "the Fire and the Sun," she writes, "These [different] levels of awareness have … objects with different degrees of reality; and to these awareness, each with its characteristic mode of desire, correspond different parts of the soul."[80] Unlike Kant's view that situates the experience of the unconditional claim of morality

[77] Rothchild, *Retrieving Discarded Visions*, 295, 296.
[78] Murdoch, "Vision and Choice in Morality," in *Existentialists and Mystics*, 80-1.
[79] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 426.
[80] Murdoch, "The Fire and the Sun," in *Existentialists and Mystics*, 389.

within a noumenal realm,[81] Murdoch insists, as Antonaccio comments, that with reference to Plato "all of human experience and perception is seen to be in contact with value all the time"; "the noumenal and the phenomenal exist *inside* each human life," Murdoch notes.[82]

With respect to this Murdochian shift, I find it most clearly seen in Plato's notion of recollection or *anamnesis*, as Murdoch repeatedly makes reference to it: recollection of what the soul knew before birth—before physical embodiment—but has forgotten.[83] Murdoch clearly reclaims the ubiquity of value that demands to be *rediscovered* in our daily struggle of moral life. Furthermore, she elsewhere clarifies, "The moral (or spiritual) life is both one and not one. There is the idea of a sovereign good, but there are also compartments, obligations, rules, aims, whose identity may have to be respected.… We have to live a single moral existence, and also to retain the separate force of various kinds of moral vision."[84] It is what Murdoch would envision "concrete universals" where a "single moral existence," impelled by the one-making drive of the Good, can and should be outwardly exposed to the reality of concrete others and the world, in the pursuit of a variety of goods and ends. More radically put, the ego seated in a single moral existence can and must be stunned through concrete attention to the other. It is the point where love is reclaimed for Murdoch to redress Plato's account of the Good and to reconfigure religion as *re*-orientation of consciousness.

Religion for Murdoch is reorientation of consciousness, as she reconfigures Plato's *Eros* as her impassioned commitment to the worth of the individual, contingent and finite. Murdoch's

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[81] Murdoch elsewhere notes on Kant that "[i]t is clearly inadequate to define morality solely in terms of duty, and without reference to quality of consciousness." (*Metaphysics*, 383)

[82] Antonaccio, *A Philosophy to Live By*, 109; Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 182. (original emphasis) Antonaccio interestingly points out this Murdochian shift from Kant to Plato by the following contention: "there is an essential continuity between the natural and the moral, or between a phenomenal world of fact and a noumenal world of value." (*Ibid*.)

[83] Plato, *Meno* 81c-d and 82a-86b; *Phaedrus* 248a-e; *Phaedo* 72e.

[84] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 483.

demythologized stance on theism constitutes what it means to be "religious." For religion to be true, and not be "consolation (magic)," Murdoch asserts that religion "must concern the absolute in a specifically moral way."[85] Like tragedy, religion for Murdoch "must break the ego, destroying the illusory whole of the united self."[86] To be sure, Plato is the central figure in Murdoch's attempt to link morality with a godless religion. Murdoch holds that in Plato's mind moral value has "nothing to do with a personal God or gods"; the idea of Good, not God."[87] Insofar as "the Good itself is not visible,"[88] we understand the Good through scattered intimations of it in terms of degrees of perfection. Rothchild brings forth a critical inquiry about Platonic scale of perfection and writes: "the upshot of the scale of perfection is that the Good alone is to be loved for its own sake, where the individual can be loved to the extent that she or he instantiates the Good."[89] He continues that although Murdoch concurs with Plato's idea of perfection which are "objects of *love*," [90] "Murdoch perceives an insufficiency in the Platonic account because it cannot accommodate the notion of loving a concrete other qua individual other."[91]

The imperative as concrete attention to the other reiterates and radicalizes Murdoch's two-way movement of consciousness and reconfigures Plato's Eros as follows:

> The activity of Eros is orientation of desire. Reflecting in these ways we see 'salvation' or 'good' as connected with, or incarnate in, all sorts of particulars, and not just as "an abstract idea.' 'Saving the phenomena' is happening all the time. We do not lose the particular, it teaches us love, we understand it, we *see* it.[92]

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[85] *Ibid*., 140.
[86] *Ibid*., 104.
[87] *Ibid*., 399.
[88] Murdoch, *Sovereignty of Good*, 68.
[89] Rothchild, *Retrieving Discarded Visions*, 329. Here he refers to Gregory Vlastos's note on Plato to support his analysis: "the individual cannot be as lovable as the Idea; the Idea, and it alone, is to be loved for its own sake; the individual only so far as in him and by him ideal perfection is copied fugitively in the flux." (in *Platonic Studies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 34.; qtd. in *Ibid*.)
[90] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 14.
[91] Rothchild, *Retrieving Discarded Visions*, 328-9.
[92] *Ibid*., 497. (original emphasis)

Here love is reclaimed in Murdoch's rendition of Plato's account of love to emphasize the concrete other, insofar as love enables us to see the particularities of an individual qua individual. In this understanding of love, Murdoch poignantly combats fantasies and illusions which are perceived as "for most people a consoling, though perhaps ethically efficacious, fiction."[93] It is often-times seen and purchased in the forms of self-absorbing and self-fantasizing reflexivity in churchly piety and practices for supernatural rewards versus punishments, for example.[94] Recall for Murdoch's note on the human psyche and its mechanism: "[the psyche] is reluctant to face unpleasant realities. Its consciousness is not normally a transparent glass through which it views the world, but a cloud of more or less fantastic reverie designed to protect the psyche from pain. It constantly seeks consolation, either through imagined inflation of self or through fictions of a theological nature. Even its loving is more often than not an assertion of self."[95] Given this Murdoch's account, Antonaccio discusses Murdoch's acute awareness of the pitfalls of reflexivity as enmeshed in human psyche or consciousness: "The relentlessly "machine-like" nature of the psyche makes self-scrutiny dangerous because the psyche is in effect "programmed" to look after itself… reflexivity infects consciousness in such a way that looking inward may only heighten the psyche's tendency to console and deceive itself."[96] Then, how can we counter this protective lure of egoism?

Antonaccio suggests that "the cure for psychic egoism lies not in direct forms of self-contemplation such as psychoanalytic therapy, but in disciplined modes of attention to what lies

[93] *Ibid*., 138.
[94] Here I share my personal experiences within Korean Christian Protestant right-wing extremism, which often claims out of the pulpit that the church is the place where the Christian believers are coerced to believe promises of supernatural rewards, literally speaking, that they will receive a ticket to "heaven," that those rewards are given differently based on the degrees of the believer's devotion and faithfulness in pastor's eyes, or that the church, and no other religion, is an earthly stop on the way to "heaven." The purpose of these idolatrous claims is to marshal support for the authoritarian rule of the church leaders. I contend that these churches infatuated with these convictions—easily falling into the danger of selling the Gospel—are "hells" in our world and should be resisted.
[95] Murdoch, *Sovereignty of Good*, 77.
[96] Antonaccio, *Picturing the Human*, 134.

outside the fantasy-producing psyche."[97] I contend that the cure lies in the capacity of love manifested in concrete attention to the other persons and the worlds beyond the relentless egoistic fantasy, as seen in Murdoch's words: "The more the separateness and differentness of other people is realized, and the fact seen that another man has needs and wishes as demanding as one's own, the harder it becomes to treat a person as a thing."[98] It is what Murdoch calls "unselfing" as moral and spiritual effort of the disciplining of the self in order to see others as valuable beyond egoistic and even hypertheistic-ridden fantasy.

Therefore, religion, or spirituality for Murdoch, is not about belief in a traditional God but is a fundamental human capacity. It is part of what it means to be human and to be moral; it includes our life world, sense of self and others, and our recognition of values incarnate at every level of human existence. Thus her godless religion reclaims an idea of the religious depth of morality, as she writes as follows: "high morality without religion is too abstract, high morality craves religion."[99] What's at stake here in Murdoch's thought on religion is not about the disappearing of religion, although she alluded to it in *Acastos*, but more about the loss of ways to see the world truthfully and to articulate a "true" religiosity, or "true" consolation in the midst of objects of clinging to false consolations and illusions. Against her own critical self-scrutiny about self and the world—in her words, "[a]lmost everything that consoles us is a fake"[100]—is there, if at all, true consolation?

3. Is There True Consolation?

[97] *Ibid*., 191.
[98] Murdoch, "On 'God' and 'Good,'" in *Existentialists and Mystics*, 353-4.
[99] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 484.
[100] Murdoch, *Sovereignty of Good*, 58.

Murdoch's concept of the Good is so deep-seated into the very texture of human consciousness that the two-way movement takes her back to redress Plato's love as concrete attention to the other in the activity of moral perception. Her demythologized religious thinking draws upon the religious depth of morality. Pondering the significance of the unity of the ethical and the religious, Murdoch also affirms, in her reflexive realism, that something other than oneself is real. Love in the face of the void for Murdoch is the discovery of the real of what stuns and limits us. What stuns and limits us, Murdoch notes, is the Good, understood as real, which is the ground or source of being and value that "renders all of reality a moral reality in the light of moral perception."[101] Thus, love is the discovery of reality in the sense that we love the Good in and through loving concrete others. This love of the Good is for Murdoch what religion is all about. Her imagined character Plato, in her essay "Above the Gods," says that "[r]eligion is the love and worship of the good, and that's the real basis of morality."[102] Religion, in turn, is to reorient the reflexive understanding of consciousness that impels loving attention to other persons in order to purify consciousness itself: "Love is desire for good, virtue is being *in love* with good."[103]

At this crucial point in Murdoch's argument, a poignant question arises. As I noted in the earlier section on Murdoch in this chapter, what's at stake in Murdoch's thought on religion is not the disappearing of religion but more so the loss of ways to see the world truthfully and to articulate a "true" religiosity or "true" consolation in the midst of the dazzling object of the self. For Murdoch is mindful of the reality that "we are always in motion toward *or* away from what is more real."[104] To be sure, in her Platonic dialogue *Acastos*, a fictional Socrates defends a demythologized

[101] Antonaccio, *A Philosophy to Live By*, 111.
[102] Murdoch, "Above the Gods," in *Existentialists and Mystics*, 519.
[103] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 343. (original emphasis)
[104] *Ibid*., 295. (my emphasis added)

religion with goodness, as he tells Antagoras, "Not all intelligent people think that religion is just superstition. For instance someone might say that the old stories are not literally true, but that they can convey truth—and that there are not many gods but only one, called, perhaps, Zeus, or God, a spiritual power, which is perfectly good."[105] This seems resonant with Murdoch's own claim that "there are no philosophical proofs for the existence of God, but it is not senseless to believe in God."[106] She is, of course, critical of religion along neo-humanist lines and states that "it is time to say goodbye to the old literal person "elsewhere" God."[107] Nonetheless, as Widdows notes, "Murdoch is wary of rejecting all forms of religion and religiosity as, in doing so, we might lose something of what it means to be human."[108] Religion for Murdoch, as we have seen in her demythologized vision of the religious life, is not something abstract or self-serving belief in a traditional God but is rather a fundamental human capacity, which "is everywhere, like breathing."[109]

Murdoch's awareness of religion as a continuous aspect of the moral life is paradoxically suggestive of an endless task of moral progress.[110] This sentiment is displayed in *Acastos*, where a fictional Socrates declares,

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[105] Murdoch, *Acastos*, 75.
[106] Murdoch, "Vision and Choice in Morality," in *Existentialists and Mystics*, 93.
[107] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 420.
[108] Widdows, *The Moral Vision of Iris Murdoch*, 143.
[109] Murdoch, "Above the Gods," in *Existentialists and Mystics*, 519. Elsewhere, Acastos who seems to be the mouthpiece of Murdoch's own views, says, "I think religion *contains* morality. It goes beyond common sense, it goes beyond that sort of limited attitude, dividing the world into manageable bits. Religion is believing that your life is a *whole*—I mean that goodness and morality and duty are just *everywhere*—like *always* looking further and deeper—and feeling *reverence* for things—a religious person would care about everything in that sort of way, he'd feel everything mattered and every second mattered." (*ibid*., 508, original emphasis)
[110] Carla Bagnoli in her essay "The Exploration of Moral Life" points out the difference between Kant and Murdoch with respect to the nature of morality as an endless task: Like Kant, "Murdoch, too, thinks that undertaking the moral ideal of purity of thought (in which virtue consists) is an endless task. But unlike Kant, she does not think that it is endless because we have a natural and inextirpable propensity to evil, but because we are living individuals, who fail and progress over time, thereby displaying their history. Murdoch's claim is that an adequate account of the moral pursuit requires that change, failure, and progress be explained from within the life of the person." (in *Iris Murdoch, Philosopher*, 219)

> I think religion will always be with us, and we shall continually remake it into something we can believe. You see, we want to be certain that goodness rests upon reality. And this desire will never go away, we shall always be searching for the gods. We want to love what is pure and holy, and to know that it is … inviolable, indestructible, *real*.[111]

What Murdoch is proposing here is that religion is to *re*-orient consciousness as an endless task against clinging into false consolations, illusions and/or fantasies about the self and the world, as love is reclaimed as a new orientation of our desires. This religious depth of morality can be found "as a living force within each human soul and not in some supernatural elsewhere" so as to gain access to the reality of moral value.[112] Thus, in her view, the moral and religious task is as endless as the pilgrimage in the direction of reality, which demands the question of moral change.

The idea of the Good as a moral absolute which "adheres essentially to the conception of being human (and cannot be detached)"[113] finds a point of connection between moral change and attention to the reality of persons represented in the idea of "unselfing." In her essay "The Idea of Perfection," Murdoch explains a moral change in her famous M and D example where M's effort to see D justly comes from the moral discipline of attention. Murdoch makes many complicated observations from this one simple example. But, beyond hypothesizing about possible discrepancies between the inward mind and the outward behavior of M in response to D's existence, Rothchild makes a point that the effort to see D more clearly "lies with M's self-reflexive awareness," which evinces, as he continues to note, "a process of perfection that ruptures (recall the "shock" to the self) but heals, enervates but deepens, the self within concrete encounters with the world." [114] Murdoch's emphasis on the reorientation of consciousness illuminates the importance of attention to the reality of persons, not simply as crafted under the dominance of

[111] Murdoch, *Acastos*, 40. (original emphasis)
[112] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 419.
[113] *Ibid*., 425.
[114] Rothchild, *Retrieving Discarded Visions*, 256, 257.

observable actions and patterns of behavior in the self. Then, in what sense the idea of attention is significant in M and D example?

To be sure, "structures of value" are always and already built up around us, and it is not hard to imagine that we are easily subsumed within and misled by some fixated and preconceived images and related patterns of thought and action. M's looking at D is locked into an illusory world in terms of her own desires and preferences for her son, as often pictured in Korean soap operas even to drastic and bizarre ways. Here attention is "not the application of a method or the engagement in a particular form of technique," but a process of seeing with love and justice, as M's *effort* to see D justly is gradually manifested.[115] Murdoch says, "the act of attention is the effort to counteract such states of illusion."[116] It is all the more important when it is intertwined with love, insofar as the French root of the word *attendre* means "to wait." Thus, love as the drive for unselfing is a matter of waiting which signals the task of attention as a moral and spiritual effort that is progressive and perfectible.

The task of attention upon individuals grasped magnetically by the inexhaustible reality of the Good is a continuous and endless effort that moves toward perfection. It is interesting to note, I am suggesting, that it is understood as a moral and *spiritual* effort because Murdoch describes attention by using some religious metaphoric language: "attention is our daily bread," "a place for the idea of grace" in which "both energy and vision are unexpectedly given."[117] Like her construal of religion as a fundamental human moral capacity, which is everywhere, like breathing, the task of attention "goes on all the time and at apparently empty and everyday moments we are 'looking,'

[115] Niklas Forsberg, "Iris Murdoch on Love," in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Love*, eds. Christopher Grau and Aaron Smuts (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 11.
[116] Murdoch, "The Idea of Perfection," in *Existentialists and Mystics*, 329.
[117] Murdoch, "The Idea of Perfection," in *Sovereignty of Good*, 42.

making those little peering efforts of imagination which have such important cumulative results."[118] It is considered as a *religious* effort that strives for truthfulness and the real, insofar as Good is "the infinite difficulty of the task of apprehending a magnetic but inexhaustible reality" of our supersensible destiny.[119] Here love is reclaimed in Murdoch as the knowledge of the individual, and seeing someone with love is an endless task of applying a universal concept to a personal, concrete situation: "Moral tasks are characteristically endless not only because 'within,' as it were, a given concept our efforts are imperfect, but also because as we move and as we look our concepts themselves are changing."[120] Seen in Murdoch's numerous reference to Plato's myth of the Cave, moral progress is situated within "a continuous *sense of orientation*," that is to say, consciousness that "discriminates among levels or degrees of goodness as it carries out its evaluative activity"[121]; it is all the more challenging because we are confronted by a moral demand that is external to our consciousness, paradigmatically by the reality of another individual, yet that demand is grasped in the light of truth of goodness: "Moral progress (freedom, justice, love, truth) leads us to a new state of being. This higher state does not involve the ending but rather the transformation of the 'ordinary' person and world.… There is the selfish ego surrounded by dark menacing chaos, and the more enlightened soul perceiving the diversity of creation in the light of truth." [122] Murdoch suggests "a change of consciousness in the direction of a patient truthfulness,"[123] and Rothchild interprets this Murdochian idea of moral progress not simply as "demarcate[ing] the end or an irreversible point of perfection, but rather [as picturing] a disclosure and awareness of the ordinary self's continuous struggle as a ceaseless means toward truth and

[118] *Ibid.*
[119] *Ibid.*, 41.
[120] *Ibid.*, 27.
[121] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 260 (original emphasis); Antonaccio, *A Philosophy to Live By*, 112.
[122] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 165.
[123] *Ibid.*, 374.

goodness."[124] It is implied in her ethic of unselfing seeking "a selflessness which is at the same time a self-being."[125]

The connection between individual reality and the idea of perfection lies in the primacy of the object (in Adorno's words) other than the self, which is an important ingredient in reflection of truth and goodness to that we attend. Back to the M and D example, the idea of perfection motivates M's renewed perceptions of D. This motivation is not merely by simple looking, but by loving attention to external reality, most normatively, "the existence of other people and their claims."[126] Nicholas Forsberg comments on it as follows: "What M is doing is not merely to try to see D accurately, but to see her lovingly and justly… There is a sense in which love is not a decision. Even though we may say that we can, and perhaps must, *command* love, that love also is a form of repetition (to speak with Kierkegaard), there is a sense in which we can't *decide* to love someone…. And if seeing is to be linked to loving, seeing someone or something is not a mere fact of simple observation. Love is not a simple and single act, founded on a neutral decision."[127] This effort of "seeing" is motivated by the magnetic idea of goodness, Murdoch admits that "we are not always responding to the magnetic pull of the idea of perfection"[128] as exemplified in the M and D case. She further writes, "M's activity is essentially something progressive, something infinitely perfectible. So far from claiming for it a sort of infallibility, this new picture has built in the notion of a necessary fallibility. M is engaged in an endless task."[129] This endless task is a long deep process of unselfing, for it constitutes perceptions of what the world is like that demand

[124] Rothchild, Retrieving Discarded Visions, 258.
[125] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 374.
[126] Murdoch, "On 'God' and 'Good,'" in *Sovereignty of Good*, 57.
[127] Niklas Forsberg, *Language Lost and Found: On Iris Murdoch and the Limits of Philosophical Discourse* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013), 144. (original emphasis)
[128] Murdoch, "The Idea of Perfection," in *Sovereignty of Good*, 41.
[129] Murdoch, "The idea of Perfection," in *Existentialists and Mystics*, 317.

responsibility of being human and being moral and that, therefore, call for the question of moral change. Moral change remains grounded in the continuous attending to value, as "goodness is connected with the attempt to see the unself, to see and to respond to the real world in light of a virtuous consciousness."[130] If our vision of the world sees individual reality in its own goodness rather than egoistically as a possible means for ourselves, we will act without lies and fantasy.

With respect to the demand of moral change, another point should be noted: that is, what renders this moral and spiritual effort "endless," beyond Murdoch's view of religion as "a mode of belief in the unique sovereign place of goodness or virtue in human life."[131]? Here we are confronted with Murdoch's hard-nosed realistic suspicion that "almost anything that consoles us is a fake."[132] Antonaccio notes succinctly that "[N]o reader of Murdoch's work can fail to notice this deep suspicion with which she regarded… the trap of false consolation as inescapable in human life": "the tissue of self-aggrandizing and consoling wishes and dreams which prevents one from seeing what is there outside one."[133] This false consolation for Murdoch seems most apparent in religion where the clinging to self-obsessive consoling tools of survival and protection for the self *away* from the world is seated and justified. In *Acastos*, Murdoch evokes the dispute against Socrates' stance on religion as basic human goodness in Antagaros' words:

> I wouldn't call that religion. I see what you are at, Socrates, but I won't let you do it. You want to struggle religion back as some sort of refined morality.… I don't believe in goodness in your grand solemn sense. I don't believe in moral perfectionism.… There isn't anything deep or high. You want to separate out a part of religion to do with perfect virtue or salvation or something, to make religion go on existing without supranatural beliefs, but there is no such part. We're all the same, only some of us are more rational and free. Anything else is pure hypocrisy![134]

[130] Murdoch, "The Sovereignty of Good over the Other Concepts," in *Existentialists and Mystics*, 376.
[131] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 426.
[132] Murdoch, "On 'God' and 'Good,'" *Sovereignty of Good*, 58.
[133] Antonaccio, *A Philosophy to Live By*, 197; Murdoch, *Sovereignty of Good*, 57.
[134] Murdoch, *Acastos*, 79.

Although "she is keen not to lose religiosity, Murdoch is still wary of religion and its capacity for consolation and delusion," as she and we would notice, disappointingly quite often, in our current forms of Christianity.[135] Widdows makes reference to Scott Dunbar, who summarizes rightly Murdoch's position in this regard: "The Christian religion … at its most widely endorsed and popular level offers the most consoling moral framework this side of the eternal. In so doing, it too lacks realism about the human condition and fails to take the human pilgrim seriously."[136] For Murdoch, religions, particularly Christian religion, as opposed to the genuine meaning of religion properly understood, with its "all-encompassing framework", seemingly "masquerading as truth," and promises of supernatural rewards has "more propensity for false consolation and illusion than anything else."[137]

To be sure, Murdoch worries so much about religion as degenerated into fantasy as an imagination in a negative, self-serving light, ending up being nothing more than "private egoism." With respect to the idea of original sin, for example, Murdoch is wary of its use as "a fantasizing protection of the ego, a deterministic myth, concealing change and obliterating freedom."[138] David Tracy notes well on this: "for her, a belief in God *and forgiveness of sin* can function as another veil created by our anxiety to hide away what is terrible and absurd in life and reality."[139] While we are *continually* confronting something other than ourselves, we are caught up in the fat, relentless egoistic spirit of self-sufficiency that, in turn, truncates our moral imagination. More

[135] Widdows, *The Moral Vision of Iris Murdoch*, 144.
[136] Scott Dunbar, "On Art, Morals and Religion: Some Reflections on the Work of Iris Murdoch," *Religious Studies* 14, 1978, 516; qtd. in *Ibid*.
[137] Widdows, *The Moral Vision of Iris Murdoch*, 145. It is helpful to note that Paul Tillich insists on the quest for religion beyond religion against profanization and demonization. It is what Tillich calls the Protestant Principle, religion against religions. In his book *What is Religion?* Tillich says that "religion can become autonomous and self-sufficient, far removed from God. And it can consummate the idolatry by calling itself absolute religion." (*What is Religions?* trans. James Luther Adams (Harper & Row, 1973), 148.
[138] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 248, and 103.
[139] Tracy, "Iris Murdoch and the Many Faces of Platonism," 74. (*my addition*)

seriously, religion symbolized as "bad faith" swamped in solipsistic self or self-enclosed institutions or communities employs and manipulates forms of inscription. Murdoch is critical of the doctrine of Christianity with its consoling pictures of a personal God as the central figure of Jesus, as particularly guilty of false consolation, culminating in "amendment of life, or renewed security in carefree sinning." [140] Widdows notes, consonant with Murdoch's idea of demythologized religion, "The myth must not be taken too literally; if it is, rather than aiding the moral pilgrim, it will be nothing more than consoling fantasy and actually arrest moral progress."[141] For Murdoch, while religion is a fundamental human capacity to seek true goodness, focus the real, and inspire to the moral life, religions, on the other hand, are dangerously consoling and deluding, particularly when it is combined with images of art. That's why the transcendent status of the idea of the Good is emphasized as an *imageless* concept, evoking "mystical [*noetical*] imageless attention to what is conditioned."[142] Even with this idea of the Good, however, Murdoch adamantly gives self-reflexive critique against her own position. In her words in *The Sovereignty of Good*, she writes, "'Good' even as a fiction is not likely to inspire, or even be comprehensible to, more than a small number of mystically minded people who, being reluctant to surrender 'God,' fake up 'Good' in his image, so as to preserve some kind of hope.[143] Here, Antonaccio helpfully raises a question regarding Murdoch's self-reflexive critique: "is not Murdoch's own morality of goodness—so conveniently unburdened of any embarrassing religious myths or dogmas—the biggest consolation of all?"[144] Or, in my question to Murdoch, is there true consolation at all?

[140] *Ibid*., 81-2.
[141] Widdows, *The Moral Vision of Iris Murdoch*, 148.
[142] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 108 (my emphasis added). Murdoch helpfully explains Plato's *noesis* as follows: "*Noesis* is an indispensable mystical state, thinkable perhaps as contemplation of the Form of the Good, a passionate stilled attention, wherein the self is no more. (This does not imply leaving the world.)" (*ibid*., 319, original emphasis).
[143] Murdoch, "On 'God' and 'Good,'" in *Sovereignty of Good*, 70.
[144] Antonaccio, "Iris Murdoch's Secular Theology of Culture," 286.

Despite Murdoch's deep suspicion of clinging to falsehood and illusions, her protest against consolations does not seem to land in any pessimistic retreat to moral scepticism and despair. For Murdoch, as noted earlier, almost everything, including religion, that consoles us is a fake. In this seemingly grave statement, the important qualification of "almost," not everything, implies that there can be some truthful consolations.[145] The ultimate stake for Murdoch is how to distinguish and discern objects of egoistic consolation and wish-fulfillment that we "fake up" in our own image from true ones as a source of moral purification. Love as clear moral and religious vision when guided by imagination is, in Murdochian sense, forcefully reclaimed with a realization of "our supersensible destiny" that there are sources of value outside of the self. Murdoch contends, in the face of the reality of the relentless ego, that "love, love of lovers, of family, of friends, is an ultimate consolation and an ultimate saviour. To love and to be loved is what we all desire, and what we desire as, as we are able to see it, good."[146] Love is reclaimed with respect to "the inner limits of Murdochian Good as a symbolism of the real" as noted in Schweiker's phrases; love demands to be reclaimed for Murdoch, as love is "the force that joins us to Good and joins us to the world through Good."[147]

Love is knowledge of the individual and is the extremely difficult realization that something other than oneself is real, according to Murdoch. Given her claim of love as an ultimate consolation, Murdoch is under no illusion concerning the difficulty it entails. Thus love is an endless and passionate task of moral imagination, which is itself the intermediate tension between solipsism and the perfection of the Good, as she notes: "Love is the tension between the imperfect soul and the magnetic perfection which is conceived of as lying beyond it.… Its existence is the

[145] Antonaccio, *A Philosophy to Live By*, 198.
[146] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 346.
[147] Schweiker, "The Sovereignty of God's Goodness," 230; Murdoch, *Sovereignty of Good*, 103.

unmistakable sign that we are spiritual creatures, attracted by excellence and made for the Good. It is a reflection of the warmth and light of the sun."[148] Murdoch reclaims love as moral imagination that entails "a form of contemplation… open for everyone" in Marije Altorf's words.[149] For Murdoch, "this perceptual form of contemplation is at the core of religious experience,"[150] as Antonaccio annotates Altorf's words, because love is the capacity to see and value the world around us, which is the basis for all moral activity. Religion for Murdoch demands more of us than any mere morality can, and thus is "above the gods … it's beyond us, it's more real than us, we have to come to it and let it change us, religion is spiritual change, *absolute* spiritual change."[151]

Love in the moral sense of "see" is a work of imagination, which is in Murdoch's thought linked to an affirmation of the individual. The point to be emphasized here, once again, is that love as an exercise of imagination is the act of waiting. It is particularly demanded at the moment of the void, as "a kind of fright," where "the conscious will feels when it apprehends the strength and direction of the personality which is not under its immediate control."[152] Loving attention to the reality and the world beyond the self, when guided by imagination, defers our judgments upon differences of the other selves in order to stop our self-absorbing fantasies and to "see more." As Murdoch suggests, it is through attention and imagination to the reality of "the void" "where the center of significance is suddenly ripped out of the self, and the dreamy ego is shocked into awareness of an entirely separate reality."[153] What stuns us at the moments of the void is not the

[148] Murdoch, "The Sovereignty of Good over Other Concepts," in *Existentialists and Mystics*, 384.
[149] Marije Altorf, *Iris Murdoch and the Art of Imagining* (New York: Continuum Studies in British Philosophy, 2008), 111; qtd. in Antonaccio, *A Philosophy to Live By*, 200.
[150] Antonaccio, *A Philosophy to Live By*, 200.
[151] Murdoch, "Above the gods," in *Existentialists and Mystics*, 514. (original emphasis)
[152] Murdoch, "The Idea of Perfection," in *Sovereignty of Good*, 37.
[153] Murdoch, "The Fire and the Sun," 417.

formlessness of nature or human reason or will, but the "unutterable particularity," and individual human beings in particular.[154] It is the notion of necessity at the void that prompts purification and love.

Love is the continuous operation of erotic and spiritual energy to reorient and purify consciousness and attention to the Good that still remains at the reality of the void. As was noted in previous chapters, Murdoch's reading of Plato's *Timaeus* envisages important clues to "the place of necessity in human life, what must be endured, what makes and breaks, and to purify our imagination so as to contemplate the real world (usually veiled by anxiety and fantasy) including what is terrible and absurd."[155] Murdoch pictures human existence as rooted in two causalities, that is, in seeking the necessary for the sake of the divine, which renders us aware of the profound truth of our condition, which consoles truthfully rather than falsely. Love prompted by purified imagination attends to the necessity, because necessity teaches us the profound truth of our condition as mixed beings "sunk in contingency and confusion, yet also vitally connected with the power of spirit."[156] Love as the cherishing of the finite and particular when consenting to the reality of the void is crucially important in a sense that demands the ultimate question of what it means to be human.

This conceptual framework of love provides the context for Murdoch's claim that the core of morality is best conceived as something "religious." In terms of the void, to seek the necessary for the sake of the divine is to accept the loss of contact with reality, and, paradoxically enough, the possible—or rather confessedly noted as "partial" in Murdoch—remedy is "to use the loss

[154] Murdoch, "The Sublime and the Good," 215.
[155] Murdoch, "The Fire and the Sun," 456.
[156] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 145.

itself as an intermediary for attaining reality" in Simone Weil's words.[157] Love as unselfish attention attends to the loss itself and breaks the barrier of egoism by which we always console ourselves with fantasies of "bouncing back." Murdoch appreciates Simone Weil's image "of becoming empty so as to be filled with the truth,"[158] not with the selfish occupation. In other words, one makes moral progress when one simply consents to the reality of the void without explaining it away through magic and fantasy, as often manipulated in religion particularly. In this respect, this acceptance, or love, is what Murdoch relates to the notion of obedience. With reference to Simone Weil, obedience for Murdoch is not indicative of passivity or submissiveness to certain forms of authority, but of "the freedom wherein the good man spontaneously helps and serves others."[159] Rather than a flight from contingency or particularity, love reclaims a vision of the penetration of goodness into the most random, contingent, and particular features of reality.

This envisioning work of love as a true exercise of moral imagination, when faced with the reality of the void, is finally related to the tragic freedom of love. Murdoch identifies it as "exhilarating" but also "painful" in this exercise of overcoming one's self:

> The tragic freedom implied by love is this: that we all have an indefinitely extended capacity to imagine the being of others. Tragic, because there is no prefabricated harmony, and others are, to an extent we never cease discovering, different from ourselves. Nor is there any social totality within which we can come to comprehend differences as placed and reconciled. We have only a segment of the circle. Freedom is exercised in the confrontation by each other, in the context of an infinitely extensible work of imaginative understanding, of two irreducibly dissimilar individuals. Love is the imaginative recognition of, that is respect for, this otherness.[160]

This tragic freedom implied in love points to a way of being in the world and, at the same time, being *human* in the world, which has traditionally been found in the religious life, but which for

[157] Simone Weil, *Notebooks*; qtd. in Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 502.
[158] *Ibid*., 301.
[159] *Ibid*., 109.
[160] Murdoch, "The Sublime and the Good," in *Existentialists and Mystics*, 216.

her does not depend on any supernatural beliefs.[161] Thus, for Murdoch, "religion is not only a particular dogma or mode of faith and worship, but can exist and indeed exists, undogmatically … potentially everywhere, forming a deep part of morality."[162] Continuously critical of dangerously consoling and deluding religions found in the late modern era, Murdoch attempts to articulate a true religiosity, a true consolation by reclaiming love in the concrete attention to human moral pilgrim. This humanizing impulse rooted in Murdoch's godless religion is stated in Murdoch's words: "[e]ven if all "religions" were to blow away like mist, the necessity of virtue and the reality of the good would remain."[163] It is what love is deeply rooted in a true religiosity that demands the absolute claim of morality in human pilgrimage, and thus it can be a consoling thought to someone like Murdoch who disengages exclusively church-centered forms of piety and practice, "not by offering the cheap grace of a thinking which never disappoints, but by affirming the reality of goodness while keeping a steady gaze on the horrors, disappointments, and failures of human life."[164]

Having explored Murdoch's account of true consolation with respect to love, I will note that she acknowledges a more "effortful ability to see what lies before one more clearly, more justly" in moral perception and imagination and suggests that "freedom is the result of a deep struggle of the self with itself," as Antonaccio puts it.[165] Consistent in her caveats on the

[161] Schweiker offers an illuminating remark on its danger when inscribed in hypertheistic terms: "The terrifying possibility of human freedom is that the lust for more power will rid this world of life. The tragic freedom of love in the unflinching devotion and attachment to one's God can lead to the hatred of all that is ungodly." (in "Goodness and Fictive Persons," 160)
[162] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 336.
[163] *Ibid*., 428. Murdoch elsewhere notes in a similar regard, "An existent God would be an idol or a demon. (This is near to Kant's thinking.) God does not and cannot exist. But what led us to conceive of him does exist and is *constantly* experienced and pictured. That is, it is real as an Idea, and is *also* incarnate in knowledge and work and love" (*ibid*., 508, original emphasis).
[164] Antonaccio, "Iris Murdoch's Secular Theology of Culture," 287.
[165] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 322; Antonaccio, *A Philosophy to Live By*, 116-7.

doubleness of religion, similar to that of art, Murdoch envisages an ethic of unselfing seeking "a selflessness which is at the same time a self-being."[166] Salvation for Murdoch, although she does not explicitly use this term much in her works, is the virtue of unselfing, not situated within the ego's own pitfall of reflexivity, but rather within the tragic freedom implied in love as concrete attention to the other.[167] For Murdoch, unselfing is not the destructive abnegation of self, in other words, "not a vision utterly devoid of self," as found in Buddhist idea of *anatman*.[168] Rather, Murdoch's renewed attention to unselfing as a redemptive force is placed in the self as having the capacity to see and attend to other concrete selves and to the world. It reminds us of Murdoch's illuminating words: "The world is not given to us 'on a plate.' … We work at the meeting point where we deal with a world which is other than ourselves."[169]

Love as the realization of a supersensible destiny in Murdoch's sense involves a realistic recognition of the human condition and suffering therein, combined with a concomitant checking

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[166] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 374.

[167] Antonaccio helpfully points out the self-refuting paradoxes that attend ideals of renunciation in any ethic of unselfing: "The danger is that the attempt to overcome one's ego may itself be a form of egoism in another guise…. [On the Freudian view that Murdoch explicitly endorses] The relentlessly 'machine-like' nature of the psyche actually makes self-scrutiny dangerous because the psyche is 'programmed,' so to speak, to look after itself. So relentless is this machinery that even a negative judgment of oneself may perpetuate a consoling self-absorption. The reflexive nature of self-scrutiny allows the psyche to double back on itself and produce 'plausible imitations of what is 'good' under the guise of sado-masochism" ("The Ascetic Impulse in Iris Murdoch's Thought," 95-6). In Buddhism, a religious tradition that Murdoch looks to for moral and spiritual insights, there is a self-critical scrutiny about its unselfing. Anam Thubten in his essay "No Self, No Problem" writes the following: "The ultimate way of becoming a renunciant is by giving up attachment internally, attachment to everything, not just attachment to samsara and the things that we don't like. We give up attachment to nirvana and the things that we love too, because when we are attached to nirvana that is just another way of lingering. It's another way of sustaining this flimsy ego. Therefore, we have to give up attachment to nirvana and to every form of ego because ego takes all kinds of forms. Sometimes ego can even take the form of spiritual phenomena" (In *The Best Buddhist Writing*, ed. Melvin McLeod [Boston: Shambhala, 2010], 168). I can also see this danger of self-refuting malaises, for instance, in Protestant Christian spiritual cults and practices such as "sin-cleansing," "gift-calling" prayer meetings driven by so-called "charismatic evangelical" pastors and their churches/centers.

[168] Maria Antonaccio, "The Ascetic Impulse in Iris Murdoch's Thought," in *Iris Murdoch: A Reassessment*, 94-5. There are still controversial issues about the nature of Murdoch moral philosophy by appropriating Buddhist thoughts. Thus, it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to discuss about how Murdoch takes the help of Eastern religions, particularly Buddhism. See David Robjant, "As a Buddhist Christian; The Misappropriation of Iris Murdoch," *The Heythrop Journal*, LII (2011), 993-1008; Sumie Okada, "Iris Murdoch: her interest in Zen Buddhism," *Western Writers in Japan* (Palgrave Macmillan, 1999), 151-5.

[169] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 215.

of easy and false consolations. She conceives the unavoidability of religion "discovered in our ordinary unmysterious experience of transcendence,"[170] or, put simply, implied in love, reclaims and highlights goodness embedded in concrete others. Murdoch's following question would be an endless question for a renewed attention to an ethic of unselfing in our self-infatuating gods-making world: "How is one to connect the realism which must involve a clear-eyed contemplation of the misery and evil of the world with a sense of an uncorrupted good without the latter idea becoming the merest consolatory dream?"[171] Murdoch's humanist salvation is a moral and religious effort by which to wait, expect, and "see more" the real world of contingency and necessity in human pilgrimage. Her peculiar understanding of human salvation does not mean anything limited to the traditional Christian sense, say, of the promise of life after death; rather, "a slow progression" that leads one to a new state of being where one perceives reality "stripped of the distorting veil of inner fantasy and consolation that destroys the moral sense," and, hence, one endeavors to be worthy as a human being and as a moral and spiritual agent.[172]

4. The Reality of the Good, not God?

Murdoch develops a *reflexive* realist account of the Good and its related analysis of the human condition, which necessitates reclamation of love in the development of her ethics. The Good in Murdoch's thought as for Plato's is construed as distant and imageless. In her Platonic dialogue, "Above the Gods: A Dialogue About Religion," when asked if we can get beyond images and really see the Good, Plato responds, "I don't know.… it's terribly distant, farther than any star.

[170] *Ibid*., 508.
[171] Murdoch, "On 'God' and 'Good,'" in *Sovereignty of Good*, 59.
[172] Anne Rowe and Avril Horner, "Introduction: Art, Morals and 'The Discovery of Reality,'" in *Iris Murdoch and Morality*, eds. Anne Rowe and Avril Horner (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 2.

We're sort of—stretched out—It's like beyond the world, not in the clouds or in heaven, but a light that *shows* the world, this world, as it really is."[173] To be sure, it is what the symbolism of the Good indicates for Murdoch, that is, the concept of incorruptibility when posited as imageless as well as transcendent. Hence, although we cannot look directly at the Good in itself, Murdoch argues that there is a magnetic force that draws us toward the beauty and goodness, as we understand the Good through the intimations of it in all of our various modes of attention.

Murdoch in her *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* insists that "the 'Good' is not the old God in disguise, but rather what the old God symbolized."[174] Murdoch revisits and acknowledges transcendental images and concepts of what the old God symbolized, as she defines it as "a single perfect transcendent non-representable and necessarily real object of attention."[175] We also find "resonance between her notion of imperfection and Christian accounts of the fall" as noted in Murdoch's thought.[176] In her essay "The Idea of Perfection," she says, "To speak here of an inevitable imperfection, or of an ideal limit of love or knowledge which always recedes, may be taken as a reference to our 'fallen' human condition, but this need be given no special dogmatic sense. Since we are neither angels nor animals but human individuals, our dealings with each other have this aspect."[177]

While she does recognize religious experience as the ubiquity of value present in human life, Murdoch's critique of religions, particularly traditional Christianity, enables her to reject the narrow traditional, personal belief in God the Father as a consoling figure, and Murdoch herself,

[173] Iris Murdoch, "Above the Gods: A Dialogue about Religion," in *Existentialists and Mystics*, 518. (original emphasis) (hereafter indicated as "Above the Gods," in *Existentialists and Mystics*)
[174] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 428.
[175] Murdoch, *Sovereignty of Good*, 55. Also in "On 'God' and 'Good,'" in *Existentialists and Mystics*, 344.
[176] Rothchild, Retrieving Discarded Visions, 121.
[177] Iris Murdoch, "The Idea of Perfection," in *Existentialists and Mystics*, 321-2.

in following Plato, asserts that "[w]e can lose God, but not Good."[178] Thus, in her repeated appeal to Platonic myths, especially *Timaeus*, the Good is distant and impersonal in that the transcendence of a distant Good places an unconditional demand on our perception of reality. The Good, despite remaining separate, creates the conditions for the possibility of the cognitive recognition of the two senses of goodness: incarnate, though in imperfect copy, participating goodness in the world and transcendent goodness, symbolized as impersonal Absolute, as an unconditional element in consciousness. Murdoch's reading of the Good and her claim of the ubiquity of value reveals itself in what is taken as the first principle in Murdochian ethics: "[i]t is a 'reality principle' whereby we find our way about the world."[179] Relatedly, with respect to the transcendence of a distant Good enables Murdoch to assert, as Rothchild notes, that "the necessary reality of the Good as well as the status of individuals… are not predicated solely on the status of the creator" and he quotes the following words of Murdoch: "[h]uman beings are valuable, not because they are created by God

[178] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 473.

[179] *Ibid*., 474. A first principle is a basic, foundational, and self-evident proposition whose origin harkens back to Aristotle. In *Metaphysics*, Aristotle considers a first principle as "the first basis from which a thing is known" (*Metaphysics*, 1013a14–15). First principles were later found in Origen, and it is important to note that the first principles from Origen onwards were not simply located in the realm of knowledge or practical sciences, but situated in a hermeneutical task: different levels of meaning are correlated to levels and degrees of human existence: to the body, to literal, historical text, to social duties and relations, and to the spiritual level (the tripartite soul seen in Plato). Thus the first principles of ethics are further developed in ways that moving through levels of meaning is interrelated to moving through the levels of human existence to educate the soul. James T. Champlin in his book *First Principles of Ethics* writes, "Ethics, then, even in theory, is entirely practical in its scope, since it supplies us with principles by which we may determine the right in each case" (J. T. Champlin, *First Principles of Ethics: Designed as a Basis for Instruction in Ethical Science in Schools and Colleges*, [Boston: Woolworth, Ainsworth & Co., 1861], 7-8). They have to do with the motive, intention or purpose of an act. William Schweiker is one of the recent prominent thinkers on explicating the moral meaning of the first principles of ethics: "By a first principle I mean the idea, symbol, or root metaphor which gives systematic integrity to an ethics. This idea, symbol, or metaphor is a principle insofar as it is the source of intelligibility within an ethics; it is first because the principle is irreducible and primary.… The first principle of any ethics, I contend, has to do with the value and direction of power with respect to the value of the world and others" ("The Sovereignty of God's Goodness," in *Iris Murdoch and the Search for Human Goodness*, eds. Maria Antonaccio and William Schweiker [Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996], 212). See also Albert R. Jonsen, *Responsibility in Modern Religious Ethics* (Washington, D.C.,: Corpus Books, 1968); Schweiker, *Power, Value, and Conviction: Theological Ethics in the Postmodern Age* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 1998). Also see Schweiker, *Responsibility and Christian Ethics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

or because they are rational beings or good citizens, but because they are human beings."[180] Predicated on this understanding of the Good, it is apparent why Murdoch attends to the experience of the unconditioned, but Murdoch situates the transcendent and impersonal Good and the finite reality within her demythologized theory of religion.

To be sure, God or Good is the supreme reality, in relation to which "human beings and the world are to be valued and understood,"[181] found in the western thought, Christian tradition and Platonic philosophy. For each of these traditions, these forms of thought are deeply related to the questions of how we picture a view of reality (metaphysics) and how we speak morally about the real (ethics). In her metaphysical ethics, Murdoch finds some similar attributes between God and Good, but there are some criticisms on the ways that Murdoch pictures the reality of moral value with respect to the idea of the Good.

First, while she conceives the Good as the sovereign object of desire, Murdoch seems to parallel the trivialization of ultimate questions to "the vanishing of theologies"[182] with respect to the decline of the personal, theistic God. She notes that "[m]any people hate religion, with its terrible history and its irrationality, and would regard resort to religious rituals as a false substitute for real morals and genuine amendment of life."[183] Indeed, Murdoch attempts to recover religious modes of thought as "something innate in morality", "not as a dangerous possibly heteronomous property of religion."[184] However, despite her protest against the *narrow* traditional conception of God, Rothchild argues that Murdoch construes God *too narrowly* as a dogmatic language or some false forms of certainty.[185] While she equates the Good with what the old God symbolized,

[180] Rothchild, *Retrieving Discarded Visions*, 122; Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 365, qtd, in *Ibid*.
[181] Schweiker, "The Sovereignty of God's Goodness," 210.
[182] Murdoch, "Existentialists and Mystics," in *Existentialists and Mystics*, 232.
[183] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 487.
[184] *Ibid*., 304.
[185] Rothchild, *Retrieving Discarded Visions*, 129. (my emphasis added)

Murdoch insists that we can replace God with Good as the central concept in ethics, and for this reason she has been accused of reducing religion into the agenda of ethics. Gregory Jones calls Murdoch's perspective on religion "arbitrary—and ultimately unsatisfying," and says, for Murdoch "only a "demythologized" Christian theology is invited to the table."[186] Such criticism seems straightforward to define Murdoch's godless religion as nothing religious in a meaningful sense, and thus can be welcomed and accepted by those who continue to be religious adherents. However, Murdoch's concern is, I contend, to debunk the ways pictures and images of Christian God have been narrowly construed, only internalized into solipsistic and self-obsessed fantasies that arrest moral progress: "the picture of Christ may enlighten and inspire us, or enable us *to stop thinking*," writes Murdoch.[187]

Second, Murdoch's godless religion might entail affirming a claim that cuts against her whole moral philosophy. Murdoch indicates that we understand the Good through intimations of it in finite reality as they are illuminated by the Good, since the Good itself is not visible. The Good does not represent a purpose or goal which we should strive; we should be good "for nothing" as Good is for nothing: "'for nothing' is indeed the experienced correlate of the indivisibility or non-representable blankness of the idea of the Good itself."[188] To be sure, this way of conceiving the Good prevents it from being corrupted by self-serving ends and concerns, which, Murdoch believes, are often encapsulated within the image of a loving and personal God. In this context, Murdoch describes the Good as holding "a metaphysical position but no metaphysical form."[189] Relatedly to her appeal to this notion of Good, Murdoch in her "the Fire and the Sun," submits that

[186] Gregory Jones, "Review of Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals by Iris Murdoch," *The Thomist,* 57, 1993, 689.
[187] Murdoch, *Metaphysics,* 306. (my emphasis added)
[188] Murdoch, *Sovereignty of Good*, 69; "On 'God' and 'Good,'" in Existentialists and Mystics, 358.
[189] *Ibid*., 73.

"[t]he image of a morally perfect but *not all-powerful* Goodness seems to me better to express some ultimate (inexpressible) truth about our condition."[190] Given this impersonal, untainted Good, but "not all-powerful," however, some questions merit attention: on what grounds in Murdoch's thought can different degrees of finite goodness be mediated and perceived? Put differently, if finite reality is the only manifestation of the Good we can have access to, yet the Good is distant and incorruptible but not powerful for Murdoch, what work would it exert on human finite goodness and reality? Is it located, in the final analysis, only internal to the knowing self thereby falling into the trap of self-consolations that Murdoch professedly resists?[191] In other words, the image of the Good does not seem to have the power to effectuate our moral and spiritual efforts.

Finally, and relatedly, when we see some reasons behind her attempt to replace the concept of God with the concept of the Good, it is unclear to me that attention to individual finite reality is rendered possible if it is guided by the indefinable, and yet not powerful Good. Exposed to the inevitable question of how to establish the reality of the Good, Murdoch examines Anselm's ontological argument for the existence of God and justifies its relevance to the ontological necessity of the Good and her claim about goodness. She argues that "the reasons for rejecting God are themselves clarified by the Proof. No empirical contingent being could be the required God and what is 'necessary' cannot be God either. The concept of an existing personal being is too deeply embedded in the traditional idea of God."[192] The proof for Murdoch is not about God,

[190] Murdoch, "The Fire and the Sun," in *Existentialists and Mystics*, 431. (my emphasis added)
[191] Schweiker's insightful arguments about the "inner limits of the Good as a symbol of the real" ("The Sovereignty of God's Goodness," 230) found in Murdoch's thought propels me to have the above-mentioned questions. Heidi Marlene Gehman refers to Schweiker's arguments for developing her critical reflection on Murdoch's idea of the Good and argues for conscience as the primary mode of human moral agency. See her work, *Conscience and Moral Agency: Iris Murdoch and H. Richard Niebuhr on the formation of the moral self* (Ph.D. Dissertation: The University of Chicago, 2005).
[192] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 425.

but about the Good, "necessity and certainty and goodness."[193] In making this move to the reality of the Good, as William Schweiker notes, "Murdoch frees the proof from the burden of establishing the necessary existence of a personal God and understands it to be a claim about moral value.… Ethics is a theology without God because Good is what the old God symbolized."[194] Yet, Schweiker argues, however, that "the Good is not all that God symbolizes"[195] and further argues that this Murdochian concept of Good does not specify the extent to which power is to be recognized and actualized in service of finite reality. He writes, "it is absolutely important to note that as the source of life the Good does not bind its power to finite, created life. The Good does not recognize or respond to what is other than itself. In others words, the Good does not symbolize the transformation of value creating power so that power respects and enhances finite life."[196] We will continue to pursue this issue in the next section, particularly with the question of why love is reclaimed in Murdoch religious thought.

5. Conclusion: Moral Philosophy without God

[193] *Ibid*., 426.
[194] Schweiker, "The Sovereignty of God's Goodness," 224.
[195] *Ibid*., 227.
[196] *Ibid*., 231.. In *Iris Murdoch and the Search for Human Goodness*, there are different theological responses to Murdoch's concept of godless religion by such thinkers like David Tracy, Franklin Gamwell, and Stanley Hauerwas. David Tracy in "The Many Faces of Platonism" poses the following question: "How else to account for her appeal, even after her denial of a personal God, to a Christ-mysticism which discloses the approachable, even consoling, aspect of the Good?" (73) Rothchild points out Gamwell's response in this way: "Murdoch's "denial" of God appears to betray her moral realism and commitment to the depths of human life," (in *Retrieving Discarded Visions*, 130) and quotes Gamwell's words: "My provisional conclusion is that Murdoch's religion without God is inconsistent with her emphatic moral realism because that philosophical proposal is also a pragmatism. On her own terms, the loss of theism is the loss of a deep aspect of human life." ("On the Loss of Theism," 184) Stanley Hauerwas in "Murdochian Muddles" quibs about Murdoch's reference to Tillich: "what bothered me there… was her positive appreciation of Paul Tillich's work. Her friend Tillich is my sworn enemy." (193) Antonaccio in *A Philosophy to Live By* delineates well three different theological receptions of Murdoch's thought: the conciliatory, the confessional, and the constructive responses. (179-186)

For Murdoch, religion is not conceived as a particular sphere of human reality, but rather as its relation to the unconditional. Murdoch illuminates a poignant insight about the unconditional as the depth of human existence against the great problem of the modern and late modern world: the experience of emptiness, of hatred and exclusion and of different forms of bigotry. Her suggested description of religion as something innate in morals is deeply attuned to her realist hermeneutic force to enact the moral reflexive agency of humanity and to bridge the finite to the infinite. While she reclaims love in the face of the void, that is obtained through attention to the concrete other, Murdoch regards love as the central organizing principle for picturing self, other, and the infinite and situates it within a critical response to late modern situation. Love as the response to the void led Murdoch to envisage the reorientation of consciousness to the unconditioned Good, as she says that "Good exerts a magnetism which runs through the whole contingent world, and the response to that magnetism is love."[197]

Critical of dangerously consoling and idolatrous religions found in late modernity, Murdoch's demythologized vision of the religious life attempts to articulate a true religiosity, a true consolation—not a self-serving belief in a traditional God as inscribed in moral or religious abstractions—by reclaiming love in the face of the void. Murdoch's metaphysical picture of reality construes religion as the fundamental mode of being human and being moral. By replacing God with Good in the ontological argument, Murdoch affirms an imageless Good and sees religion as "a mode of belief in the unique sovereign place of goodness or virtue in human life."[198] Given this humanizing impulse rooted in her godless religion, as I concur with Schweiker's and Antonaccio's

[197] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 343.
[198] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 426.

claim, that Murdoch contributes to the development of a theological humanism[199] by humanizing the unconditional element in the structure of reality, yet protesting any false consolations and fantasies in the church for survival and protection.

In articulating her vision of moral philosophy and theology, Murdoch develops her distinctive points of arguments about being, value, and goodness that frame her interpretation of love: ethics of unselfing as the disciplining of the self in order to see others as valuable in themselves. To be sure, as we have discussed throughout the chapters, love is reclaimed in Murdoch's thought to invigorate the human ethical thought and praxis in light of what is other than ourselves: love as "true vision occasions right conduct."[200] Particularly in religious thought, love is reclaimed for Murdoch to reorient and purify consciousness compelled by the magnetism of the Good. Thus, relatedly, with respect to moral change, Murdoch envisions the virtue of unselfing as moral and spiritual effort to purge our egoistic need for consolation. The reason I broach these distinctive emphases in Murdoch's thought is not to launch into a definitive proof of a Murdochian perspective on religion; nor is it to escape from Murdoch's stance for not being religious or Christian enough. The purpose of this dissertation is to isolate some insights where her distinctive orientations to goodness and value render the role and the place of love reclaimed in her thought. As I have suggested earlier, Murdoch's idea of the Good merits further attention below to identify

[199] Throughout the dissertation, I reclaim the true radical nature of love and its humanistic and theological import situated within the thought of Murdoch in order to evaluate and resist the current popular-absolutist discourses of morality, culture, and religion. Theological humanism is a stance to engage the reality of a transcendent goodness and also of many worlds which are other than ourselves and thus to deepen the human responsibility for the perception of value in the world and to reawaken human recognition of the depth of the structure of being that I found in Murdoch. A theological humanism that I speak of here is a fundamental stance and orientation in life dedicated to the imperative of love, thus to a search for truth relevant to the world we now inhabit. It is not taken as a specific dogmatic insistence situated within certain theological strands of thought, but rather as a hermeneutical lens to capture the relation between love and multidimensional lived reality. I am indebted to and learn much from William Schweiker's understanding of a theological humanism that insists on a wider respect and enhancement of the integrity of life with and for others than some other kinds of humanism. See Schweiker, *Theological Ethics and Global Dynamics*; *Dust That Breathes*; currently, *The Enhancing Life Project*.

[200] Murdoch, *Sovereignty of Good*, 64.

her insistence of the ultimate reality of the Good against which our fragmentary but anticipatory lived reality is to be judged.

Murdoch's metaphysics set up pictures of reality where value is grounded in the transcendent Good and inherent in individual finite being. Murdoch conceives of metaphysics as the definitive guide that demands to "see more" and to engender moral change. Murdoch's understanding of the Good is always apprehended by the unresponsive, motionless nature of the Forms. As the ideal of perfection, "[the Good] lies always beyond, and it is from this beyond that it exercises its authority."[201] We have observed in previous chapters the reasons why Murdoch believes that "God sees us and seeks us, Good does not."[202] Briefly put, for Murdoch, Goodness is real, as we perceive it everywhere, but the nature of the Good remains imageless "without our having the sovereign idea in any sense 'taped'" or without being tainted into the errant causality of necessity.[203] The picture of a separate and impersonal Good derives also from her protest against the narrow traditional belief in God the Father as a consoling figure that may eliminate the need for moral effort. As I noted earlier, the notion of the incorruptibility of the Good, even the image of the Good that is morally perfect but *not all-powerful,* I suspect, does not have the power to make our efforts good. This principal orientation for Good is the orientation about "nothing" in Murdoch's thought of Good *for* nothing in contrast to the idea of God *from* nothing found in Christian ethics.

Murdoch insists that we must be good "for nothing." Murdoch writes, "The only genuine way to be good is to be 'good for nothing' in the midst of a scene where every natural thing,

[201] Murdoch, *Sovereignty of Good*, 62.
[202] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 83.
[203] Murdoch, "On 'God' and 'Good,'" 350.

including one's own mind, is subject to chance, that is to say necessity."[204] To be sure, as Antonaccio interprets it, "what is revealed in our exposure to change is the fragile nature of our desires and intentions," and the reason Murdoch insists that we must be good for nothing is "not that she is pessimistic or nihilistic" but that the necessity or even the void are the things that "the ego finds most challenging to its illusions of control."[205] Despite this insightful thought, however, it is unclear if Murdoch's conception of the Good, as undefined and without purpose or *telos*, is able to give any content to our grasp of goodness, given the dilemmas of competing goods we face in the ever-multiplying ways of life. Furthermore, it is difficult to see how she would mediate between finite goods, particularly given the self/other structure of moral progress in her thought. Granting her claim that love is the most extreme difficult realization that something other than oneself is real, it seems insufficient to overcome this difficulty in the moral life because it offers no criteria against which claims of goodness in self and others are to be judged.

In comparison, Christian understanding of God's creating *ex nihilo* affirms God's permanent activity of integrity. The dialectic of being and nonbeing symbolized in *Creatio ex nihilo* reveals itself the symbolic importance of the No-Yes dialectic for the living God. In terms of "nothing" out of which being and the world is created, Langdon Gilkey regards the No-Yes dialectic as a central feature of human existence: "The experience of the void shattering us precedes the appearance of a solid ground; the 'no' precedes the reception of a 'yes'; anxiety is the precondition of both courage and faith."[206] God *from* nothing offers a crucial description of the relation between God and the world in light of the theocentric perspective. A living God never abandons creatures, though they suffer the threats of nonbeing and experience distance from God;

[204] Murdoch, *Sovereignty of Good*, 69.
[205] Antonaccio, *A Philosophy to Live By*, 195.
[206] Langdon Gilkey, *Gilkey on Tillich* (New York, NY: Crossroad Pub., 1990), 49.

God is never a spectator, unlike the Demiurge as a perfect spectator, as Murdoch sees it, merely ordering matter, not creating it. The idea of *ex nihilo* symbolically points to the source and ground of values and also to the freedom of creation and to the freedom of the created. Rothchild nicely notes it, "*creatio ex nihilo* preserves God's absolute transcendence, yet it also promotes God's powerful immanence in relationality with the creatureliness of finite beings."[207] God from nothing is rooted in the essential Christian framework in which God empowers the created worth of all reality. How about Murdoch?

Murdoch also acknowledges that we are beings who seek our own sense of reality and goodness. She says that "[t]he unity and fundamental reality of goodness is an image and support of the unity and fundamental reality of the individual."[208] As we have seen in Murdoch, however, the chief enemy of excellence in morality is personal fantasy: "the tissue of self-aggrandizing and consoling wishes and dreams prevents one from seeing what is there outside one."[209] Here she pictures the search for the Good as situated within the working of consciousness as possessing a discernable consistency. Then, I suspect, Murdoch's trajectory relies too heavily on the capacity of individual consciousness to properly attend to reality. Despite her acute awareness of natural selfish energy and the necessity of disciplined attention that makes unselfing possible, we are still left to rely on our own individual moral effort and conscious capacity to see accurately. Thus, it would still remain an open question: Does Murdoch put too much confidence or hope in the turn to the "de-individualized individual"?

Despite these observations on her distinctive thoughts on Good and God, the strength of Murdoch's view of the endless task of individual moral consciousness to properly recognize and

[207] Rothchild, *Retrieving Discarded Visions*, 98.
[208] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 427.
[209] Murdoch, *Sovereignty of Good*, 57.

value finite reality is taken up into and enhanced by love. Love, I contend, is our fundamental realization of something other than oneself, which demands the living with integrity in the face of the void, and ultimately in light of God beyond Good. In the final concluding chapter, I will reflect on the meaning of acceptance of human finitude and "the void" which, in turn, demands perpetual effort for moral change. In this way, love is unceasingly, "no time off,"[210] to envisage a theological ethics beyond life and death, open to the unconditional in the posthuman, postreligious world.

[210] Murdoch, Metaphysics, 484.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

1. A Synthesis

I have shown in this dissertation how Murdoch's understanding of love is closely linked to the experience of the void. In this reclamation of love in the face of the void, I have also claimed that her argument of love makes sense if it runs through three categories that I find in Murdoch's thought: the Good, inner life, and true consolation. Love for Murdoch is not a description about our needs and wants, but rather chaotic, erotic desire directed toward the Good which is manifested in attention to the concrete individual. Indeed, this new orientation of our desires is difficult to achieve, Murdoch admits, due to our self-consoling attention to ourselves. Thus, as Niklas Forsberg points out, "[Murdoch] is asking us to pay attention to love and to think about why it has been blotted out."[1] To be sure, in our contemporary era, the question about love has been transmuted into different ways to define a basic claim about goodness and value of life. But Murdochian love is pictured and reclaimed as a kind of "rebirth" in which we see the world truthfully and responsibly, and particularly more so when we are confronted with the void at the individual and wider social world.

What's at stake in reclaiming love in the face of the void is that our response to this void is often-times couched in the fantasies about "survival" and then recast in the forms of false consolations and illusions, culminating in moral and religious blindness. This blindness derived from the fantasies about survival and false consolations, in turn, eventually manifests itself as the recipe for separation, exclusion and oppression of others beyond the self. Is not this false certainty

[1] Niklas Forsberg, "Iris Murdoch on Love," 2.

about survival as seemingly and always pursing the brightness and judging that it is "right," and, at the same time, denying the genuine risk, tragedy, and dark aspects of life as evil or "wrong"? Does not these deceptions and illusions about survival only hinder the fundamental integrity of life?

Here it is in her recognition of the reality of the void itself that Murdoch confronts the void and thereby summons love: a fat relentless ego is shocked into awareness of an entirely separate reality, thus into the moral demand of the discovery and appreciation that someone other than the self is real and valuable. Reclaiming love in the face of the void, therefore, is only possible by "seeing," and more correctly, "reorienting" to see the reality of the void itself. This discussion reminds me of the one biblical passage, Matthew 6:23, "but if your eye is unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is *darkness*, how great is the darkness!" (NRSV, my emphasis added). This passage can be related to Murdoch's concern about the danger of moral imagination enmeshed in consciousness and belief: self-consolation and illusion. It is what the reality of the void debunks and combats the false consolation of self-survival and protection that we often fall into. Love is reclaimed at the center of the void, which demands the restless quest for the rediscovery of the real of what stuns and limits us; love is, as Murdoch calls it, "a new orientation of our desires, a re-education of our instinctive feelings" in our human pilgrimage.[2] It is in this sense that Murdochian love preserves its meaningfulness in the face of the void when and where the self-protective moral and religious imagination is challenged and shattered. Love is not such a trick or magic to cover up with lies and fantasies about survival, but is to face the suffering or afflictions therein represented by the void itself. Loving attention to the reality and the world beyond the self is ultimately related to the reflective gaze upon the self, which

[2] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 503.

in the end comes close to reaching true consolation and true salvation (i.e., *salvus* in Latin means healed or whole).

To be sure, there is awareness of human finitude and even the fallibility of human inquiry that can limit the illusions about survival but can also signal a moral demand situated within the horizon of human possibilities for moral and spiritual change. Here I find in Murdoch the axiological and ontological dimension about the meaning of acceptance of human finitude and "the void." It, in turn, demands perpetual effort for "unselfing" which is deeply rooted in the thought of Murdoch, and, particularly, as I contend, in her reclamation of love as the response to the void in true consolations. Let me explain.

2. Goodness and the Acceptance of Death

Murdoch is keenly aware of the nature of being human and says, "we are, as real people, unfinished and full of blankness and jumble."[3] For Murdoch, clear perceptions or cognitions of self and the world do not readily appear within the purviews of human beings who are easily tainted by their own self-consoling views and beliefs. In grating these matters at hand, Murdoch seeks to articulate her ways to respond to finite reality, particularly, the reality of death. For Murdoch, influenced by Buddhist thought, there is "a special link between the concept of Good and the ideas of death and chance or necessity" and she also writes elsewhere regarding this link: "Goodness is connected with the acceptance of real death and real chance and real transience and only against the background of this acceptance, which is psychologically so difficult, can we understand the full extent of what virtue is like."[4] The acceptance of real death in Buddhist thought is by

[3] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 97.
[4] Murdoch, *Sovereignty of Good*, 96; Murdoch, "The Sovereignty of Good over Other Concepts," in *Existentialists and Mystics*, 385.

extinguishing the fire (the literal meaning of *nirvana*) internally, which means the giving up of attachment to everything, or, in Murdoch's words, "the absence of the anxious avaricious tentacles of the self."[5] Antonaccio comments on Murdoch's thought over the necessity of real death like the following: it teaches us the profound "truth of our condition, as mixed beings who are stretched between a contingent and accidental world and the vital power of a spiritual realm."[6] Murdoch herself writes, "We may seek to 'be with' the divine cause, as exhorted by Plato, but we cannot avoid necessity, and indeed need it (as he tells us) to force upon us the reality of our situation as mortals."[7]

Murdoch's association of Goodness with death and chance signals a religious impulse because morality as virtue is bound up with the acceptance of real death, with our mortality. As this acceptance is "psychologically difficult,"[8] so necessity symbolized as the void is "the condition for a just perception of reality," where "an acceptance of our own nothingness" is transvalued into "our concern with what is not ourselves."[9] Here love is reclaimed, according to Murdoch, as the discovery of reality, as the extremely difficult realization that something other than oneself is real. To be sure, human love is often voiced as "familiar and reassuring" to the self by seeking what is immediately good for the self, and in this respect, Murdoch succinctly warns that "[f]alse love moves to false good. False love embraces false death."[10] In spite of all the warnings against clinging to false consolations, love is reclaimed as a redemptive force to resist "our tendency to conceal death and chance by the invention of forms."[11] Thus love as a true

[5] Murdoch, "The Sovereignty of Good over Other Concepts," in *Existentialists and Mystics*, 385.
[6] Antonaccio, *A Philosophy to Live By*, 196.
[7] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 108.
[8] Murdoch, *Sovereignty of Good*, 100.
[9] Antonaccio, *A Philosophy to Live By*, 195; Murdoch, *Sovereignty of Good*, 100.
[10] Murdoch, "The Sovereignty of Good over Other Concepts," in *Existentialists and Mystics*, 384.
[11] *Ibid*., 371.

exercise of moral imagination grasps the tension between the imperfect soul and the magnetic pull of the Good. It is in the context of such endless tension that Murdoch pictures tragic freedom: "Freedom is, I think, a mixed concept. The true half of it is simply a name of an aspect of virtue concerned especially with the clarification of vision and the domination of selfish impulse. The false and more popular half is a name for the self-assertive movements of deluded selfish will which because of our ignorance we take to be something autonomous." [12] Murdoch's understanding of freedom is coherent with her understanding of human person: we as picturing creatures picture ourselves and then come to resemble those pictures.[13] Tragic freedom implied in love poses the challenge of the moral fate of fictive persons, and Murdoch insists that tragedy is the highest art whose essence is love where the fictive objects of love created by human imagination can and should be tested.[14]

It is in the reality of the void that we feel and are stunned with the realization of "our supersensible destiny." It is evident for Murdoch because love is forcefully reclaimed at the reality of the void, where Good still persists. In this context, Murdoch radicalizes the acceptance of real death by placing a distance between suffering and death. Of course, she envisages morality as involving the acceptance of the human condition and the suffering therein, but she is careful not to substitute the idea of suffering for the idea of death, as the Romantic movement since Kant and the later existentialism would endorse. Murdoch notes, "To do this is of course an age-old human temptation.… The idea of a rather exciting suffering freedom soon began to enliven the austerity of the Puritan half of the Kantian picture, and with this went a taming and beautifying of the idea

[12] *Ibid*., 382.
[13] Murdoch, "Metaphysics and Ethics," in *Existentialists and Mystics*, 75.
[14] Schweiker, "Goodness and Fictive Persons," 149.

of death, a cult of pseudo-death and pseudo-transience."[15] The reality of the void that must be experienced in the acceptance of death differs from the *Angst* of popular existentialism, Murdoch notes, and she argues with reference to Simone Weil that "the exposure of the soul to God condemns the selfish part of it not to suffering but to death."[16] Only against the background of the acceptance of mortality does the virtue of unselfing make sense. Love as the capacity to see the spiritual through the material, as seen in the Demiurge symbolizing *Eros* in the *Timaeus* to seek the necessary for the sake of the divine, attends to the reality of the void, "involving the control of the imagination,"[17] and thereby pierces the veil of egoism and spurs to our concern with what is not ourselves. The acceptance of our own nothingness is correlated to Murdoch's notion of "good for nothing." This contingency is what constitutes who we are and is also valorized necessary to the human pilgrimage: we are mixed beings, "sunk in contingency and confusion, yet also vitally connected with the power of spirit."[18] Also in the human pilgrimage, encountering persons or events that thwart our self-bound desires for survival and protection, love is a truthful consolation via attention to the Good in the midst of a scene where the whole thing originated in love is subject to death and chance. And love is reclaimed in Murdoch's thought as a spiritual energy, speaking of *anamnesis*, by which the emptiness and absence is experienced and pictured as real.

3. Love and Many Worlds

To be sure, Murdoch scathingly admits that we as mixed beings are "spiritually inspired but irrevocably limited."[19] Given possibilities for and limits on life, Murdoch conceptualizes a

[15] Murdoch, "Sovereignty of Good over Other Concepts," in *Existentialists and Mystics*, 367.
[16] *Ibid*., 385.
[17] Murdoch, "Knowing the Void," in *Existentialists and Mystics*, 159.
[18] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 145.
[19] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 228.

transcendent reality, as a world that is other than ourselves, so as to reorient "the directions of thought."[20] This reality is experienced as a counter-world. William Schweiker and Günter Thomas notes on this concept: "a *counter-world* is a reality that manifests a distinction between present conditions and possible states of affairs."[21] The idea of world is significant in the thought of Murdoch that a world is not a physical environment, but the structure of the universe of meaning to which self belongs and also from which it distances itself. To be a self is to be in some world, in the domain of meanings where one is situated differently and, accordingly, orients one's life. We move between worlds, but we are in the world. For Murdoch, "The world is not given to us 'on a plate', it is given to us as a creative task."[22] The great moral and spiritual task in life is to find reality at the meeting point where we deal with a world that is outside of ourselves.

Given this understanding of the idea of world, it is all the more important for Murdoch that a world is a domain of "freedom" where the value orientations and the awareness of deeper levels of meaning are expressed. Murdoch speaks of tragic freedom in our consciousness to face "our supersensible destiny" and thus to attend and to unself in light of goodness embedded in concrete others. Schweiker and Thomas argues that "we inhabit many different "worlds"" that we establish or we are given, and thus "orient [our] lives in different ways within those domains that both sustain and limit actions and relations."[23] Counter-worlds can be perceived and utilized in a creative way for the drive to transform our current condition or in a destructive way for the drive to stunt and violate the integrity of life. Schweiker and Thomas put it as follows: "[t]he idea of counter-world enables us to examine that interaction and tension in both creative and destructive

[20] Murdoch, *Sovereignty of Good*, 101.
[21] William Schweiker and Günter Thomas, "Which Life; What Enhancement? A Report on the *Enhancing Life Project*," in *Religion and Culture Web Forum*, Fall 2016, 19.
[22] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 215.
[23] Schweiker and Thomas, "Which Life; What Enhancement?," 18.

ways, life enhancing and life endangering ways."[24] In this respect, Murdoch warns against false consolations found in this world with its relation to counter-worlds ranging from cave-world and visible world to even ecclesiocentric world.

Murdoch thus clearly see counter-worlds found in religion and the religious imagination. To be sure, religion for Murdoch is not taken as an escapist form.[25] Murdoch rather insists on the demythologized vision of religious transcendence where "the reality of the Good pierces the human world from within the human world," as Schweiker notes.[26] For Murdoch, religion is "the creative imaginative activity of our mind, spirit, in relation to our surroundings."[27] Murdoch envisages our finite concern to be symbolic of ultimate concern as to respond to the fundamental question of what it means to be human, and relatedly, of how we can make ourselves better and of how we should live.

I contend that love is reclaimed in Murdoch when she identifies the experience of "the void" in moral and religious imagination and in renewed commitment to what is really real and good. It is because the void is the state of being that cannot be determined by human reason or will or under its immediate or absolute control by anything internal or external to the self. The void is an event where and when "the center of significance is suddenly ripped out of the self, and the dreamy ego is shocked into awareness of an entirely separate reality"[28]; where and when the overwhelming sources of despair are faced in the forces of disintegration and destruction, and the unconditional

[24] *Ibid*.," 19. I am indebted greatly to this insightful essay presented in *The Enhancing Life Project*, and it is where I see a possible trajectory of future interdisciplinary work of religion, ethics, sciences, humanities, and beyond, and I gain insightful thoughts from there.
[25] In Tillich's words, there is a distortion in utopianism "if it is allowed to lose its essential dialectical character and is held as a precise and literal intellectual anticipation—an anticipation that at some time in the future is to be replaced by a tangible, objective possession." ("The Protestant Principle and the Proletarian Situation," in *The Protestant Era*, 172.)
[26] Schweiker, "Goodness and Fictive Persons," 157.
[27] Murdoch, *Metaphysics*, 495.
[28] Murdoch, "The Fire and the Sun," 417.

element seems effaced, and the spirt of self-sufficiency is shaken and shattered; when and where the corporate and individual expressions of evil blind us not to see the depth of what is "really real."

Love is reclaimed at the moment of the void whose background is acceptance of death. In other words, the void is not simply denied as an event of self-loss and world-loss, but rather as a time and space that demands universal truth that concerns everything concrete. Paradoxically speaking, love is reclaimed in a total absence of love. In the midst of the void, something else, in turn, spurs with the force of what is holy and unconditioned and yet with loving attention for the unutterable particularity of finite life, and it is when and where love is reclaimed. Murdoch reclaims love as the power to see the ubiquity of value rediscovered in our daily struggle with the world, particularly in concrete attention to the other individuals. Love is where we are confronted and stunned with the realization of a "supersensible destiny" as a counter-world that helps to find a spiritual journey from a world of appearance toward a world of reality. Love is when we feel the moral demand on decision, painful and daring decision in the experience of the void.[29]

Love is absolute because it concerns everything concrete. Love moves between and beyond the current world and counter-worlds. Thus love is reclaimed as a hermeneutical force to bridge the finite to the infinite, the particular to the universal, and the contingent to the transcendent. Love, like the boundary-situation of human beings, is always able to break through the prison of a world of its own making in individual and collective forms of life and thus to anticipate newness of being and life in relation to some counter-worlds operative through religious and cultural imagination.

[29] As Murdoch refers to Tillich several times in *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, it is worth noting Tillich's words of love in relation to void, as it is correlated to "ultimate concern" as a spirit of counter-world, not simply otherworldly matter: "the vacuum of disintegration can become a vacuum out of which creation is possible, a "sacred void," so to speak, which brings a quality of waiting, of "not yet," of a being broken from above, into all our cultural creativity." ("Religion and Secular Culture," in *The Protestant Era*, 60.) In *The Courage to Be* (190), Tillich asserts "[t]he courage to be is rooted in the God who appears when God disappears in the anxiety of doubt."

The absoluteness of love is its power to discover what is demanded by some counter-worlds at the predicament of the concrete to which it returns: other concrete persons, the radical discipleship of Jesus Christ for Christians, and the state of nirvana to name a few. To be sure, it is challenging and difficult in the orientation of our loves, as Augustine had already understood it, and it is particularly so when, at the moment of the void, some counter-worlds, culturally and religiously, are conceived and manipulated as consoling and fantasizing compulsions to "fill-in."

Cultural counter-worlds clash over the contested sites of memory's inscription on violence, marked by power, mourning, and conflict. In the case of the *Sewol* ferry disaster,[30] for instance, there has been a call for investigating the truths about this tragedy that the Korean government led by the impeached President Park Geun-hye tried to hide deliberately since the sinking of the ferry on April 16, 2014. For the bereaved family of the 304 drowned people, most of whom were teens on a school trip, this tragic event is not about the past incident but rather the history of the present. But the ex-president Park and her government rushed to shove off the mourning by encouraging forgetfulness for the dead. Of course, the government knows all the truth better than anyone else, but refuses a counter-world of mourning for and remembrance of the *Sewol* that has inevitably evoked an act toward the truth. The drowned, for whom speech is impossible, become the driving force behind the speech of the living bereaved. In contrast, at this extreme void in Korean history, the government provoked a divided public opinion about this disaster and thus fabricated another counter-world to blur and invalidate the mourning of "here and now" in life-endangering ways. Furthermore, in their attempt to cover up the truth, Park and her government intensified, through

[30] For more about the *Sewol* ferry sinking and its aftermath, see in a recent editorial about the *Sewol* ferry: "After Three Years, Raise the Sewol Ferry, and the Entire Truth." *The Hankyoreh* (March 23, 2017), http://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_editorial/787702.html. What's at issue in Park's response to this tragic event is that at the ferry sank, Park as the president appeared to be absent. She didn't address the nation until seven hours after the ship started taking on water. It still remains an open question about what Park was doing during her "missing seven hours."

the polarization of counter-worlds, coupled with the outdated logic of the Right and the Left, accusations of political parties and Korean people resisting her anachronistic political manipulation. In such a threshold between presence and absence of being and life, love is and should be reclaimed as a protest against the totalizing dynamics of self-referential systems, couched in the guise of counter-worlds, where the individual self has been dissolved under the name of cultural and political creed, dogma, and ideology.

Consider another example from religious counter-worlds. Recognition of human fallibility and estrangement is closely related to the generation of counter-worlds in religions. Of course, the doctrines and discourses of love are mostly told and shared in the specific religious communities, but I am suspicious of whether their praxis is manifested in our concrete struggle with the world. In an exercise of religious imagination faced with counter-worlds, "abuses and distortions" of the call to the transcendence would render their unconditional and normative force simply a "recipe" for problems at stake in our moral life, or even worse a "conversation stopper" in the form of imposing the otherworldly utopias of religious fantasy. Religions can become fantasies, as often found in contemporary Christian right-wing extremism, for instance, when they attempt to exempt themselves from the world and witness against the world, and even re-theologize the "world" and deny the depth of our being picturing and living in many worlds. In this context, love is reclaimed to counter the lure of over-reaching illusion and fantasy about survival; love, therefore, is always able to provide a standpoint, betwixt and between the divine and the human world, to scrutinize the validity of religious convictions and conventions. In the religious thought of Murdoch, while the absence of Good and the absence of God is pervasively identified, our experience of ultimate reality can be truthfully articulated as a force of reunion rooted in the authentic nature of religion,

as we continue to seek the unconditional and sovereign goodness or virtue in human life. This is the task of love.

4. Concluding Remark

I have explored Iris Murdoch's thought of love reclaimed in the face of the void. In light of the pressing global challenges and problems in our current era, it is necessary to revisit the questions of love and the problem of the void to orient and reorient our understanding of self, world and God: to picture the meaningfulness of the reality and goodness, to change inner life in relation to others and the world, and to guide and reorient our life into a transcendent reality. Engaging with Murdoch in this dissertation, I contend that every fresh creation or renewal of moral and religious imagination requires a constant struggle with the problems in the structures of lived reality, as love is unceasingly reclaimed as the virtue of unselfing through concrete attention to the Good before God.

It is to that point that my argument of Murdoch's love can contribute to contemporary Christian theological ethics by understanding of love in the face of the void. Against three forms of false consolations—egoism, false understanding of God, and fantasies and illusions—we only understand how love functions in the face of the void if we see that it combats those three forms of consolations. In order to develop this argument, I have organized Murdoch's corpus in three categories—the idea of Good, inner life, and true consolation—through which I have explored how love helps to meet the void in true consolation rather than fantasies and illusions about self, others and the world. This is another contribution I can make, insofar as I differently organized Murdoch's materials from some ethicists such as Antonaccio, Rothchild, and Schweiker, although I am indebted to their compelling analysis of Murdoch's thought. Antonaccio (1996) organizes

Murdoch's corpus in light of moral identity and the Good, and in her recent work (2012) explicates Murdoch in the theme of "*askesis*" with respect to her pursuit of ideals.[31] Rothchild (2004) uses Tillichian tripartite categories of the human dimension—culture, morality, and religion—to explore the themes of residual goodness, moral fault, and to focus on the foundational role of love in moral transformation. Schweiker in his early discussion on Murdoch (1996) situates his argument of God's goodness and conscience with respect to the question of power and value, and in his later interpretive work on Murdoch (2010) he points out the role of art and love as a guide for the discovery of supersensible destiny to challenge the moral fate of fictive persons. In comparison to these thinkers, I have sought to reclaim love in the face of the void in terms of the protest against illusions and false religiosity about self-survival. Finally, the task of theological ethics is beyond learning to die and learning to live, but rather is learning to love to see the world truthfully and responsibly in the posthuman, postreligious world.

לְשֵׁמַע־אֹזֶן שָׁמַעְתִּיךָ וְעַתָּה עֵינִי רָאָתְךָ׃

"I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eyes *sees* you."

(Job 42:5, NRSV, my emphasis added)

[31] Antonaccio, A Philosophy to Live By, 10.

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