

IRIS MURDOCH AND THE DOMAIN OF THE MORAL*

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In *The Sovereignty of Good*¹ Iris Murdoch suggests that the central task of the moral agent involves a true and loving perception of another individual, who is seen as a particular reality external to the agent. Writing in the 1960s she claimed that this dimension of morality had been “theorized away” in contemporary ethics. I will argue today that 20 years later, this charge still holds true of much contemporary ethical theory.

Murdoch’s view is that morality has everything to do with our concerned responsiveness – what Murdoch also calls “loving attention” – to other particular individuals, where this responsiveness involves an element of particularity not reducible to any form of complex universality. In Murdoch’s writing personal relationships are the principal setting in which this moral endeavor takes place. Thus loving attention to a friend or to one’s child involves understanding his or her needs and caring that they are met. The moral task is not a matter of finding universalizable reasons or principles of action, but of getting oneself to attend to the reality of individual other persons. Such attention requires not allowing one’s own needs, biases and desires regarding the other person to get in the way of appreciating his or her own particular needs and situation.

Because one’s love for the other person is inextricably bound up with the importance of that person to one’s own life, seeing the other in herself – distinct and separate from oneself – is, Murdoch emphasizes, a difficult task. Yet one ought to help the friend simply because the friend needs help and not as a way of shoring up the friendship or guarding against the loss of the friend; only the former motivation will count as exemplifying morality in its Murdochian aspect.

While Murdoch is correct to emphasize the domain of personal relations as a moral domain, and as one which has been insufficiently

attended to in contemporary ethics, neither she nor I wishes to confine particularity to personal relations. Rather, compassion toward a stranger, or, more broadly, toward someone with whom one has no preexisting relationship of substance, is to be encompassed as well. All that is necessary is that the agent understand or attempt to understand the other person's good, and that she act from a genuine and direct regard for the good of this particular other person (or persons). She must act out of regard for the other's good and act so as to promote that good.² The other need not be in a negative or undesirable state such as distress or suffering, in order for the Murdochian response to be appropriate; she may simply be able to be better off, e.g., by introducing her to a new source of satisfaction or pleasure whose lack she may not have previously felt. Here too the moral task is not to generate action based on universal and impartial principles but to attend and respond to particular persons.

As in the case of personal relations, the agent has the task of avoiding confusing her own needs and situation with those of the other person. Obstacles can stand in the way of understanding a stranger's situation and what would benefit him in that situation. For example, while genuinely desiring to help the other, one can be so taken with the thought of one's power to help that one fails to see that what one could do best for him is to enable him to come to grips with the situation himself rather than relying on one's direct helping efforts. Compassion, concern, love, friendship, kindness are all sentiments or virtues which normally and in some cases necessarily manifest the Murdochian dimension of morality.³

I want to contrast Murdoch's view with two currently influential views in moral philosophy. The first, which can be called "impartialism",⁴ represents the common ground between Kantianism and utilitarianism. Attention has often been focused on the great differences between these two theories, but recently important convergences between them have been recognized.⁵ Both views identify morality with a perspective of impartiality, impersonality, objectivity, and universality. Both views of morality imply the "ubiquity of impartiality" – that our commitments and projects derive their legitimacy only by reference to this impartial perspective. Both views imply that the

impartially-derived 'right' takes moral precedence over personal 'good'.⁶

The second view with which Murdoch's is to be contrasted has emerged more recently in direct reaction to impartialism. Represented by some influential writings of Bernard Williams,⁷ and by Thomas Nagel,⁸ and Samuel Scheffler,⁹ this view advances two claims: First, some boundaries must be drawn around the domain of impartiality and impersonality; impartiality is not (legitimately) ubiquitous. Second, there is a domain of personal life and projects the nature and legitimacy of which as a source of reasons for action do not depend on its relation to the objective, impartial perspective. Williams, especially, emphasizes that individuals properly pursue some goals simply because they provide meaning to their own lives, or because they cohere with a set of concerns or values they regard as essential to their sense of their own integrity. Nagel's conception of the legitimacy of reasons stemming from the personal domain does not require as deeply-grounded reasons, but can encompass mere personal desires and interests. In either case, the legitimacy of acting from such personal reasons is connected with our personal autonomy. We do not always need to be justified in thinking that the pursuit of our goal is, purely impersonally or objectively speaking, a good thing, something that everyone has reason to support or affirm our pursuit of. While the domain of the personal is of an entirely different nature than that of the objective-impartial, it is no less legitimate as a source of reasons for action. So Williams, Nagel, and Scheffler argue.¹⁰

Nagel, Scheffler, and Williams do differ on some important points, which might obscure the similarities in their view of morality. Nagel and Scheffler unequivocally grant independent, reason-generating legitimacy to the impartial point of view, while Williams mounts a sustained attack on impartiality. So Williams is much more strongly critical of a Kantian perspective in ethics than are either of the others. By contrast Nagel calls for a stronger role for the 'objective' perspective in our lives,¹¹ and criticizes Williams for a too-ready dismissal of the claims of impartiality.¹²

Within the commitment to impartiality, Scheffler sees the impersonal domain in purely consequentialist terms, and Nagel leans in the

same direction,¹³ but for Williams Kantianism, rather than consequentialism or utilitarianism, remains the paradigm 'impartialist' philosophy. Both Nagel and Williams imply that on some occasions it is appropriate to act for purely personal reasons, paying no homage whatsoever to the impartial perspective. For Scheffler the impartial point of view must always be taken into account, but "the independence of the personal point of view" (from the impersonal/impartial one) is taken to mean that it is appropriate for the agent to give the personal point of view more *weight* in determining one's action than it would have from the impartial point of view.

Despite these differences, all three philosophers share the view that morality itself is to be characterized in impartial or impersonal terms, and that there is a legitimate personal domain of reasons which lie outside morality altogether and the force of which lies at least partly outside morality.¹⁴

I want to argue that Murdoch's account of morality is significantly distinct from the Nagel-Williams-Scheffler view (the "NWS view") as well as from Kantianism and utilitarianism. None of these views leaves adequate room for the Murdochian virtues. It is especially important to distinguish Murdoch's view from the NWS view. Since both are critical of Kantianism and utilitarianism, they have sometimes been insufficiently distinguished from one another.¹⁵

Murdoch's difference with Williams, Nagel, and Scheffler lies not in the two theses mentioned above. Defending Murdoch's view, I would agree that impartiality has no claim to ubiquity, and that not all personal reasons for action require vindication from the impartial point of view. My quarrel is that their view leaves no room for Murdochian particularity as a dimension of *morality* and of a moral consciousness. I will argue that this particularity, as seen either in compassion for strangers or care for friend and family, is *neither* impersonal (or impartial) nor personal, neither objective nor subjective. It is a dimension of moral life which is "theorized away" by an exhaustive division of reasons for action into these two types. Thus Williams's, Nagel's, and Scheffler's views are marred by a too-narrow view of morality itself, a view shared with their utilitarian and Kantian opponents: all accept an identification of morality with an impartial, impersonal, and objective point of view. These writers all give the impression that the sole or

major issues of personal conduct concern the clash between personal and impartial reasons for action, between an impersonal 'right' and a merely personal 'good'. Nagel says,

In ethics the contest between objective detachment and the individual perspective is acute. We feel it in the dilemma between deciding on the basis of action and deciding on the basis of outcome; in the dilemma between living one's private life and serving the general good.¹⁶

Nowhere in Nagel, Scheffler, and Williams is articulated the moral task of caring for or attending to particular other individuals - a task which is neither (as I will argue) a matter of personal good nor of detached objectivity.

Let me begin my argument with an example described in some detail, which will serve as a point of reference in the later discussion. Ann is a friend, though not a close friend, of Tony. One evening they run into each other by chance and talk. Though Tony does not state this directly, Ann perceives that he is in quite bad shape, and in need of some comfort and a sympathetic ear. Ann volunteers to spend the evening with Tony (thereby jettisoning her own plans) - an evening which, as it turns out, drags on well into the night. But Ann is correct in her assessment that she is able to offer significant support and comfort to Tony during the evening; it is clear by the end that she has really helped him.

For Murdoch, Ann's action here can be described in moral terms. Ann has given "loving" attention to Tony, seeing there a need which has not been explicitly addressed to her, and being able to discern that this is a need which she is able to meet. She has had to allow Tony's plight to weigh with her so that her offer to help comes across as sincere yet as not making him feel that she is engaging in substantial self-sacrifice; for, were this to happen, the two of them might not be able to establish sufficient ease and trust with each other to allow Ann genuinely to comfort Tony during the evening.

By stipulating that Ann and Tony are not close friends I mean to describe a situation in which Ann need not have a *duty* of friendship to stay with Tony (though even if she does, this would not necessarily preclude a Murdochian reading of Ann's action, in which she acts not from duty, but rather from direct concern for Tony). By not being set in the context of a richly-textured and deep personal relationship, I mean

the example to be, while closer to the 'personnal relations' end of Murdochian morality, still not too far from the 'stranger' end either.

My first arguments will be addressed mainly to Nagel's views. More fully than Williams or Scheffler, Nagel attempts to distinguish the personal/subjective and the impersonal/impartial/objective points of view, and most explicitly accords independent reason-giving force to each. The implications of my argument for Williams and Scheffler will be indicated afterward.

For Nagel, the objective/impersonal point of view is characterized in terms of detaching from one's own point of view (134),¹⁷ accepting the way one lives "from the outside" (105), seeing oneself as merely one among others (112), providing a standpoint of choice from which all choosers can agree on what should happen (134), seeing the world from nowhere within it (112). Thus an objective reason is one equally applicable to anyone. Anyone has reason to do something to relieve someone's pain, or at least has reason to want this to happen. The state of affairs to be promoted in action has objective value. It is good in itself, or it removes something bad in itself.

Counterposed to objective reasons are two types of personal or subjective ones, of which the one relevant here is a reason of "autonomy", grounded in an individual's own desires, projects, aims, concerns, commitments (120, 122). A subjective reason does not require vindication from an objective point of view; it stands as a (legitimate) reason for the agent in question whether or not it is a reason for anyone else. Nagel says that someone might have a subjective (but not likely an objective) reason to try to become a first-rate pianist, or to play all of Beethoven's sonatas by heart (122, 123).

It is natural to think of reasons as reasons for which someone can act.⁸ In that regard reasons can be seen either motivationally or justificational; they can refer either to why someone *does* act, or to legitimate reasons *for* acting. In order to bring Nagel's views into relationship with Murdoch's as seen in the Ann-Tony example, the reasons in question must be both motivational and justificational. Clearly Nagel means reasons to be justifying of action; 'subjective' and 'objective' refer to legitimate types of reasons for action, whether someone in fact acts from them on a particular occasion or not. But in addition, they can be construed psychologically or motivationally. To say that some-

one acts from (or according to) an objective reason is to say that he acts from a reason which he *takes to be* objective – that is he takes it to be applicable to everyone equally, to be generated by a detachment from his own perspective, and the like. To say he acted (in the motivational sense) from a ‘subjective’ reason would, then, be to say that he did *not* take his reason to be objective.¹⁹ Since Nagel is, at least in part, speaking of what considerations we should use to guide our actions, we must assume that ‘reasons’ are to be understood motivationally as well as justificationally. The agent must intentionally adopt the objective standpoint, not merely act from considerations which, unbeknownst to him, conform to that standpoint.²⁰

I will argue that Ann’s reason for action in the example described above need not be *either* objective *or* subjective. Let us consider objectiveness first. We have portrayed Ann as acting from concern for Tony, that is, as taking (what she perceives to be) Tony’s difficulties as a reason to help. Concern is not necessarily generalizable in the way that principles are; in order for it to be intelligible that Ann act out of concern for Tony, we need not imagine that she have the same concern for all other persons, or even any other persons, whom she regarded as in a situation similar to Tony’s. She need not be regarding Tony’s condition as an ‘objective’ bad, a bad which simply anyone would have reason to want Tony to be rid of. She need not be seeing her reason for action nor her action itself as being generated from, nor as justifiable in terms of, an objective standpoint detached from herself, on which all could agree.

The intelligibility of Ann’s action as stemming from a non-objective reason is in a sense provided for by Nagel’s own view, and indeed by the NWS view in general. For these views recognize the existence of reasons – namely, ones directed toward what one conceives to be one’s own good or interest – which require no vindication by an objective perspective. In doing so they open the door to non-objective reasons which are *other*-directed rather than *self*-directed. Just as I may want to be a first-rate pianist without thinking that others have a reason to promote my being so, so I may, out of friendship or care, endeavor to help a friend or acquaintance to achieve her goal of becoming a first-rate pianist, without thinking that others have a reason to do the same. Just as Ann may be concerned to rid herself of her own depression

without thinking that anyone else has a reason to do so, or even to want this to happen, so she may, out of concern for Tony, want Tony to be rid of his depression, without thinking that others have a reason to want or to promote this either.

Other-directed, non-objective reasons are as distinct from objective reasons as are 'reasons of autonomy' interpreted as self-concerned non-objective reasons. Essentially this point was made by Butler. He argued that just as I can have a desire, or 'affection', for an object (e.g., food) which will serve my own good, so I can have a desire for another person's good. Neither desire is the same as an emanation of 'conscience' or 'reflection', which are characterized as objective and detached, (though they can be affirmed by, and perhaps in that way somewhat changed by, conscience).²¹ A desire for the good of a particular other person, then, is analogous to a desire for one's own good (or for an object which serves that good) in being a distinct sort of reason from an objective reason.

Could an impartialist reply to this argument by suggesting that perhaps Murdochian actions and reasons for action, say concerned responses to individual other persons' needs, can *themselves* be justified or generated from an objective point of view? It might be suggested that it is only from an objective point of view that Murdochian reasons can be seen to be legitimate reasons for action; so that the Murdochian agent, as well as the agent acting more directly from objective considerations, would be acting, ultimately, from objective considerations.

One can find an analogous line of thought in Nagel, that reasons of autonomy are themselves objective, even though they are also described as subjective in contrast to objective. This thought depends on the notion of an 'agent-relative' reason, which is one containing an essential reference to the person for whom it is a reason (102). The example given is something's being in one's own interest, a reason which involves *everyone's* having an ('agent-relative') reason to do that which is in his or her interest, but not an ('agent-neutral') reason do promote that which is in the specific agent's own interest. But that particular agent-relative reason is simply a reason for autonomy (a reason to do that which is in one's own interest).²²

But Nagel also sometimes calls agent-relative reasons 'objective' reasons.

Both agent-relative and agent-neutral reasons are objective, since both can be understood from outside the viewpoint of the individual who has them (102).²³

In this way reasons of autonomy, while subjective, also have a kind of objectiveness. By analogy it could be argued that Murdochian reasons could be encompassed within the framework of objective reasons, just as reasons of autonomy, or subjective reasons, are.²⁴

That Murdochian considerations (if they are acknowledged as legitimate reasons for action) can be thought to have some kind of 'objectivity' once they are considered to be legitimate reasons for action, then, involves a two-level process by which an objective or impartial perspective at one level can yield particularist and non-impartial principles at the level of direct reasons for action.²⁵ From an impartial or objective point of view, it might be claimed, any rational person, looking at things impartially, can see that principles which are not themselves impartial in form should be adopted.²⁶

But the idea that Murdochian modes of action can be seen by reflective persons to be acceptable (and morally significant) does not support impartialism. That there is a reflective standpoint from which Murdochian as well as impartial morality can be acknowledged does not mean that such a standpoint can be characterized as 'objective' in the sense of 'impartial' and 'impersonal'. A closer look at Nagel's view brings this out clearly.

Nagel wants to argue against the impartialists that the objective point of view – the point of view characterized as detachment from the self, as being from nowhere in the world, and the like – is only part of the 'truth' about who we, as moral agents, are (134). The whole truth is that we are *both* subjective and objective; our lives and agency can be viewed from both a personal and an impersonal point of view (134f, 112). This means that the reflective point of view from which this whole truth about us can be seen is not 'objective' in the same sense in which 'objective' characterizes only *one* of the two components of that truth.²⁷ Perhaps we can speak of two meanings of 'objectivity' here – one ("objectivity₁") in which objective means impartial and imper-

sonal and is specifically counterposed to 'subjective', and another ('objectivity₂') in which it refers to a reflective standpoint from which *both* subjective and objective₁ perspectives and reasons can be seen as legitimate.

Nagel's acknowledgment of this point brings out the confusion in his use of 'objective' to apply to reasons of autonomy. Reasons of autonomy can not be objective in the same sense that agent-neutral reasons are (i.e., objective₁), if they are also to be 'subjective' in contrast with the 'objectivity' of agent-neutral reasons. They can only be objective in the broader 'objectivity₂' sense.

This point applies to Murdochian reasons in the same way. It is only in the broader 'objectivity₂' sense that Murdochian reasons for action could be said to be objective, not the more specific sense of 'objectivity₁', in which it signifies impartiality and impersonality. Even if rational agents can agree to accept Murdochian reasons for action, this will not mean that such reasons will have been derived from impartiality.²⁸ In this way Murdochian reasons are ones which lie outside the Nagelian framework of 'objectivity₁' altogether.

That Ann stands in a certain *relationship* with Tony which grounds her action and response toward him could be taken as the basis of a rejoinder to my argument so far, drawing on Nagel's idea of 'agent-relativity'. For perhaps Ann takes her reason for helping Tony to be a reason for anyone standing in the same sort of relation to a friend as she stands to Tony. Such a reason would, then, no longer have the particularity of a Murdochian reason, and could be thought to have a kind of objectivity.

Such a reason for action is an agent-relative reason, since the reason is to apply to all who stand in a certain *type* of relation to anyone else.²⁹ However, the reason is not objective (in sense 1), since the agent is no longer merely one among others, acting in a way anyone would act toward anyone else. Ann does not detach from her own point of view, since her specific relationship with Tony remains the basis of her reason for action. What is true of agent-relative reasons is that they have *universality* – they apply to all agents of a certain *type* – but not *impartiality* (applying to all agents tout court).

It might be thought, however, that the universality of agent-relative reasons can be *derived* from impartiality. The argument might be that

from a purely impartial perspective we can see that it is good to have principles (or reasons) which take the form that agents who stand in certain specific relations with other persons have a reason to do certain things toward that person which other agents do not. An impartial view would lead us to say that parents have special responsibilities to their children, friends to their friends, doctors to their patients, etc.

Yet even if such a derivation were possible, it would not serve to reduce all Murdochian reasons to impartialist ones. For that derivation would function only on the level of justification and not that of motivation. If it is intelligible that Ann, or any agent, act from a Murdochian reason in the absence of any awareness of its being in some sense derivable from impartiality, then, in the relevant motivational sense, the Murdochian reason will not have been exhibited as derived from impartiality.

But in any case I want to argue that even a justificatory derivation of agent-relativity from impartiality can not be carried out. It is not enough that special personal (and other) relationships express a value without which humanity would be diminished. For this will be no more an *impartialist* (objective₁) justification of special relationships than was the analogous one given for Murdochian reasons. All that will have been shown is that there is some standpoint (perhaps an 'objective₂' one) from which such special relationships and their moral claims and reasons can be acknowledged, but not that that standpoint is an objective or impartial one.

A genuinely impartialist derivation of agent-relative reasons would have to see the special relationships as generating agent-neutral value. For example, someone's welfare can best be promoted by someone who knows them (rather than someone who does not) and who is in a position to help. A friend knows them best and is in a better position than others to help. Therefore, there is special reason, which applies only to friends, for a friend to help someone in need. And this special, agent-relative reason will have been grounded in nothing but agent-neutral, impartial considerations.

However, this impartialist derivation does not really capture what we normally regard as the grounds of the responsibilities of, and values of, special relationships. For one thing, it would not account for why someone who has been "out of touch" with his friend for a while

nevertheless has a stronger responsibility to him than someone who knows the person equally well but is not a friend; nor why, of two people equally in a position to benefit a third person, we think that (*ceteris paribus*) a friend or relative has the stronger responsibility to do so.

More important, we feel that particular relationships are not simply generators of agent-neutral good, but are rather expressive of a good which is internal to those special relationships; and that the moral dimension of those relationships, as generators of reasons for action, is bound up with this particularity, at least the particularity of that *type* of relationship. Thus the care of a parent for a child is not the same kind of thing as the care of a friend for a friend, or a sister for a brother, and the special responsibilities bound up with each are inextricably linked with the particular form of that care.³⁰

In summary, even if Ann's act of friendship toward Tony were grounded in an agent-relative reason based on her special relationship to him, this would confer only universality, and not impartiality, on that reason.

Nevertheless, Murdochian particularity is not derivable from nor grounded solely in agent-relative, relationship-based universality. Were it to be so, it would be necessary that Ann possess a particular view of the *kind* of relationship in which she stands to Tony, a view which says that the particular action of helping Tony is the one she has reason to do. While Ann *might* possess such a view, holding for example that relationships of that type (e.g., ones involving a certain specifiable degree of closeness) provide reasons for acting in a certain kind of helpful manner in a certain kind of situation, it seems implausible to claim that she must necessarily do so.

To say this is not to deny that we see our relationships with particular persons in light of general categories – e.g., parent/child, close friend, oldest friend, best friend – which affect how we act toward the person in question. And we make use of such categories in our motivation without explicitly thinking about them on each (appropriate) occasion. Thinking of someone as a 'best friend' might mean that I am more willing than with a mere acquaintance to go to great lengths to help him out when he is in need. And it is true that people may be operating with general characterizations of their relationships which

are somewhat more specific than the ones mentioned above, even without being explicitly aware of this. Nevertheless, such characterizations are not generally fine-grained enough to ground, by themselves, (agent-relative) reasons for specific actions.

We can see this in the case of Ann. Ann will perhaps be affected in her response to Tony by some general idea of the *sort* of relationship in which she stands to him; if Tony had been a stranger rather than a friend, Ann perhaps would not have been moved by his plight, nor taken it as a reason to lend him a sympathetic ear for the evening. But Ann's action toward Tony undetermined by this conception. There is an element of particularistic care or Murdochian attention which comes into play, even if it comes into play only within the context of that sort of relationship.³¹

Obligations of special relationships – the clearest case of directly action-specifying reasons of an agent-relative, relationship-based sort – do not cover the same moral territory as that covered by Murdochian particularity. We often, out of direct concern for a friend, colleague, or child, do for them what is not demanded by any obligation toward them, either by doing more than what is required (giving up one's vacation in order to help one's friend move to a new apartment), or by doing something lying outside the obligation structure altogether (phoning one's friend to see how he is doing, not out of concern, but because one has not spoken to him for a long time). So some aspects of particularity lie outside of the agent-relative morality of special obligations.

The upshot of the discussion of agent-relativity is that there are at least two distinct forms of reason for action, which are both themselves distinct from Nagelian objectivity. One is Murdochian particularity, the other agent-relative, relationship-based reasons.

Still, a champion of agent-relative universality may have a rejoinder to the argument so far. He may invoke the 'generality of reasons' to say that if Ann is genuinely acting *for a reason*, then that reason must be generalizable to others. And so her reason must be agent-relatively universal in that sense even if she is not aware of it. She is *committed* to *some* specification of the features of her situation such that anyone in a situation containing such features will have the same reason to act as she.

This implication of generality holds only for a certain construal of what it is to act 'for a reason', and it is one which does not necessarily hold in all cases of doing so. On that construal when I judge my action to be right, I am committed to judging a comparable action right for others in situations relevantly similar to myself; and I am committed, at least implicitly, to some view of what that 'relevant similarity' consists in. Stephen Darwall articulates this view when he claims that an agent's reason for acting must be regarded by the agent as, objectively speaking, justified, i.e., as a reason for action in the justificational sense.³² In this sense of 'an agent's reason', the agent is committed to agent-relative generality.

Does Ann act 'for a reason' in this sense? Ann acts for a reason in that she acts, willingly and with full awareness of what she is doing, in response to, and for the sake of, a certain consideration (namely, Tony's distress). In order to attribute this reason or explanation to Ann's action, in the situation described, certain other things will have to be true of her, and certain possibilities excluded. For example, we exclude the possibility that Ann hates Tony and is looking for personal revelations which she can use against him on some future occasion; that unbeknownst to him Tony is in a position to do Ann a large favor; and the like. To say that Ann has acted for a reason is, then, to give a certain explanation of her action, one which involves her knowing why she acted, and which rules out certain alternatives. (It is in this way in inference to the best explanation.)

This way of acting 'for a reason' does not fit Darwall's (agent-relative) universality. Ann does not (necessarily) take the step of considering whether the consideration for which she acts is a valid or justifiable one. An agent need not take up on her action a perspective from which the issue of the justifiability of her reason for action is raised. That is, she need not look at her action from a point of view outside it, in order to assess its justifiability. She need not think of, or form the judgement that, her action is "right" or "the right thing to do", and so she need not be committed to generalizing such rightness to others. She need only be acting out of concern for Tony's good, which is to say that she must have some cognitive relationship to Tony's situation; she must understand – with an understanding

grounded in her attention to Tony – that he is in distress. And, if she has acted in the way described, her failure to act for a reason in this Darwallian generalizable sense need not (though someone else responding to a comparable situation could) be acting thoughtlessly, impulsively, irrationally.³³

In summary, my argument has been that Ann's action in helping Tony does not (necessarily) stem from an objective, impartial, impersonal perspective, nor even from an agent-relatively universal perspective. Murdoch does herself make use of a notion of 'impersonal', but gives it a different significance than it has in Nagel's and other impartialist theories. Murdoch uses that concept to refer to an attention to or concern for another person in her own right and for her own sake, not colored by the agent's own desires, fears, fantasies, and illusions in regard to that person. This notion of impersonality is still particularistic rather than objective and universal, for it is not a perspective in some sense above, or taking account of, all persons, but concerns only one person's relation to another particular person. (I will however continue to use that concept in a Nagelian way).

I now want to argue that Ann's reason for helping Tony, and Murdochian reasons in general, are not 'subjective' or 'personal' reasons – reasons of autonomy – either. Reasons of autonomy are understood as grounded in personal desires or interests. But on the most basic level Ann is not acting out of personal desire or interest. Helping Tony is not something which Ann *wants* to be doing. In a clear sense we can imagine that what she wants to be doing is spending the evening in the way she had originally planned. It would be a mischaracterization of how Ann comes to this action to see it as a reflection of personal desire – as something which she does *because* she *wants* to. She comes to the action from her response to another person, a response which, while not independent of her relationship with that person, is independent of the desires which she brings to that situation. She acts as she does because of a fact external to herself, not, as in Nagel's reasons of autonomy, from a desire or interest within herself.

Can it not be replied to this that Ann's friendship with Tony is indeed a good to Ann, so that when she acts out of friendship for Tony she does act for the sake of a personal good, and in this way from a

reason of autonomy? Nagel does in fact include friendships in his list of generators of reasons of autonomy. He says that the value of the things we choose

depends on our individual aims, projects, concerns, including particular concerns for other people that reflect our relations with them, and they acquire value only because of the interest we develop in them and the place this gives them in our lives. (122)

This depiction of acting from friendship does not ring true. In caring for our friend's welfare do we think that we are responding to a value which is grounded in the interest which we take in her? As Murdoch emphasizes, an appropriate concern for a friend is a concern for something seen as having value in its own right, and not only in terms of its role in one's own relationship to that person. This is not to deny that many specific actions undertaken with regard to a friendship can be put in the mold of reasons of autonomy. One can act so as to affirm a relationship with someone, or to shore up a faltering relationship. But if *all* of someone's actions toward her friends were guided in their aim and motivation by the importance of the relationship to her own life, one would think that the one thing necessary for genuine friendship was absent, namely, a concern for the friend for her own sake.

It is certainly true that we may seek friendships as personal goods, and seek to hold on to friendships *because* we value them. But it is only a hollow shell of a friendship where the one party sees the other person's welfare as having value only because of the interest he develops in that person. While the value (from the friend's standpoint) of a friend's welfare is not simply an agent-neutral value – a valuing of *anyone's* welfare, simply because the other is human – *neither* it is simply a *personal* value. It must be seen as having value in its own right, though that value is specifically the value of *a friend's welfare*. So that while we may seek friendships as personal goods, many situations involving friendship present themselves as *calling for* actions one does not seek and might wish had not arisen, and which could very well not have arisen within that particular friendship. And yet one performs those actions willingly, and often gladly, 'out of friendship'.

A more general issue is at stake here. The language of "reasons of autonomy" suggests that action taken from such reasons involves consciously seeking or striving to realize a certain goal, one seen as a good

for oneself. This is even more clearly true of William's language of "projects" – a long-term endeavor seen as something one is continually striving to bring about. But much (though not all) action of a Murdochian sort has much more to do with responding to an unsought reality external to one's explicit projects and endeavors. In this regard Murdochian reasons are akin to objective/impartial ones – they lie outside and can act as a constraint on individual personal goals. And yet the Murdochian consideration (the other's distress, say) does not appear to the individual in the form of a purely detached and external datum. It is much more bound up with the particular agent in her individuality, for, as we have seen, the Murdochian agent responds to the (particular) other in a way which does not (necessarily) involve the notion that this is the way in which *all* must respond. But while this responsiveness involves the agent's own individuality, it does not necessarily, as do reasons of autonomy, involve the pursuit of personal goods and goals.

The upshot of this argument is that the disjunction of subjective and objective, personal and impersonal reasons does not exhaust types of reasons for action. Murdochian reasons – acting from loving attention to particular persons – are neither personal nor impersonal. It is in this way that Nagel's view, in Murdoch's words, "theorizes away" an entire dimension of moral consciousness and moral life. Personal conduct is not simply a struggle between an impersonal rightness and a personal good, between impersonal principles and personal desires.

Essentially the same diagnosis applies to Scheffler's and Williams' views. Scheffler gives the impression that the task of the morally serious agent is to give an appropriate place to the demands of an impartial consequentialist good, while not having one's own life and concerns swamped by this acknowledgment. Scheffler's solution to this problem is the independent weight accorded to the personal point of view; this has the moral effect of allowing an agent to pursue his own projects to a greater degree than a purely impartial consequentialist would allow, while not restraining him from pursuing a pure consequentialist project, should he wish to do so.

However, one finds no recognition in Scheffler that a good deal of the moral life involves not being responsive to pure consequentialist demands but responding to very particular other persons whose lives

our lives are bound up with or touch in some way. This task is not nearly as unrealistically demanding as the pure consequentialist project; but at the same time it has a claim on us which 'the personal point of view' fails to include. One can reply that Scheffler simply did not set out to discuss this area of life, or even of the moral life. Yet his book conveys a general sense of what the tasks and concerns of the morally responsible agent are. And, like Nagel, the concerns of Murdochian morality are entirely omitted.

Williams is much more concerned than either Nagel or Scheffler to defend the legitimacy of personal pursuits and of the personal point of view, and as part of this throws into question the entire objective/impartial domain. But these two concerns omit an entire dimension of the moral life which would remain even if the impartial/impersonal were abandoned. And the writings of Williams with which we are concerned can leave an impression that one has been presented with a sophisticated defense of high-minded selfishness. While this would not be a just interpretation, these writings fail to provide a coherent conception of morality which remains once the Kantian one is abandoned.³⁴

Murdoch's views of morality pose a challenge, then, to a view of morality shared in some way by Kantianism, utilitarianism and their critics such as Nagel, Williams, and Scheffler; and that is the identification of morality with an impersonal, impartial, objective point of view. But Murdoch should not be thought of as providing a complete conception of morality to replace the impartialist one. Murdoch's view is necessarily incomplete as an account of the whole of morality, for it fails to give sufficient attention to morality's less personal and individualized aspects. Nevertheless, one need not accept an impartialist account of the whole of the non-Murdochian domains of morality. We have seen, for example, that agent-relative claims grounded in special relationships are an aspect of morality which is neither fully impartialist nor purely Murdochian. Though unsatisfying as a final position, perhaps some progress is made by thinking of morality as involving several differing types of considerations which may interact in complex ways in practice but which are not reducible to one another.

And yet there is one challenge to my argument from the impartialist camp which needs to be addressed, if only briefly: Could it not be said that while there is value in the phenomena of compassion, loving

attention, friendship, and the like, to which Murdoch draws attention, nevertheless that value is not *moral* value.³⁵ It is good, it could be said, to be compassionate, to act from care for a friend – but not *morally* good.

The complexities of the term “moral” and its variations need a more extensive exploration than I have seen, or can give here. The case for regarding Murdochian qualities of character and modes of being as part of morality stems from the following considerations: We admire and wish to emulate a compassionate and caring person, as we do a person who is conscientiously responsive to objective/impartial demands. While we would be less likely to say of the former than the latter that she is a “very moral” or a “moral” person, we express a comparable thought by saying that she is a “good” or even a “morally good” person. Even without the use of the term “moral”, it would be difficult to deny that calling someone “good” could be part of a moral judgment or a moral assessment of her character.

We include Murdochian traits (kindness, considerateness, compassion, and the like) in our ideals of human character. We wish our children to have these characteristics, and see their inculcation as part of ‘moral education’. Furthermore, there is no clear alternative category in which to place the value involved in compassion and loving attention; its value is not, for example, aesthetic.

Moreover, the particularistic account of morality encompasses one feature present in ordinary moral consciousness but absent in the impartialist conception, and that is what Michael Slote calls “self-other asymmetry”.³⁶ On the impartialist view, morality consists in taking up a perspective in which no one is favored over any other. This implies (more so in consequentialism than Kantianism) that there is no moral difference between benefiting myself and benefiting someone else, if every other feature of the situation remains the same, for example, if both alternatives maximize total benefit. But, as Slote points out, according to our ordinary moral intuitions, we are permitted to sacrifice a greater benefit to ourselves for a lesser benefit to someone else, while disallowing a greater sacrifice to someone else for a smaller benefit to ourselves (or to a third person).

Murdochian morality also embodies this self-other asymmetry; for it sees moral value in action and attitude toward others which it does

not accord in regard to the self. In this way Murdochian morality is more in line with a basic moral intuition than is a pure impartialist conception of morality.

Yet it is worth noting a difference between the role of self-other asymmetry in Murdoch and in Slote's discussion of consequentialism. In the latter, self-other asymmetry is an explicitly anti-consequentialist principle of permissibility, allowing the promotion of another's lesser benefit at the expense of one's own greater benefit. Murdoch's view differs from this in two ways. First, and most obviously, Murdoch is concerned with what is morally good and not merely morally permissible, and would no doubt regard many cases of sacrifice on behalf of a lesser benefit to others as morally good.

Second, and more significantly, Murdoch's view is not concerned with weighing up benefits and losses. It is, in fact, not concerned with the agent's own benefit at all. It bids us to focus on others not at the *expense* of the self, but, so to speak, without considering the self at all. The moral task is not self-negation but self-transcending. One way in which Murdoch's view captures an important part of moral action is that in many cases of acting for the sake of another, it could not meaningfully be said whether the agent had lost more than the other had gained or not. Both consequentialism and the anti-consequentialist view that Slote articulates in opposition to it presuppose that the agent's benefit and loss are something determinate prior to the situation at hand. But often when we do something for another, while we are not thinking about ourselves, we are not clearly giving something up of ourselves either. If, for example, I stay an extra hour in my office to help a student to whom I have already devoted a fair amount of time but whom I want to help, I am not *necessarily* giving up a potential benefit which is either more *or* less than what the student will gain. In fact, in some cases, engaging in the process of weighing up the benefits and losses, even if one ends up giving up more oneself than the other gains, might betoken a failure of the focus on the other that Murdoch wants from us.³⁷

There is, then, a *prima facie* case for according moral value to the phenomena which Murdoch articulates.³⁸ The challenge, then, can be thrown back to the impartialist: Outside of an exclusive prior commitment to impartialism, what grounds are there for restricting the con-

cept of morality solely to the objective/impartial domain of action?

Yet ultimately it is not the term 'moral' itself but rather the place and importance in human life which the moral domain is thought to have which is fundamentally at stake here. My concern is only to accord to loving attention, care, and the Murdochian qualities generally that same importance ordinarily thought to attach to the 'moral'.

NOTES

* An earlier draft of this paper was read to the 'Rationality and moral values' Symposium at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro in April, 1985. I would like to thank participants in that colloquium and especially my commentator, Laurence Thomas, for helpful comments. Portions were also read to a colloquium at the Department of Philosophy and History of Ideas of Brandeis University, whom I thank also for helpful comments. I would also like to thank Marcia Lind and Owen Flanagan for acute criticisms of a later draft.

¹ Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970).

² The element of "regard for the other's good" is meant here to build in a concern to understand what the other's good is; so that it is not being claimed that it is good to act with a mere intention to benefit, independent of any genuine grasp of the need or good of the other. Laurence Thomas has rightly pointed out that this element is insufficiently emphasized in the account of moral value given in my *Friendship, Altruism, and Morality* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980); see his review in *This Philosophical Review* 92 (1983), pp. 135–139. This defect is not present in Murdoch's account, which I follow in this paper.

³ These virtues can be construed as dispositions to respond in a Murdochian manner – with concerned attention to particular individuals – rather than as implicit expressions of an underlying universal and impartialistic, action-guiding principle. This point is argued more fully in my 'Particularity and responsiveness,' in Jerome Kagan (ed.), *The Emergence of Morality in Early Childhood* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986). In this way I see kindness and compassion as different from 'benevolence' understood as 'love of humanity' or a concern for the overall good of humanity. The latter is a sentiment directed at others not in their particularity but in their generality, as members of the human species. Bishop Butler, in *Five Sermons*, ed. S. L. Darwall (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1983), first distinguished between a sentiment directed toward the good of a particular person, and one directed toward persons in general, though his account of this distinction is not always consistent. For example, sometimes it is used to refer to the entire class of other-directed sentiments, including these particularized ones. Murdoch's view differs from Butler's, however, in the greater 'depth' involved in 'loving attention' than Butler implies in the affections toward particular other persons. I am concerned to argue in this paper that there is an element of morality – found in Murdoch's account – which does not fit into the impartial/impersonal/universal mold. This argument will hold whether or not this element is also found in the virtues mentioned.

⁴ This term is that of Stephen L. Darwall, in *Impartial Reason* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), though he applies it only to Kantianism, not utilitarianism.

⁵ See Bernard Williams, 'Persons, character, and morality,' and other essays in *Moral Luck* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981); and Michael Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 1982).

⁶ The priority of right over good mentioned here is moral, not definitional. On a definitional level, utilitarianism differs entirely from Kantianism in defining the right in terms of the good. Both, however, give *moral* priority to the right.

⁷ 'A Critique of Utilitarianism,' in B. Williams and J. Smart, *Utilitarianism: For and Against* (Cambridge University Press, 1973), and 'Persons, character, and morality.' It should be said that in other of William's writings, e.g., 'Egoism and Altruism' and parts of 'Morality and the emotions,' Williams takes a view closer to Murdoch's. Williams' new book, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985) appeared while this paper was in its final stages, and it was impossible to give it adequate attention, though some remarks will be made about it below.

⁸ I will be drawing primarily on Nagel's 'The limits of objectivity', in Sterling McMurrin (ed.), *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1980) rather than his earlier *The Possibility of Altruism* (Oxford: Oxford University press, 1970). Nagel's new book, *The View From Nowhere* (Oxford: Oxford University press, 1986), was published after this article was written, and so could not be taken into account in the body of the paper. Chapters VIII and IX of that book are a re-working of the material from the Tanner Lectures on which this article is based. A brief reading of those chapters indicates that the main lines of criticism I make of the Tanner Lectures apply as well to the book. Most of the passages I cite from the Tanner Lectures correspond to particular passages within the new book, and ones which do not nevertheless reflect essentially the same views in the book. There are definitely some changes from the Lectures to the book, however, and in subsequent footnotes I have tried to indicate some particular alterations which seem relevant to my argument. There may be other significant changes which my brief reading has failed to uncover, however, and the greater complexity of the book's argument would require further scrutiny to determine exactly how the argument of this paper would have to be reworked to apply more directly to it.

⁹ *The Rejection of Consequentialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982).

¹⁰ There are some differences in the terminology used by these three philosophers to refer to the two domains and the attendant forms of reasons for action. Williams refers to the domain in question as "personal" and involving "integrity"; Nagel calls it "subjective", involving "reasons for autonomy", and Scheffler speaks of the "personal point of view." I will refer to it as the "personal", or "subjective", domain.

¹¹ Nagel, 'The limits of objectivity,' pp. 118 and 137, *View From Nowhere*, p. 187.

¹² See his review of Williams' *Moral Luck*, *Times Literary Supplement*, May 7, 1982.

¹³ More precisely, and in terminology which will be explained below, for Nagel "agent-neutral" value is understood in purely consequentialist terms. (See, e.g. *View*, 162.) But "agent-relative" value, which Nagel sometimes does and sometimes does not place in the impersonal/objective/impartial domain, is not. (Ambiguities in the characterization of this domain are explored below.)

In *View* (p. 174) Nagel notes some similarities and differences between his view and Scheffler's. For example, for Scheffler as for utilitarians every personal interest is reflected in the domain of impersonal value; whereas for Nagel only certain interests do so (e.g. avoidance of pain, but not the desire to climb Mt. Kilimanjaro). Despite this, Nagel says he does not believe that Scheffler's "agent-centred prerogative" is strictly incompatible with his own view, though, given his own exemption of some subjective reasons from the need to be weighed at all against impersonal demands, he expresses some reservation about adding on to this moral latitude the further "moral indulgence" of an agent-centered prerogative. (*View*, 174-5.) These differences are not material to the similarities between Nagel's and Scheffler's.

¹⁴ In response to such arguments, and especially to Williams, has emerged a 'neo-Kantian' rejoinder, represented by Stephen Darwall, *Impartial Reason*; Barbara Herman, 'Integrity and impartiality,' *The Monist* 66 (1983) and 'Rules, motives, and

helping actions,' *Philosophical Studies* 45 (1984); Marcia Baron, 'On the alleged moral repugnance of acting from duty,' *The Journal of Philosophy* 81 (1984). These neo-Kantians take Williams' criticisms seriously and attempt to accommodate some of his insights within a basically Kantian framework – one which retains some version of the ubiquity of impartiality, and the priority of the right over the good. Against these neo-Kantians I would want to make the argument that while they, and especially Darwall, do attempt to take phenomena such as compassion and friendship seriously, their commitment to Kantianism makes it impossible to give full and accurate expression to the nature and value of these phenomena. This argument is the topic of another paper, 'Testing for permissibility,' growing out of the 'Rationality and moral values' Symposium.

¹⁵ See, for example, Herman and Baron, above, and O. Flanagan and J. Adler, 'Impartiality and particularity,' *Social Research* (Autumn, 1983). These articles do not mention Murdoch's view explicitly, but mention my view in *Friendship, Altruism, and Morality* which, on the issue at hand, comes to the same thing.

¹⁶ 'The limits of objectivity,' p. 136. See *View*, p. 189.

¹⁷ All page references to Nagel are, unless otherwise noted, to 'The limits of objectivity.' In his review of Williams's *Moral Luck* (note 12 above), Nagel speaks of "an impersonal standpoint from which everyone is judged alike."

¹⁸ Nagel says that his use of "reason" concerns only "value" and not "action" (98), though on p. 121 he uses "reason" in application to action.

¹⁹ I do not think that the person would be further required to take his reason to be explicitly subjective, i.e., as one which he explicitly regarded as *not* applicable to others. For it to be motivationally subjective, the agent need only *not* think of it *as* applicable to others (i.e. as objective).

²⁰ I am indebted to Marcia Lind for showing me the necessity to clarify the distinction between justificational and motivational perspectives regarding Nagel.

²¹ See Butler, *Five Sermons*.

²² See also, 'The limits of objectivity,' p. 119.

²³ See also, 'The limits of objectivity,' p. 103.

²⁴ It is not being suggested here that Murdochian reasons are *themselves* a kind of 'agent-relative' reason, but only that the notion of agent-relativity is used by Nagel to generate a line of thought which regards reasons of autonomy as objective. The former suggestion will be considered, and rejected, below.

²⁵ Such a suggestion was made by Thomas E. Hill, Jr., at the 'Rationality and moral values' Symposium. In some form it is present in R. M. Hare's *Moral Thinking: Its Levels, Methods, and Point* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980).

²⁶ This line of thought is taken explicitly by George Sher, 'Other voices, other rooms,' in Meyers and Kittay (eds.), *Women and Moral Theory* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Allanheld, 1986), in the context of a critique of the work of Carol Gilligan.

²⁷ I owe some version of this reading of Nagel to Warren Quinn, though he would not necessarily approve of the use to which I am putting it.

²⁸ In *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, especially Chapters 5 and 6, Bernard Williams argues that ethical reflection does not always or necessarily take the form of, or go in the direction of, systematic ethical theory. While his distinction between "reflection" and "theory" is not the same as mine between "reflection" and "objectivity", the point which this distinction is meant to serve is similar.

²⁹ It is perhaps significant, however, that Nagel does not mention this particular type of reason – one grounded in a particular *type* of relationship in his discussion of agent-relative reasons in 'Limits', though his general characterization of such reasons does encompass them. This lacuna is to some extent remedied in *View* where such reasons (there called "reasons of obligation") are included as a type of agent-relative reason. However, unlike the other two types of agent-relative reason (reasons of autonomy, and

deontological reasons), in *View* these reasons are given no further discussion. It should be noted that with regard to these reasons Nagel expresses "less confidence...than with regard to the other two" types of agent-relative reason that they resist agent-neutral justification (*View*, 165). My argument of the next several paragraphs is meant to rebut the latter suggestion – that reasons of special relationship can be derived from agent-neutral values alone.

Furthermore, as I argue below, by seeing such agent-relative reasons purely in terms of *obligations*, Nagel has excluded a wider territory of moral reasons for action which include direct concern for others grounded in particular relationships but not matters of obligation.

³⁰ This argument for the internality of the goods of special relationships is made in more detail, though only in relation to friendship, in my *Friendship, Altruism, and Morality*, Chapter 4.

³¹ A fuller version of this argument is contained in Blum, 'Particularity and responsiveness.' A similar argument is given by Alasdair MacIntyre, defending his Aristotelian view against a Kantian rejoinder, in 'Moral rationality, tradition, and aristotle: a reply to Onora O'Neill, Raymond Gaita, and Stephen Clark,' *Inquiry* 26 (1984), p. 450.

³² Darwall, *Impartial Reason*, pp. 28–34. Darwall is here contrasting "the reason why she acted" – an explanation of the agent's action with no implication that the agent is aware of the reason for which she is performing the action – with "the agent's reason," in which the agent knows the reason for which she is acting. Both of these are to be contrasted with "a reason for action," which refers only to justified reasons for performing the action, with no implication that someone is acting for that reason. A similar typology of reasons can be found in E. J. Bond *Reason and Value* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), Chapter 1.

³³ Even if, in acting for what one takes to be a reason for action, an agent *were*, contrary to my argument, committed to thinking of her reason as applicable to others as well as to herself, this would not commit her to thinking that any other *particular* situation, including future situations that she may face, are ones in which the agent in question has a reason to act. For it is quite possible, and by no means unusual, when actually faced with some particular situation, to fail to see it as exactly analogous to one's own (current) situation in the relevant respects. This fact is often masked in philosophy discussions where the descriptions of the situations are assumed to have already incorporated all the relevant features; but in life, situations do not come labeled in this way. A similar point is made by Thomas E. Hill, Jr., in 'Self-respect reconsidered,' in O. H. Green (ed.), *Respect for Persons: Tulane Studies in Philosophy* 31 (1982), p. 132, n. 5. This does not mean that the notion of relevance of considerations is an entirely arbitrary or subjective one. But it does mean that one can be committed to the formal principle of generality of reasons without thinking of one's current reason for action as being in a substantive sense agent-relatively generalizable to others.

³⁴ This gap is to some extent remedied in Williams' latest book, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, which appeared too late in the writing of this paper to give it adequate attention. In it, Williams introduces the domain of the 'ethical,' which is distinct from both the personal and the moral, the latter still understood in essentially Kantian terms. This view has the virtue of recognizing non-impartialist claims that arise from outside the individual and which reside at least partly in the welfare of other persons; yet it is never made entirely clear how the "ethical" is to be characterized, nor how it relates to the moral. My own argument in this paper is that the category of the moral should be broadened to include at least some of what Williams puts in the domain of the ethical.

³⁵ Such a view is taken by Barbara Herman in her articles cited above (n. 14).

³⁶ Michael Slote, 'Self-other asymmetry,' *The Journal of Philosophy* 81 (1984) and *Common-Sense Morality and Consequentialism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985), Chapter 1.

³⁷ However, I do not mean to imply that the failure to focus on the self at all is entirely a strength of the Murdochian perspective. It can also be a weakness in not making clear that the self has some moral standing, so that servility is a moral defect, and standing up for one's (insufficiently recognized) rights can be a virtue. It is not that Murdoch takes the explicit position, found say in Kierkegaard's *Works of Love*, that the self has no such moral standing. Murdoch is not attempting to state a comprehensive view of morality, and it is compatible with her view that there are self-regarding virtues. However, her perspective gives no articulation of or even distinct conceptual space for those virtues. My point in the above paragraph is only to point out that there are elements of our moral experience which, while according with a self-other symmetry in general, are better captured by Murdoch's lack of self-focus than by the anti-consequentialist weighing of the self's and the other's benefits and choosing the other's lesser benefit over the agent's greater one.

³⁸ I do not consider here other arguments against the morality of Murdochian qualities dealt with in my *Friendship, Altruism, and Morality* – for example the argument that these traits are merely qualities of temperament and thus without moral significance; or that they involve emotions and emotions cannot be voluntary. Against the first I argue that compassion and kindness are not qualities of personal temperament but traits of character. Against the second I challenge both the use of pure voluntariness as a condition of morality, and also the view that emotions are entirely involuntary.

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