

to be a proposition is bound to be an algebraic object of some kind, and one which surely admits of alternatives.

Lancaster University

NICHOLAS UNWIN

Iris Murdoch, Philosopher. EDITED BY JUSTIN BROACKES. (Oxford UP, 2012. Pp. xii + 385. Price £35.00.)

Before she left her position at St. Anne's College, Oxford, in 1963, Iris Murdoch had published three papers in the *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, two essays in aesthetics, the first monograph in English on Sartre, and she had given as a talk what would later become 'The Idea of Perfection,' one of her most brilliant works. She was a rising star in British philosophy, as much a part of her generation as Elizabeth Anscombe, Michael Dummett, or Bernard Williams. In the introduction to this important volume, Justin Broackes compares her to Philippa Foot: 'it would have been hard to tell either in 1960 or in 1970 which of the two presented a more powerful challenge to the dominant moral philosophy' (p. 6). Murdoch went on to influence Cora Diamond, John McDowell, Charles Taylor, Hilary Putnam, and Susan Wolf, among others. Yet it is hard to deny that her prominence has lapsed. Notoriously, the 10-volume *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, published in 1999, had no entry for Murdoch. She has little presence in moral philosophy, rarely cited, less often discussed. When she is mentioned, it is as an early advocate of 'moral perception' or 'virtue ethics': the details and idiosyncrasies are lost.

With its assertive, insistent title, *Iris Murdoch, Philosopher* aims to put Murdoch back in the canon: an indispensable moral philosopher who went on to write novels, not a novelist who once wrote obscure and picturesque philosophy. It includes essays by Maria Antonaccio, Carla Bagnoli, Laurence Blum, Bridget Clarke, Peter Conradi, Roger Crisp, A. E. Denham, Julia Driver, Margaret Holland, Richard Moran, and Martha Nussbaum, a long introduction by Broackes, a 'personal record' by John Bayley, and a chapter of Murdoch's work-in-progress on Martin Heidegger. Anyone with an interest in Murdoch will want to read it and will profit from it. The question is what it will do for those whose interest is weak, the idly curious. How will it alter the shape of moral philosophy and Murdoch's place within it? The answer, I think, is that it will benefit both, but that there is more to do.

The challenge with Murdoch is not only to explain her distinctive views, but to show that we should take them seriously. How does she argue for them, if she does? Why would it matter if she is right? Among the obstacles here are the rhetorical flights of Murdoch's writing, the apparent absence of arguments, and in her masterpiece, *The Sovereignty of Good*, an intense immersion in, and frustration with, the state of British philosophy in the 1950s. How to bring Murdoch into closer conversation with contemporary concerns? Although every essay in this collection is valuable, some of them do more than others to address this challenge.

Conradi and Nussbaum offer engaging studies of particular novels, Nussbaum using *The Black Prince* to explore Murdoch's Platonic conception of love and art. Antonaccio provides a useful overview of Murdoch's philosophical writing from the 1950s through *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*. Moran questions Murdoch's portrayal of Sartre and finds in her work a surprising affinity with existentialism. Holland explores the role of social convention and neurosis as obstacles to moral freedom, in a sympathetic exposition of Murdoch's thought. Clarke defends moral perception from the charge of uncritical conservatism, and Denham defends it from refutation by the empirical study of psychopaths. In a subtle exploration of visual metaphors in Murdoch's philosophy, Lawrence Blum draws out the contrast between receptivity and active attention. He concludes that Murdoch gives inadequate play to deliberation in our ethical lives. These essays enrich our understanding of Murdoch in significant ways. But they do not really speak to the indifferent. Though this is not a defect of the essays in their own terms, they are unlikely to move those who neglect Murdoch not because they find decisive problems in her thinking, but because they do not see the need to bother with it.

Two further essays deal with Murdoch's relation to moral theory. In 'Iris Murdoch on Nobility and Moral Value,' Roger Crisp pits Murdoch against utilitarianism, Kantian ethics, and Aristotelian virtue theory. None of these approaches can admit the moral value of self-sacrifice, the nobility of being moved directly, at great cost to oneself, by compassionate awareness of the needs of others. The value of nobility is not exhausted by its effects on welfare; it is independent of the motive of duty; and it involves a loss of happiness for the sake of others that does not make Aristotelian sense. In stressing the phenomenon of nobility, Murdoch shows the weakness in these views. Their advocates will want to respond to Crisp's argument; and there is more to his discussion than this brisk summary suggests. Its weakness as a case for Murdoch is that the objection traced to her does not depend on what is most distinctive of her views. It could be made by any non-utilitarian, non-eudaimonist critic of Kantian ethics. We don't need Murdoch for this. Nor, according to Driver, do we need Murdoch's 'particularism.' Her essay is a staunch critique of the particularist theme in Murdoch, most vivid at the end of 'Vision and Choice in Morality.' Driver believes that Murdoch's sensible resistance to over-generalisation in ethics and her emphasis on judgement can be fully absorbed by the morality of principles. There may be something to learn from Murdoch's errors, but not much.

As arguments for the significance of Murdoch to moral philosophy, the most successful essays in this volume are Carla Bagnoli's 'The Exploration of Moral Life' and the striking 90-page introduction by Justin Broackes. Bagnoli gives a provocative reading of Murdoch as neither realist nor anti-realist, emphasising her remark, in 'The Darkness of Practical Reason,' that 'a constructive activity of imagination and attention "introduces" value into the world which we confront' (p. 208). For Bagnoli, 'Murdoch's plea for metaphysics is thus not a plea for acknowledgment of an independent moral reality' (p. 211). This emphasis seems wrong to me. The remark about introducing value is unusual for Murdoch, and

it can be interpreted more modestly. Our concepts may depend on our imaginative lives without it being true that ‘we transform [facts] into values’ through ‘our conceptual and cognitive activity’ (p. 209). Even so, Bagnoli’s work brings out the depth and difficulty of these issues; and it offers the prospect of a neglected view.

Whatever the force of such explorations, the more urgent need is for Murdoch to be introduced: to be made available to those who struggle with her. This task is pursued by Justin Broackes, whose patience and respect for Murdoch call to mind the association of intellectual discipline with loving attention, and so with virtue, in *The Sovereignty of Good*. Broackes sets out methodically, in numbered lists, a series of Murdoch’s key ideas. He presents her philosophy as organised and systematic. He gives it structure. Among his most impressive accomplishments is to bring its intellectual context to life, so that Murdoch’s targets no longer seem distant or irrelevant. He explains her anti-Humean moral psychology, her anti-scientism, and her resistance to the view that concepts are anchored in what is publicly available, an idea that remains current. Broackes also gives an analytical summary or breakdown of the essays in *Sovereignty*. For readers baffled by Murdoch’s writing, this may be the most valuable thing in the book. It is pedagogically brilliant.

If I have a complaint about the introduction, it is that Broackes understates how radical Murdoch is. He brings out her focus on the ‘secondary moral words’ that stand for virtue concepts, ‘allowing into the world instances of such moral properties as humility, generosity, and courage’ (p. 8). Their instantiation offers ‘facts the appreciation of which is *intrinsically motivating*’ (p. 11). But for Murdoch, the ‘true vision [that] occasions right conduct’ need not be a vision of moral properties, even specialised ones, but of the plain facts of one’s circumstance: ‘The more the separateness and differentness of other people is realised, 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’ (Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* [London: Routledge, 1970], p. 62). Murdoch does not simply expand the menu of moral concepts beyond *good* and *right*; she questions the very distinction between fact and value. On her view, the correct application of ordinary concepts entails motivation. This point comes out in her critical essay on Heidegger, who ‘notices, and at once abandons, an idea of immense importance, that of the moral content of cognition and the ubiquity of evaluation’ (p. 97). For Murdoch, it is cognition as such that has moral content, and evaluation is everywhere, not just in the evaluative words. The knowledge that is virtue is not knowledge of the Good, or even knowledge of particular virtues, but knowledge of the real existence of other people. A mark often thought to be distinctive of ethical concepts, their intrinsic connection with the will, cannot be thus confined.

Moral philosophy would be profoundly different if Murdoch’s conviction were shared. Its metaphysics could not begin with the supervenience of ethical truth on the application of concepts whose content is not ethical. Its epistemology would attend not to knowledge of virtue or the Good, but to our knowledge of ordinary facts. Its psychology would not separate knowledge of one’s circumstance from the orientation of one’s will. That is why, by changing our concepts

and thus what we know, moral philosophy could hope to make us good. Though they can seem incredible, Murdoch both defends and offers arguments for these claims. It matters to the scope and ambition of moral philosophy whether she is right about them. That is why moral philosophers should not ignore her work, and why they should read this book.

University of Pittsburgh

KIERAN SETIYA

Morality and War: Can War Be Just in the Twenty-first Century? BY DAVID FISHER.
(Oxford UP, 2011. Pp. viii + 303. Price £25.00).

This book by David Fisher is an instructive application of the just war thinking, first developed as a medieval theory, to contemporary debates on the morality of war. Fisher believes that the current pervasive moral skepticism is an immediate challenge to the moral principles of just war thinking. The prevalent school of thought in international relations is realism, which bases policy on national interests to the exclusion of moral considerations. But, as Fisher points out, war is not a natural force beyond our control, and the way in which we choose to conduct it will result in more or less suffering. Nor is it the case that the exercise of moral restraint will necessarily undermine the success of military campaigns.

However, Fisher seems to link the exclusion of morality in international relations too closely to the metaethical views of subjectivism and relativism. He claims that, 'The combination of liberal toleration of values and philosophical skepticism about the basis for values leads to a radical form of multiculturalism that not merely tolerates a diversity of values but is unable to discern any rational basis for distinguishing between them where they disagree' (p. 32). Morality is then seen as a matter of private choice and personal preferences.

This is over-simplified. Liberal toleration of some values does not involve the recognition that these values are on par, just as religious toleration does not imply the endorsement of all the tolerated religions, some of which may be incompatible with one another. Liberalism is a view about the limits of the state in promoting certain values which constitute conceptions of the good life, but it does not seek to exclude the value of justice in regulating the conduct of governments or the international relations between states. On the other hand, some subjectivists and relativists have not been tolerant of other people's values. Those who seek to exclude morality from international relations or the conduct of war need not be subjectivists or relativists, and certainly they are not liberals. They are more likely to be motivated by the pursuit of self-interest, excessive national pride, religious fervour, or a discriminatory exceptionalism that exempts their own nation from the moral demands they make on others. The argument against them should be conducted at the normative level about the substantive content of the relevant moral values, rather than at the metaethical level about